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STEPHEN LEACOCK: THE NOVELIST WHO NEVER WAS

ONE OF THE PHANTOMS that stalks through discussions of Leacock's work is that of Leacock the stillborn novelist. He was a writer of sensitivity, intelligence, and considerable artistry, but he never wrote a novel, though in one or two of his books—notably *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912) and *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich* (1914)—he came close enough to raise the spectre which has dogged his admirers ever since. Why did he not take that last step? *Could* he have taken it? Or are the talents that made him a splendid humorist simply not those that are required by the novelist?

These are certainly some of the most interesting questions that Leacock's work poses; they are also probably among the most important, for our estimation of Leacock's stature as a writer cannot but be affected by the answers we give to them. The humorous sketch, however well done, is a slight thing and far too feeble to support the reputation of a major writer. On the other hand, the comic novel can be a major work capable of supporting the reputation of an important writer. The sketch is often a way-point in the progress of a writer towards the comic novel, as it was for Dickens, Thackeray, and Mark Twain; or toward the drama, as it was for Chekhov. But in itself the sketch does not count for very much, and important writers soon move beyond it. In the two books that have been mentioned, Leacock obviously moved far beyond the isolated humorous sketch, but he did not reach as far as the novel, the major form to which he came nearest and to which his talent appears to have been most suited. What this suggests about his stature depends on whether we view his talent as inadequate for the novel, or as adequate but, as it were, deflected from the novel.

It appears to come down to this: if Leacock could not have written a novel, then his talent was not so considerable after all. And if he could have, but decided—consciously or unconsciously—not to do it, then we have what Robertson Davies has called a tragedy: a writer who never produced the best

that was in him, a major talent that never wrote a major work. What is at stake in this matter, then, is no less than our estimate of the magnitude of Leacock's talent.

The most important early discussion of the matter was that of Peter McArthur. In the volume on Leacock in the "Makers of Canadian Literature" series, in 1923, McArthur voiced his suspicions that Leacock was being pressed by his publishers, by his public, and by his own temperament towards constant repetition of his early successes, to the detriment of his growth as an artist. The publishers, McArthur felt, played a particularly villainous role, but he suggested that it was possible even in 1923 for Leacock to break loose and write more ambitious works than he had yet attempted:

If the publishers and the public could get over their hysterical demand for comedy and read Stephen Leacock's writings with discernment, they would soon realize that his power of pathos is never less artistically sure than his command of laughter. His great danger is that he may be misled by an insistent and profitable demand into the modern evil of specialization—an evil with which he has dealt in his literary essays—and will give too free a rein to his genius for fun. As matters stand he is one of the truest interpreters of American and Canadian life that we have had; but by giving free play to all his powers he may finally win recognition as a broad and sympathetic interpreter of life as a whole.¹

"As we look back now over the whole body of his work we must agree with McArthur." Thus Robertson Davies, in his 1957 essay in *Our Living Tradition*, and if we want a persuasive contemporary statement of the case for Leacock the novelist we may continue Mr. Davies's argument:

There is in the best work of Leacock a quality of sympathetic understanding, of delicacy as well as strength of perception There are in his books too many hints at darker things, too many swift and unmistakable descents towards melancholy, for us to be satisfied with [a] clownish portrait any longer. He was a man of unusual maturity of outlook, whose temperament disposed him to comment on the world as a humorist; at the top of his form he was a humorist of distinguished gifts, with a range and brilliance not often equalled. But the humor, though deep in grain, was not the essence of the man's spirit. That essence lay in the uncompromisingly adult quality of his mind, and the penetration of his glance. These were qualities which, if circumstances had been slightly different—if he had not been a humorist—might still have made him a writer of great novels, or even of tragedies.²

Malcolm Ross, in his Preface to *Sunshine Sketches*, violently disagrees: First of all, nothing in this book (or in the later books) suggests that Leacock had any aptitude at all for novel writing. It is not only that he is a caricaturist

rather than a character-maker (and too good at it to be anything else); it is also that Leacock does not and, I think, could not write narrative as a novelist writes narrative. Instead, he relates anecdotes—and in the manner of the home-spun story-teller. In short, he writes *sketches*, and the Leacock sketches are a blessed compound, like nothing else that ever was or ever shall be, of caricature, anecdote, and *essay*. They must not be read as if they were the baby-steps of the novelist-to-be who never was. They are things-in-themselves. We would not have them, nor could Leacock have made them, other than they are.³

