

# Crafting Humor: A Study Of Situational And Character-Driven Comedy In Selected Works Of Stephen Leacock

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the intricate art of humor as portrayed in the selected works of renowned Canadian humorist, Stephen Leacock. Focusing on the nuances of situational and character-driven comedy, the study explores how Leacock masterfully employs these elements to craft memorable and delightful narratives. Through a careful analysis of the selected works of Stephen Leacock, this paper examines the ways in which Leacock constructs humorous situations and develops characters that serve as vehicles for comedic expression. Drawing on literary techniques such as satire, irony, and wit, Leacock's work is dissected to reveal the underlying mechanisms that contribute to its enduring appeal. By illuminating the strategies employed by Leacock to elicit laughter and amusement from his audience, this study provides valuable insights into the art of humor writing and underscores the timeless relevance of his comedic genius.

**Keywords:** Stephen Leacock, humor, comedy, situational comedy, character-driven comedy, satire, irony, wit, literary analysis.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Humor, with its multifaceted nature, has long been celebrated as a universal language that transcends cultural boundaries and connects individuals through laughter. Among the pantheon of humorists, Stephen Leacock occupies a prominent place, renowned for his adeptness at weaving intricate comedic tapestries through the interplay of situational and character-driven comedy. In this study, we embark on a journey into the world of Leacock's humor, aiming to dissect and analyze the techniques he employs to craft laughter-inducing narratives in selected works.

In this paper, titled "Crafting Humor: A Study of Situational and Character-driven Comedy in Selected Works of Stephen Leacock," we embark on a journey into the heart of Leacock's comedic genius. Leacock's literary legacy is characterized by a keen observational wit and an unparalleled knack for capturing the absurdities of everyday life. Through a meticulous examination of his works, we seek to uncover the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the enduring appeal of his humor. By focusing on the dual pillars of situational and character-driven comedy, we aim to elucidate how Leacock constructs comedic scenarios and develops memorable characters that serve as conduits for humor.

Situational comedy, rooted in the absurdities and incongruities of everyday life, forms a cornerstone of Leacock's comedic repertoire. Through his keen eye for the absurd and the unexpected, Leacock ingeniously creates humorous situations that resonate with readers on a visceral level. Leacock demonstrates a remarkable ability to mine humor from the mundane.

In addition to situational comedy, Leacock's works are also characterized by a rich tapestry of eccentric characters whose idiosyncrasies and foibles serve as a constant source of amusement. From the bumbling bureaucrats to the pompous aristocrats, Leacock populates his narratives with a colorful array of characters whose exaggerated traits and comedic quirks leave an indelible mark on the reader's psyche. Through a careful analysis of these characters, we aim to unravel the intricacies of Leacock's character-driven comedy and examine how he breathes life into his creations with wit and ingenuity.

By delving into the world of Leacock's humor, this study not only sheds light on the techniques employed by one of the masters of comedic writing but also offers valuable insights into the art of humor itself. Through a synthesis of literary analysis and critical inquiry, we endeavor to unravel the complexities of humor and celebrate the enduring legacy of Stephen Leacock as a titan of comedy.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF TH STUDY:

1. Examine how Stephen Leacock utilizes situational comedy in his selected works to create humorous scenarios that resonate with readers.
2. Investigate the development of character-driven comedy in Leacock's narratives, exploring the ways in which he crafts memorable personas that contribute to the comedic atmosphere.
3. Analyze the literary techniques employed by Leacock, including satire, irony, and wit, to understand their role in enhancing the comedic effect and engaging audiences.
4. Explore the thematic underpinnings of Leacock's humor, investigating how his comedic narratives reflect and comment on societal norms, cultural idiosyncrasies, and human nature.
5. Assess the enduring significance and universal appeal of Leacock's comedic craftsmanship, examining how his works continue to entertain and provoke laughter across generations and cultural boundaries.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Stephen Leacock's contributions to the realm of humor literature have garnered significant scholarly attention over the years, with numerous studies delving into the intricacies of his comedic techniques and thematic explorations. Scholars have examined various aspects of Leacock's works, shedding light on the enduring appeal and cultural significance of his comedic narratives.

One prominent theme in the literature on Leacock is the exploration of his use of situational comedy. Critics such as Robert L. Gale and Carl Spadoni have highlighted Leacock's skill in crafting absurd and humorous scenarios, often rooted in the idiosyncrasies of small-town life and the quirks of human behavior. Through works like "Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town," Leacock paints a vivid portrait of everyday life infused with laughter and levity.

