Stephen Leacock
Staines, David

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Stephen Leacock: A Reappraisal.

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Stephen Leacock made three major structural revisions to *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* between its serial publication in the *Montreal Star* from February 17, 1912 to June 22, 1912 and its publication in book form later the same year. He added the preface and reorganized the sketches as follows: the first two installments for the *Star*, "Mariposa and its People" and "The Glorious Victory of Mr. Smith," were combined to form the book's opening sketch, "The Hostelry of Mr. Smith"; and the sixth installment for the *Star*, "Mariposa’s Whirlwind Campaign," was divided to become the fifth and sixth sketches of the published book, "The Whirlwind Campaign in Mariposa" and "The Beacon on the Hill." The addition of the preface is significant because it, with "L’Envoi: The Train to Mariposa," provides a kind of framing device for the sketches proper. That is, Leacock’s preface and "L’Envoi" present the reader with different, though complementary, perspectives on *Sunshine Sketches* and Mariposa, perspectives which differ not only from one another but also from the point of view of the narrator of the sketches proper. All three perspectives—those of the authorial prefaeer, the ironically involved narrator, and the distanced, reflective narrator of "L’Envoi"—are necessary to a rounded view of the town and the book. By reorganizing the opening and middle sketches, Leacock gave prominence to the character of Josh Smith and created in the interior sketches—four through nine—two three-sketch sections, of which the first is concerned with Mariposan religion, and the second with Mariposan romance. This symmetrical centre of the *Sketches* opposes three
sketches on the virtues of Mariposa in matters of romance, love, marriage, and family to three sketches on the failure of Mariposa's institutionalized religion to meet simply the needs of its Anglican parishioners. This structurally contrived, balanced opposition at the centre of *Sunshine Sketches* begins to suggest that Leacock's masterpiece is a more highly organized and complex work than has hitherto been shown.¹ The organization and concerns of sketches four through nine reflect the values of Leacock's humanism and toryism, the tory-humanism that values continuity in human affairs, responsibility and tolerance, organicism, balance and equipoise in all matters, and the community over the individual—a community such as Mariposa, an individual such as Josh Smith.

Since I have dealt elsewhere in detail with the opposition between Mariposa and Mr. Smith,² here I will briefly outline the nature of that opposition and proceed to a discussion of the religious and romantic concerns of the book—what may be called the spiritual concerns at the heart of *Sunshine Sketches*.

Josh Smith can be viewed, and has been viewed,³ as *Sunshine Sketches*’ closest approximation of a hero. He runs the hotel which temporarily becomes Mariposa's commercial showpiece; he contracts for eggs with Jeff Thorpe’s “woman” and thereby assists financially the bankrupt barber; he saves the Mariposa Belle; he sets fire to Dean Drone's debt-ridden church for the insurance money, then single-handedly prevents the fire from spreading to the town; and he champions the conservative cause of protectionism against liberal reciprocity with the United States, thereby saving, by ironic extension, the British Empire. Smith acts, of course, in every instance for patently selfish reasons. The additions to Smith's Hotel are a temporary ruse for the sake of retrieving the lost liquor licence. The contract with Thorpe merely serves to feed the fully operational “caffs” temporary requirement of more eggs. Smith raises the grounded Mariposa Belle to ensure his own comfort and to win a twenty-five dollar bet with Mullins the banker. And it can be speculated that Smith sets fire to Dean Drone's new church and fights the fire to safeguard, financially and then materially, the town which he exploits for his own aggrandisement. The first sketch, “The Hostelry of Mr. Smith,” moves most purposefully towards Smith's realization that the “hotel business formed the natural and proper threshold of the national legislature.”⁴ This realization transforms Smith’s vision of himself. Mr. Smith is a quick study. He is victimized in the opening sketch by the telegram ordering him to close down his hotel: he is the victor with the telegram that he has sent from the city in the last sketch, the telegram that prematurely announces his victory, thereby assuring his victory, as in Mariposa no one wants to vote on the wrong side—the losing side. In short, Josh Smith is a marginally likeable, self-serving individualist and manipulative materialist, one who comes from Canada's timber frontier and insinuates his way into the “inner life” of Mariposa. He exploits the deduced Mariposans, becomes the town's elected representative, and by the last sketch is on his way to “Ottaway.” Perhaps we are to imagine that
Smith, the “over-dressed pirate” (p. 10), will help guide the Canadian ship of state as shrewdly as he steered the Mariposa Belle to dock.