One cannot resist pointing out the strange single-mindedness that does not apparently conceive of the possibility that one may delight in Leacock's sketches for what they are, and still find qualities in them which suggest that their author had gifts beyond those he chose to display. But Mr. Ross does focus our attention on the two abilities the novel requires: the ability to create living characters, and the ability to set these characters in a special kind of narrative structure which we recognize as characteristic of the novel. Did Leacock have these abilities?

The evidence would appear to show that he did. In an earlier paper,⁴ the present writer endeavoured to show that Leacock's approach to character is much more complex and delicate than it has usually been made to appear. This is particularly true in *Sunshine Sketches*, in which Leacock normally begins by satirizing the characters, but later shows, with warm sympathy, the characters' own views of the actions that Leacock has portrayed. There is no need to develop the argument fully in order to point out that the method is not that of the caricaturist, who is only concerned to show the appearances, the bold outlines of character, rather than its nuances and its own subjective interpretations of its surroundings. The method is in fact an idiosyncratic type of character-making, to use Mr. Ross's term—comic character-making, certainly; highly personal, inimitably funny—but not caricature. Moreover, the method, which proceeds from comic external items to painful insights into the private griefs and joys of the characters, has an important quality of verisimilitude: this is, after all, the way we come to know people in life.

The result of this method is the creation of living characters. They are not great characters, not models of psychological complexity which reflect the full range of the human condition; in E. M. Forster's terms, Leacock's characters are flat.⁵ But a flat character is not necessarily a lifeless one, as Parson Trulliber and Mr. Micawber attest. The flat but vigorously alive character is the stock-in-trade of the comic novelist—Fielding and Dickens, Thackeray and Mark Twain and Sterne—and it is with such novelists that Leacock has his

closest affinity as a creator of character; it is such a novelist that Leacock might have become.

Some of Leacock's characters are fully alive and likely to continue so. Jefferson Thorpe: the big winner, the big loser, and always the big dreamer of economic good fortune. Dean Drone: the unworldly cleric, broken and yet somehow triumphant over a world more iniquitous than he can ever understand. Josh Smith: the amoral cynic who conceals a wide streak of sentimentality. Mariposa, filled with such characters, stretches itself in the sun and seems to possess a life of its own.

Yet although it is remarkable how many of the characters of *Sunshine Sketches* lodge themselves in the imagination, I think that Leacock's most successful character is to be found in *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*: Tomlinson, the Wizard of Finance. Leacock's vision of Tomlinson is his usual dual vision: Tomlinson is viewed both as outsiders see him ("unfathomable", "inscrutable") and as he sees himself ("puzzled", "simple"), and the comedy arises from the disparity between the simple, good-natured farmer he actually is, and the Wizard of Finance that those around him insist on making him. He is a Jefferson Thorpe whose luck has held a little longer, and he has come to see that all his riches serve only to make him miserable—as they would have made Jeff Thorpe miserable. We may be reminded of Leacock's fleeting remark that "It seemed to spoil one's idea of Jeff that copper and asbestos should form the goal of his thought when, if he knew it, the little shop and the sunlight of Mariposa was so much better."⁸ Tomlinson does know that the farm on Lake Erie is much better than the thousand-dollar-a-month suite at the Grand Palaver Hotel, but he is trapped by his own good fortune; however hard he tries, he cannot lose his money nor can he regain his farm. His prosperity is hollow, even bitter. Spiritually impoverished amidst material affluence, Tomlinson has learned, to his sorrow, the real value of the simple life from which he has been torn, and his simplicity and honesty expose the business society around him for the soulless fraud it really is. Leacock returned again and again to this theme and this contrast, and to the related subject of the corrosive effect of wealth on human fortitude and generosity, but he was never able to give it more powerful expression than he did in the character of Edward Tomlinson.

