



ARTIGOS

## THE LABYRINTHS OF UNRELIABLE NARRATION: LITERARY TRANSLATION AND THE JOURNEY OF AMERICANITY

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**Abstract:** This article consists in part of my PhD. Research, and, as such, briefly introduces: the research chief conceptual parameters, some relevant features of my object of analysis, and the structural organisation of my thesis as a whole. There, I analyse the Canadian comic novel written by Stephen Leacock and entitled *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912), discussing some of its excerpts that I also translated into Portuguese. Making these pages comprehend every theoretical contribution that emerges during the analysis of both novel and its translation would not be a feasible task – especially given the fact that, at least in my view, it is the literary and translation experiences and evidences that shall highlight the need for some reflections, more often than the other way round. My attempt has nonetheless been to trace the main attributes of some issues vital to my articulations in this thesis, more specifically concerning the concepts of Americanness and cosmopolitanism as well as the challenges involved in dealing with an ironic and unreliable narrator.

**Keywords:** *Unreliable narrator, americanity, literary translation.*

## OS LABIRINTOS DA NARRAÇÃO NÃO-CONFIÁVEL: TRADUÇÃO LITERÁRIA E A JORNADA DA AMERICANIDADE

**Resumo:** Este artigo consiste em parte de minha pesquisa de doutorado e, como tal, introduz brevemente: os principais parâmetros conceituais da pesquisa, alguns aspectos relevantes do meu objeto de análise e a organização estrutural da minha tese como um todo. Lá, eu analiso o romance de humor canadense escrito por Stephen Leacock, intitulado *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912), discutindo sobre alguns de seus trechos que eu também traduzi para o português. Fazer com que essas páginas comprimissem todas as contribuições teóricas que surgem durante minha análise do romance e de sua tradução não seria tarefa fácil – especialmente tendo em vista que, pelo menos da forma que vejo, são as experiências e evidências literárias e tradutórias que devem enfatizar o uso de certas reflexões, mais do que o contrário. Meu intento, entretanto, foi o de delinear os atributos mais significativos de algumas questões vitais para minhas articulações na tese, mais especificamente naquilo que diz respeito aos conceitos de Americanidade e cosmopolitismo, bem como aos desafios envolvidos no lidar com um narrador irônico e não-confiável.

**Palavras-chave:** *Narrador não-confiável, americanidade, tradução literária.*



Em um ar grave como o de hoje, em um mundo tão desprovido de senso do ridículo, nos sobra a literatura humorística: que bem podia ser um reagente natural dele. (Umberto Eco, *Entre a Mentira e a Ironia*, 2006, p. 80)

### **Introduction: Translatable American identity**

In the words of William Keith (1989, p. 209), “Canadian literature took a long time to emerge; it is now doing so – it may even be time to say that it has now done so – but it cannot survive without readers.” That is, the emergence of Canadian writers who assume the task of promoting Canadian culture to the rest of the world is of paramount importance for its colonial picture to change, but the maintenance of readership, through the writers and/or translators’ effort, is not less important. This is why xenophobic and/or purist views on cultural identity do not help us here, for it is exactly by reaching larger audiences that a culture is capable of thriving with effectiveness; the more hybridised such culture becomes the better. Keith (1989, p. 210) explains that “Canadian fiction deserves to be read if we are to have a healthy and living culture within the country”. And it deserves to be read by Canadians and non-Canadians, through translations and adaptations of Canadian culture into new realms of meaning. This is what allows stereotypical images regarding marginal cultures to be replaced by new images; it is paradoxically by fragmenting fixed identities through translation that such identities might acquire more vigorous characters.

Controversially, therefore, the most palpable and tangible identity is that one which allows itself to become fragmented. Nevertheless, despite his overall optimism in his reading of Canadian literary past and prospects, Keith (1989, p. 212) admits that “one can only hope that the recent increase in attention to Canadian literature in schools and universities will lead to an eventual leavening of the mass, the non-reading majority”. Keith (1989) here does not disregard the enhancement in the attention given to Canada (with its economic growth and consequent entrance within a more central positioning of the globalising world map, both in a political and social contexts; if Canada was once the place wherefrom immigrants departed, today it is one of the regions whereto they are heading), as a country which is gradually leaving the global margin and gaining space as a



neighbour (both in the objective and subjective sense) of other more hegemonic nations, but neither seems to be unequivocally confident about Canadian prospects in the globalising world map for one can only hope anything is going to change. This is, again, most probably due to his worries about those who are receiving Canadian productions, and how they have been experiencing such productions when that happens. How is this “attention to Canadian literature” really taking place?