Against Smith stands the community of Mariposa, the ironically idyllic, somewhat northern Canadian town that embodies Leacock's qualified ideal of tory community. Smith is the materialist, the individualist, the personification of, and “josh” on, liberal individualism. In opposition to Smith, Mariposa's most obvious virtue is its nature as an interdependent community. “This opposition” (p. 12), as Leacock's narrator describes the relation between Smith and Mariposa, is made clear in the contrasting first two sketches, a contrast between real business as practised by Smith—for his own enrichment—and the illusory business of Jeff Thorpe, whose evanescent fortune was to be used partially for local philanthropic purposes, and whose real business, barbering, provides a meeting place for relaxed communal interchanges. The six middle sketches of *Sunshine Sketches* continue to contrast the material values embodied in the individualist Smith with those communal values of Mariposa, with the added and ominous suggestion in the sketches on religion that some of these Mariposan values are being lost and forgotten. The sketches on religion further point up the problems that arise when metropolitan schemes are assimilated to rural Mariposa by the practically incompetent Mariposans. Here again, Smith figures centrally in the resolution of a Mariposan dilemma (the financially troubled church), which, if not in this instance of his making, is the result of those crassly materialistic values that he has come to personify. In the matter of religion, Leacock's anti-materialism finds expression in his subtle satire on the ecclesiastical trappings of High Anglicanism. Opposed to this negative appraisal of misdirected Mariposan religion are the three sketches on romance and love, wherein Mariposan adherence to appearances serves a communally redeeming purpose. Opposed to Smith's outward movement, the three sketches on love offer the contrary inward movement of Peter Pupkin.

The reader who comes to the *Sketches* by way of the many favourable, sometimes sentimental, critical assessments of the Rev. Mr. Drone will be perplexed upon encountering the numerous faults of the misguided and misleading pastor. Drone, the Anglican minister of the Church of England church in Mariposa, is introduced sitting in his garden and reading drowsily in Greek. The narrator asks a leading question: “For what better could a man be reading . . . than the Pastoral of Theocritus?” (p. 96). Since Greek would appear to be all that this pastor “reads” (and as his muddled biblical references would further suggest), the reader might well answer, “his Bible.” It is unnecessary to recall Leacock's frequent invidious remarks on classical literature to observe that in reading the pastoral poems of Theocritus Dean Drone is wasting his time and neglecting the pastoral duties of an Anglican minister. The preface provided the pertinent gloss with his remarks on “languages, living, dead, and half-dead,” the acquisition of which left Dean Drone knowing “nothing of the outside world” and “intellectually bankrupt”
As developments reveal, Drone's ill-spent time and mismanagement invite the literal bankruptcy of his Church of England church.

The new church is more than a testimony to Drone's and Mariposa's incipient materialism: it is most damagingly a denial of the past. It has replaced the "little stone church, . . . a quaint little building in red and grey stone" (p. 100). The stone from the old church was, as the narrator notes, "devoutly sold to a building contractor, and, like so much else in life, was forgotten" (p. 105). The plan had been to incorporate the stone from the old church into the new church. The central concern of *Sunshine Sketches* could be neither better nor more artfully put: the worthwhile from the past—from "Mariposa"—must be remembered forward if there is to be any hope for a full and continuous life in the present and the future. In the matter of Mariposan religion, such a re-membering does not prove to be the practice.

Leacock's narrator leaves little reason to question the error of the motives behind the new church's existence. The imposing edifice is "a large church with a great sweep of polished cedar beams inside, for the special glorification of the All Powerful, and with imported tiles on the roof for the greater glory of Heaven and with stained-glass windows for the exaltation of the All Seeing" (p. 102). A moment's reflection should reveal the ludicrous incongruity between mistaken aspiration and vain achievement in Mariposa's new Anglican church. In Leacock's view, strong cedar beams do not glorify the All Powerful, nor do imported tiles reflect greater glory heavenward; and whether or not the All Seeing is exalted by stained-glass windows, it is certain that those who are inside the church, admiring the cedar beams and thinking of the tiles and looking at the windows, will not be able to see into the Book of Nature beyond the comparatively opaque windows. Malcolm Ross has summarized popular reaction to the similar importation of High-Church Anglican architecture into the Maritimes in the late nineteenth century: "To stain a window was perhaps to stain a soul." In Leacock's view, such ostentation takes the Anglican Church away from its roots—an astray from the via media. More than simple materialism, this is the error of Drone and his congregation. And this original error leads to the commission of others.