Leacock was not a creator of great characters, all the same. Not only are his people flat, but they also have a curious static quality about them; they rarely grow or develop or decline; time does not affect them. It is as though Leacock had photographed them once, in an extremely revealing posture, but

without inquiring deeply into their past or their future; they play their parts in his book and go offstage unchanged. The most effective of them are simple, too; unsophisticated and occasionally stupid. Though there are hints that he was capable of rendering more complex characters—the narrator of *Sunshine Sketches*, for instance, suggests such a power—the characters he actually created almost all fall within a very narrow range. All the same, this does not disbar him as a novelist: many fine novels have been written with an equally narrow range of characterization. In the early work of Fielding, there is roaring low comedy which Leacock's Victorianism did not permit, but leaving that aside, surely there is little more complexity in Parson Adams than in Dean Drone, or in Joseph Andrews than in Peter Pupkin. It is difficult to see any reason why Leacock's characters would not fit easily into a comic novel, and in fact they are strikingly similar to those of what Edwin Muir has called the "character novelists".

Muir's whole analysis of the character novelist is fascinating in its application to Leacock. Briefly, Muir argues that the aim of such great novelists of character as Dickens, Thackeray, Scott, and Mark Twain is to display certain permanent types of human being against a background of human-dominated space—the city of London, for instance, rather than Egdon Heath—and more or less outside time. Their characters "are almost always static . . . their weaknesses, their vanities, their foibles they possess from the beginning, and what actually changes is not these, but our knowledge of them."⁷ As we have seen, it is thus with Leacock's characters: one interesting example is the "Envoi" to *Sunshine Sketches*, in which we are given the impression that the narrator has grown older since the events of the book, while the people of Mariposa whom we see at the station are completely unchanged by the passage of time. The discrepancy is evidently the result of Leacock's conception of them as timeless and unchanging.

Since the main purpose of the action of this type of novel is to show us more aspects of the unchanging characters, the novelist "must have the freedom to invent whatever he requires. So it has been a convention that the plot of a novel of character should be loose and easy" (p. 27). The vehicle of the character novelist's imagination is humour, and "the values of the character novel are social" (p. 63). The ultimate tendency of this kind of novel is toward "an image of society" (p. 60). Again the comment links into Leacock's work in a useful way. His two greatest books are complementary portrayals of rural and urban society, and he sees the characters of his books primarily in their public or social or occupational roles, and almost never as creatures

whose primary claim on our interest rests in their private lives: they are deans of the Church of England, hotel proprietors, university presidents, society women, and so forth. Such occasional exceptions as Peter Pupkin and *The Little Girl in Green* are memorable partly because they *are* unusual figures in this respect. What we remember finally is the portrait of the community, the men and women interacting as members of the community. We are brought back to Edwin Muir by recalling Northrop Frye's comment that "genuine Canadian humour . . . is based on a vision of society."⁸

Finally, Muir points out that one does not *choose* to become a character novelist, or a dramatic novelist, or an action novelist; this is a matter of the quality of one's personal vision and these "types of novel are . . . distinct modes of seeing life" (p. 63). What a man is, what sort of mind and insight and belief he has, these things determine what kind of novelist he will become.

Leacock's mind and vision, as we glimpse them in his work, in Ralph L. Curry's biography, and in the reminiscences of those who knew him, like Pelham Edgar, are strikingly similar to those of the great comic novelists. Leacock's creation of a public personality for himself is, as Robertson Davies saw, very similar to the way Dickens and Mark Twain created their public personalities; and Leacock's feeling of affinity with those sprawling geniuses is clearly indicated by the fact that he wrote books on each of them and on no other writers. It is not surprising, then, that his own assessment of *Sunshine Sketches* displays the approach to plot and character that Muir finds typical of the comic character novelist:

I wrote this book 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. If there were room for a school of literature of this kind I should offer to lead it. I do not mean that the hero would always and necessarily be killed by a brick. One might sometimes use two. Such feeble plots as there are in this book were invented by brute force, after the characters had been introduced. Hence the atrocious clumsiness of the construction all through.⁹

In such a passage there is an undercurrent of contempt for the whole business of plot, and differences between plots are reduced in importance to the difference between one and two bricks. What Leacock was interested in was "extremely original" characters, and it is such an interest in character for its own sake that Virginia Woolf thought the distinguishing mark of the novelist.

