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Saying Goodbye to Mariposa: Robertson Davies's Deptford and the Small-Town Convention

Ryan Porter

Stephen Leacock's Mariposa, observes Gerald Lynch, is a type of "home place" for Canadian literature and identity (*The One* 182), a label suggesting that the town's significance transcends its canonical place in literature and enters a realm touching on a cultural imaginary: "acknowledged or not, [Mariposa's impact] may be unavoidable for any writer using the genre of the short story cycle and a Canadian small-town setting after 1912" (183). In reflecting on Leacock's centrality to a "Canadian literary sensibility," Frank Birbalsingh argues that "it would be hard to imagine Canadian literature being what it is today without his writing and its example" (195). Leacock's rendering of Mariposa as a "typical" Canadian small town no doubt offers readers an attractive, imaginary, even fantastic ideal of a home place, one whose iconic status and broad recognition is unmatched in Canadian literature; it is paradigmatic of a *type* of small-town fiction with which many subsequent texts are in conversation.[1] Robertson Davies's Deptford Trilogy is no exception, and critics Robert Thacker, Clara Thomas, and W.J. Keith all read Deptford and Mariposa as progeny of the same lineage. With an almost exclusive focus on *Fifth Business*, this essay proposes that Deptford is, simultaneously, a product and a rejection of Mariposa's influence. The narrator and protagonist, Dunstan Ramsay, explores the nostalgic small-town archetype[2] as home place for which Mariposa serves as a template, and his final departure from Deptford constitutes an allegorical exodus from Mariposa's aesthetic and cultural influence. His distinctly ambivalent memories of Deptford, however, also function as an extended meditation on the conditions needed for the small-town idyll to take shape.

At least a superficial link between the towns can be found in their similar temporal settings, says Clara Thomas, as Dunstan's recollections of his childhood "encompass the same time period to which the

novels of Duncan [Sara Jeannette] and Leacock were contemporary" (221). Thomas points out further similarities among the three: "it [*Fifth Business*] is set in Southern Ontario and its total tone and makeup is specific to the past of this country, at a time when such towns played a keystone part in the country's development" (221). What Thomas means by the "total tone and makeup" of the novel may be clarified by what Keith labels the "detached perspective" of Leacock's and Davies's narrators: "They have widened their own horizons and look *back* at the town in question with affection or amused irony or occasionally with disgust, but certainly from outside" (167).

While these critics read the past through these literary constructions, Robert Thacker deciphers their influence on Ontario's self-regard in the present, as the province "persists in seeing itself — through its literature, the stuff of myths — as a place of small towns[;] . . . the small-town ethos is a legacy, an inheritance which helps to explain the present by assessing and redefining the past" (213). This cultural approach that reads the typified small town as a type of cultural home place is common in Leacock criticism. For instance, Douglas Mantz reads Mariposa as an image of "psychic roots" (97) for a Canadian nation: "Leacock's train journey turns back the clock of history collectively as well as individually, back through the stages of the national past which lies behind the biography of every Canadian" (99). Not surprisingly, Davies criticism often echoes this cultural reading; Monk, for example, summarizes Deptford's social perspective as a "background of conventional Canadian attitudes and behaviour" (*Mud* 14). Perhaps most significantly, Thomas suggests that both Deptford and Mariposa offer the reader an image of "the core of English Canada's [historical] 'identity,' about which there was then no doubt" (219).

The melancholic last chapter of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* alludes to the declining importance of the autonomous small town in early twentieth-century Ontario; as the final image of Mariposa fades, both the club men and the reader come to realize that the town may have been no more than a falsehood of reminiscence, a mirage of the home place. The early part of the twentieth century in Ontario was a period of general emigration from the rural small towns to the industrialized cities (Baskerville 157); yet with the decline of the countryside came the clearer definition and increased appeal of "rural values," a trend on which Leacock both capitalizes and comments. Thomas

appears to commit the same error as other critics of Leacock's work: that is, she confuses the lighthearted, ironic, jovial tone of the book with an accurate distillation of the spirit of the age, an age thought defined by the vitality of robust organic communities as opposed to their decline. It is a further error to read Deptford as an homage to the popular conception of that age and to its literary predecessor, as profound tension exists between Deptford and Davies's protagonists, all of whom experience acute anxiety as a result of the identity and moral confines the village erects around individuals.