Charron and Flotow (2012, p. 120) bring us a relevant data which might help one to understand why it is important to reflect upon such matter: “Indeed, there seems to be a shared impetus between [...] literary scholars to promote what Bernd has termed *americanidade compartilhada*”. The concept of a shared Americanness seems indeed to fit pretty well in the idea of spatial and temporal confrontation, especially through the advent of translation; that is, if literary scholars have been gradually changing their approach in what regards the shared Americanness of American literature, it seems natural for the translation of such literature to follow a similar path. In fact, the authors would still suggest that “if translation is to create and foster some ‘americanidade compartilhada’ or any other type of ‘Inter-American’ understanding, it needs to both acknowledge and mediate the ‘américanité’ of the source work, and recognize it as a factor in the target culture” (CHARRON; FLOTOW, 2012, p. 132). Therefore, on the other hand, translating American literature would not necessarily result in this better grasp on the notion of shared Americanness; for it requires that such translation acknowledges and mediates the “américanité” of the source work besides recognising its impact in the target culture. It seems that it would be pretty difficult thus to imagine a concept of American identity capable of encompassing every country sharing the status of Americanness, and at the same time suggest that national literature is limited to its time and space of production; if this were the case there would be an evident paradox, for Americanness and/or Americanness imply the idea of going beyond both geographical and temporal national frontiers. As Charron and Flotow (2012, p. 121) sapiently remark “the notion of ‘american identity’, if it does exist, is necessarily a translated and translatable one”. Being necessarily a translated and translatable one”, Charron and Flotow’s (2012) notion of American identity does indeed put into question the very basis of concepts such as those of cultural periphery, cultural inauthenticity, the relationship of the original to the copy,



cultural belatedness, cultural malaise, ideological order to succession of cultures, and, ultimately, of Canadian supposed belatedness.

A clear illustration of this Canadian supposed belatedness is the fictional town of Mariposa, the main setting of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912), which is not to be taken as a representation of nothing real whatsoever. In this sense, my worries as a literary critic and translator have never been to attempt at providing my reader with a realistic image of Orillia (town where Stephen Leacock has lived as a child, and which indeed resembles Mariposa rather considerably), as if it clearly were the inspiration for Leacock's (1912) work, and as if he wanted me to represent it with the best possible equivalence. In fiction, all is fiction; the power of literature is the fact that it does not need to tell us the truth – the literary discourse is there to make us envisage possibilities, after all we are not stupid. If we wanted to find real spaces we would not use literature as a means for that to happen, we would simply buy a map. Leacock's (1912) emphasis on the local for providing such reflections and as to put into question hegemonic values is not, as well highlighted by Magee (2006, p. 23), something much out of the ordinary in the period when his novel was written: "The local colour [...] reflects the small town dread of big city sophistication which underlay both American and Canadian local colour at the turn of the century". But, even though this feeling of dread of big city sophistication is indeed a plausible interpretation of the narrative, he does not seem to be afraid of the future in the romantic sense, but skeptical towards its main tenets. *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912) does not seem to have been taken as an opportunity for allowing the emergence of nostalgia for an idealised rural, pure, and pristine space per se, as an innocuous feeling brought forward just for him to express his sorrow. It is not a book about the past, but about the impossibility of a present or future without the direct intervention of such past. In his criticism against urban growth and industrial development, Leacock (1912) seems to be fairly dispassionate about such questionable interventions in the local. His humorous sketches are an opportunity for him to laugh at those who were more often interpreted as the "villains" in the story of most towns insertion in the globalising world map. This critique against such growing antagonistic strength invading the Canadian setting (embodied by the figure of Smith, whose characterisation is that of the urban developmentalist, versus Mariposa and its



inhabitants) is the means whereby he is able to unveil what he deemed the most likely motivational interests hidden behind the curtains of the supposed benevolent gifts of the capital.

