

## Mariposa Moves On Leacock's Darkening "Sequel" to *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*

Although *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912) is just one of the dozens of collections of humorous writing Stephen Leacock released throughout his career, it has come to dominate critical and popular understandings. Virtually all academic writing on Leacock and his works takes *Sunshine Sketches* as its focus, while major critics and authors have hailed it variously as “the first work to establish a Canadian voice” (Richler xiii), and as one that conveys “the genius of irony, the subtler art, the deeper wisdom” (Ross ix). This focus on *Sunshine Sketches*—and to a far lesser extent on *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich* (1914)—reflects a broader critical consensus that there is very little in Leacock's middle and late career as a humorist that warrants significant attention.

In *Happy Stories, Just to Laugh At* (1943), however—the final collection of Leacock's humour published during his life—there is a cycle of short stories that sheds unexpected and intriguing light upon *Sunshine Sketches*, and which has nevertheless suffered from near total critical neglect. In “Mariposa Moves On,” Leacock returns to find Mariposa in “the shadow of war” (*Happy Stories* 203)—a Mariposa where the sunshine has only continued to dim. While the original sketches generated the warmth of humour from luminous circumstances with shadows dancing behind them, as with Judge Pepperleigh's abiding grief for his dead son or Dean Drone's visions of his late wife, in this cycle Leacock uses the pretext of a Second World War Victory Loan drive to re-examine the town's character and explore the idea that all dreams must end and even happy memories must fade. Gerald Lynch has recently reasserted the importance of answering “the

much vexed question of Leacock's true view of Mariposa" ("From" 98); if the stories in "Mariposa Moves On" do not necessarily provide a comprehensive answer, they do nevertheless offer a fascinating counterpoint to the dappled sunshine of the original cycle. Much that was significant in that cycle's final chapter is brought back into focus: the implicit and long-delayed return to Mariposa after "thirty years" to see "if things had changed much since your day" (*Sunshine Sketches* 189) finally takes place, and both the reader and the narrator are forced to acknowledge that the town is no longer what it once was. Thus, the Mariposa that might perhaps endure unchanged in memory has been radically altered in reality by the passage of time, and especially by the ravages of war.

Why should a story cycle that constitutes such a critical coda to Leacock's most famous work be so neglected? The relative inaccessibility of this cycle may well have contributed to its obscurity—despite having run through eight editions, the work has not been in print since 1945 (Spadoni 358) and was not included in the *New Canadian Library* (NCL) reprint series of Leacock's works. Further, the general critical and popular consensus has been that Leacock's humorous works, after the initial successes of *Literary Lapses* (1910), *Nonsense Novels* (1911), *Sunshine Sketches* and *Arcadian Adventures*,<sup>1</sup> never rose to the level of his initial triumphs, being instead viewed as "repetitive," "of poor quality" and self-plagiarizing (Bowker, "Preface" 11). Robertson Davies attributed this apparent decline to Leacock's lack of growth as a writer, which, Davies argues, stemmed from Leacock's conviction that he had mastered the art of the comic sketch. This conviction led to the "mechanical joke-smithing" that made his subsequent works such "wearisome reading" (10). Mastered or not, his exercise of this art was prodigious; though Leacock put out a book of humour more or less annually from 1910 until his death in 1944, the latest of them to receive much critical attention—*Arcadian Adventures*—was published in 1914, and is most often considered simply as a counterpart to *Sunshine Sketches*. No other late-career collection of Leacock's humour apart from a 2010 reissue of *My Remarkable Uncle and Other Sketches* (1942) remains in print today.

Even among those critics who have acknowledged *Happy Stories*, "Mariposa Moves On" has not received much attention. Some, like David M. Legate and David Staines, note only that the cycle exists (Legate 242; Staines and Nimmo 395). Ralph L. Curry mentions the stories in his 1959 study, but says of them only that Leacock's awareness that "the little town could not live again" accounts for their modern setting and that they showed signs of

“hasty composition” (254). Albert and Theresa Moritz, in what is otherwise the most thorough of the biographies, echo Curry’s assessment in dismissing the stories as “hastily written propaganda pieces” (404). Gerald Lynch offers a sentence describing “Mariposa Moves On” as an expression of Leacock’s already well-known disdain for petty partisan politics (*Stephen* 10). Even Carl Spadoni, who acknowledges in his extensive introduction to the Broadview edition of *Sunshine Sketches* (2002) that the latter-day stories “offer a Leacockian perspective on the evolution of Mariposa and its people,” refers to them as “dated,” and “essentially pieces of propaganda for the war effort,” lacking “the charm and timeless quality found in *Sunshine Sketches*” (xxxiii). While they are certainly propaganda pieces, and admittedly “dated” by their overt situation within the context of familiar historical events, the consensus that they lack some of the sunshine of the original sketches offers an important starting point for analysis.