Furthermore, scholars have focused on Leacock's adeptness in developing character-driven comedy. In studies by Elizabeth Waterston and Alan Bowker, among others, attention is drawn to Leacock's colorful cast of characters, each imbued with distinct personalities and eccentricities that serve as sources of comedic fodder. Characters such as the bumbling politician in "The Mariner of St. Malo" or the hapless professor in "Literary Lapses" embody Leacock's talent for creating comedic personas that resonate with readers.

The literary techniques employed by Leacock have also been a subject of scholarly inquiry. Critics like Duncan MacArthur and Ian Gordon have analyzed Leacock's use of satire, irony, and wit, noting how these devices contribute to the humor and depth of his works. Leacock's satirical take on social conventions and cultural norms, as exemplified in essays like "My Financial Career," provides fertile ground for literary analysis and interpretation.

Moreover, the thematic dimensions of Leacock's humor have been explored in depth. Scholars such as David Staines and Paul Goetsch have examined how Leacock's comedic narratives reflect broader themes of human folly, societal absurdity, and the human condition. Through his humorous tales, Leacock offers incisive commentary on the foibles of humanity, inviting readers to laugh while reflecting on deeper truths.

Overall, the literature on Stephen Leacock underscores his status as a master of comedic storytelling, whose works continue to entertain and inspire readers around the world. By exploring the nuances of situational and character-driven comedy, analyzing his literary techniques, and probing the thematic depths of his humor, scholars have illuminated the enduring significance of Leacock's comedic legacy in the landscape of literature.

## 4. RESEARCH ANALYSIS:

The study titled "Crafting Humor: A Study of Situational and Character-driven Comedy in Selected Works of Stephen Leacock" offers a comprehensive exploration of humor in the literary works of Stephen Leacock, focusing specifically on situational and character-driven comedy. The research analysis of this study aims to provide insights into the following key aspects:

**Literary Techniques:** Through an analysis of Leacock's selected works, the research will examine the specific literary techniques employed by the author to craft humor. This analysis may include an exploration of Leacock's use of irony, satire, wordplay, and other comedic devices to create both situational and character-driven comedy.

**Thematic Exploration:** The research will delve into the thematic underpinnings of Leacock's humor, investigating the broader social, cultural, and philosophical themes explored through comedic narratives. By examining how Leacock's humor reflects and comments on societal norms, human behavior, and the absurdities of everyday life, the study aims to uncover deeper layers of meaning within his works.

**Character Analysis:** A significant aspect of the research involves an in-depth analysis of the characters populating Leacock's narratives. By examining the traits, motivations, and interactions of these characters, the study seeks to understand how they contribute to the comedic atmosphere and drive the plot forward through their actions and reactions to various situations.

**Audience Reception:** The research will consider the reception of Leacock's humor by both contemporary and modern audiences. Through the analysis of critical reception, reader responses, and cultural context, the study aims to assess the enduring appeal and relevance of Leacock's comedic works, shedding light on why his humor continues to resonate with readers across generations.

**Comparative Analysis:** Additionally, the study may involve comparative analysis with other humorists or comedic traditions to contextualize Leacock's contributions within the broader landscape of comedic literature. By examining similarities and differences in comedic techniques, themes, and audience reception, the research aims to highlight the distinctive qualities of Leacock's humor and its place within the canon of comedic writing.

Overall, the research analysis of "Crafting Humor: A Study of Situational and Character-driven Comedy in Selected Works of Stephen Leacock" promises to offer valuable insights into the artistry of Leacock's humor, its thematic richness, and its enduring appeal to readers worldwide.

#### 4.1. Humour of Situation in Stephen Leacock's works:

Humor arising from situations in Stephen Leacock's works transcends mere verbal exchanges or character interactions; instead, it hinges entirely upon the circumstances themselves, which become inherently funny due to the juxtaposition of incongruities. Henri Bergson's analysis provides valuable insights into the techniques underlying this form of humor, namely repetition, inversion, and the reciprocal interference of series.

Bergson explains that "a situation is invariably comic when it belongs simultaneously to two altogether independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different meanings at the same time" (p. 123). This concept elucidates the inherent comedy in situations that belong to multiple series of events, allowing for contrasting interpretations.

Leacock, drawing upon Greek humor traditions, emphasizes the contrast between how things are expected to be and how they are hilariously disrupted. He recalls that humor "grew to turn on a contrast between the thing as it is, or ought to be, and the thing smashed out of shape as it ought not to be" (HTT, p. 12), highlighting the essence of situational comedy.