It is difficult though to identify such antagonism at first glance because Mariposans in general tend to interpret everything related to “the future” as an ultimate symbol of conquest (and look at the common path to the city – thus the future – as the only existing one). What is purportedly simultaneous has also always been cross-time; in this sense, my project to insert the 1912 Canadian period within the XXI century Brazilian one is what makes the measurement by clock and calendar so intricate for one to follow objectively. The concept of simultaneity-along-time seems to fit pretty well in my attempt to demonstrate how, through Leacock’s (1912) novel reinsertion in the contemporary Brazilian context, the Americanness shared by every temporal and spatial configuration supposedly dividing the Western hemispheres is what provides the key for such invisible barriers to be transposed and obliterated. As obvious as it might seem, the surfacing of translation is what gives readers the opportunity to understand the bridge offered by the Americanness emerging from the process of putting up a bridge where Canadian and Brazilian past and present values and experiences are allowed to dialogue. This could be regarded as a good step forth in what concerns our attempt at devising any sort of global citizenship and, of course, of an effective intercontinentality. By bringing the importance of “retaining the critical faculties” (LYNCH, 1984, p. 6) when dealing with not only Mariposa but everything else, Leacock (1912) is not advocating for any sort of liberty for liars; he is using irony to show how partial the conclusions society generally gets to are – even though the participants in this process are not aware at all of that. This partiality is perhaps originated by the fact that both experiences – the narrator’s and readers’ one – are inevitably liable to differ because of interpretation varieties. “Interpretation is not a single enterprise with one unified goal; instead, it can legitimately aim at a variety of different targets” (IRVIN, 2006, p. 114).

Therefore, the narrator’s interpretation is unavoidably different from the readers’; not only because the goal of a constructed event is never unified – something concocted by a writer is actually very commonly doomed to trigger very complex and distinct responses – but especially because the targets are constantly



diverse – readers never experience a text exactly in the same fashion. The meaning of a textual substantiation is, in this sense, a fluid one. Meaning making occurs according and depending on more than one single sphere which, still according to Irvin (2006, p. 115), might include the meaning intended by the author, the meaning(s) careful and well-informed audiences attribute to the work, or the meanings projected onto the work by audiences engaged in virtually unconstrained interpretative play”. Consequently, as Leacock’s (1912) novel develops, it becomes impossible for the reader not to suspect of the connection between what is being narrated and the conclusions of the narrator, based on such moments. This is probably due to the lack of connection between the narrators’ judgments and the events occurring in the town. As a matter of fact, s/he realises that those people whose closeness to the Mariposan ideals is already too strong are, as a result, working hard as to make their version of the stories told become as acceptable as possible. Not at all necessarily exactly how they suppose such stories are taking place. Wait and see.

#### **Discussion: “The need to reduce confusion”**

Given that this article consists in part of my PhD. research, I deem it relevant to briefly describe how my thesis is structurally organised. Its first chapter subsumes the main analytical and translation tools that I rely on during the following ones, bearing in mind that, before my conclusion, I analyse Leacock’s (1912) novel and discuss some of its excerpts translated into Portuguese. For these pages to comprehend every theoretical contribution that emerges during the analysis of both novel and its translation would not be a feasible task – especially given the fact that, at least in my view, it is the literary and translation experiences and evidences that shall highlight the need for some reflections, more often than the other way round. My attempt has nonetheless been to trace the main attributes of some issues vital to the following reflections in this thesis, discussed more deeply in each of my preceding topics. The focus of my review is on Leacock’s legacy and, more specifically, on the object of my research – as to set forth and reflect upon what has already been written and discussed about *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912) to show where it is situated in literary terms and to make



out how the existing critique informs and responds to my own reading of the novel. Afterwards, I address the matter of heterogeneity and anachronism as they emerge within the novel, so I can delineate in which sense both these issues are relevant for the *sui generis* development of the narrative, which depends on confusing the reader concerning realms such as time and identity. Then I get to my translation tool, proposed by Jorge Luis Borges and chosen since I regard my translation infidel and, very modestly, creative (meaning not that I deem myself good at creating anything, but that I simply do it because it is much more fun. Sorry). I finish the first section of the thesis with a brief review on some of the chosen literature addressing the issue of humour and its variants – laughter, irony, the comic, etc. Such review, whose theorists reappear especially in my next chapter, proves to be of paramount importance for my translation choices and for a more thorough consideration upon the material that shall accompany such choices – the main premises of which are brought onto the field in the topic responsible for closing this thesis review on the literature.