Character, then, would have been the structural centre of a Leacock novel—and it is in the portrayal of character that Leacock displays his greatest powers as a writer of fiction. Moreover, his characters are very similar to those of a certain kind of novelist. When we turn our attention to the form of the novel, however, it is a little more difficult to show the adequacy of Leacock's talents. Part of the difficulty comes from the form itself: the novel is notoriously difficult to define. Part of it comes from Leacock's work: though he did give us some characters to discuss, he never wrote a narrative of novel length, and our conclusions about his ability to do so therefore rest on considerably less concrete evidence.

What is a novel, and why do *Sunshine Sketches* and *Arcadian Adventures* seem to fall outside the category?

One of the most provocative discussions of the novel as a form is that of Professor Ian Watt. In *The Rise of the Novel*, he finds the novelist's approach to his material to be the basic factor common to novels. This approach he calls "formal realism", which is

. . . the narrative embodiment of a premise . . . which is implicit in the novel form in general: the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms.¹⁰

To this comment we must add two points, the first being the obvious one that the novel is a prose fiction of considerable length; E. M. Forster suggests that the minimum is about 50,000 words. The second point is that the specifically *comic* novelist appears to be exempt from providing a *full* report of human experience; he is more at liberty to select from his material's those comments and incidents which may be juxtaposed for comic purposes.

It seems evident that Leacock's narrative method is generally consonant with the demands of formal realism. Throughout the two near-novels, his prose is devoted to persuading the reader of the reality of the scenes, events, and characters; his eye consistently picks out the telling detail, the convincing image. Golgotha Gingham's hat was a "black silk hat heavily craped and placed hollow-side-up on a chair"; an expensive funeral displays "a casket smothered in hot-house syringas, borne in a coach, and followed by special reporters from the financial papers"; Mr. Boulder has "falling under-eyelids that made him look as if he were just about to cry." Figures that carry an

intrinsic air of certainty and solidity are frequently used: the ground on which the Church of St. Asaph's stands is "worth seven dollars and a half a foot."¹¹ John Henry Bagshaw, M.P., does not simply require expensive grooming; instead he has shaves that cost the country twenty cents a day. Wherever possible Leacock chooses the individual and particular rather than the general and abstract.

We have seen that Leacock devotes considerable attention to such matters as "the individuality of the actors", and even although these actors are little affected by the passage of time, Leacock is careful to give the books scrupulously exact and particular chronologies. The specific settings also draw a good deal of his attention: both *Sunshine Sketches* and *Arcadian Adventures* open and close with the narrator's gaze directly fixed on the physical surroundings; and these passages are clearly related to the overall import of the books. Although his intention is clearly to delineate a typical little town or a typical big city, Leacock is as conscious as any novelist that the route to the universal lies, for the writer of fiction, through the particular: streets and corners, buildings and business establishments are named; there are *seven* summer cottages along the lake; even the vegetation is specified—maple trees, goldenrod, rushes. And the use of language is not simply referential; it is almost colloquial, the personal expression of a narrator whom we soon learn to trust, and a further contribution to our sense of the narrative's authenticity.

That Leacock was in fact attempting something very like an "authentic report of human experience" is strongly suggested, then, by the evidence of the books themselves. In the case of *Sunshine Sketches*, however, even stronger evidence is provided by the fact that Leacock modelled Mariposa on the real town of Orillia, Ontario, and modelled it in amazingly close detail. The barber of Orillia, for instance, was Jeff Short, who became Jeff Thorpe; similarly Horace Bingham, Orillia's undertaker, became Golgotha Gingham of Mariposa. Ralph L. Curry has recorded a number of equally obvious sources in Orillia for people and institutions in Mariposa.¹² To borrow thus from life is to imply that you expect your narrative to draw its power and point from its fidelity to life; this is the classic posture of the novelist, though of course the simple fidelity to life we see here is subsumed in the complex artistic vision of the whole work, just as it is in a novel. And Orillia's reaction to *Sunshine Sketches*, of which Robertson Davies has given a tart and funny account,¹³ makes it clear that as far as Orillia was concerned Leacock had given a rather too authentic report of human experience.