Drone's new church is a "high" church even in spatial terms. The first sentence of "The Ministrations" reveals that the church stands "a little up the hill from the heart of the town" (p. 95, emphasis added). The new church "towered above the maple trees of Mariposa like a beacon on a hill. It stood so high . . ." (p. 106). The pastor of this literally "high" church, Rural Dean Drone, rather than tending to his Christian pastoral duties, sits reading his pagan pastorals of Theocritus at a "rustic table" (pp. 95, 97, 100). But the rustic table—"table" being the designation of the traditional Anglican altar—as little reminds Drone of his religious roots and the error of his ways as did the disposal of the old stone church and the defacement of the cemetery. To some extent, Drone's misplaced faith in such things as logarithms and ostentatious churches illustrates
what Leacock observed of the failure of economics: "The fault of economics was the assumption that what can only be done by the Spirit could be done by material interest." Drone is much lacking in the Spirit. He is unconcerned with Logos, the Word of the Bible, which, with the Book of Nature, is the true evidence of the Creator's works. Despite the windy intentions of glorifying God, the narrator makes clear the true inspiration of the new church: "You could see and appreciate things from the height of the new church,—such as the size and the growing wealth of Mariposa,—that you never could have seen from the little stone church at all" (p. 106, emphasis added). This association of "height" and material affluence suggests an appreciation of things from a realtor's point of view. The new church is a testimony to Mr. Smith's and the city's god—Mammon.

In accordance with the suggestive satire on High Anglicanism, there is subtle and straightforward anti-Catholic satire, which is an apt association because the High-Church movement was accused in nineteenth-century England of "Romish" sympathies. When the Anglican congregation begins to turn against Drone,

Yodel, the auctioneer, for example, narrated how he had been to the city and had gone into a service of the Roman Catholic Church: I believe, to state it more fairly, he had "dropped in,"—the only recognized means of access to such a service. He claimed that the music that he had heard there was music, and that (outside of his profession) the chanting and intoning could not be touched. (p. 109)

The ritualism of Roman Catholic worship is associated, in so far as Yodel's opinion of Latin hymns is concerned, with an inferior sort of auctioneer's yodelling. Drone's one contribution to the efforts to raise money is a "magic lantern lecture" on "Italy and her Invaders" (p. 116). Even if the "magic lantern" (an early version of the slide projector) is not meant to suggest in a derisive fashion the tabernacle light of the Catholic altar (which testifies to the "Real Presence" of Christ at the altar), there should be no question as to the import of "Italy and her Invaders": not only is Drone actively interested in the things of Italy (Roman Catholicism) but he is also permitting her "Invaders" (High Anglican practices) to establish a position in Mariposa. It can thus be seen that by means of spatial imagery (the location of the church), symbolism (the rustic table), and humorous implication (Yodel, the magic lantern lecture), Leacock indicted Drone for leading his Anglican flock away from the roots of Anglicanism and towards a High-Church Anglicanism that is suggestively associated with Roman Catholicism. It is not, however, the ecclesiastical trappings of High Anglicanism that the Mariposans seek to escape. It is the church's financial debt. As Yodel's remarks reveal, and as the conclusion to "The Beacon" will further emphasize, the Mariposans look for solutions to their problem in the very things that caused their dilemma—in a richer ritualism (Roman Catholicism), in city schemes (the Whirlwind Campaign), and in a bigger church which they build with the insurance money.
When the city-inspired Whirlwind Campaign fails, Drone does penance over his letter of resignation. He sees finally that his remaining, mistaken pride in his facility with language is unfounded: "Then the Dean saw that he was beaten, and he knew that he not only couldn’t manage the parish but couldn’t say so in proper English, and of the two the last was the bitterer discovery" (p. 138). Appropriately, Drone’s obsession with words and literarness— with the Greek language, with the epithet “mugwump,” and with his letter of resignation—rather than with the spirit of the Word, is associated with the mismanagement of the church. Drone’s taste in church architecture finds here a literary parallel in his “fine taste for words and effects” (p. 136). But when Drone attempts to write in “proper English,” in the language of the Church of England, his words become merely “one set of words and then . . . something else” (p. 135). At every turn, Drone is defeated by that which caused his problems: affectation in word and deed.