In the following chapter I have thus set forth a brief, but in my view crucial, analysis of the literary evidence emerging from Leacock's (1912) sketches – bearing in mind that the next step is to discuss how a careful look upon such evidence influence and guide my translation choices when bringing his text to my target context. The first topic comprises an account on the town wherein actions occur as for readers to get in touch with the literary evidence that corroborates with the idea it is more a character than simply a setting, followed by my reflection upon one of the most prominent characters surfacing therein, as to elaborate upon Leacock's problematisation of a dichotomist gaze upon him. My analysis is deepened in another topic, in terms of accessing how humour influences and ironise categorical approaches on national or singular identities, whereas it is later situated within the contradiction manifested when the local knowledge of Mariposa inhabitants is placed in parallel with the values coming from the City through the experience of Jeff, the barber. I continue developing such critique afterwards, elaborating upon the moments when Leacock raises readers' awareness to questionable epistemes that are generally taking for granted when the contradiction mentioned in the last sentence takes place in the chapter about the elections. Followingly, the shallowness and opportunism emerging from those



who master characteristics applauded by the sketches' characters, and embodied by Bagshaw, is discussed – which lays the groundwork for my putting the narrator's ironic discourse as time and space transgressive in the spotlight when writing the final section, which regards the hypocrisy of altruistic approaches towards profiteering enterprises, even in small scale events.

In the last analytical chapter I have therefore proposed a discussion on what I experienced as some of the most daedal literary evidences of Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912) regarding my endeavour at reconstructing his literary discourse in Portuguese. Theretofore I relied on my previous analysis of his text as the key to guide my translation choices, inasmuch as a careful look upon Leacock's (1912) literature consists in the very first step for a more objective manipulation of the text. The first topic is centred in Leacock's (1912) characterisation of Mariposa and in the obstacles my translation faces in terms of readers' distinct meaning associations in my target context. Later, I discuss how women are represented in the novel, as to make out how such representation would get to those who might read the translation, while, followingly, I analyse the idiosyncratic attributes of Leacock's (1912) narrator in terms of discourse, as to reflect upon possibilities to provide a reconstruction of his hyper-textual comments on the events he narrates. The following topic intensifies this dissecting of Leacock's (1912) narrator and of his discourse as to focus, more specifically, in the temporal shifts and bridges such discourse provides – both inevitably escalated into even more considerable shifts and bridges in the Brazilian text. What comes later is the possibility of my applying Borges' creative infidelity as for some of the meanings surfacing the novel to be empowered, while the next topic encompasses a scrutiny regarding Leacock's (1912) humorous and ironic artefacts for grappling with the issue of identity in the story, exploring possibilities for recreating such artefacts – even though the process of translation results in a metamorphosis of identities. Finally, I disclose my “infidel” positioning as a translator vis-à-vis my reading and rewriting of the narrative, inasmuch as in this topic I deploy the literary moments when my interferences are perhaps most conspicuous – and thus even more verifiable if compared to my discussions on previous excerpts.

Some of the questions my translation shall inevitably endeavor to answer are the ones brought forth by Charron and Flotow (2012, p. 123) regarding the





relation between the source and target text: “what is retained of this ‘américanité’? Is it preserved in translation? Does it blend in with or resist other possible forms of ‘américanité’ (be it English-Canadian *americanness*, Spanish-American *americanidad*, or the Brazilian *americanidade*)?” Looking for answers shall not be a simple task, for they require deep reflection, research, and responsibility. Every translation preserves some aspects to the detriment of other ones, but the bottom line lies in how to balance such issues, and what has to be privileged in each occasion of convolution. Given the fact that Leacock’s (1912) piece is a humoristic one, but that, at the same time, it puts across pretty serious matters which are surfacing from a very specific sociopolitical context, it behooves me to be sensible as to choose, at every moment, what should be favoured, as well as when, and how it should be favoured. One of my hypothesis can is that, given my lack of interest in trying to resist other possible forms of américanité, I imagine a lot of blending is, indeed, going to occur; the blending already takes place in Leacock’s (1912) piece, and it is hard to think of a prudent translation that does not widen such blending even more. Consequently, the choice for an annotated translation is almost second nature for this enterprise insomuch as it allows the original to be retextualised without an unnecessary textual and ideological exaggerated domestication and/or homogenising in the target text. In fact, and even though foreign-language words (in the case of my research object, words in English and sometimes in French) might superficially look as if it made the fluidity of the text less smooth, a foreignising translation allows cultural dialogue to occur and, thus, proves to be directly related to Charron and Flotow’s (2012) notion of américanité, which is brought here as the theoretic scaffold for this research.