The willingness to read similarities between *Sunshine Sketches* and *Fifth Business* glosses over some important differences. The most prominent features of Leacock's text are his sensitive character portrayals, and the unanimity and community-mindedness of those characters, all of which contribute to a tone that oscillates between hilarity and sentimentality. Early critiques of Davies's *Fifth Business,* on the other hand, concentrate on the characters' "moral imperatives" (Reid 179) and Deptford's "practical common sense and . . . solid reliance on material, down-to-earth reality" (Bjerring qtd. in Lennox 24). Deptfordian sobriety provides a sharp contrast to the well-oiled exuberance of the Mariposans.[3]

Both books share a similar narrative premise. While the final chapter of *Sunshine Sketches* reveals that Mariposa exists only in the collective memories of melancholic urbanites, each of the Deptford novels consists of the reminiscences of a successful man who spends his formative years in small-town Ontario: the narrative of *Fifth Business* consists of a letter Dunstan Ramsay has written to his former headmaster at Colborne College; *The Manticore* is largely made up of the writings and reminiscences of David Staunton while undergoing Jungian psychoanalysis; finally, *World of Wonders*, while narrated by Ramsay, is dominated by the voice of Magnus Eisengrim (Paul Dempster), a childhood resident of Deptford who was kidnapped by carnies at a very early age. Mariposa and Deptford are products of memory, but in Davies's novels, retrospect is unaccompanied by longing. If nostalgia is largely responsible for Mariposa's allure — an allure that I would argue is largely responsible for its reputation as an image of the home place — nostalgia's veritable absence in the Deptford novels, particularly *Fifth Business*, marks an important difference between the two towns; the varying renditions of

Deptford reveal more about the development of the reminiscing subject than about the reminisced object.[4]

An analysis of the narrative premises of both books reveals Mariposa to be an inaccessible retrospective ideal, while Deptford is the product of a developing, reminiscing subject. In *Sunshine Sketches,* the general trend is toward a return; Mariposa offers both the reader and the club men of the final chapter a passive, static, and contained ideal situated in a generalized recent past. Deptford's influence, however, proves far more persistent, as it has an active role in the psyches of its residents. While the village represents only a limited place along his trajectory of esoteric achievement in the field of hagiography, Dunstan's psychic escape from Deptford is never quite successful, and he must synthesize his current individuated self with the undesired collective values of Deptford — what are really presented as the physical, spiritual, and moral confines placed on the individual and enforced by the village collective. Through a process of escape and self-discovery, Dunstan must negotiate the residue of his Deptford past with his evolving present, and this process helps reveal how the small-town convention emerges;[5] if Mariposa is the past perfect, Deptford is the past progressive.

Of course, any canon of Canadian literature would contain a surfeit of characters who spend their early years in small towns, only later to escape their moral and cultural restrictions: Jubilee, Hanratty, Manawaka, Blairlogie — the list of towns could go on. It is not my purpose to explore "escape" as a theme in general, as these towns all bear idiosyncrasies that would make such a thematization pointless. Rather, by first focusing on Dunstan's sincere attempts at accurately rendering his village, this article will then explore the broader connotations of Dunstan's explicit knowledge of, temporary reliance on, and eventual abandonment of a small-town archetype or idealized home place, as epitomized by a Mariposan convention. If Leacock's town is read as a home place of Canadian fiction and cultural identity, then *Fifth Business* draws attention to the mode of memory responsible for that type of exegesis.