The gregarious cohesion of the Mariposan community of the Whirlwind Campaign may not completely offset the selfishness that they evidence, yet their behaviour does present them in terms of a human, if ineffectual, community. Although the conditions which they place on their contributions to the Campaign assure their financial security and boosterish vanity, these conditions are nevertheless in pointed contrast to Mr. Smith’s conditional donation: “Mr. Smith had given [the campaigners] two hundred dollars in cash conditional on the lunches being held in the caff of his hotel . . . . So Mr. Smith got back his own money, and the crowd began eating into the benefactions” (p. 129). From its realization in the city, the Whirlwind Campaign undergoes, like so much else imported to Mariposa, a transformation to mere appearance, an appearance or illusion that attempts vainly to function as reality. Yet this appearance does serve a real purpose. Unlike the costly appearance of the church, the Campaign serves to call forth feelings of communal purposefulness in contrast to Smith’s obsessively individualistic avariciousness. But what the Mariposans really needed to redeem their church was a return to the Anglican via media, a retreat from High-Church ostentation, a recovery of the inspiration of pneuma and the Word as opposed to the whirlwind. In the progress of events, though, this was never a possibility.

When the metaphoric beacon on the hill breaks “into a very beacon kindled upon a hill” (p. 139), it serves specifically to illuminate the error of High Anglican ostentation and functions generally to highlight the folly of Mariposa’s materialistic ambitions. This symbolic illumination of error is presented once again in comparison to the shady dealings of Mr. Smith, who functions in “The Beacon on the Hill” as a sort of deus ex machina. The firefighting is described: they “fought it, with the Mariposa engine thumping and panting in the street, itself aglow with fire like a servant demon fighting its own kind” (p. 140). The Mariposas fight furiously because “the fire could leap into the heart of Mariposa” (p. 140). The brigade is led by Mr. Smith, by whom the narrator is suddenly fascinated and to whose actions he wishes especially to direct the reader’s
attention: “Most of all I wish you could have seen Mr. Smith” (p. 141). Much is transpiring in this scene. As leader of the firefighters Smith is imagined to be fighting the fire with fire, and both “fires” are imaged as “demons.” Figuratively, Smith is battling a spiritual pride equal to his own materialistic ambitions. Moreover, this fire which Smith started threatens “the heart of Mariposa,” the place where, it will be recalled, Smith’s Hotel is located (p. 9). Smith fights the fire, then, to save his own hotel and the material possessions of what he already has determined will become his constituency—his political base.

As has been shown, Leacock’s narrator disapproves of the new church and of the Mariposans’ discarding and forgetting of the old stone church which, “like so much else in life, was forgotten” (p. 105). The new church must come down, by hook (axe) and by crook (Smith). By employing Smith to burn down the church, Leacock effectively points up the relation between the agent of destruction—Smith—and the motivations behind the beacon’s existence—pride, affectation, and materialism. Although the narrator ironically celebrates Smith’s actions, exclaiming, “At it, Smith! Down with it!” (p. 141), it would be as mistaken to conclude that he approves of Smith even in this instance as it would be to think that he admires the new church. Smith is useful in the matter of the church for his destructive efficaciousness, a quality which again places him in contrast to the habitually ineffectual Mariposans. Moreover, the scene of Smith’s transfiguration on the angled beams of Drone’s driving shed can be viewed as a grotesque parody of the Crucifixion.