We should also notice two instances in which Leacock published work

approximating serious fiction. The first of these was an essay called "Fiction and Reality: A Study of the Art of Charles Dickens" in *Essays and Literary Studies* (1916). This is an amazing performance, in which Leacock defends Dickens against various charges, the principal one being that Dickens's characters are flat, unreal caricatures rather than real people. The defence is conducted by holding a hearing at which several of them testify to their own reality and to the abilities of their creator. For our purposes, the interest of the piece comes from the fact that the characters are absolutely convincing; the dialogue, the setting, and the action are all so true to Dickens as to be almost uncanny; the essay is a little triumph which strongly suggests that Leacock had considerable gifts as a writer of fiction.

"The Transit of Venus" in *My Remarkable Uncle* (1942) is Leacock's one attempt at the serious short story, if we except the sentimental stories which Pelham Edgar tells us he wrote in his youth. It concerns a professor of astronomy who falls in love with one of his students and, after much trepidation and some scholarly despair, contrives to marry her. An amusing but unexceptional story, it is written at a much lower level of meaning and power than most of Leacock's humour. Yet, though it is a funny story, it is quite unlike anything else that Leacock ever wrote.

The nature of the distinction between this and Leacock's usual work becomes clear when we try to define what we mean, in this context, by the term "serious short story". "The Transit of Venus" differs from the humour in one essential respect: this time, Leacock is primarily interested in telling the story, and the humour is merely a mode of telling it. The narrative is the main concern; the humour is incidental. And if we glance back at "Fiction and Reality", we shall see that the same principle holds there: the humour is subordinated to a larger fictional aim. In most of Leacock's stories, on the other hand, the narrative exists primarily for the sake of the humour—which is one reason why none of his books is a novel: Leacock was more interested in being funny than in telling a story. The novelist does the opposite: he tells a story which purports to be true, and which may be funny only insofar as the humour supports the narrative.

One of the main reasons, then, why neither *Arcadian Adventures* nor *Sunshine Sketches* is a novel is their humorous, rather than narrative, intention. The other main reason is clearly related: it is a matter of structure, and once again Leacock's humorous aim produces the effect of non-fiction. *Sunshine Sketches*, for instance, is not a single long narrative, with all that would imply in terms of a single chief climax and denouement; nor is it unified, as

the novel normally is, by coalescing around two or three major characters who stand near the centre of the action from beginning to end. On the contrary, it consists of eleven sketches (plus the Preface and Envoi) varying from fifteen to forty pages in length, each of which has its own action, its own conclusion, and frequently its own central characters as well. The sketches are too discrete to allow the kind of overall unity the novel demands. And the sketches possess this independence, as a result once again, of Leacock's comic aims; the conclusion of each sketch provides an ideal comic resolution of the action of that sketch, a resolution which is so appropriate and so funny that it brings the narrative movement to a halt, and Leacock has to begin all over again in the next chapter. The finality of these conclusions, more than anything else, is responsible for the book's narrative disunity. It is as though an internal combustion engine stopped at bottom dead centre of each stroke.

It would appear that Malcolm Ross is right: "Leacock does not and, I think, could not write narrative as a novelist writes narrative". But the situation is not as simple as it appears.

For one thing, the kind of narrative Leacock would have had to write might have been extremely disorderly; we have already noticed Edwin Muir's analysis of the reasons why the plot of the comic novel is usually "loose and easy". What Mr. Ross seems to have in mind is the much more tightly-woven structure of the dramatic novel, the kind of novel written by a Jane Austen or a Hemingway. But the unwritten Leacock novels would be much more likely to have been the sort of genial, expansive, cluttered books that Henry James referred to in disgust as "large, loose, baggy monsters".¹⁴