Mariposa and Deptford: Contrasting Memories

Early in his retrospective, Dunstan demonstrates his awareness of small-town life as a popular theme already thoroughly explored in literature and other cultural media:

> Once it was the fashion to represent villages as places inhabited by laughable, lovable simpletons, unspotted by the worldliness of city life, though occasionally shrewd in rural concerns. Later it was the popular thing to show villages as rotten with vice, and especially such sexual vice as Krafft-Ebing might have been surprised to uncover in Vienna; incest, sodomy, bestiality, sadism, and masochism. . . . Our village never seemed to me to be like that. It was more varied in what it offered to the observer than people from bigger and more sophisticated places generally think, and if it had sins and follies and roughnesses, it also had much to show of virtue, dignity, and even of nobility. (15-16)

While this passage contains Dunstan's thoughts on small-town conventions, Davies iterates a similar sentiment in *Feast of Stephen*, a book on Leacock and his writings:

> Descriptions of small-town life have become commonplace, especially in the literature of this continent. In Leacock's day they tended, with a handful of notable exceptions, to look on the sunny side of village and rural life and to accept the widely-held view that small-town people were kindlier, less corrupt, and more chaste than dwellers in great cities. Since then, of course, a school has arisen which portrays small towns, very profitably, as microcosms of Sodom and Gomorrah in which everybody but a handful of just men and women are deep in corruption, especially of the sexual order. (14-15)

It would seem that in *Fifth Business* Davies speaks through Dunstan since an obvious overlap between author and protagonist exists, at least in their shared awareness of a popular literary trope; Davies acknowledges the existence of small-town representational conventions, and thus attempts to situate his own portrayal beyond them. In Dunstan, Davies establishes a narrative voice whose asserted honesty claims to provide the "straight dope" on a well-established convention in Canadian literature by disregarding trends and fashions. If the small-town type is popularly associated with this country's cultural foundations,[6] then particular versions sketch an author's nostalgic, critical, or condemnatory cultural perspective. Dunstan suggests that his narrative corresponds to no agenda other than to provide the reader with a window onto a real small town's past.

The passage from *Fifth Business* also sketches a "problem of perspective"[7] that perhaps rests at the core of familiar small-town portrayals. The small-town convention that makes use of "laughable and lovable simpletons" is a veiled reference to Mariposa. As the final chapter of Leacock's text reveals, however, the creative source for Mariposa is the urban club. Stylized versions are the creations of, and products for, those from "bigger and more sophisticated places." Dunstan maintains that these literary conventions are really versions produced by those with insufficient knowledge of small-town life, or by those whose distant perspective, across time and space, allows them to think they see what they want to see. This effect of spatial-temporal distance is also something to which Dunstan comically draws attention when he discusses the smaller village located near Deptford: "We did, however, look with pitying amusement on Bowles Corners, four miles distant and with a population of one hundred and fifty. To live in Bowles Corners, we felt, was to be rustic beyond redemption" (18). By ironically drawing an analogy to Deptford's own tendency to patronize smaller, distant locales, Dunstan claims to be aware of, and to have transcended, distance's simplifying effect, a claim contributing to his own representational and rhetorical reliability. His is a village depicted by a village voice, or so he claims, in order to provide a contrast to Mariposa's consolatory or "fashionable" social aesthetics.

While Dunstan attempts to situate his portrayal of the small town beyond those identified conventions, it is immediately clear that his Deptford is ruled by proscriptive moral norms. On the other hand, Mariposa's lack of prohibition (both in terms of behavioural norms and liquor laws) reflects the source of the town's construction, the urban sphere; the retrospective image of the town seems to offer leisure opportunities to the wealthy urbanite, much like the fishing and hunting camps of the north or a steamship voyage to Europe. Mariposa is the fantasy of childhood, an inaccessible home place, conjured, perhaps, to temporarily soothe some metaphysical ache or feeling of urban alienation, but, at the same time, it contributes to the diversity of experience available to the urban plutocrat; this opportunity is accessed not through money, but a nostalgic memory. The small-town fantasy in *Sunshine Sketches* is an experience not of any specific past, but of an agglomerated cultural childhood, and it is the product of the collective memories of the wealthy, deep in the heart of the city. As it is the