Smith starts the fire “in April” (p. 140), which is the time of the Crucifixion. He does so with the help of “Gingham’s assistant” (p. 146)—the assistant of the Gingham whose Christian name is Golgotha, “the place of the skull” where Christ was crucified (Mark 15:22). When Smith splits the beam of the driving shed, “the beam gapes asunder” (p. 141), a suggestively mock-biblical expression that distantly recalls St. Mark’s description of Christ’s death: “And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” (15:36). The scene of the church’s fall is described: “Then when the roof crashed in and the tall steeple tottered and fell, so swift a darkness seemed to come that the grey trees and the frozen lake vanished in a moment as if blotted out of existence” (p. 143). Again, the blotting darkness suggests St. Mark’s description of Christ’s death: “There was darkness over the whole land” (15:33). It can be argued further that not only is the scene of the fire a parody of the Crucifixion but that Smith functions as a hideous parody of Christ. By His death, Christ ransomed mankind and provided assurance of heaven; by burning down the beacon, Smith ransoms the indebted parish by indirectly providing the redemptive insurance money. Smith, in league with Golgotha Gingham, is associated with death rather than with life. (Smith is also, in his “huge red helmet" [p. 142], something of a Satanic figure. His “voice ... dominates the fire itself” [p. 142], a fire that earlier is termed “a great Terror of the Night” [p. 140]. And the name “Smith” is, of course, suggestive of the roaring furnace of a blacksmith’s smithy.) In fulfilment of Smith’s parodic function, the destruction of the church is
followed by further moral inversions: what should be experienced as a
catastrophe is felt to be a "luxury of excitement . . . just as good as a
holiday" (p. 144); the beacon is worth more when extinguished than
when beaming; and "a little faith and effort" (p. 145) resolves into faith in
illegality and the efforts of Smith as arsonist and axeman.

It may have been the bleak outlook resulting from the sketches on
religion that led Leacock to follow them with the three sketches that
portray most positively the virtues of life in Mariposa. Although Leacock
does not seem to have possessed faith in the conventionally religious
sense (he was by most reports an occasional kind of Anglican), the
Pupkin-Pepperleigh romance suggests that he believed in the redemptive
"enchanted" of love. Where the Mariposas discard the old and truly
spiritual in favour of the new and ostentatiously material, Peter and Zena
achieve a kind of fusion of the romantic and the realistic.

In the three sketches dealing with love in Mariposa—"The Ex-
traordinary Entanglement of Mr. Pupkin," "The Fore-Ordained Attach-
ment of Zena Pepperleigh and Peter Pupkin," and "The Mariposa Bank
Mystery"—Josh Smith's customary manipulative role is undertaken by an
indigenous Mariposan, Judge Pepperleigh, and by an appreciative out-
sider, Pupkin Senior. Unlike Smith, the outsider who comes to Mariposa
only to move out, Peter Pupkin is an outsider moving inwards to a perma-
nent place in the heart of the community. Smith comes from Canada's
northern timber frontier, where he learned to manipulate both axe and
men, and settles temporarily in Mariposa as the embodiment of all that
threatens the community. In contrast, Peter Pupkin, the latest issue of
Loyalist stock, moves from the older, longer-settled eastern provinces of
Canada and settles permanently in Mariposa to become an example of
the best the community has to offer. Although useful in the matter of
razing the beacon, Smith, the pseudo-frontiersman, threatens the values
of the community. Pupkin, from the longer-civilized Maritime provinces,
marries a native Mariposan and with her fortifies the community with an
"enchanted baby" (p. 211). Those who help to "fore-ordain" the attach-
ment of Pupkin and Zena—Judge Pepperleigh and Pupkin Senior—are
the representatives of law and order and the long-established business
community.

The three sketches devoted to Mariposan love present a systematic
blurring of the line between illusion (or romance) and reality. The
romantic perception that makes of commonplace occurrences "extraordi-
nary entanglements" leads actually to extraordinary love; the romantic
notion of a "fore-ordained attachment" results in actuality, for the
romance is to some extent fore-ordained by Judge Pepperleigh and Pupkin
Senior; and the illusory bank robbery serves a real purpose by bringing
about a resolution to Pupkin's romantic dilemma. By blending the ro-
mantic and the realistic, sketches seven through nine best illustrate Lea-
cock's credo that "you cannot tell a love story just as it is—because it isn't
. . . . When a young man sees in his girl an angel, and a young girl sees in
her lover a hero, perhaps they are seeing what is really there." Leacock's
narrator is insistently "kindly" towards Mariposan folly in these three
sketches on Mariposan love, an attitude which is best appreciated in contrast to the satirical-elegiac narrative stance in the preceding three sketches on Mariposan religion.