Moreover, the presence of foreign words and/or foreign expressions in any translated works of fiction “serve to remind the reader of linguistic and cultural difference. This factor, always problematic to the translator, can be an indication of the level of linguistic and cultural hybridization in a given culture” (CHARRON; FLOTOW, 2012, p. 130). For this conceptual revolution to take place successfully, it is important to bear in mind that another pivotal factor has to be taken into consideration. As astutely suggested by Charron and Flotow (2012), literature does indeed allow cultures to meet and dialogue materially, problematising taken for granted fictional/nonfictional contexts. It can only do so, however, “where



translation and adaptation as well as any number of other creative practices take place” (CHARRON; FLOTOW, 2012, p. 134). Literature, then, plays indeed a major role for the fragmentation and contagion of supposedly pure identities and reinvention of less fixed meanings; but the advent of translated literature is even more fundamental for this picture to change. This is why one could say the major liability of contemporaneity is our attempt to universalise some values to the detriment of other ones; positioning that has already convinced many regions and peoples – as Venuti (1998) demonstrates when he discusses the US approach to literary translation from minor languages into English – that there is indeed nothing left to mediate or to translate. Venuti’s (1998) critique is a clear illustration that we are not living a moment marked by the power of the dialogue – we are living the absolutism of global monologue.

Speaking of monologue, this is precisely the discursive channel we have for assessing Leacock’s (1912) narrator description of the Canadian town where the novel takes place. It is worth mentioning, in this sense, that such description is overtly unreliable, as it is filled in with contradictions that mark the narrator’s intentions to manipulate facts and control our interpretations on the place. Such contradiction is nonetheless not only limited to how the narrator presents the town and describes it to his readers, but actually it permeates the whole order of events taking place in Mariposa. It seems that the notion of a homogeneous body of people sharing the same values and welcoming the same sorts of interferences is, by itself, a paradox; even though Mariposans were together and believed they share some sort of unflappable national identity with those inhabitants of metropolitan centres (or even with themselves), in some moments of the novel it becomes confusing to judge if they are walking to their salvation or to their doom through the path of national hope. Canada, in this sense, is always seen as a vague cloud whose shape is altered according to the wind. Benedict Anderson (1996, p. 112) addresses such difficulty when identifying what the idea of nation is really responsible for representing; in his view this is such an intricate issue because “[s]een as both a historical fatality and as a community imagined through language, the nation presents itself as simultaneously open and closed”. The idea of nation, therefore, gives us a historical fatality, but also a sense of community because it is what embodies which future shall be the one of every region, what path they must take,



whereas it supposedly puts people together in the same (sinking) boat. The nation is also described as both open and closed; but how can that be? The nation assumes the role of that institution capable of accepting the entrance and maintenance of some systems of meaning, those that exert some sort of authority through finance, religion, power, or all of it, and prohibiting the entrance or maintenance of others, those that are supposedly no longer useful for the thriving of a region because they fit no longer in the national narrative.

Unable to find out whether s/he fits or not in such “national narrative”, the narrator’s voice is the voice of someone who readers are unable to make out if is already a character of the novel or the author himself. Apropos, what is perhaps the most interesting Leacock's (1912) over-all ironic formula is the fact that he applies his ironical tone without using the narrator as someone who incorporates the author’s position. Leacock (1912), as the narrator, has, for instance, never given his backing, as a writer or a theorist, to such idea of linear chronology setting the rural and undeveloped at the past of the urban and developed – as both his combination of innovative and traditional approaches towards social and political issues he deemed necessary demonstrate in his nonfictional works and as his criticism against industrial development and U.S.A.’s engulfment of Canadian values do in his fictional ones. These details, surfacing from specific moments of the novel, are not only pivotal for our discussion regarding the contextual references and richness of its narrative; it would also be detrimental for the study not to take such aspects into account when materially translating such metaphorical suggestions into Portuguese for translation itself, like the longing hymn of Canada and the sinking boat of the nation, can also be used as a manner either to endorse or to problematise the illusion of the universal City to the detriment of the local town. In this sense, our ability to keep finding funny something written more than one century ago would be thus an evidence of its everlasting pertinence not only for Canadians but for any readers elsewhere. Literature should not be judged only considering how well it conforms to or exposes the flaws of the context when and wherein it was written, it needs to be understood also considering its ability (or lack of it) to talk to those readers who were not there at all, which seems to be our specific case.