Moreover, the humor of situation often stems from the "unsuitability of men to their circumstances, the detection of some discrepancy between the character and the role assumed at the moment, the social juxtaposition which brings embarrassment to the encounters, [and] the foolish impulse which pushes the character into an awkward situation" (Sully, p. 317).

The humor of situation in Leacock's works thrives on the unexpected, the absurd, and the paradoxical, offering readers a delightful journey through the comic intricacies of human existence.

Despite the exultation over the disaster of the individual involved, there is also a sense of relief that no harm will come to him. Horseplay and practical jokes are two parallel manifestations of the humor of situation. This humor often arises from the blunders, misadventures, and minor miseries of characters who become perpetual victims, eliciting laughter at their ineptitude and distress.

Leacock's inaugural humor collection, "Literary Lapses" (1910), showcases several stories where humor emerges from the situation. In "The Conjuror's Revenge," whenever the conjuror performs tricks, a man seated at the front, dubbed the Quick Man, comments 'He-had-it-up-his-sleeve'. This refrain gains traction until "the reputation of the conjuror was rapidly sinking below zero" (pp.74-74). Eventually, the conjuror requests the Quick Man's gold watch for a Japanese trick. With consent, the conjuror proceeds to break it into pieces, leaving the Quick Man bewildered. As the conjuror continues to destroy the Quick Man's belongings, the audience becomes convinced "that there are some tricks, at any rate, that are not done up the conjuror's sleeve" (p. 76). Zdenka notes that laughter transitions into sympathy for the conjuror and aversion towards the

baffled Quick Man (p. 56). Ironically, the Quick Man's belongings end up smashed, not hidden in the conjuror's sleeve as he suspected.

In "Telling His Faults," a beautiful girl at a summer hotel offers to read Mr. Sapling's palm, declaring him "just full of faults, just full of them" (LL p. 58). She accuses him of cynicism, lacking faith in women, and being too determined and sarcastic. Mr. Sapling tries to embody these traits, only for the girl to further criticize his world-weariness. Eventually, she concedes that his only redeeming quality is his generosity. Despite her harsh assessment, Mr. Sapling feels proud to be acquainted with her family when they later make numerous requests, demonstrating their trust in him (LL, p. 59).

The situation depicted in 'Borrowing a Match' is exceptionally humorous. The narrator approaches a man and asks for a matchbox to light a cigar. The man's generous and enthusiastic response leads him to search his pockets diligently, even to the point of tearing his pocket away by the roots in his eagerness. Finally, he exclaims in triumph, producing an item from inside his coat lining, only to reveal it as a toothpick. In a moment of impulse, the narrator pushes him under the wheels of a trolley-car and flees the scene.

In "Maddened by Mystery," found in "Nonsense Novels," the humor derives purely from the absurd situation. The Great Detective is informed of the kidnapping of the Prince of Wurttemberg in Paris, prompting concern from high-profile figures such as the Prime Minister of England and the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Countess of Dashieigh's desperation is highlighted as she expresses the dire consequences if the prince is not found, saying, "that poor 'little pup'... if he's not found, I'm ruined" (NN, pp. 18-19). As the evidence accumulates, the detective's deductions lead him to conclude that the missing prince is a young man with peculiar characteristics, described as a "pup with a long wet snout" and having a "streak of white hair across his back" (NN, pp. 18-19).

The detective, in disguise, meticulously scours every corner of London, from the Prime Minister's residence to the Bishop's abode, and eventually to the Countess's mansion. To his astonishment, he discovers a portrait of a Dachshund on the wall bearing the inscription "The Prince of Wurttemberg". With this revelation, the mystery is unraveled: "THE PRINCE WAS A DOG!!!" (p. 21). The Countess, having bred the canine, stands to gain a substantial sum, in addition to the prize money offered at the Paris dog show. In a bid to salvage the Countess's reputation, the Great Detective assumes the identity of the dog at the show, winning first prize and safeguarding her fortune. However, his oversight in neglecting to pay the dog tax results in his capture and subsequent demise at the hands of the dog-catchers.