The scene of Pupkin's meeting and falling in love with Zena, the scene which concludes "The Extraordinary Entanglement," makes clear the enchanting, transforming quality of love. Not only is "the whole world changed" (p. 165) for Pupkin as a result of meeting Zena, but the narrator, too, undergoes a change. He begins the relation of love's effect on Pupkin by revealing the commonplaceness of the ironic, "most peculiar coincidences" which bring Pupkin and Zena together. But as he moves from Pupkin's perception of the "whole world changed" to Pupkin's view of Mariposa, it becomes apparent that the narrator sympathizes with the sentiments expressed and that he bemusedly, patronizingly, though not condescendingly, condones the workings of this romantic love: "And, for Pupkin, straight away the whole town was irradiated with sunshine, and there was such a singing of the birds, and such a dancing of the rippled waters of the lake, and such a kindness in the faces of all the people, that only those who have lived in Mariposa, and been young there, can know at all what he felt" (p. 165, emphasis added). The irradiation of sunshine offers here a contrast to the "darkness" of "The Beacon" which blotted out the trees and the lake (p. 143). However, Mariposa is "irradiated with sunshine" only when the vision is a lover's; Mariposans all have "kindly" faces only when seen with a lover's eyes—Pupkin's, the prefacer's, the narrator's, those of the narrator of "L'Envoi," and Leacock's. Significantly, the sunshine of these *Sunshine Sketches* is contingent upon "an affection," as the prefacer admitted in his concluding paragraph. And "kindliness," it will be recalled, is the key and controversial word in Leacock's definition of humour: "The essence of humour is human kindliness."9 For Leacock, love, like humour at its best, transforms reality and allows humanity to be viewed in as kindly a light as human folly will allow.

Complications occur, of course, before the story of Peter and Zena realizes its enchanted resolution. A romance would not be a Leacockian romance without its conventions being parodied as they are simultaneously exploited and elevated. In the second sketch of the threesketch love story, "The Fore-Ordained Attachment," the complications arise, ironically, from Pupkin's adoption of Zena's romantic perspective. In one of *Sunshine Sketches*' characteristic inversions of the conventional, Pupkin is shown to fear that Zena will not marry him because his family is wealthy rather than heroically poor. This threat from unchivalric affluence is termed "cold reality" (p. 179). And as is often the practice in the *Sketches*, the reality that threatens Mariposa is projected onto "the city." Pupkin feels threatened by a poet "up from the city, probably" (p. 188); Pupkin is driven to his final attempt at suicide because "Zena had danced four times with a visitor from the city" (p. 195); and, after the bank "robbery," Pupkin's new role as hero is threatened by the investigating detectives who "come up from the city" (p. 203).

Yet the narrator has made his view clear with reference to the threat of the city in a passage that contrasts the Mariposan girls with their city rivals:
The Mariposa girls are all right. You've only to look at them to realize that. You see, you can get in Mariposa a print dress of pale blue or pale pink for a dollar twenty that looks infinitely better than anything you ever see in the city,—especially if you can wear with it a broad straw hat and a background of maple trees and the green grass of a tennis court. (p. 169)

The Mariposa girls are more attractive because they “wear” with their simple dress a more becoming environment than do their urban counterparts. Zena and Peter have little to fear. Their romance is not only invulnerable to the threats of reality and the city, it is indirectly assisted by the extra-Mariposan world. This favourable interdependency is illustrated by the realization of Pupkin’s greatest fear—that his wealthy father will visit Mariposa.

Upon his arrival in Mariposa, Pupkin’s father demonstrates, however, that his son’s apprehension was unfounded. The father smokes a corncob pipe with Judge Pepperleigh, casually passes time in Jeff Thorpe’s barber shop, hunts ducks, and, unlike Josh Smith who “stiffs” junior bank tellers in “freezeout poker” (p. 79), plays poker for insignificant stakes (pp. 210-11). Pupkin Senior, unlike the auditor of “L’Envoi,” is fully capable of returning to and courteously adapting to life in the little town. And he genuinely enjoys Mariposa, for “they had to send him telegrams enough to fill a satchel to make him come away” (p. 211). Most important, Pupkin Senior has passed on to his son the real heroic virtues which make possible the resolution of the romantic complication. Leacock’s narrator is little short of lavish in singing the praises of these real Loyalist virtues—the virtues of loyalty, duty, courage, and self-sacrifice.

