Classic Canadian Humour Unveiled: Stephen Leacock in (Pre-)Communist Romania[1]

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1. Introduction

Major humorist of the first half of the 20th century, a writer as important as Mark Twain for the Canadian literary space, "in his own time, Stephen Butler Leacock was the most famous Canadian author both at home and abroad" (Staines, 1986: 1), his name being synonymous with laughter as Timothy Findley's is with madness, mayhem and Armageddon (*idem*, p. 5). However, those who knew him argued that he never sought greatness, "he simply wished to have his say and found that humour helped to increase the size of his audience" (1986: 122). It was also asserted that the writer's center laid in confluence of the two traditions, humanism and torysm "that found in Leacock fertile ground for the propagation of such qualities as a tolerance of human fallibility and acceptance of social responsibility" (Lynch, 1988: 1–2). His humour was classified as essentially Canadian, in the nation's everlasting struggle for self-expression:

> The Canadian is often a baffled man because he feels different from his British kindred and his American neighbours, sharply refuses to be lumped together with either of them, yet cannot make plain this difference. But Leacock was doing it in his humour. (…) The best of Leacock exists somewhere between – though at a slight angle from – the amiable nonsense of characteristic English humour (e.g. Wodehouse) and the hard cutting wit and almost vindictive satire of much American humour (Priestley 1959: 10–11).

The quote above made history and was used on at least one occasion to dismiss less informed criticism on Leacock, and restore his position as Canadian, not American humorist (cf. R.E. Watters's review of Ralph L. Curry's *Stephen Leacock. Humorist and Humanist* in *Canadian Literature*, 2013). As one of the first Canadian authors to be translated and reviewed in Romanian periodicals in the first half of the

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twentieth century, Stephen Leacock was often taken for an American humourist by Romanian rewriters[2], as well.

1. Stephen Leacock in Pre-Communist Romania

As mentioned above, Leacock is one of the first Canadian authors to be introduced to the Romanian readership in the early days of Canadian reception in our country, i.e. the beginning of the 20th century. During the inter-war and WWII years several authors were translated and discussed in Romanian periodicals, and Mazo de la Roche even had some of her novels in the *Jalna* series poorly translated by the controversial Jul Giurgea who signed many translations from English literature, in general. It is worth mentioning that, as far as the history of the book in Romania is concerned, the early inter-war period was still dominated by translations of British fiction mediated via the French language. However, there are no signs of such cases of indirect translations for the Canadian works that were made known to the Romanian public during those years, either in periodicals (mostly Stephen Leacock and Mazo de la Roche, but also Lawrence Burpee, Peter Pippermint, Samuel S. Cox, and Bliss Carman) or in volumes (Mazo de la Roche); all the translations that were published in the periodicals of the time are marked as translated from English, yet the public's taste was strongly influenced by the French cultural model, as Romanian TS scholars argue:

> the exclusively commercial and business criteria that guided the policy of private publishing houses [in the 1920's, 1930's and 1940's] had three obvious consequences for the reception of foreign literature in Romania. Firstly, the translation of many books belonging to the academic canons (British ones included) was left aside. Secondly, the translated books as such were frequently unacceptable on linguistic and textual grounds. Both publishing houses and translators themselves could be held responsible for that aspect. Publishers would impose on translators, in 80 per cent of the cases, drastic constraints regarding the length and type of the text. Works whose success had been previously tested on a foreign (French) audience had to be no longer than 120 pages so as not to bore the readers. This made the short story a favourite candidate among literary genres. It was also in order to facilitate reading and make it "more attractive" that these translations were often serialized in collections (Dimitriu 1999: 191).

But on the other hand, in the pre-communist decades, aesthetic criteria were part of the horizon of expectations of educated readers, not to mention that aesthetic values were expected from literary works and translations by the interpretive communities of the time. Pre-communist critics insisted that "translations have the same literary value as their originals, that translators make use of their creative powers, and that they have spiritual affinities with their authors" (Dimitriu, 2006: 77). Another expectation was that "the vocabulary used in translations should be in keeping with the characters' social, historical or geographic background (i. e. appropriate register)" (*ibidem*). In fact, since the early 1920's critics were pleading

[2] We employ the term 'rewriter' in the sense coined by the Translation Studies scholar André Lefevere to refer to all agents that 'manipulate' a text, be they translators, critics, annotators, reviewers, etc. (1992: VII, *passim*).