In "How We kept Mother's Birthday" from "Winnowed Wisdom" (1926), the comedic situations unfold as a family endeavors to celebrate their mother's birthday. Despite their intentions to make it a special day, it descends into the routine of daily life, with mother continuing her chores while the rest of the family embarks on a fishing excursion. Their inability to accommodate her on the trip due to space constraints underscores the absurdity of the situation. Even during dinner, mother finds herself bustling about, prompting Father to intervene and take over some tasks. Yet, when it comes time to clean up, the family defers to mother's insistence on doing the dishes herself, humorously recounted as, "'only Mother said that she would really much rather do it, and so we let her because we wanted just for once to humour her'" (WW, p. 70). Despite the mundane nature of the day, mother's heartfelt appreciation at its conclusion leaves the family feeling gratified for their efforts.

The story serves as a prime example of how Leacock adeptly utilizes the device of contrast. The situations intended to please and surprise mother starkly contrast with the mundane reality that unfolds. Mother, the central character, remains in the background, and even the closing situation is misinterpreted by the family members. Additionally, the narrative sheds light on the burden placed on women during celebrations, even on their own birthdays, while simultaneously critiquing the egotism and self-indulgence exhibited by families towards mothers. Moreover, it serves as a tribute to the fortitude and genuine devotion of mothers.

In "My Financial Career" from "Literary Lapses," Leacock recounts the tale of a young man depositing his entire fortune—fifty dollars—in a bank. He deems this act so significant that only the bank manager should handle it. However, in a humorous twist, he ends up being ridiculed by the bank staff after failing to make the deposit. Leacock's intention is not to mock the savings of a poor man for whom fifty dollars is a substantial sum, but rather to illustrate how money influences human behavior and relationships. The shift in treatment from respect to laughter upon the revelation of the man's modest wealth highlights the absurdity of the situation and underscores the hypocrisy of the bank clerks, who themselves may not be much wealthier than the protagonist.

"The mixing-up of characters" serves as the central humorous element in the story "Gertrude the Governess: or, Simple Seventeen" from "Nonsense Novels." Seemingly serious situations conspire to thwart the happiness of a young couple in love. Only when a haughty nobleman recognizes Gertrude as the heiress to a great fortune does he consent to his son's marriage to her. While Leacock's endings are typically not so sharp and laconic,

this story stands as a rare example of how he concludes with a twist. The final lines, "Gertrude and Ronald were wed. Their happiness was complete. Need we say more? Yes, only this. The Earl was killed in the hunting-field a few days after. The Countess was struck by lightning. The two children fell down a well. Thus the happiness of Gertrude and Ronald was complete" (NN, p.76), add a satirical punch, highlighting the absurdity of their newfound fortune amidst tragic circumstances.

#### **4.2. Humour of Character in Stephen Leacock's works:**

"Humour of Character in Stephen Leacock's works" explores the intricacies of individual quirks and peculiarities, drawing upon Bergson's insights. Bergson proposes that humor emerges when an individual's character becomes rigid, compelling them to adhere strictly to one path and shutting themselves off from introspection. He terms this rigidity "automatism," which isolates individuals from their fellow beings and renders them subjects of comedy (Bergson, p. 179).

Furthermore, Bergson suggests that laughter is directed not only at others' faults but also at their good qualities, eccentricities, and earnestness. The withdrawal of an individual into themselves often becomes a source of ridicule, as comedy arises from this isolation within societal contexts.

Leacock expands on this concept, defining the humour of character as the manifestation of incongruities, contradictions, or paradoxes that lead to a "frustrated expectation," the basis of all humor (Leacock, HH, p.116). Humorous characters embody incongruities that do not clash with reality, with quirks in dress, gait, manner, and accent retaining their impact through repetition and conservatism.

Moreover, Leacock emphasizes the intertwining of humour and human kindness, noting that humorous characters often exhibit inconsistencies between their rough exteriors and their kind actions. These characters contribute to making the world a better place, reflecting a deeper understanding of human nature and society (Leacock, HH, p. 124).

Leacock's renowned and frequently reprinted piece, "My Financial Career" from "Literary Lapses," exemplifies a unique blend of situation and character. It portrays a young man overwhelmed by modern banking procedures, who, in confusion, impulsively withdraws the entire amount he had just deposited, only to triumphantly declare that he now keeps his money in an old sock. Initially, the man creates the impression that he intends to deposit a large sum, garnering respect. However, upon discovering his meager deposit of fifty dollars, he becomes the subject of ridicule. Yet, Leacock exhibits genuine sympathy for the hapless protagonist, finding amusement in the struggles of ordinary individuals against various impersonal tyrannies (Watters, 83).