Much of the output of Stephen Leacock’s final years is marked by what has been called “an underlying autumnal mood” (MacKendrick 193), and it is within this context that “Mariposa Moves On” must be considered. The last ten years of Leacock’s life were marked by a gradual decline and a series of losses,<sup>2</sup> and his literary output during this time reflects the darker tone of his life at large. *Too Much College* (1939) carries a number of more than usually cynical reflections on the nature of the academy, while Leacock admits in his preface to *Model Memoirs and Other Sketches from Simple to Serious* (1938) that the volume is “offensively serious,” but defends himself by citing his advancing years (v). Many of the pieces included in *My Remarkable Uncle*, the most famous of his late-career collections, strike a notably sombre tone, with the heart-wrenching essay “Three Score and Ten: The Business of Growing Old” offering a particularly vivid and pathos-laden description of the quality that marks the end of a person’s days. Leacock writes of “an increasing feeling of isolation, of being alone. We seem so far apart. . . . This must be near the end” (219). This and other works—like the darkly rueful “Looking Back from Retirement,” from *Here Are My Lectures and Stories* (1937)—offer what Alan Bowker has called “an honest expression of the fear and anger of a man who recognizes that he has lost paradise and that the end is approaching” (“Introduction” 38). Such works were joined by suggestively titled books like *Last Leaves* (1945) and *While There Is Time: The Case against Social Catastrophe* (1945), both of which were still in preparation at the time of Leacock’s death. Throughout this final stage, Leacock rightly considered himself “a very sick man” (Staines and Nimmo 528), and was putting his

affairs in order, as he looked ahead to the mist that swirled before him. He had been in serious pain since an operation for prostate cancer in 1938; he began arranging his final dispositions in the fall of 1943. That winter he was diagnosed with throat cancer; by March of 1944 he would be dead. When he began *Happy Stories* in 1943, however, the tide of events had dropped a yet darker veil on Leacock and his world: the Second World War. This war and the catastrophe it threatened would provide the backdrop for Leacock's return to Mariposa.

"Mariposa Moves On" is a series of eight stories, all very short, which initially appeared in the *Montreal Gazette* in the spring of 1943. A letter from Leacock during their preparation describes them affectionately as "great stuff . . . little stories of Mariposa, laid in the Barber Shop" (Staines and Nimmo 509) and gives no hint of any troubling contents. "Mariposa Moves On" fills the last forty pages or so of *Happy Stories*. Leacock's strangely ambivalent preface strikes a note at odds with the volume's title, declaring,

All the stories in this book have, or are meant to have, one element in common. They are not true to life. The people in them laugh too much; they cry too easily; they lie too hard. The light is all false, it's too bright, and the manners and customs are all wrong. The times and places are confused. There is no need, therefore, to give the usual assurance that none of the characters in the book are real persons. Of course not; this is not real life. It is better. (v)

With a false light, hard lies, and the confusion of times and places proliferating, it is perhaps not surprising to see Leacock return to the little town that had seemed, at least in memory, so resistant to such dissolution. The surprise of "Mariposa Moves On" for the reader of *Sunshine Sketches*, however, is that, in stark contrast to the redemptive and nostalgic conclusion that most critics find in the original collection's final "Envoi," it is very hard to read this final cycle—or Mariposa itself—as having a happy ending.