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for a "literature of translations" to be developed alongside with our national literature following the model of Western European countries. Translations were meant to enrich the Romanian cultural inheritance and enlarge our horizon (Lăcătuşu 2000: 70, *passim*).

According to Lupu and Ştefănescu's bibliography for this period, (1997: 209) Leacock is by far the most translated author in the periodicals of the time. Some of the articles include short stories or fragments of short stories that are made available to the Romanian readership, either accompanied by short critical introductions or not. Still, as the Romanian critic Gelu Ionescu remarks, most of the titles were changed or simplified for commercial purposes (1981: 39).

No.	Year	Title and translation	Translator	Place	Review
1.	1924	*La fotograf (With the Photographer)*	Al. Terziman	Chişinău	Dreptatea/ Dreptatea cultural-artistică (Justice/ The Cultural-Artistic Justice)
2.	1927	*Jurnalul intim al Mariei Waşineff (Sorrows of a Super Soul: or, the Memoirs of Marie Mushenough)*; with a note on the American humorist	Al. N. Biaz. [= Henri B. Blazian]	Bucureşti	Adevărul literar şi artistic (The Literary and Artistic Truth)
3.	1927	*Romanţă medievală (Guido the Gimlet of Ghent: A Romance of Chivalry)*	Rud. A. Knapp	Bucureşti	Orizontul (The Horizon)
4.	1934	*File rupte din "Ziarul" Mariei Waschineff (Sorrows of a Super Soul: or, the Memoirs of Marie Mushenough)*	G. Rădulescu	Bucureşti	Magazinul (The Magazine)
5.	1938	*Un bun prieten (My Unknown Friend)*	Puica S.	Bucureşti	Timpul (The Time)
6.	1942	*Când ai noroc. "Nuvelă tragi-comică şi cu tâlc"*[3] *(When You're Lucky*, "a tragi-comic tale"*)*	Mih. Niculescu.	Bucureşti	Duminica Magazin (The Sunday Magazine)
7.	1943	*Guvernanta norocoasă (Gertrude the Governess: or, Simple Seventeen)*	–	Bucureşti	Magazinul (The Magazine)
8.	1943	*Mărirea salariului (My Financial Career)*	–	Bucureşti	Păcală

Table 1. Translations from Leacock in the inter-war and World War II years

[3] I marked with an asterisk the titles that I translated literally. Since some of the original articles are no longer available today, the source text cannot be identified.

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The following articles – usually no longer than a page or two functioning as prefaces or short introductory passages – contain only critical remarks on the Canadian authors and their works and make no reference to their translation:

No.	Year	Title and translation	Author of the article	Place	Magazine
1.	1921	*Winsome Winnie* (the Romanian critic takes the Canadian Leacock for an "American humorist", his book being a series of "pastiches and imitations" (1921: 4))	-	Bucureşti	Adevărul literar şi artistic (The Literary and Artistic Truth)
2.	1927	*Stephen Leacock*, the teacher of humour whose "humour is 'extremely transatlantic'; in his works, humour combines with the craziest fantasy and the grotesque with infinite happiness" (Lupu and Ştefănescu 1997b: 209)	-	Bucureşti	Orizontul (The Horizon)
3.	1927	*Romanţă medievală (Guido the Gimlet of Ghent: A Romance of Chivalry)*; accompanied by the translator's foreword	George Protopopescu	Piteşti	Cronica Argeşului (The Argeş Chronicle)
4.	1928	*Naufragiaţii de pe Dorado (My Remarkable Uncle)*; with a short portrayal of the author	Rud. A. Knapp	Bucureşti	Gazeta de duminică (The Sunday Gazette)
5.	1938	*Profesor de umor (The Teacher of Humour)*; translation from 'The Times Literary Supplement'	Mihai Alexandrescu	Bucureşti	Preocupări literare (Literary Concerns)
6.	1942	Naufragiaţii de pe Dorado (*My Remarkable Uncle*)	-	Bucureşti	Timpul familiei (The Family Time)

Table 2. Literary Criticism on Leacock in the inter-war and World War II years

Stephen Leacock was the most appreciated and translated author in the Romanian inter-war and World War II periodicals, probably due to his short stories that were the favourite genre during the period and his sense of humour. However, if his name appears in six of the nine articles of criticism and in eight of the thirteen translations that were published during this period, a volume of his selected works would only come out in 1965.