Similarly, "The Awful Fate of Melpomenus Jones" in "Literary Lapses" recounts the tale of a curate who cannot bid farewell to his hosts due to his aversion to lying. His inability to depart at the appropriate time proves fatal, as each attempt to leave is met with insistence from his hosts to stay longer, leading to a decline in his health. Eventually, his conflict escalates into illness, culminating in a delirium of fever and his untimely demise. Leacock poignantly concludes, "And the rushing of his spirit from its prison house was as rapid as a hunted cat passing over a garden fence" (21). This story illustrates the serious consequences that may arise from a lack of tact and experience in social interactions, underscoring the importance of timely departures in maintaining healthy host-visitor relationships.

"Literary Lapses" encompasses several character-driven stories, among which "Number fifty-Six" stands out as a charming tale featuring a young laundry owner named Ah-Yen. Possessing a keen, analytical, and highly imaginative mind, Ah-Yen indulges in fanciful speculations about the lives of his customers, based on meticulous observations of their laundry bundles. His attention is particularly drawn to a regular customer assigned the number 'fifty-six,' prompting him to construct elaborate narratives about the individual's background and experiences.

Ah-Yen deduces that the quality of the customer's linen indicates relative affluence and surmises that he must be a university student, given his absence during the summer months and the presence of exam-related markings on his shirt cuffs. He further elaborates on the customer's romantic entanglements, imagining quarrels and reconciliations with a lover. However, his speculation takes a tragic turn when he receives a bundle containing a shirt stained with what appears to be blood and pierced by a hole, symbolizing a fatal gunshot wound to the heart (Leacock, pp. 69-70).

Deeply grieved by the apparent loss of his dear customer, Ah-Yen shares the tale with his real-life friend, who is revealed to be the actual 'Number Fifty-Six.' Despite understanding the truth behind the laundry owner's imaginative narratives, the friend chooses not to dispel Ah-Yen's illusions, recognizing the comfort they provide. The story, despite its humorous elements, is imbued with an undercurrent of pathos, as laughter and tears intertwine seamlessly (Leacock, p.69-70).

In actuality, the shirt was stained with red ink, and the hole was caused by ashes from a cigar, highlighting the comedic misunderstanding that underlies the tale. Thus, "Number fifty-Six" serves as a prime example of Leacock's ability to blend humor with poignant undertones, creating a narrative where laughter and sorrow coalesce into a single, poignant experience.

"The Life of John Smith" provides an intriguing glimpse into the mundane yet somewhat tragic existence of its titular character, described as the epitome of the "ordinary common man." John Smith's career trajectory is depicted as a series of uninspiring transitions, from the ribbon counter to various other mundane positions, ultimately culminating in his dismissal and subsequent decline. Leacock satirizes official biographies by suggesting that even ordinary individuals like John Smith deserve their life stories chronicled. Smith's life is characterized by dullness, laziness, and a perpetual state of mediocrity, with his only regret being a fleeting encounter with "the most beautiful girl in the world," whom he remained enslaved to in his thoughts.

On the other hand, "The Hallucination of Mr. Butt" from "Moonbeams from the Larger Lunacy" (1915) presents the story of a clubman named Mr. Butt, driven by an incessant desire to assist others out of difficult situations. However, his well-intentioned efforts often result in unintentional nuisance, as he fails to recognize that his help is neither needed nor desired. Upon learning of the Joneses' arrival in town, Mr. Butt immediately visits them, inadvertently disrupting their lives with his unwanted assistance. Oblivious to their attempts to rid themselves of his presence, Mr. Butt persists in his delusion that he is a benefactor, boasting of his helpful deeds while remaining oblivious to the inconvenience he causes.

In both narratives, Leacock skillfully blends humor with elements of tragedy and societal critique. Through the lens of ordinary characters like John Smith and Mr. Butt, he sheds light on the absurdities of human existence and the folly of misplaced altruism, offering insightful commentary on the human condition.

"A Study in Still Life—My Tailor" from "Further Foolishness" (1916) introduces readers to a tailor who has stood steadfastly in the back of his shop for thirty years, adorned with his tape woven around his neck and a welcoming smile on his face, poised to greet customers. The initial part of the narrative revolves around the typical interactions between the narrator and the tailor, infused with Leacock's trademark humor. The tailor's courteousness, his rehearsed phrases, and his earnest efforts to please the customer serve as sources of amusement.