Even before the darkness of Leacock's final years, there were creeping notes of ambivalence to be found in some of his works that revealed his evolving opinion of his early masterpiece and the place that small towns held in his esteem. As much of a success as *Sunshine Sketches* was, it was not for Leacock a wholly satisfactory work. Writing a sustained narrative of that sort (even one sutured together from related vignettes) was a taxing process, and one which he would never seriously attempt again at any comparable length after *Arcadian Adventures*. The characters were not fully fleshed out and convincing, but instead pastiches and types. Peter McArthur records one of Leacock's complaints about his own work:

I wrote [*Sunshine Sketches*] with considerable difficulty. I can invent characters quite easily, but I have no notion as to how to make things happen to them. Indeed I see no reason why anything should. I could write awfully good short stories if it were only permissible merely to introduce some extremely original character, and at the end of two pages announce that at this point a brick fell on his head and killed him. . . . Such feeble plots as there are in [*Sunshine Sketches*] were invented by brute force, after the characters had been introduced. Hence the atrocious clumsiness of the construction all through. (136)

“Considerable difficulty,” “feeble plots,” “atrocious clumsiness”: in spite of the typically humorous patter that surrounds them, these are criticisms of the sort one might expect to read in a particularly negative review, not coming from the author’s own pen. They are nevertheless in keeping with a broader ambivalence towards this small-town atmosphere, as towards much else, that begins to be in evidence in the later stages of Leacock’s career.

A remarkable example of this ambivalence can also be found in an otherwise uncharacteristic short story in *The Dry Pickwick and Other Incongruities* (1932). First published in *The Milwaukee Sentinel* on July 14, 1929, “Come and See Our Town: How the Visitor Feels When Shown Around” begins in a fashion virtually identical to that of *Sunshine Sketches*—with a newcomer arriving by train in a little town in the sunshine and one of the town’s proud citizens taking him around to show it off. The tone of light-hearted pomp, the careless exaggeration, the wounded pride at any suggestion of the town’s smallness, all are present in this story—but the sense of affection is not. Whereas in *Sunshine Sketches* the visitor is implicitly the reader, and consequently silent within the body of the text, in “Come and See Our Town” the visitor has a great deal to say about the experience indeed, though he only responds to the guide in parenthetical asides: “if you ask me my private opinion of your town,” he thinks to himself, “I should say it looks about the dingiest, meanest place I was ever in.” In *Sunshine Sketches*, the voice of local pride was uncontradicted; in “Come and See Our Town,” however, the visitor comments, “in these monologues with the local patriot you never get the chance to speak out: at best you can only murmur. He does all the broadcasting” (242). These encounters seem to be losing some of their shine, and it is thus not wholly surprising that our next—and last—encounter with Mariposa after so many decades finds it shrouded in “the shadow of war” (*Happy Stories* 203).

Leacock wrote the new Mariposa stories in connection with the Fourth Victory Loan appeal, hoping to encourage his fellow Canadians to give generously to the war effort in that time of need, and the people of Mariposa

consequently tackle the problem with gusto. This open focus on fundraising stands in stark contrast to the original publication of the collected *Sketches*, which Leacock insisted be kept cheap so that the book would be accessible to the young and the poor: “those who are most willing to buy it,” he wrote to John Lane in June of 1912, “are young people with lots of life and fun in them and, as a rule, not too much money. Rich people buy stuff with a gorgeous cover and fine paper, and never read it” (Staines and Nimmo 77). It is difficult to imagine the directors of the Fourth Victory Loan spurning the money of the idle rich.

The need for such money was dire in 1943. The Nazi occupation of Europe was then at its height, and it was apparent that a great burst of international effort—likely in the form of an Allied invasion of France, Italy, or both—would be required to dislodge Hitler’s armies from their redoubts. The shocking failure of the raid on Dieppe in August of 1942 was still fresh in Canadian minds, and the conviction that a larger assault would soon be mounted gave rise to the Fourth loan’s slogan, “Back the Attack!” (Ker and Goodman 49).