1.1. Stephen Leacock As Seen by Romanian Rewriters of Pre-communist Periodicals

During the Inter-War and WWII years the criticism published in periodicals does not go beyond an impressionistic, historical-biographical stance as understood by the nineteenth-century French tradition (and articulated by Hippolyte A. Taine, cited by Guerin, 2004: 51 and Sainte-Beuve). This type of criticism was aggressively attacked by Proust who expressed his exasperation with biographical

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anecdote, widely practiced in France by such distinguished literary critics as Sainte-Beuve. Proust argued that "biography is a profoundly misleading basis for the reading of literature, let alone for the appreciation of its literariness" (quoted in Jefferson 2007: 3).

The few articles that introduce Canadian literature to the Romanian readership, in general and Stephen Leacock, in particular resemble pre-critical reappraisals of literary works undertaken by more or less professional rewriters. As far as the articles on Leacock are concerned, there are Romanian critics that do not even regard the humorist as a Canadian author and take him for an American one; this is a mistake which occurs twice in *Adevărul literar și artistic/ The Literary and Artistic Truth* (1921 and 1927). First, a fragment from *Winsome Winnie* came out and its anonymous rewriter took Leacock for an 'American humorist', his book being a series of 'pastiches and imitations' (1921: 4). According to the commentator, one of the benefits of such a reputation (of an American humorist, that is) guarantees a reading public that is willing to accept any new work for amusement. He further assesses the writings of the volume as belonging to the 'usual pattern' (without any further explanation of what this pattern consists of), arguing that Leacock tries to ridicule 'the systems employed by authors that take pride in their originality'. Second, Al.N. Biaz (a pen-name of Henri B. Blazian) who translated a fragment from *Nonsense Novels*, namely "Sorrows of a Super Soul: or, The Memoirs of Marie Mushenough" (rendered into Romanian as "Jurnalul intim al Mariei Mașineff") also takes Leacock for an American humorist, arguing that he became 'a new king of American humorists after the death of Mark Twain' (1927: 4). The American author (sic!) is praised for his humour that combines 'spontaneous joy' with 'forgiving irony', 'the grotesque' and 'the unexpected', 'comic situations' and 'the absurdity of a funny vocabulary' in naïve characters. His art, i.e. the memoirs introduced to the Romanian public, is a parody of the famous diary in which 'Maria Bașchirceft' analyses her feelings and troubles.

A more comprehensive critical article on Stephen Leacock is *Studiu despre humor (Study of Humour)*, a translation from *The Times Literary Supplement* from a review on Leacock's *Humour and Humanity: An Introduction to the Study of Humour* which came out in 1937. According to the Romanian translation or rather adaptation by Mihai Alexandrescu (1938: 139), this is a book about humour for the students' use, not meant to teach us how to laugh if we do not have a sense of humour. However, the name and reputation of professor Leacock are a guarantee (an opinion of the anonymous Romanian mentioned above) that we are in front of a good book since only Leacock could write 'a humorous book about humour'. The cultural allusion to Mr. Beerbohm who had already read the study and had given his approval is further evidence in support of Leacock's popularity. In this case, Alexandrescu presupposes that the Romanian readers are familiar with the English writer and caricaturist Sir (Henry) Maximilian Beerbohm, also known as "the Incomparable Max" since no further explanation is provided in the Romanian text for this information. Humour is defined by Leacock as "the kindly contemplation of the incongruities of life, and the artistic expression thereof". As Lynch argued in his *Humour and Humanity* (1988: 27), Leacock's 'kindly contemplation' did not disallow incisive satire. It should not be taken as synonymous with or confused with