The latter part of the story delves into the narrator's introspections upon learning of the tailor's passing. As he reflects further, he realizes his lack of consideration for the tailor's personal life, prompting deeper contemplation on the nature of human communication and relationships. Through this narrative, Leacock subtly highlights the importance of empathy and understanding in human interactions, using humor as a tool for introspection and character development.

In another fascinating portrayal, Leacock introduces his uncle Edward Philip Leacock, affectionately known as 'E.P.,' whose larger-than-life qualities are vividly depicted in a series of brilliant sketches. In "My Discovery of the West" (1937), E.P. emerges as an adventurous soul, described as "as visionary as Tartarin, as loud as Falstaff, bearded and jovial as a Plantagenet" (Leacock, p. 48). This depiction presents him almost as a historical figure, participating in the Manitoba boom during the opening up of the West. E.P. makes subsequent appearances in sketches such as "The Most Unforgettable Character I've Met," originally published in the Reader's Digest in July 1941 and later included as the title sketch in "My Remarkable Uncle and Other Sketches" (1942).

Leacock sets the stage by asserting that his uncle's character is so extraordinary that it requires no embellishment. "It was so exaggerated already that you couldn't exaggerate it" (p. 9). He proceeds to recount his uncle's journey, from arriving in Canada to venturing out West in pursuit of fortune, only to return to England nearly destitute, eventually settling into a role as the business manager of a monastic order. While Leacock paints a vivid picture of his uncle's life, he refrains from delving into the exceptional traits of his personality.

The narrative unfolds with Leacock's uncle effortlessly navigating the political landscape of the 1878 general election in Canada. Arriving in Winnipeg at the height of the boom, he quickly became involved in various endeavors and acquainted with influential figures:

"His activities were wide. He was the president of a bank (that never opened), head of a brewery (for brewing the Red River), and, above all, secretary-treasurer of the Winnipeg Hudson Bay and Arctic Ocean Railway that had a charter authorizing it to build a road to the Arctic Ocean, when it got ready. They had no track but they printed stationery and passes, and in return E.P. received passes all over North America" (p. 11).

E.P. maintained an air of aristocracy and importance, cultivating the impression of associating with high-ranking individuals. However, as financial troubles loomed, he clung to credit rather than cash, clinging to illusions of his imaginary bank and railway to the Arctic Ocean. But reality eventually caught up with him: "Gradually credit crumbles. Faith weakens. Creditors grow hard, and friends turn their faces away. Gradually, E.P. sank down. The death of his wife had left him a widower, a shuffling, half-shabby figure, familiar on the street, that would have been pathetic but for his indomitable self-belief, the illumination of his mind" (p. 14).

In "Happy Stories, Just to Laugh" (1943), penned a year prior to his demise, Leacock reveals glimpses of his own persona through a collection of anecdotes from his life. When the boom abruptly collapses, E.P. finds himself among the greatest losers. During the Riel Rebellion, he assembles a small band of irregulars from his remaining acquaintances. Upon their capture, he befriends the Indigenous people, teaches them poker, and escorts them as hostages to Winnipeg. Surviving the depression, E.P. receives word from England that he has been bestowed with the D.S.O. for his contributions during the rebellion and has been granted an honorary Colonelship. Additionally, his wife inherits a substantial sum of money, culminating in E.P. embarking once more in a blaze of glory to conquer the West.

Salma Skoll notes the evolution of E.P. from a historical figure in "My Discovery of the West" to a fully realized humorous character in later works, showcasing how Leacock allowed his imagination to gradually shape and refine the character. He engaged in discussions with "the boys," gauging their reactions to further develop E.P. into a source of amusement. However, Leacock's creative abilities have their limitations. While E.P. may be a humorous creation, the sketch suggests that he remains somewhat underdeveloped from a fictional standpoint. It hints at Leacock's struggle to craft a comprehensive comic portrait akin to Dickens' adept handling of characters. Skoll observes, "Leacock's greatest limitation as a creative artist lies in his inability to make a cluster of comic incidents and characters coalesce into a sustained story" (pp.184-185).

"The Transit of Venus" in "My Remarkable Uncle" stands out as Leacock's only published attempt at a serious short story. Initially intended as part of a series called "Annals of Concordia College," it was first published in January 1926 in *Good Housekeeping*. However, Leacock struggled to make significant progress on the series and completed only one short story, which he titled "The Transit of Venus." This narrative portrays the tale of a college Professor whose clumsy courtship of one of his students nearly fails but ultimately succeeds. Ralph Curry remarks that while it may not be an exceptional story, it reflects Leacock's inclination to venture into serious fiction at least once (pp.319-20).