product of leisure time, those idle evening hours spent at the club, it offers other possible existences in which complex moral confrontations and alienation cannot exist. This childlike ethos projected onto the past both confirms and further influences understandings of a benign cultural heritage, and the town becomes an exuberant and glossy historical model for the present. The indeterminacy of Mariposa's eventual melancholic dissolution into ephemeral fantasy can be interpreted as Leacock's refusal to allow the leisure class its desired simulation of a childhood idyll. This may be read as a manifestation of Leacock's well-known dislike for that class's profligacy, a dislike on fuller display in the subsequent *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*.

While Deptford is similarly reconstructed through memory, its main ontological thrust is toward the closing off of experiential possibility; the town is un-imbued with the "anything goes" attitude of the Mariposans. Monk suggests that notions of good and evil in Deptford "are determined wholly by convention and are defined in the context of an extremely conservative attitude to life in general and an extremely puritanical morality by a mixture of fear and practicality" (*Mud* 67). Monk calls this attitude "Deptford morality." Dunstan's stated aim in writing of Deptford is to give his reader, his former headmaster, a sense of the reality of village life; the reality of village life, however, can be rather ugly, since a type of pioneer morality exudes a powerful influence over Deptford. Dunstan attributes Deptford's often narrow and intolerant perspective to the influence of the village's settlers: "we were all too much the descendants of hard-bitten pioneers" (23-24). This offering explains Deptford's lack of an aesthetic sense, but it also helps explain the town's pious exclusion of those not involved in the same dominant improving-by-cultivation philosophy, of which practicality, self-denial, and moral orthodoxy are descended traits; the perceived strength of character derived from this pioneer lineage constitutes one surface of a Janus-faced philosophical heritage, the other surface reflecting a restrictive morality and literal mindedness. Dunstan diagnoses this lineage long after he has both felt and left behind its imperatives, yet his narrative reveals to what extent the village's moral heritage played a chafing but determining role in the making of his identity prior to his initial departure from Deptford.[8]

One practical embodiment of Deptford's pioneer morality is Dunstan's mother, Mrs. Ramsay, who wholly disapproves of Dunstan's

increasingly idiosyncratic intellectualism, and, as a result, there exists a fearsome domestic tension in the Ramsay household.[9] This domestic tension suggests that Deptfordian identity is modelled on a convention different from that found in *Sunshine Sketches*; Deptford constitutes "a limited and limiting society" (Hutcheon 197) wholly opposed to Mariposa's welcoming bonhomie. Unlike the experiential freedom the urban present projects onto the Mariposa past, Deptfordians abide by the experiential constraints they ascribe to the town's forebears.

Mary Dempster's transgression with Joel Surgeoner reveals the full influence of the collective values of the community on individuals, and it also reveals Dunstan's inability to subscribe to the town's moral code, which neglects the mystery of the spirit in favour of the demonstrability of the flesh. Because she conflates her religious beliefs with the dictates of Deptford's literalism, what John Bligh calls an adherence to "law" as opposed to "grace" (581), Mrs. Ramsay, like the majority of Deptfordians, does not appreciate the nature of what she opposes, unlike Dunstan himself who is developing a nascent understanding of the metaphorical in reality, what Monk calls the "numinosum" (*Infinity* 80). Dunstan's initial sympathy for Mary later develops into his belief that her act was a Christian miracle resulting in the salvation of a lost soul, and although Dunstan struggles against Deptford's religious understanding during the length of his adult career, he must first extricate himself from the consequential grasp of this blinkered comprehension. During this process, Dunstan is aware that the expulsion of the Dempsters serves as a warning to those who would transgress Deptford's conception of normalcy. The initial stages of Dunstan's movement toward something "bigger and more sophisticated," really a spiritual understanding whose basis lies outside of Deptford, is further fraught with difficulty, since Dunstan still identifies with the town and experiences acute emotional anguish as a result of this tension.