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‘gentle.’ For Leacock, ‘kindly’ described primarily the attitude of the author of the work and the vision of humanity the work offers; it also carried recognition of shared humanity, of ‘kin.’ The Romanian rewriter’s view is similar to the interpretation of the Canadian Studies scholar: Leacock’s humour shows confidence in the progress of humanity and does no longer find amusement in doing harm or defeating opponents. Alexandrescu further mentions Leacock’s confidence in the Anglo-Saxon essence of humour, “human kindliness” as opposed to Aristophanes’ cruel Latin humour. However, Leacock is more of a practitioner than a theorist, resorting to humour on any occasion, in both fiction and criticism. With respect to his humorous literary practices, authors that Leacock commented upon are alluded to by the Romanian rewriter. Thus, Lewis Caroll and Charles Dickens (probably known to the Romanian readers in the late 1930s to whom Mr. Pickwick was no longer a culture bump) are mentioned. As Lynch (1988: 39) claims, in the nineteenth century, humour “reaches its real ground,” where “it becomes the humour of situation and character: and, at its highest reach, laughter fades into a smile, that verges closely upon tears, when humour reflects the incongruity of life itself, our human lot”. This is the type of humour practiced by Dickens, to whom Leacock frequently refers to as “the Master”.

Preference for a certain type of fiction could also be regarded as part of the horizon of expectations of the interwar and WWII readership. This is either the case of popular fiction for women (Mazo de la Roche’s *Jalna* series) or of sentimental novels that came as fictional diaries or epistolary novels rendering the main character’s love affections (Stephen Leacock’s “Sorrows of a Super Soul: or, The Memoirs of Marie Mushenough” from *Nonsense Novels*) in the tradition of the 19th century French and German Romanticism. The literary voices of Romanticism were common to Romanian readers as translations from Goethe’s *Werther* were part of the Romanian literary and cultural polysystem since 1875 when the first translation came out as *Patimile junelui Werther*. As for French Romanticism, characters such as Benjamin Constant’s Adolphe or Etienne Pivert de Senancour’s Obermann were known to the target readers either by translations that circulated in the era (as in the case of *Adolphe*, translated as *Adolf* in 1921 by Paul Ionescu) or criticism in periodicals. For instance, Vladimir Streinu’s interpretations of Werther and Obermann follow an impressionistic stance that draws on Sainte-Beuve historical-biographical approach. He even quotes the French master in *Universul Literar/ The Literary Universe*, in an article comparing Obermann with Hamlet, Oblomov and Chateaubriand’s René for a confirmation of his viewpoints on the main characters’ “secret in origin, distanced in term” (1938: 2) affiliations. In fact, Streinu’s impressionistic stance is certified as biographically Sainte-Beuveian by later criticism: “one of the most important suggestions of Sainte-Beuve that Vladimir Streinu followed was to decipher the uniqueness of a literary creation, of an author” (Vârgolici 1997: 4). Thus, even though the Romanian commentators of Canadian literature do not acknowledge the influence of 19th century French biographical criticism on their approaches, classics of Romanian criticism of the period (such as Vladimir Streinu, Alexandru Philippide, Garabet Ibrăileanu, to name only a few) follow Sainte-Beuveian precepts in literary value.

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2. The Context of Stephen Leacock's Communist Reception in Romania