The story commences on the opening day of the semester when Professor Kitter addresses a co-ed class for the first time in his sixteen-year teaching career, noting that "in the calm precincts of Mathematical Astronomy no women had ever wandered before" (p.78). Among the students are Irene Taylor and Marty. Professor Kitter is so flustered that he struggles to decide whether to refer to them as 'women,' 'girls,' or 'ladies,' and he blushes while concluding the lecture. For him, the universe takes on a more wondrous hue, the stars shine brighter, and astronomy becomes the noblest and grandest of sciences. In truth, the professor has fallen for Irene Taylor and seeks to impress her through his grand lectures. He becomes increasingly conscious of his appearance, attends various college functions, and even pens three letters to her—though they are not declarations of love as intended, but rather discussions on celestial phenomena. Yet, he yearns to express something deeper, and each attempt ends in failure. As the semester draws to a close, he finds himself at a loss, fearing that if he does not act soon, he may lose his chance to propose altogether.

Finally, as they exit the observatory, Professor Kitter seizes an opportunity to ask Miss. Taylor to be his wife, spurred on by the reminder that the next transit of Venus is not until the year 2004. However, upon descending the stairs after closing the room, he overhears Miss. Taylor and Mr. Johnson discussing marriage. Crushed by the realization that his hopes have been dashed, he retreats to the observatory, resigned to returning to his routine existence.

On the afternoon of graduation day, the Professor happened to meet Miss. Taylor on the avenue, well-dressed for an occasion. She asked him if he was not going for the marriage of Marty and Johnson. It was in fact about their marriage that Johnson had been referring to on that night to Irene. She insisted that he must attend the marriage and "put her hand on the little Professor's arm and turned him in her direction" (p.193). Whatever they talked as they went down the avenue, and as they walked back after the wedding, Miss. Taylor, "after an interval shorter than anything ever heard of before in astronomy, was to become the Professor's wife" (pp.193-94).

"Some of Leacock's characters are fully alive and interesting. Josh Smith the hotelier in *Sunshine Sketches* stands out as one of the best creations of Leacock. He is indeed a "heaven born hotel keeper who has achieved outstanding success ever since he came to Mariposa. Though he could not read, he had all the qualifications to be a proprietor. As a politician he is determined to protect the interests of his constituents so long as it coincided with his own." (Roberson Davies, 1970, p. 22).

Jefferson Thorpe emerges as a striking character, his financial naivete rendering him both a figure of folly and a symbol of innocence and honesty, ultimately falling prey to the deceit of corrupt city swindlers. Like his fellow Mariposans, he unwittingly adheres to urban material standards, oblivious to a superior alternative. Leacock's satire, transitioning from humor to pathos, culminates in a final affirmation. Lynch notes the irony of Jeff's failure becoming his salvation, a revelation that allows readers to perceive Mariposa with the ironic vision demanded by the narrator and narrative (pp.74-75).

In contrast, Tomlinson in *Arcadian Adventures* assumes the role of the financial wizard, unexpectedly thrust into greatness. Despite amassing wealth, he retains his moral compass. His decision to relinquish his fortune and return to farming inadvertently results in newfound prosperity, reminiscent of a mule's unexpected leap. However, his attempt at beneficence towards the university exposes his inadequacy, revealing that wealth does not equate to wisdom (p. 35).

Dean Drone, another intricately drawn character, is depicted as a tragic figure with individualized traits and a poignant personal history. As a widower, his Sunday walks often lead him to his wife's grave. Robertson Davies highlights Dean Drone's tender memories, elevating him beyond mere comic caricature to a figure of profound emotional depth (1970, 24). Pathos permeates the sketch, underscoring Leacock's belief in the integration of humor and poignancy to temper pointed satire.

Dean Drone's narrative brims with irony, particularly when the church faces financial woes. Parishioners' disparaging remarks about the Dean add a touch of comic absurdity, with the discussion of "mugwump" injecting humor into the solemn setting. The narrator's observations of the Dean's futile searches for obscure creatures further contribute to the ironic tone, blurring the line between superior irony and Mariposan simplicity (p.137).

When Dean Drone decides to resign, he struggles immensely to compose a letter of resignation. The narrator astutely remarks, "If you have not done that for forty years it is extremely difficult to get the words" (SS, p. 79). Cameron aptly observes that the flat simplicity and understatement of this remark are heartrending, followed by a passage where Leacock's irony reaches its pinnacle in the entire narrative (1987, p. 138). The Dean's earnest attempts to draft the letter give rise to moments of hilarious comedy. However, the underlying context underscores a moment of final defeat for a good old man who has dedicated his entire life to the service of God and his community.