Something that is indeed rather comic as it is expressed in the narrative is



the usage of digression. Digression is a phenomena pretty much utilised by the Brazilian writer Machado de Assis (1839-1908) – who, just like Leacock (1912), would also stop the narrative to talk to readers, ask them questions, and even criticise them; I dare to say one could easily compare Leacock’s unnamed narrator to many of the ones whose voice is heard in Machado’s narratives, since both do not get tired of digressing and actually seem to take much pleasure out of it – the digression, in this sense, operates not as an interference within the narrative, but as a vital part of it. That can be seen in Leacock’s (1912) novel in the chapter wherein the narrator describes the kind of relationship the Mariposan judge had with his daughter. The narrator, at such point, not only admits he has fallen into the trap of the digression – a digression that, as it happens throughout the narrative, made him deviate from the main point and enter a discourse which he was not willing to focus on at the beginning – but actually says he is aware we knew it to be a digression even before he himself could realise. Once and again, besides, Leacock (1912) reverses epistememes as, through his ironic humour, he gives a contrary voice to his characters in order to emphasise the narrator’s overestimation of Mariposan subjects and underestimation of many other very important people. The problem is not to say that Mariposan people are also intelligent, creative, and significant (maybe they are, maybe the world has not been giving them as much attention as they deserve), the problem is that the sketches’ narrator tries to convince readers of that by transforming them in something they are not – just for them to fit the hegemonic idealisation of who and what can be deemed important. Digressing, inventing, lying, manipulating... readers gradually learn that they need to be careful regarding such narrative for, apparently, it is not advisable to put so much faith into it.

During the narrator’s digressions, we see much of Leacock’s distress concerning the Canadian social and political condition. In what regards the relevance of the specific political statements brought forward in the novel, Myron Frankman (1986), argues that the theoretical questions proposed by Leacock prove to be “timeless” for they talk of social problems that seem to be the same if compared to the social figure of more than half a century later. Frankman (1986, p. 53) states that although the formal analysis of social and economic issues devised by Leacock (1912) contains some flaws, many of its recommendations still seem to



be relevant, especially when his concern for social justice in the early 19th century is applied nowadays: “many of his recommendations still have merit, and his 1920 agenda for resolving the riddle of social justice is as timely now as when it was written”. If indeed the ironically developed criticism in Leacock’s *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912) were applied in the contemporaneity it would be impossible not to see in the town of Mariposa and in the inhabitants who live there – despite the fact that these have been characterised more than 100 years ago – many attributes that make such seemingly “limited” references rather close to what we have nowadays. As a matter of fact, the timelessness that marks this fictional piece contributes not only for it to have its afterlife ensured but also to the questioning of the ambivalence “local/universal”, for the microstructure of the political issues present in Mariposa is not separated from the macrostructure of what takes place in the rest of the world – both at the time when it was written (horizontally) and afterwards (vertically).

In this sense the concept of literary non-linearity when brought together with the idea of “100 years later” cannot prevent creative readers that enjoy inferences from comparing this issue with Gabriel Garcia Marquez’ novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), which allows us to think of the number 100 as a symbol of this moment of temporal, spatial, and, inevitably, identity fragmentation through literary atemporalisms. 100 is the number for convincing us that, like in Marquez’s novel, what “was” still “is”. It is important to bear in mind in this sense that what is supposedly taken as real, concrete, and palpable is only available to us if we are willing to embrace the unreal, the fluid, and the impalpable (for one step of solidity there are several previous steps of abstraction). The issue of how one invents, is invented, and can reinvent or be reinvented, such as the fixity and/or mobility entailed by such intricate processes, is tackled with by Octavio Paz (1981, p. 8), when he argues that “the invention of meaning is the continuing and multiple reading of the ever-changing nature of the reality in which, and of which we are”. In his view such invention takes place through a conscious and unconscious process of reading and experiencing events in which, as he puts it, versions of ourselves in the world and in the moment of our living “are simultaneously and constantly being invented, by ourselves as well as others. Yet this invention seeks a fixity, for we are constrained to *know*, are we not?” (PAZ, 1981, p. 9). Are we not? Tricky question,



but a very intriguing one. There is a fictive link that is what might ultimately allow the language guidance given by the writer to transgress its supposed fixity, through the transformation of such fixity. There is a becoming here, a willed as well as an unwilled transformation, a movement towards a possible consciousness which will emerge within the contexts of continuing redefinitions “in a milieu of changing meanings, the fusions and confusions of an unfamiliar and evolving culture. It is here where present consciousness with its attendant ambiguities, anxieties, and disorientations, invents meaning in the need to reduce confusion” (ITWARU, 1990, p. 13).