The Department of Finance consequently oversaw a program of borrowing from Canadian citizens—exhorted to action by an army of artists, clergy, statesmen, journalists, and public intellectuals—and throughout the course of the war raised some four billion through a series of public loans taken from the savings of Canadians at minimal interest rates.<sup>3</sup> The Third Victory Loan, in the fall of 1942, had brought in an unprecedented \$991 million, and it was hoped that its successor would exceed the stated goal of \$1.1 billion. The Fourth Loan initially seemed to hit an almost Leacockian snag when it became a cause of popular protest: the King government had dramatically reduced the availability of beer and spirits, owing to wartime shortages, but many Canadians refused to purchase the bonds until these restrictions were loosened. “No beer, no bonds” was the shout (Slater 90). Nevertheless, much like the great drive in Mariposa, the Fourth Loan was a success: \$1.3 billion was raised in the first half of 1943 alone, and “Mariposa Moves On” paints a picture of this success in the making even as it aimed to help it along. It was intended that this particular Loan’s overriding tone be “not a happy, relaxed, bell-ringing note of victory that could produce complacency, but an aggressive, hard-biting, all-out smashing-through” (Ker and Goodman 49), and the increasingly dire tone of the new sketches reflects this.

The stories that comprise “Mariposa Moves On” are very short when compared to the original *Sketches*—none more than a couple of pages long—and mostly focus upon the sometimes receptive, sometimes hostile ways in which the citizens of Mariposa respond to being asked by the government

for money. Much has changed in Mariposa since the time of *Sunshine Sketches*, even as much also remains the same; of Josh Smith, his hotel and his late parliamentary candidacy there is nary a mention, except perhaps for an oblique reference to “some of the skunks we’ve succeeded in electing in Mariposa in past years” (239), but Jefferson Thorpe’s barbershop—directly across the street from the hotel in *Sunshine Sketches*—continues under his steady hand and still serves as “a sort of centre of town talk and public information” (206). The narrator specifically notes in the second of the new sketches that he has “spoken of [the barber shop] before” (206), thus creating an explicit link between himself and the narrator of the original *Sketches*. No other major characters carry over from the one work to the next, though the former postmaster, Trelawney, makes a brief appearance as the now much-aged Colonel Trelawney, who is nominated as the Conservative Candidate for Mariposa because his only son was killed in the first year of the war (238-39).

The governing concept of “Mariposa Moves On” is that the town has been given a quota to fill: they have committed to raising one million dollars for the Victory Loan. Their achievement during the last Loan drive was \$640,000—an impressive feat for a town of twelve thousand citizens, though that number, given the famous jealousy of the census-takers, is declared again to be too low (210)—but nobody in town seriously believes they will be able to beat it. “You know Mariposa,” the narrator confides, no longer bothering to maintain any pretence; “it was just vain glory and civic pride” (222). The stories describe the various ways in which Mariposa luminaries are cajoled, persuaded, shamed, tricked, or even outright threatened into subscribing to the Loan. Eventually the quota is met, and the drive really does raise the desired million. The consequences of this are catastrophic, however, and hearken back to the complications suggested by *Sunshine Sketches*’ final chapter.

That chapter, the “Envoi,” sees both narrator and reader “returning” to Mariposa by train—returning to the town that “has lain waiting . . . there for thirty years” (*Sunshine Sketches* 189). The “Envoi” concludes with a startling moment of literal self-reflection: the reader is enjoined not to “bother [looking] at the reflection of your face in the window-pane shadowed by the night outside. Nobody could tell you after all these years. Your face has changed” (191). The train then arrives in Mariposa—but the reader is returned immediately to “the leather chairs of the Mausoleum Club,” back in the big city, where there is only “[talk] of the little Town in the Sunshine that once we knew” (191). This lack of self-recognition underscores the

untraversable distance between the Mariposa of memory and the Mariposa of reality, and the moment at which this is realized has been a complex preoccupation of Leacock scholarship for decades—a fitting focus for what Ina Ferris has described as “the central event of *Sunshine Sketches*” (78).<sup>4</sup>

This forestalled self-recognition and the impossibility of a return to Mariposa as it *was* are undoubtedly important features of the “Envoi,” but little has yet been made of the narrator’s emphasis on a specific timeframe for the imagined return. It is hoped that the town will be “just as it used to be thirty years ago” (191), but the moment at which this might be proven either way is forestalled by the abstraction of the return. While there is nothing to prove that Leacock intended in 1912 to write about a return to Mariposa along this very timeframe, it is nevertheless the case that he did describe such a return—and with precisely the results the “Envoi” implies.