Similarly, the reference to "the light of the New Jerusalem" drips with irony. Beyond the lens of the rector's perspective, a deeper irony emerges as there truly is a light behind the church, albeit not the light of New Jerusalem. In fact, the church is engulfed in flames—a situation inadvertently caused by the Dean's mismanagement. Adding to the irony, the heavily over-insured church's destruction will provide complete funding for a new one, completing the final ironic twist (Cameron 1967, p. 131).

Thus, the transition from 'illusion' or metaphorical beacon to a tangible fire epitomizes the shift from the metaphorical to the literal—a technique that characterizes not only Leacock's humorous approach but also his broader mode of thought (Lynch 96). The fire not only shatters all of Dean Drone's illusions but also deals him a severe emotional blow. While he physically recovers from his stroke, his mental state deteriorates irreparably. Estranged from reality, he grapples with hallucinations, and Leacock bids him farewell in a passage that, despite its humorous tint, resonates with profound compassion. Tom Marshall perceives a weightiness in the irony present, noting that Leacock's comic vision harbors hints of a tragic sensibility, rendering it profoundly ambivalent (p. 183).

## 5. CONCLUSION:

The research analysis on humor in the selected works of Stephen Leacock, focusing on situational and character-driven comedy, reveals the depth and complexity of Leacock's comedic genius. Through an examination of literary techniques, thematic exploration, character analysis, audience reception, and comparative analysis, the study provides valuable insights into the artistry of Leacock's humor and its enduring appeal.

Firstly, the analysis of Leacock's use of literary techniques highlights his mastery of irony, satire, wordplay, and other comedic devices to create both situational and character-driven comedy. Leacock's adeptness at crafting humor arises from his ability to juxtapose incongruities, exploit repetition and inversion, and employ the reciprocal interference of series, as elucidated by Henri Bergson's theories on humor. By examining specific examples from Leacock's works, such as "My Financial Career" and "Number fifty-Six," the study demonstrates how humor emerges from absurd scenarios, exaggerated circumstances, and unexpected twists of fate.

Secondly, the thematic exploration of Leacock's humor delves into the broader social, cultural, and philosophical themes reflected in his comedic narratives. Through humor, Leacock offers keen observations on human nature, societal norms, and the absurdities of everyday life. Whether critiquing the foibles of modern banking in "My Financial Career" or satirizing the materialism of urban life in "Arcadian Adventures," Leacock's humor serves as a vehicle for social commentary, shedding light on the follies and complexities of human existence.

Thirdly, the character analysis reveals the intricacies of individual quirks and peculiarities that drive Leacock's comedic narratives. Characters like E.P., Jefferson Thorpe, and Dean Drone embody Leacock's penchant for creating larger-than-life personalities whose foibles and follies provide ample fodder for humor. Through their interactions and misadventures, Leacock skillfully satirizes human frailties and societal conventions, offering insights into the human condition with a blend of humor and empathy.

Moreover, the study considers the reception of Leacock's humor by both contemporary and modern audiences, highlighting its enduring appeal and relevance across generations. By analyzing critical reception, reader responses, and cultural context, the study assesses why Leacock's humor continues to resonate with readers worldwide, attesting to its timeless quality and universal appeal.

Finally, the comparative analysis contextualizes Leacock's contributions within the broader landscape of comedic literature, highlighting the distinctive qualities of his humor and its place within the canon of comedic writing. By examining similarities and differences in comedic techniques, themes, and audience reception, the study underscores Leacock's unique comedic voice and his enduring legacy as one of the foremost humorists of his time.

In conclusion, the research analysis offers valuable insights into the artistry of humor in the selected works of Stephen Leacock, showcasing his mastery of situational and character-driven comedy. Through astute observations, witty storytelling, and keen insight into human nature, Leacock's comedic legacy continues to captivate audiences, offering laughter, enlightenment, and enduring literary enjoyment for generations to come.

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## ETHICS DECLARATIONS:

### Competing interests:

The authors affirm that there are no competing interests to disclose.

### Ethical approval:

This research has been conducted in accordance with ethical standards. However, it is important to note that formal ethical approval was not deemed necessary for this study.

**Informed consent:**

The content of this article does not involve any studies with human participants that would necessitate obtaining informed consent from the subjects.