His military service allows Dunstan to at least delay his mother's demand to accept his place in Deptford's moral fold; furthermore, it initiates Dunstan's European education, which only succeeds in protracting the existing intellectual/cultural distance between the increasingly cosmopolitan Dunstan and the parochial Deptford. Yet upon his return from the war, this distance results in Dunstan's temporary utilization of the small-town convention, as typified by the rural-urban dichotomy in *Sunshine Sketches*; whereas his initial goal is to depict

Deptford with an accuracy that defies existing tropes, Dunstan flirts, however briefly, with those small-town conventions he claims to transcend.

Dunstan's Second Education:
Something "Bigger and More Sophisticated"

While Dunstan is fairly reticent about his combat experience, he is rather effusive about his recuperation from the war. This period mainly takes place at the home of the Marfleets, an upper-middle-class English family: "How my spirit expanded in the home of the Marfleets!" says Dunstan. "To a man who had been where I had been it was glorious" (76). This last line, of course, refers to the trenches of France, but "where [Dunstan] had been" includes small-town Ontario, and the permissive atmosphere of the Marfleets' home helps heal Dunstan's physical wounds acquired in France, but also those invisible wounds acquired in Deptford.

His first taste of cosmopolitanism comes in the form of a genteel, frivolous, even sensual intellectualism that provides a direct experiential contrast to his first sixteen years in Deptford. During his stay with the Marfleets, Dunstan experiences his "sexual initiation" alongside his first notable cultural event, and he comments on their likeness: "I see that I have been so muddle-headed as to put my sexual initiation in direct conjunction with a visit to a musical show[;] . . . the two, though very different, are not so unlike in psychological weight as you might suppose. Both were wonders, strange lands revealed to me in circumstances of great excitement" (77-78). The two events appear similar in "psychological weight" to Dunstan because their symbolic content, what really amounts to their emphasis on sensual and intellectual pleasure, is antithetical to Deptford's ethos, what Monk describes as its corporeal notions of good and evil: "Deptford's ideas of good . . . manifest an old-fashioned Puritanism whose cardinal virtues are prudery, prudence, and hard work. . . . Deptford 'good' . . . is life-denying[;]. . . it is essentially the world of thanatos, or anti-life" (*Infinity* 92). Dunstan's cultural initiation is a fitting counterpart to his transgression of Deptford's moral barriers because, just as intellectual paucity and chastity are his lot at home, experiential and epistemological possibility within this new place helps reveal the spiritual pleasures existing within and beyond the carnal encounter. The home of the Marfleets and the village of Deptford rest

at opposite ends of a cultural dichotomy that situates the Marfleets as representatives of the urban sphere, which in *Sunshine Sketches* provides a productive contrast to Mariposa; the Marfleets give Dunstan a taste of the larger world, and much like the Mariposans are drawn toward the supposedly more expansive world of the urbanites, Dunstan is attracted to the permissive luxuriousness of the British middle class.