Thus far, moreover, we have ignored two unifying aspects of Leacock's near-novels. The first of these is the interlocking of the characters from story to story: Mullins, for instance, though he is never a major character, appears in most of the chapters of *Sunshine Sketches*. And characters who are central to some of the sketches also appear in minor roles in others: thus Dean Drone plays some slight part in each of the first three sketches, and we are prepared to see him in the foreground of the next three; young Pupkin is introduced in the third chapter, where he is already in love, although not with Zena Pepperleigh, and he meets Zena when both are trying to help raise money for the Anglican church, during Dean Drone's ordeal. A close reading of *Sunshine Sketches* reveals a good deal of this sort of careful preparation, and Ralph L. Curry has pointed out that this particular unifying device is even more widely utilized in *Arcadian Adventures*.¹⁵ This preparation helps to account for the unity the book does possess, though it is inadequate to produce the

tighter unity of the novel. To put it another way, we might say that this kind of unifying device saves the book from being merely a collection of sketches, though it is too weak to overcome the disintegrative effect of the multiple conclusions.

On the second major device by which Leacock achieves a certain narrative unity rests a considerable portion of the case for Leacock the potential novelist. This is the organization of the books into blocks, or sequences, of two or three sketches which still tell only one story. There are three of these blocks in *Sunshine Sketches* and two in *Arcadian Adventures*; and within the blocks, we can see Leacock working in a manner very like that of the novelist.

A comparison of the second chapter of *Sunshine Sketches* with the later sequence in the same book dealing with the problems of the Reverend Mr. Drone may clarify the point. The second chapter, "The Speculations of Jefferson Thorpe", is a self-contained story, with its own carefully developed background, characterization, and plot. Leacock makes it plain in the first sentence that the chief interest in the plot will be the result of a mining boom, and our knowledge of this provides the suspense and tension that sustain the quiet leisurely introduction to Jeff and his quiet leisurely way of life. Then, after seven or eight pages, the boom north of Mariposa sends the whole town into speculative stock purchases, and Jeff, who has always dreamed of high finance, plunges in deeply. To our surprise and his, one of the companies in which he has invested most heavily makes a major strike: Jeff is suddenly worth \$40,000.¹⁶ But he loses the money—and some other people's—in a Cuban land fraud, and when we leave him he is rather worse off than he was before. Though it is much more complex than this summary of it would indicate, the whole action is over in twenty-five pages. A Mordecai Richler could make a novel of such an action, but Leacock gives it to us only in outline: it is a single fast, brief, comic story.

Dean Drone's story, on the other hand, is told in three chapters. Each of the first two ends for a logical reason, and yet neither breaks the momentum towards the overall climax which takes place in the third chapter. The three chapters form a narrative unit in which each of several distinguishable parts is subordinated to the requirements of the unit as a whole—just as the parts of a novel are subordinated to its overall scheme.

The first of the three sketches, "The Ministrations of the Rev. Mr. Drone", opens by outlining the Dean's character and his style of life, and telling us something of his personal history. The narrative properly begins, however, when we discover his perplexity over the church's finances; this in

turn leads to the disclosure that the reason for the church's difficulties is that the Dean has prevailed upon his congregation to build a new church—or, as the Dean prefers to call it, a Greater Testimony. An account of the various fund-raising activities follows; they give rise to a series of comic debacles, during which both the narrative tempo and the comedy increase. As the last of these efforts proves futile, Mullins enters with his plan for a Whirlwind Campaign, and the chapter closes. It is reasonable that it should close at this point, for its purpose has been achieved; we have seen the background, and the failure of the usual fund-raising techniques has provided an action which is now complete. Yet the introduction of Mullins at the end of the chapter adds an element of hope and suspense, and though the first chapter has ended for a logical reason, we are more conscious of the continuing action which Mullins's arrival suggests than we are of the conclusion of the chapter; here the conclusion provides not a stop in the action, but a pause and a change of direction.

The second of the three chapters is wholly devoted to the Whirlwind Campaign that Mullins inaugurates in imitation of one he has seen in the city. It deserves a separate chapter both because it is the church's largest, most ambitious attempt to raise money, and because it is the last hope of the congregation; if it fails, all is lost. Essentially it is a continuation of the action of the previous chapter, but the disproportionately large hopes and efforts are not more effective than the more modest schemes already tried. At the conclusion of the campaign, we find it has broken even. Mullins puts his own cheque for a hundred dollars into his pocket and goes up to the rectory to report to Dean Drone. Once again the chapter ends when a sequence of events is complete, but once again the main action is carried forward into the next sketch.