Much of the original collection’s appeal lies in the kindly and enduring caricature of small-town life that can be found in Leacock’s presentation of Mariposa. The inspiration for the book, as Leacock’s preface makes clear, is “a land of hope and sunshine where little towns spread their square streets and their trim maple trees beside placid lakes almost within echo of the primeval forest” (xi)—a world of harmony and harmlessness, of respectability and respect. Mariposa is a crystallized memory, seemingly impervious to the cares and troubles of the outside world, and the ideal that it represents waits to redeem the visitor if only he or she will remember the town as it was. Nevertheless, as Lynch has argued, this return to Mariposa *must* be abstract and imaginative if it is to be therapeutic. To actually return in person would be to discover that both the visitor and the town are so different as to be all but unrecognizable—and maybe that they always were (*Stephen* 114-20). This distance and abstract impermanence evoke a darkness that resides very near to the *Sketches*’ enduring light. Despite its accessibility through an imaginative train ride or through reading “such a book as [*Sunshine Sketches*]” (*Sunshine Sketches* 185), for Mariposa to be authentically human in Leacock’s view its sunshine must have a dappled quality. While Margaret Atwood has suggested that Mariposa is “a place where pathos is possible but nothing really tragic is allowed to happen” (187), the contours of Leacock’s humour insist on the possibility of something darker creeping in; it is found in “the contrast between what we might be and what we are, between the petty cares and anxieties of today and the nothingness to which they fade to-morrow, between the fever and the fret of life and the final calm of death” (*Humour* 125). With this in mind, Leacock’s coda to *Sunshine*



*Sketches* demonstrates that the return to Mariposa forestalled in the work's meditative "Envoi" is impossible not only because the traveller is no longer really Mariposan, but also because, to an extent, neither is Mariposa.

The town *has* changed, in "Mariposa Moves On," and not for the better; there are signs of decay even before the story sequence's dramatic conclusion. In the first story, "The Happy Warrior," the narrator laments that fishing in the Mariposa area is no longer what it once was. "Nowadays," he says, "if you go trout fishing on the streams you've got to carry soda. You can't any longer drink the water in the creeks" (205). What's worse, "the fish are disappearing in the older settled parts of Ontario," and one has to go far north to find any (205)—a far cry indeed from the quality of fishing in Mariposa that could have been spoken of so expansively in the "Envoi" that "not even the long dull evening in this club would be long enough for the telling of it" (*Sunshine Sketches* 187).

It is not only the natural surroundings of Mariposa that are suffering, however; though the town has seen some improvements in the thirty years since the days of *Sunshine Sketches*—including a "park with an historic monument"<sup>5</sup>—the ones the narrator goes out of his way to mention are, incredibly, a "Municipal Abattoir and an Asylum for the feeble-minded" (*Happy Stories* 223). The barber Jeff Thorpe, when he suddenly came into a fortune in *Sunshine Sketches*, was frustrated in his attempts to build homes for the blind and the incurable by the fact that no such people could be found in Mariposa (*Sunshine Sketches* 43); now, however, it seems that an asylum for the "feeble-minded" can thrive. These and other features are especially disturbing in light of Mariposa's status as Canada's symbolic small town. Leacock's claim in the preface to the original *Sketches* that Mariposa "is not a real town" but rather "about seventy or eighty of them" (x-xi) has expanded considerably in the introduction to "Mariposa Moves On" to encompass "at least several hundred in Canada and in the adjacent States" (203). As Lynch has vividly expressed it, "Mariposa is Canada" in *Sunshine Sketches* ("From" 106); if it still is in "Mariposa Moves On," it has strayed very far from the inspiring vision of Canada that one might expect from a patriotic appeal.

There are yet sadder touches. In "Going, Going, Gone!" the narrator is transported back sixty-five years to a heartbreaking farm-auction, in which all of the sad, little elements of a poor family's life are put up for sale and dispersed—if they are lucky (229-230). He notes that this "tragedy" was not confined to the distant past; a mere five years would suffice—"those stricken,

hungry days when our ten million people had no one to kill and no one to feed but themselves” (230). He notes the bitter twist of the knife that was seeing the Depression end only because another world war had started: “the tragedy of our economic life that knows no stimulus but death” (231). They discuss this matter in Jeff’s barbershop, and the talk turns to the subject of economic paradoxes and the rolling back of non-essential industries and resources in a time of war;<sup>6</sup> the narrator, who (like Leacock) identifies himself as an economist, tries to give explanations for this, but they come out sounding limp and full of cant. Jeff finishes shaving his customer, looks across at the narrator and says, simply, “you’re next” (234). For Leacock, this was all too true.