While much of the appeal of *Sunshine Sketches* stems from the humorous and ironic contrasts of urban and rural life, Daniel Coleman finds an analogous phenomenon occurring between two nodes on the imagined cultural continuum of Empire; Coleman's model would suggest that the rural-urban dialectic apparent within *Sunshine Sketches* really involves the past and the present of the same conceptual line of sociocultural development. The relationship between colonial centre and colony, says Coleman, produces anxiety within the "settler-colonist" who has internalized his colonial subjectivity; this anxiety involves a feeling of "belatedness," resulting from the colonist's inability to adopt adequately to the imperial centre's model of "civility" (16), which itself stems from a belief in civilization's mono-linear trajectory. The conceptual timeline both produces and justifies the instructive posture adopted by the cultural and administrative centre, as it invariably conceives of its colonial possessions as following behind in its cultural-temporal wake. Coleman suggests that a cultural chronology is inherent to the physical and philosophical space resting between colonial outpost and centre, a phenomenon similar to that within the rural-past/urban-present[10] dichotomy upon which much of the *Sunshine Sketches* appeal rests. Dunstan is a descendent of those "hard-bitten pioneers" who finds himself in the colonial centre, and the Marfleets personify the "British model of civility," or normative standard for Anglo-Canadian cultural identity (Coleman 5). If we follow the logic of Coleman's reflections, Dunstan's sexual and cultural initiation represents the "updating" of his cultural temporality, as these firsts are part of the experience of place. What has previously been expressed as a cultural dichotomy between the urban present and rural past, or centre and margin, Coleman suggests can also be expressed as two ends of a cultural continuum that only appear antithetical.

Dunstan recognizes that small-town conventions or archetypes are products of "bigger and more sophisticated" places, or more appropriately, they are products of those whose representational authority out-

shouts any intrinsic identity possessed by the thing itself. A requisite distance, whether it is temporal, spatial, or cultural, between reminiscing subject and reminisced object helps construct the small-town archetype, yet in the early part of his narrative, Dunstan expresses his full investment in the cultural and religious life of Deptford, a propinquity resulting in his expressed concern with Deptford's representational accuracy. However, his perspective on Deptford appears to alter subsequent to his designation as war hero. Given to him by the King, the powerful hub of the colonial centre, the Victoria Cross represents the completion of his second apprenticeship, this time in a place much "bigger and more sophisticated" than Deptford. The Victoria Cross symbolizes a new experiential/cultural divide between Dunstan and Deptford, a divide that, as the next section will discuss, temporarily affects his portrayal of the village upon his hero's return. Dunstan's "second education" hampers his ability to describe Deptford as an insider, as one whose propinquity to the village affords a precise appraisal.

Dunstan's Return and Deptford's Distance

Monk interprets Deptford as a "background of conventional Canadian attitudes and behaviour" that clashes with "Ramsay's new attitudes and behaviour" (*Mud* 14). Yet only after Dunstan's homecoming from the imperial centre does his new demeanor clash with Deptford. His description of this period produces a comically benign Deptford of a nature characteristic of Mariposa. Prior to his departure, his experience in Deptford was formative, even though Dunstan recognizes the problems with the town's strictures. Dunstan as war hero, however, sees and describes the village as someone who is more familiar with small-town types than with the idiosyncrasy of a particular settlement. He first describes his grand tour of the village immediately upon his arrival as "the strangest procession I have ever seen, but it was in my honour and I will not laugh at it. It was Deptford's version of a Roman Triumph, and I tried to be worthy of it" (86). His designation as war hero by King George V is a role Dunstan has accepted, but it is also a role about which he remains self-aware, and this split subjectivity accounts for Dunstan's tendency to condescend to the village's rituals and simultaneously resist that impulse. The procession appears odd to Dunstan because he now sees it as a provincial anachronism, as only a semblance of the imperial centre's grand rituals: this may exemplify

Deptford's "belatedness," but it also reveals Dunstan's new cultural distance from the town.

The town has changed during the war years — changes reflected in the village's new interest in international affairs. Dunstan regards this new internationalism as one possible reason for his latest estrangement from the town: "I had little idea of what four years of war had done in creating a new atmosphere in Deptford, for it had shown little interest in world affairs in my schooldays. But here was our village shoe-repair man, Moses Langirand, in what was meant to be a French uniform, personating Marshal Foch" (85). What has changed more than the village itself, however, is Dunstan's perspective, enhanced by his own vast experience in the larger world, and revealed by an altered narrative tone that has acquired an element absent from his earlier descriptions of Deptford: kindliness of the sort present in *Sunshine Sketches*: "There were two John Bulls, owing to some misunderstanding that could not be resolved without hurt feelings. There were Red Cross nurses in plenty — six or seven of them. A girl celebrated in my day for having big feet, named Katie Orchard, was swathed in bunting and had a bandage over one eye; she was Gallant Little Belgium" (85).