This is why dialogue is important, and dialogue is also important for the identities provided by the state to the subject are essentially fake identities; this seems to be far too blunt, but, as many theorists have already suggested, it is not an overstatement. What it seems, then, is that the reader must do this deal with the text, accepting to enter the realm of fantasy and allowing it to be made real – otherwise literary evidence would be no evidence at all, and all the meanings of literature would, ultimately, have no meaning whatsoever. In this sense it is useless to try to identify the percentage of reality within fantasy as if art were a mathematical challenge – the challenge is much more demanding than that. This fiction/reality dualism is also ingeniously elaborated by Itwaru (1990) for the author to problematise the notion of fiction as an invention by also considering reality as an invention in itself; and it is in the core of such dualism that literature appears as a significant tool not only to be informed by the national subjects, but also to inform them as well. Fiction is not an escape from reality, there is not and there has never been such division in practical terms – the imagined world is as real as the supposedly factual one. Nevertheless, in my object of research, one cannot overlook the intricate nature of notions such as personal decision, choice, and social context as if they had nothing to do with one another; personal decisions are molded by the context, and when we make choices we do not make them out of the blue, but motivated by such context – as to oppose it and/or to endorse it. Such amalgam of mental manipulations exists within the pages of the book and the reader’s atmosphere – the mind of the narrator is a partial mind of the author, and both minds affect my own, as reader and translator, irreversibly. In the case of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912) it is important to bear in mind



that the confusion emerging from the complex line dividing and bonding the voice of the author and that of the narrator is not restricted to this piece; in fact, “Leacock’s practice in many of his humorous pieces further complicates this problem of author and narrator” (LYNCH, 1984, p. 3). Such a “problem” – in quotation marks because, in my view, there is no problem at all – is a considerable one not only because there are many attributes in the narrator’s personality that bring readers closer to Leacock (1912) himself, but also because, in many occasions, their personality seems to be poles apart.

It is in a chapter of Michael Cronin’s book *Translation and Identity* (2003), named “Translation and the New Cosmopolitanism”, that one could understand why Mariposans keep singing even after the boat where they are travelling at the onset of the story starts to sink – a boat that might be easily associated to the nation that they share. According to Cronin globalisation is typically presented by its opponents “as a process of whole-scale standardisation. The process is dominated by large multinational corporations and international organisations [...] acting at the behest of the political and economic interests of the world’s remaining superpower, the United States” (2003, p. 15). In the case of Mariposa and, to a certain extent, even that of Canada, the political and economic interests” of hegemonic regions and peoples would later prove to assume even greater proportions. Moreover, the process of whole-scale standardisation mentioned by Cronin (2003) can be easily associated to the singing of the anthem; such song creates the illusion of a general feeling of welfare, the illusion that everyone belongs to the same boat and that abandoning such boat would be taking as unforgivable sin. After having exposed the drawbacks of globalisation and its serving hegemonic needs Cronin (2003, p. 16) would say that such “thesis has been challenged by a number of thinkers [...] who view globalisation as a fragmentary and centrifugal process as much as a unifying and centripetal one”. What they usually propose, on the other hand, even though it would appear to challenge the hegemony of the powerful, do not in fact offer smaller or less powerful polities a particularly promising role. All things considered, a theoretical review on *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912) evinces that the less a literary piece responds to our mental worries and ambitions the more it informs such worries and transforms such ambitions; if my reading of Leacock’s novel does not provide me with crystal



clear images my translation shall aim at doing likewise.