When in “The Mariposa Bank Mystery” Pupkin suspects that Missinaba County’s harvest money is threatened, he forgets “for the moment all about heroes and love affairs . . . . He only knew that there was sixty thousand dollars in the vault of the bank below, and that he was paid eight hundred dollars a year to look after it” (p. 197). Following this tribute to the virtues of work and duty (those Carlylean-Victorian virtues), the narrator eulogizes Loyalist courage—that which Pupkin Senior has bequeathed to his son: “His [Pupkin’s] heart beat like a hammer against his ribs. But behind its beatings was the blood of four generations of Loyalists, and the robber who would take that sixty thousand dollars from the Mariposa bank must take it over the dead body of Peter Pupkin, teller” (p. 198). Such sound Loyalist stock comprises for Leacock—the Canadian tory, the British imperialist, the humanist—the real stuff of heroes, of which even a “teller” may partake. Pupkin’s courage turns him into “such a hero as even the Mariposa girls might dream about” (p. 198), thus bringing about his proposal to Zena and her acceptance of him, their life in an “enchanted house” which is surrounded by “enchanted grass,” and in which house sleeps an “enchanted baby” (p. 211).

Leacock has written elsewhere that in the real world, as opposed to a fictional world, the enchantments of romantic love are impermanent: “All lovers—silly lovers in their silly stage—attain for a moment this super-self, each as towards the other. Each sees in the other what would
be there for all the world to see in each of us, if we could but reach it."¹⁰

The narrative perception which conceives of romantic lovers as living permanently in an enchanted world temporarily abandons itself to the subjective perspective of the lovers. This is the case with Leacock's narrator at the conclusion of the love story. It would be wrong to harm the conclusion by forcing it onto some critical Procrustean bed of distorting irony. Of course there is much ironic parody of romance conventions and romance itself throughout the sketches on Mariposan love: the adventurous hero, the beautiful heroine, the providential coincidence, the happy ending, and so on. But as Jerome H. Buckley has observed of Oscar Wilde's often ironic portrayal of women who evoke pathos, "We may suspect the playwright of deliberately burlesquing the distress of his heroines; but we can hardly assume that he would have us regard his most calculated pathos as completely ironic."¹¹

As is often the case in Leacock's writings, the love story presents an instance of extremes being modulated—the realistic tempers the romantic and vice versa. The three-sketch love story has similarly tempered the disheartening conclusions that were drawn from the previous three sketches which portrayed Mariposa as extremely affected, materialistic, and dishonest in matters of religion. Effectively excluding Mr. Smith from the love interest, the sketches on love and marriage reveal the town in its most positive light, functioning as a cohesive community towards commendable goals—love, marriage, and a new Mariposan citizen to help justify the town's habit of inflating its census figures. All of which is to say that Leacock's enchanting love story is also a religious chant of a kind. It is a number of humorously intoned variations on a single theme—romantic love—which are chanted to counter the dispiriting failure of Mariposan religion.
"The Engagement of Mr. Pupkin," Montreal Star, April 13, 1912
Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town

IV

The morning train in the kingdom of Bithania

half past six on a July morning! The Manchon Belle is lying at the wharf, decked in flags, with steam up ready to start.

The sun is up!

half past six on a July morning, and Lake Wiesansee lying in the morning sun as calm as glass. The light clouds of the morning light are shot from the surface of the water.

Out on the lake! The last thin thread of the morning mist are clearing away like fleeces of cotton wool.

The long call of the loon echoes over the lake. The air is cool and fresh. This is the sweet new life of the land, the silent spring and the morning trail.

Sc
Sœurs, here shelter, of a Little Inn

XII. L'Envoyé. The Envoy to Manchuria.

He leaves the city every day about five o'clock in the evening, the train for Manchuria.

Strange that you did not know of it, though you came from the little town, as did, long years ago.

Cold that you never knew in all these years that the train has there long a column, puffing up steam on the station, and that you might have boarded it any day and come home. No, not home, of course, you would not call it "home" now; "home" means