The communist years mark a shift of perspective with respect to translations and the translator's status. The incoherent translation policies of the inter-war and World War II period and the amateur, unprofessional translators came to be replaced with professional translators, great literary figures, professors of foreign languages and remarkable philologists such as Dan Duţescu, Leon Levițchi, Frida Papadache, Irina Mavrodin, Antoaneta Ralian, Petre Solomon, Mircea Ivănescu, Ion Frunzetti or Dan Grigorescu. Furthermore, great Romanian publishing houses (some of which have survived to this day) were set up and masters of world literature (a new concept that emerged during this period) were translated by these publishing houses. Reviews that were particularly dealing with world literature and its Romanian reception were also set up, namely *România literară (Literary Romania)* and *Secolul XX* (*The 20th Century*). Last but not least, since the Translator's Charter was established at Dubrovnik in 1963, communist translators had its recommendations to follow, as well. It is also important to mention that the first Colloquium on Translation and World Literature was held in our country and its proceedings published in 1981 are in a way, a unique document which best reflects writers', critics' and translators' opinion on the matter. Reputed figures as the ones mentioned above debate on both translations' and translators' status for the period under discussion. Thus, the translator is considered to be responsible for the enrichment of Romanian culture with translations from foreign cultures that should be rightly selected so as have an impact on the target culture (1981: 4). The multifaceted personality of the professional translator is also outlined: he/ she should be a good philologist, literary critic and historian in order to render with accuracy and subtlety the source text into the target language and culture (*ibidem*: 23). Moreover, participants highlighted the qualitative and quantitative improvements in the field of translation as compared to the inter-war and WWII years, and linked them to the superiority of the new political regime. The Writers' Union was asked to play an active role in the continuous improvement of the quality of translations from Romanian into other languages so as to promote our literary values abroad; special training was envisaged for a team of selected translators (i.e. academic training in the country and abroad and other seminars) (*idem*, p. 18). Considerations were also made on the translator's invisible status: with a few notable exceptions (e.g.: Dan Duțescu, Tașcu Gheorghiu, Leon Levițchi, Aurel Covaci) many of the Romanian translators were 'invisible' or scarcely known through a few lines in a dictionary[4] (*ibidem*: 26). Another important debated issue was that of translation criticism and the necessity for more articles of this kind which should better highlight the translators' merits (*ibidem*: 33). *Secolul XX/ The 20th century* was praised as the only publication to host a translation chronicle that effectively dealt with the phenomenon of translation, and not with translated books and their authors.

As a rule, in the early days of the communist regime (i.e. the 1950s and 1960s) it was considered essential for a new generation of (re)writers to emerge so as to celebrate the virtues of the new political order, adopt the ideology of the

[4] One such dictionary was Marian Popa's *Dicționar de literatură română contemporană (Dictionary of Contemporary Romanian Literature)*, first published in 1971 and reedited in 1977.

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communist party and serve its interests. Partisans of the new regime (e.g. Petrașincu quoted in Selejan 2007: 27) felt that the inter-war and World War II years had ignored creations of Romanian writers in favour of rather cheap foreign translated works. This is the context in which translations from Canadian literature such as the progressive novels by Dyson Carter, i.e. *Tomorrow Is with Us* (1954) and *Fatherless Sons* (1958) came out in prefaced editions; they were meant to instigate Romanian readers against the capitalist 'class enemy that never sleeps', in this case American imperialists, "as not only in Canada, but also in other countries of the world, the fight of working people against the harder and harder exploitation of monopolist capital and the threat of the atomic war planned by American imperialists, are central and vital problems" (Cernea 1958: XI).

However, apart from such ideologically purposeful literature, canonical novels were also published: Louis Hémon's *Marie Chapdelaine* (1968), Gabrielle Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion* (1968), Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising* (1971) Morley Callaghan's *They Shall Inherit the Earth* (1986), or Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (1989). Two anthologies, one of English Canadian poets and one of French Canadian ones came out, as well as Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1972). Two collections of Canadian short stories were also published during the communist years: one signed by different authors, i.e. *Blind MacNair: Canadian Short Stories* (1970) and one devoted to Stephen Leacock (1965). As a general remark, most of the (English) Canadian fiction translated during the communist period came out at 'Univers' Publishing House that was founded for the specific purpose of dealing with world literature and its introduction to the Romanian public.

2.1. Translations from Stephen Leacock in the Communist Years

During the communist period, Leacock's works received book-length treatment or were included in short-stories collections as shown in the table below:

No	Year	Title and translation	Translator/ Annotator	Place	Publishing House
1.	1955-1974	*Colecția de povestiri științifico-fantastice (SF Collection)*	Adrian Rogoz	București	Revista Științifică și Tehnică/ Scientific and Technical Review
2.	1965	*Povestiri umoristice (Humorous Stories)*	Tudor Măinescu and Micaela Ghițescu	București	Editura pentru literatură universal/ The Publishing House for World Literature
3.	1970	*Macnair cel orb: povestiri canadiene (Blind MacNair: Canadian Short Stories)*	Petronela Negoșanu	București	Editura Univers/ 'Univers' Publishing House
4.	1974	*A Miscellany of Humorous Prose*	Tina Herescu-Daniil	București	Editura didactică și pedagogică/ Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House

Table 3. Stephen Leacock in volumes published during the communist years

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Stephen Leacock's *The Man in Asbestos* translated by Adrian Rogoz is included in *Colecția de povestiri științifico-fantastice (SF Collection)*, published by Revista Științifică și Tehnică/ Scientific and Technical Review (no. 261–262) which came out between 1955–1974 and was extremely popular among the communist readership, a true 'Romanian ABC', the equivalent of a 'pulp era' in our country (Ionescu 2010).