An additional and poignant feature of “Mariposa Moves On” is the abstractly apocalyptic quality of its conclusion. It is in the final story in the cycle—“A New Heaven and a New Earth”—that this quality becomes most evident. The title sets the tone well; in the story the phrase is only a snippet of a patriotic speech that the narrator hears wafting on the evening wind (hears, that is, and detests), but the phrase comes from the Book of Revelation:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away . . . and I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven . . . and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Rev. 21.1-4)

These may be cheering words in their original context, but, taken as the text for Leacock’s short valedictory “sermon” on Mariposa, they carry a more ominous note.

While jubilation reigns in the town over the meeting of the quota and the raising of the million dollars, this jubilation is unlike previous outbursts of community celebration in *Sunshine Sketches*. The narrator claims that the drive had been “beginning to have a queer effect on the town, disrupting its social life” (*Happy Stories* 235). Whereas before Mariposa had been a town built along strictly segregated political and religious lines, even if everybody belonged to every club and association in town as a matter of principle, it is now slowly adopting a sort of ideological monism, in which the Mariposans no longer care about Liberal or Conservative, Catholic or Protestant, Teetotaler or Drunk, Slave or Free. “You felt somehow,” he writes wryly, “as if society was breaking away from its moorings, as if we never would get back again to where we used to be. And if you said that to any of the people, they said, ‘Why should we?’” (236).

Also worrying is the effect of the money itself. "It seems that the Loan," he continues, "—the realization that they could raise a million dollars in a little town like ours—has gone to their heads" (236). The "whirlwind fund-raising campaign" of the original *Sketches* ended up as a failure on a financial level, so the consequences of such a windfall were forestalled, but this time there is nothing to stand in the way of progress; "everybody has suddenly decided that Main Street is too cramped and narrow; they want to knock down one side of it and throw it into the lake" (237). What a change from the opening paragraphs of *Sunshine Sketches*, in which Main Street is favourably compared to Wall Street and Broadway for its grandiose width—you could "roll Jeff Thorpe's barber shop over on its face and it wouldn't reach halfway across" (*Sunshine Sketches* 2). This widening project also poses imminent danger to two of Mariposa's most significant commercial and cultural landmarks in *Sunshine Sketches*: Josh Smith's hotel and Jeff Thorpe's barbershop face each other across that very street. Which will be destroyed? The narrator does not speculate.

As the sequence nears its conclusion, the narrator retires to the barbershop to sit and chat, and is informed by Jeff that a famous speaker has come up from the City to preach patriotism and victory. Jeff insists, "you don't want to miss it"; "I did," the narrator confides, "but I didn't say so" (239). He leaves the barbershop, significantly, just as the sun sets; the citizens of Mariposa are in the streets, heading to a public meeting, all talking and laughing and smiling at one another. "It seems so different from what is used to be," he laments, "but for the price paid for it, it would seem a wonderful world" (240). This communal good feeling and unity have been brought about by a war that had destroyed much of the world and would have much yet left to destroy, and the narrator's unease reflects the fashion in which the victory speech and the Mariposans' exultations constitute the very "happy, relaxed, bell-ringing note of victory" that the Fourth Victory Loan's architects explicitly condemned (Ker and Goodman 49). Nevertheless, there remains some ambiguity as to just what the narrator laments—the war, the "victory" of the loan, or the changes that both have brought about.

A snippet of the speech drifts in through Jeff's window—"a new heaven and a new earth"—and a customer asks him what is going on. "It's nothing," says Jeff, "it's just a religious revival." "Oh," says the customer, "nothing real" (240). This weary misconstruing and dismissal of the victory rally hearkens back to the pitch-black critique of modern religion offered in the original *Sketches*, which saw Mariposa's Dean Drone as "at best a simpleton and at worst corrupt,"

and “communal Mariposa [having] engaged materialistic, individualistic Josh Smith to burn down its bankrupt Church of England for the salvific insurance money” (Lynch, “From” 106). While Drone’s narrative arc in *Sunshine Sketches* concludes on a sympathetic note and the sequence moves on to the redemptive romance of Peter Pupkin and Zena Pepperleigh, “A New Heaven and a New Earth” ends before any such redemption is possible. The final realization of the Mariposans’ worst instincts is complete. The story concludes with the descent of a twilit pathos:

A new heaven and a new earth—the words seemed to echo still as I walked away from the town and beside the lake towards my home. The evening was closing in around me—as it is every evening at my age—and from the lighted town behind me, and in the evening breeze gathering off the lake, the sound still came—“a new heaven and a new earth.” (240)<sup>7</sup>

The position of the narrator’s home, left unspecified in *Sunshine Sketches*, identifies that narrator with Leacock himself more thoroughly than ever; indeed, the house is specifically situated on “Old Brewery Bay,” where Leacock did in fact have his Orillia home, in one of the sequence’s earlier stories. More crucially, though, the evening is closing in around him, and the sunshine that has previously been the distinguishing feature of Mariposa—and the note upon which *Sunshine Sketches* concluded—is gone. Mariposa is now, instead, a “lighted” town, shining under its own power. The former things have passed away, and the new city has descended: “[B]ut for the price paid for it, it would seem a wonderful world” (240).

The sketches that constitute “Mariposa Moves On” have remained out of print for almost seventy years. They are short and inconsequential compared to *Sunshine Sketches*, and lack their depth, charm, and sense of angry exuberance. Whatever the reasons for the neglect of the sketches in “Mariposa Moves On,” however, they constitute an unusual late-career re-engagement on Leacock’s part with the little town in the sunshine that helped cement his reputation as one of Canada’s most important literary voices. Through his re-situation of Mariposa in a modern context and against the backdrop of international war, Leacock complicates still further the originally redemptive qualities of the town that awaited the reader-visitor. The implicit warning offered in *Sunshine Sketches*’ “Envoi” about what an actual return to Mariposa would be like is borne out, and the reader is left at last with the vision of a town that, far from being able to save his or her soul, cannot even save its own.

## NOTES

- 1 In spite of its positioning among Leacock's early career successes and its generally consistent quality of humour, *Behind the Beyond, and Other Contributions to Human Knowledge* (1913) has likewise received virtually no critical attention.
- 2 The most profoundly felt of these losses were on the personal level: the deaths of his friend, McGill principal Sir Arthur Currie in 1933, and his much-beloved mother in 1934 left Leacock feeling more alone than he had in years. The company of his troubled son, Stevie, proved little consolation. Leacock's wife, Beatrix Hamilton, had died in 1925 of breast cancer. Stevie was their only child, and his ongoing health problems (such as the lack of a growth hormone that saw him only ever attain a full height of four feet) caused considerable tensions between father and son. Much of the sadness in each of their lives revolved around the other. Stevie's graduation from McGill University in 1940 should have been a happy occasion for Leacock, given his professorship there, and his conviction of his son's brilliance, but the day of the graduation instead found Leacock drinking alone in the University Club, unwilling to attend the ceremony (MacMillan 143). Professional concerns mixed with the personal; in 1936, in the wake of Currie's death and the installation of McGill's new president, A. E. Morgan, a new regulation was adopted that mandated retirement for professors at the age of 65 unless sufficient reason for an exception could be found. No such exception was, in Leacock's case, and he was forced to depart.
- 3 See Slater for an in-depth analysis of the Victory Loan program and its successes.
- 4 See also Mantz; MacLulich; Zichy; Lynch ("From").
- 5 One possible implication of this otherwise vague reference is that the "historic monument" is one of the countless memorials to the dead and missing of the First World War that became such a regular feature of Canadian municipal centres during the 1920s and 1930s. Its rhetorical positioning against a slaughterhouse and a home for the mentally ill makes the possibility all the more suggestive.
- 6 A recurring subject in Leacock's war writing. His First World War propaganda pamphlet on the curbing of unnecessary luxury spending, *National Organization for War* (1916), proved immensely popular; the Canadian government distributed some 250,000 copies, and it was reprinted in Britain by Lord Northcliffe's Press.
- 7 The story as it appears in the *Montreal Gazette* carries a different title—"Leacock's Mariposa Out of Joint As Loan Drive Cuts Social Lines"—and a slightly expanded conclusion. The final paragraph is the same but for an additional three words at the very end: "Please God, yes" (23).

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