As Dunstan's experiences have increased his intellectual and cultural distance from Deptford, his reliance on literary convention similarly increases. Gone is the town's small and quiet dignity, best displayed in the dead-serious search for the missing Mrs. Dempster: "But if Mrs. Dempster was lost at night, all daylight considerations must be set aside. There was a good deal of the pioneer left in people in those days, and they knew what was serious. . . . I was surprised to see Mr. Mahaffey, our magistrate, among them. He and the policeman were our law, and his presence meant grave public concern" (41-42). Dunstan's involvement in this search marks his official recognition by his mother "as a man, fit to go on serious business" (41), and the lack of irony in his recollection mirrors the pride he feels that this event, with its great significance to the whole community, marks his coming of age: a good indication of his previous cultural propinquity to Deptford's rituals and markers of maturity.

Keith claims that both Leacock and Davies write of the small town "from a detached perspective. [Their narrators] have widened their own horizons and look *back* at the town in question with affection or amused irony" (167). In *Fifth Business*, however, it is only Dunstan's descrip-

tion of his triumphant return to Deptford that marks the beginning of his bemused irony and detached observation of the village's spectacles, celebrations, and rituals. This is best displayed by his ironic appreciation of the (very) local talent performing at the ceremony held in honour of the returning soldiers. It may be genuine, but his affection is directed more toward the performers than their talent. Muriel Parkinson's singing voice is affecting, but Dunstan considers her songs "shrieked (for her voice was powerful rather than sweet)" (88). The humour of Murray Tiffin is perhaps funnier for its intractable parochialism and good nature than for the wit of the actual jokes: "Then Murray got off several other good ones, about how much cheaper it was to buy groceries in Bowles Corners than it was even to steal them from the merchants of Deptford, and similar local wit of the sort that age cannot wither nor custom stale" (88). These performers pale when compared to those of London's west end.

Dunstan's depiction of Deptford becomes most like that of Mariposa in his treatment of Deptford's gifts for its veterans; these railway watches are valued for their practicality and further reveal Deptford's inability to condone luxury. The town's pragmatism now becomes a cause for ironic humour as it no longer represents an effective opposition to Dunstan's developing personality: "These were no ordinary watches but railway watches, warranted to tell time accurately under the most trying conditions, and probably for all eternity. We understood the merit of these watches because, as we all knew, his [the Reeve's] son Jack was a railwayman, a brakeman on the Grand Trunk, and Jack swore that these were the best watches to be had anywhere" (89). This passage contains a slip into free indirect discourse, a common characteristic of Leacock's narrative, through a subtle break from Dunstan's elevated diction in the latter half of the quote; the break is made up of elements of the Reeve's presentation speech. But the irony of the preceding passage rests in the insinuation that Deptford's luminaries most likely got the "family discount" when procuring these keepsakes, a situation that does not necessarily diminish their authentic gratitude for the veterans' efforts, but rather comically re-emphasizes the village's thrift. A similar duplicity occurs in Dunstan's review of the member of parliament's attitude toward the allied nations of World War I: "Then the Member of Parliament was let loose upon us, and he talked for three minutes more than one hour . . . hinting pretty strongly that although Lloyd George,

Clemenceau, and Wilson were unquestionably good men, Sir Robert Borden had really pushed the war to a successful conclusion" (89). His speech contains those types of inflated cosmopolitan comparisons that are ubiquitous in *Sunshine Sketches*; the real nation of consequence is not those grand industrial and military powers, but the relatively diminutive Canada, a boast perhaps suitable for the mouth of Mr. Josiah Smith.