Leacock's *Povestiri umoristice (Humorous Stories)* came out in 1965 at *Editura pentru Literatură Universală/ The Publishing House for World Literature* which later became 'Univers'. The volume is accompanied by a preface signed by one of the translators, Tudor Măinescu. The short stories published in Stephen Leacock's *Povestiri umoristice (Humorous Stories)* are arranged in a chronological order except for the ones in *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich* which was originally published in 1914 and came to be rendered into Romanian as *Întâmplări din Arcadia bogătaşilor leneşi*. In the 'Note on the edition', Tudor Măinescu explains that it was done so for "the readers to follow the development of Leacock's conception and literary art" (1965: 17).

The translations carried out by Măinescu and Ghițescu in the volume are outstanding, preserving the effect of the original in the target text. In fact, Tudor Măinescu is included in the third volume of the *Bibliographical Guide to Romanian Literature* devoted to *Romanian Translator Writers* (2003: 471–474). The translations of Leacock's works are foreignizing, in keeping with the spirit of the English language; for instance the characters' names are not adapted to hint at Romanian realities. In this respect, we can argue that the rewriters of the previous period, i.e. the pre-communist one were rather domesticating in their translations from Leacock's works published in periodicals (e.g. Marie Mushenough became either Maria Waşineff or Maria Waschineff in the Romanian versions). Notes that in this edition come as footnotes are kept to a minimum observing the standards of a general edition, as opposed to learned editions for didactic purposes which contained many explanatory endnotes (e.g. Shakespeare's complete works in eight volumes published by the same 'Univers' during the communist years).

As mentioned above, *Macnair cel orb (MacNair the Blind)* is another collection of Canadian short stories (as pointed out by its subtitle) published by the same 'Univers' during the communist years. The volume comprises twelve stories belonging to twelve different authors, Stephen Leacock's *The Marine Excursion of the Knights of Pythias (Excursia marină a cavalerilor lui Pythias)* being one of them. Since it came out in an unprefaced edition, there is no criticism on Leacock or any other Canadian writer in the volume; only the book cover reads that these stories present Canadian places and people in different situations, marvellously portrayed either in funny or dramatic situations. The publishing of this anthology was also signalled by a short article in the "Translation Chronicle" of the periodical *România Literară* (*Literary Romania*), in 1970.

Last but not least, two short stories by Stephen Leacock are included in the English anthology *A Miscellaneous of Humorous* Prose, namely *The Reading Public* and *Overworking the Alphabet*. Compiled by Tina Herescu-Daniil for high-school students, *A Miscellaneous of Humorous Prose* is a didactic edition aiming at developing high school students' reading skills and enriching their vocabulary. The

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collection came out at Editura didactică și pedagogică/ Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House which is specialised in such didactic editions; it also contains translations of words and idioms considered to be unknown to students at this level and the explicitation of historical or cultural references. In the preface to the collection, Herescu-Daniil (1974: 5–6) motivates her decision of introducing some authors with two short stories to the Romanian students so as to distinguish between means in producing different humorous effects. The short bio-note at the beginning of his short stories reads that Stephen Butler Leacock (b. 1859 – d. 1944) is

> an English-born Canadian author and economist, head of the department of political science and economics at McGill University in Montreal who wrote such studies as *Elements of Political Science* and *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice*, as well as works on history and biographies of Dickens and Twain. He is best known, however, for his humorous stories and essays, combining gay absurdities and penetrating criticism of contemporary society, published in such books as *Literary Lapses, Nonsense Novels, Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town, Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich, Moonbeams from the Larger Lunacy, Laugh Parade* and *Last Leaves*. *The Boy I Left Behind Me* is a sketch of his youth, and *How to Write* contains advice to young writers. *The Reading Public* is from *Moonbeams from the Larger Lunacy* (1974: 55).