The last sketch, "The Beacon on the Hill", concludes the whole action. In it, the Dean attempts to resign his charge, but before he can do so the church is burnt by an arsonist. It is insured for twice its value, however, which enables the congregation to pay for another new church without any difficulty. The fire and its consequences expose appalling corruption in the congregation, and its exposure seems to weaken the Dean's mind. When we leave him, he has detached himself from reality; he is having hallucinations, though they are very pleasant ones, and he seems to have taken a long step toward the next world.

Evidently this is a single narrative, broken into three parts, rather than a mere linear collection of sketches. There is a sense of dramatic structure in this block of sketches, and a sense of pace, of timing, which help to account for its surprising power. This block includes some of Leacock's best char-

acters moving through a sustained action; and in "The Beacon on the Hill" it becomes apparent that plot and characters have embodied a complex moral theme.¹⁷ The story is skilful and significant. In fact, the Drone sequence is rather like a comic novella, of fifty-odd pages in length. To maintain that a man who can write a polished narrative fifty (or, in the Pupkin sequence, sixty) pages long would find it impossible to write one a hundred and fifty or two hundred pages long is at best perverse, and at worst absurd.

The novelist is a man who is interested in people, who can create characters that are recognizable kinds of human beings. He must view life from one of several particular points, and he must be able to set his characters in a narrative that is in some way significant. These are the gifts required of the novelist, and we have seen that Leacock possessed them. Those among his admirers who deny this make him a smaller writer than he was.

NOTES

1. Peter McArthur, *Stephen Leacock* (Toronto, 1923), pp. 161-62.
2. Robertson Davies, "On Stephen Leacock", in C. T. Bissell, ed., *Our Living Tradition*, First Series (Toronto, 1957), pp. 136-37.
3. New Canadian Library edition of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* [1912] (Toronto, 1960), p. x.
4. "The Enchanted Houses: Leacock's Irony", *Canadian Literature*, 23 (Spring, 1965), pp. 31-44.
5. Admittedly there are a few Leacock characters—Dean Drone is one—who are capable of surprising us, and who would thus be defined by Forster as "round" characters. But they are not very common and not very round (compare them with Jane Austen's central figures); and it is fair to say that Leacock's characters are generally flat and unchanging.
6. *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (London, 1912), p. 56.
7. Edwin Muir, *The Structure of the Novel* [1928] (London, 1957), p. 84. Subsequent references to this book are inserted in the text.
8. Introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of Thomas McCulloch, *The Stepsure Letters* (Toronto, 1960), p. ix.
9. Cited by McArthur, *Stephen Leacock*, p. 136.
10. *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1957), p. 32.
11. Gingham's hat, *Sunshine Sketches*, p. 15; Funeral, *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich* (London, 1914), p. 208; Boulder, *Arcadian Adventures*, p. 13; Church, *Arcadian Adventures*, p. 193.
12. *Stephen Leacock, Humorist and Humanist* (Garden City, New York, 1959), p. 98.
13. "On Stephen Leacock", pp. 146-47.
14. *The Art of the Novel*, ed. R. P. Blackmur [1934] (New York, 1948), p. 84.

15. Introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of *Arcadian Adventures* (Toronto, 1959), p. viii; and *Stephen Leacock, Humorist and Humanist*, pp. 108-109.
16. We may assess the value of \$40,000 more accurately if we remember that Leacock's own salary at this time, as professor and department head at McGill University, was \$3500.
17. I have discussed the significance and complexity of the "Beacon on the Hill" sequence in "The Enchanted Houses" in much more detail than would be relevant here.

PHAINESTHAI MALLON EI EINAI

Arnold Lazarus

Nothing is changed; things are as they would be
 intrinsically if you had really spurned
 your being you the day that I returned.
 Oh, you were by my side; and one could see,
 that afternoon, you even smiled at me
 the way your picture smiles once it is turned
 for viewing darkly through the glass. (You've earned,
 dear face, the interest on idolatry.)
 Yet somehow if we could have done away
 with all that is instead of all that seems,
 at least the radar of your glance would play
 its programmed messages upon my schemes,
 and all I missed in you yourself that day
 I would not now be doomed to dig from dreams.