### **Final Remarks: A desperate operation**

As I hope to have made clear as my study gets to an end, Americanness helps us see that, because the interfaces provided by the process of translation “are characterized by borrowings and the invention of hybrid forms, we know that these interfaces play essential roles” (CHARRON; FLOTOW, 2012, p. 124). Such interfaces are of paramount importance to change our configuration as subjects, inasmuch as learning that the other is different is easy, but accepting our own difference is generally less stress-free. Choosing Leacock’s (1912) novel as channel for such learning has shown me that his literary communication is like music: individuals are the instruments, and humor is a specific sound produced within such music – one that causes social commotion, and whose effects play a significant role for instruments to be ultimately in tune with one another. As the translator of his narrative, though, I am not tormented however by the possibility of decapitating Leacock’s (1912) humorous discourse here and there when that seems to me to be necessary – as long as I provide the body of his text with new heads such body shall still be anatomically capable of remaining in place (thinking differently, nevertheless). Working with humour, apropos, has been very interesting, as in the contemporaneity we still prefer to laugh, but we only pay attention to the tears; and it is whence the peripheral locale whereto humour has been taken that it learned to operate – through the back channels. For the translator, however, the surfacing of the comic cannot pass unnoticed, since “when it comes to translating humor, the operation proves to be as desperate as that of translating poetry” (VANDAELE, 2008, p. 149). To propose the maintenance of laughter, therefore – to conceive such operation that proves to be as desperate as the one undertaken by the one who proposes the maintenance of poetry – is to fight such desperation for it is a good one, the very desperation that compels both translation and art to persist.

Everything that resides in the milieu of art is subjective, liquefied, and dependent upon each particular gaze upon a particular piece. As for the art of translation, those who are unwilling to invent, to adapt, and to provide their target audience with a brand new version of a text are, at the same time, unfit to the task





– i.e. to provide one’s audience with a powerful and autonomous translation the translator needs, in the first place, to be aware of his/her power and autonomy. Like homeopathy, translation only works for those who have faith in it (i.e. in order to see the ghost, we must firstly believe it exists). One thing is nonetheless clear: there is no translation if there is no interpretation; and, as soon as I interpret a text, I have already betrayed it (in classical terms). Texts exist because we write, but they survive because we translate – and, for such process of survival to take place, the relation is never one of dependence, but of interdependence. It is in this sense that perhaps one of the most considerable limitations of my study is the lack of interconnectedness between this more autonomous view on translation (the idea of creative infidelity) with other theories and reflections upon the issue – my failure to expose the infidel and creative essence of distinct research tools, completely set aside during the development of my thesis. It would be far too reckless to affirm I have been able to trigger a conceptual revolution in what regards Americanness, humour, and translation – if only I had that power. My sole ambition is to open my readers’ eyes to the issues addressed – dealing with such issues with the attention they deserve depends on what happens next. We are not only global consumers, but also global producers; and if there is anything more symptomatic of our dual role in both national and international ground it is our cosmopolitan interconnectedness – that is, the interconnection among peoples, spaces, and times.

I cannot avoid to finish, then, issuing a necessary *mea culpa*. If, in my project, sometimes the passage from the source into the target context might entail any meaning losses that might hinder the funny facets of Leacock’s (1912) insights, in other moments I have a chance to make them stronger. In the literary translation of humour, many things might be changed, potentialised, and/or reordered for such humour to maintain its strength. If translation is that which paradoxically changes so that nothing changes, that is exactly what needs to be done in the sketches’ case. Laughter is something difficult to be provoked, let alone when the joke has to travel so far in time and space; therefore, when the translator gets the opportunity to see such joke indeed working in such a dissimilar context s/he is bound to embrace it, to make the most out of it – as I have been endeavouring to do. If Leacock’s ironic insights are so important for the total comprehension of his piece, they shall not be



allowed to pass unnoticed. Despite the fact that what was once ironic in Canada might not be considered ironic in the contemporary Brazilian context any longer, the prominence of those moments when I deem such irony more tangible shall always be enhanced by my choices. Any major changes undertaken during my translation are therefore directed towards an attempt to make my text as interesting and meaningful as Leacock's one, since there is no publishing house or commercial interests shaping or predetermining my choices. In my view, books are planes where the readers are invited in. It is essential, for their journey to occur, that my crew becomes aware of what sort of aircraft they are about to get in; choosing where we are setting from and where we aim at landing is not quite enough inasmuch as there are numberless manners for that to happen. It does not matter the airport wherefrom the plane left and whereto it is going if the journey is not taken into consideration. What matters is not the destiny, what matters is the journey – and nothing beyond that.

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