2.2. Stephen Leacock As Seen by Communist Rewriters

As a general remark, the communist period is very difficult to account for in any reception study due to the lack of centralised databases on the criticism and translations published in periodicals; this obviously hardens any endeavour to research the reception of a literary figure. Comprehensive information on (fragments of) translated works and critical pieces devoted to them and their authors can only be found after the fall of the communist regime and especially in the recent years when Romanian national libraries started to develop their online databases. In our documentation for the doctoral thesis, apart from the criticism on Canadian authors found in periodicals that are partly devoted to foreign literatures (such as *România literară/ Literary Romania* and *Secolul XX/ The 20th Century*), we did not find any translations or criticism on Stephen Leacock, not even to review his works published in volumes.

The only comprehensive critical piece devoted to the Leacock and his work remains Tudor Măinescu's preface to the collection of *Humorous Stories* that he translated with Micaela Ghițescu in 1965, a genuine sample of Romanian criticism we will outline below. First of all, we can argue that the writer's work is reread (in the sense employed by reader response criticism) by communist rewriters as can be seen from the 'note on the edition' stating that the humorous stories of the Romanian version were arranged in a chronological order and were extracted from various English editions: *The Bodley Head Leacock, The Unicorn Leacock, Perfect Lover's Guide*, the posthumous volume *The Boy I Left Behind Me* and *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*. Tudor Măinescu wrongly assumes that the Romanian reader is not acquainted with the work of the Canadian humourist. In fact, this may not be true, if we were to consider all the fragments from his work published in periodicals during the inter-war and WWII years. Drawing on Mark Twain for his theory of

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humour, Măinescu (1965: 5) informs us that Leacock even brought homage to the great American writer, whom he viewed as one of his mentors, and devoted a chapter to him in one of his five books of literary aesthetics. Furthermore, the Romanian translator and prefacer rightfully asserts that Leacock's admiration for Twain did not turn the former into an imitator of the latter. Simply drawing on Twain's American humour, his ability to use the humour of the absurd and his skill to depict reality as fantastic are no more than simple techniques to reveal the truth in life. This is for the purpose of making the reader laugh, not only to become amused, but also to start reflecting on the world, avoid the ridicule and evil. In this way, Leacock, with his British ascendance is truly original, resembling Dickens, another author that inspired him due to his great skill in depicting his characters, especially their human part. At this level, we can argue that the criticism operated by the Romanian rewriter is slightly marked by Marxist grids; thus, in keeping with communist ideology, Măinescu acknowledges that, drawing on both Twain and Dickens, Leacock was able to define his theory on humour against the background of the age he lived in, his behaviour and the contradiction between the aspects of capitalism and the absurd reality it concealed (1965: 6, *passim*). As a testimony of his keen awareness of Canadian letters, the Romanian translator quotes J. B. Priestley and his appreciation of Leacock that made history and, as we have already shown above, is also employed by international critics in assessing the humourist's literary value and originality. In this way, Măinescu also proves that Romanian criticism of Canadian letters, in general and of Leacock, in particular has evolved since the inter-war and World War Two, Canadian figures not being mistaken for American ones any more. According to Măinescu, (1956: 7), Leacock's Canadianness consists in 'dryness' and 'fun', evolving between 'incisive satire' and 'absurd comic'; this is an irony that does not turn into stupefaction, and a critical spirit that arrests one's attention without making any victims.

The Romanian rewriter also includes a short biographical outline of Leacock, mentioning that the recollections of the writer's niece and literary secretary for many years, Barbara Nimmo, could be useful to all readers interested in the life and habits of the Canadian humourist. Furthermore, without giving any references, Măinescu brings into play Leacock's academic career, arguing that his scientific writings are less valuable than his literary ones. Also, as far as his literary achievements are concerned, the Romanian critic's view is that Leacock had more success with his parodies than other literary works, although international critics such as J.B. Priestley (cited by Măinescu, 1965: 11) felt that they weren't revealing the best of Leacock. However, the Romanian translator argues that the parodies were a pretext for satire (a pantomime of old melodrama popular in the 19th century as in *Cast Up by the Sea*/ *Zvărlită de valuri pe ţărmul mării* or of the declamatory style in the novels depicting bravery and heroism in the civil war as in *The Blue and The Grey*/ *Albastru şi cenuşiu*). Equally cherished by the Romanian translator and prefacer are Leacock's humour and talent in satirising 'the idle rich' (1965: 13). This is a realm of business people in which the humourist hunts 'predatory cupidity', 'feline unscrupulousness' and 'superstitious foolishness' as if he were in the jungle. These are beasts whose habits are known by their master hunter who knows where and when to strike. As gifted as a caricaturist in the portrayal of his characters, Leacock

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does not invent anything, he simply reveals reality and its naked truth. As means, the technique of nonsense is employed so as to emphasize the absurdity of the world depicted; for instance, the millionaire in *How to Make a Million Dollars* is extremely accurate in Măinescu's opinion (1965: 14). In Leacock's fictional world, the dollar is God and the accounts are the Bible. The richer its characters, the more foolish, the cannier in business, the easier to trick by imposters; thus, the Romanian translator (1965: 15) argues that in their ignorance such characters believe in spirits and, since they are living in the modern world, they try to contact these spirits by phone thanks to agents of special units established for this purpose. However, it is *The Man in Asbestos* that synthesizes Leacock's view on life which is not a utopian one; he loves life with all its contradictions and mocks the visionaries of distant fancies. Măinescu concludes that Stephen Leacock is an optimist and a malcontent, a fine observer that does not rebel against the injustice of the world, he simply shows his indignation by means of the subtle irony in his writings.

To summarize, the preface does not contain any translation-related considerations. It rather deals with Leacock's humorous work (an author that Măinescu, regards as sharing in common both with Mark Twain and Charles Dickens) and is ideologically neutral except for a single remark on the Canadian humorist's supposed intention, i.e.: "to point out the contradiction between the surface of capitalist order and the stupid reality that it conceals" (1965: 6). Unlike prefacers to Carter's fiction, Tudor Măinescu draws up the image of Canada from J. B. Priestley who tackles problems of Canadian identity.

Conclusions

To conclude, Stephen Leacock is one of the most popular Canadian authors in the inter-war, World War Two and communist Romania. In our study, we outlined Leacock's position in Romanian culture in the early days of the reception of Canadian literature in our country. Thus, since the early 1920s fragments of his works were published by Romanian periodicals, especially excerpts from *The Memoirs of Marie Mushenough* in keeping with the horizon of expectations of the Romanian readership which still preferred sentimental plots. We also pointed out that he was taken for an American humourist, a mistake that apparently some specialists still make nowadays in their more comprehensive studies on the Canadian author (*cf.* R. E. Watters's review of Ralph L. Curry's *Stephen Leacock. Humorist and Humanist*). The criticism on him in the pre-communist period is impressionistic, drawing on St. Beuve's precepts familiar to Romanian rewriters. As far as the communist period is concerned, we underlined that Stephen Leacock received book-length treatment due to Măinescu and Ghițescu's 1965 *Humorous Stories*, a collection of some of his most important works. Also, since the criticism in periodicals is more difficult to account for during the communist period due to the lack of centralized on-line databases or specialised bibliographies, we concluded that the most comprehensive critical piece on the author remains Măinescu's preface to the edition mentioned above. Slightly influenced by Marxist grids in keeping with the ideology of a totalitarian regime, it manages, nonetheless, to achieve an accurate depiction of the writer and his work. Last but not least, we also discussed the other

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volumes in which his short stories came out, either in English for didactic purposes or in Romanian in general editions intended for a general (*Blind MacNair*) or a niche readership (*SF Collection*).

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to shade light on the Romanian reception, through translations and critical studies, of a beloved Canadian literary figure, the humourist Stephen Leacock. Introduced to Romanian readers mainly via short articles in periodicals during the inter-war and WWII years and hailed as Canada’s Mark Twain, the author received book-length treatment only in the communist period. Drawing on reader-response criticism and history of the book, we will account for the criteria that operated in the selection process of his works and the type of criticism practiced by Romanian rewriters, in the sense coined by the Translation Studies scholar André Lefevere.

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