Through this irony, Dunstan reveals his increased emotional and cultural remove from Deptford. Much as the foibles of the Mariposans are rendered through an ironic distance that mitigates consequence (Magee 38), Deptford now appears as a provincial village of diminished significance to the hero/narrator, and as a refuge from the horrors of modern warfare. Mariposa's bucolic character is the product of the urban sphere, its representational source. The distance between the retrospective gaze of the narrator and Mariposa consists of a spatial-temporal gap that accommodates idealization, and the description of the town can only be that of a non- (or perhaps one-time) resident. This same process now occurs in Dunstan's review of his hometown; he is simultaneously looking *back* at Deptford while looking *at* Deptford. As Dunstan's psyche is no longer fully subject to Deptford's restrictions, his version of the town displays a corresponding shift toward the innocent, and despite his stated awareness of small-town conventions, the town now appears to be a place "inhabited by laughable, lovable simpletons, unspotted by the worldliness of city life" — a characterization suggesting that Dunstan is no longer a fully integrated member of the community.

This narrative shift implies that the dominant tone of *Sunshine Sketches*, that which helps construct a home place of Canadian cultural identity, is possible only for those narrators who can put that home place into a context that also includes life after the small town. When the small-town influence is impotent or exists only in memory, a narrator is then free to project onto that influence associations with bucolic or provincial naiveté, or what Davies terms elsewhere Canada's "myth of innocence" (*One Half* 275). In the initial chapters of *Fifth Business*, however, Dunstan recounts his experiences with the real, imposing, and even menacing influence of naiveté's ugly cousins: ignorance and intolerance. During his return to Deptford, a time when he is free to escape its influence, the town temporarily appears backwards, charming, harmless, and colourful; Dunstan's situation now mirrors that of

the club men in *Sunshine Sketches*'s "Envoi," as his material independence offers him freedom of mind, values, and opinion. As the phrase *home place* entails subsequent experience, Mariposa as "cultural archetype" is suitable only for a "culture of experience"; its rural simplicity is an urban projection of an imaginary loss. Dunstan's unsettled narrative tone offers a type of metacritique of a conventional rendering of small-town childhoods, as his journey outlines the process of psychical, cultural, and temporal detachment from one's origins, and their subsequent, idealized retrospective.[11]

However, Dunstan's utilization of this "fashion" only amounts to a brief foray into convention. After the comical proceedings of the official welcome-home ceremony, Dunstan provides an "inversion" or "anti-masque" of the "sunny" convention of small-town Ontario: a portrayal that steps out of the sunshine and into torchlight. Immediately after the official proceedings at the courthouse, the members of the village gather outside and the atmosphere acquires a palpable difference: "here the crowd was lively and expectant; children dodged to and fro, and there was a lot of laughter about nothing in particular" (91-92). That is until "down our main street came a procession, lit by the flame of brooms dipped in oil — a ruddy, smoky light — accompanying Marshal Foch, the two John Bulls, Uncle Sam, Gallant Little Belgium, the whole gang dragging at a rope's end Deptford's own conception of the German Emperor, fat Myron Papple" (92). Ultimately, the town burns and hangs the Kaiser in effigy. Barbara Godard calls this collection of Depfordians a "carnival mob," and also refers to their activities as a reflection of the "general anti-hierarchical spirit of the Canadian village" (272). She suggests that this scene is both an inversion and accurate reflection of the "general spirit of the Canadian village." It also displays an inversion of the moral imperatives of the village's pioneer ethos.

Dunstan's description of these unofficial events lacks the "amused irony" of his earlier description of the ceremony. During the anti-masque, Dunstan "watches them with dismay that mounted toward horror" as he realizes this "symbolic act of cruelty and hatred" is perpetrated by his "own people" (92). The symbolic act is an inverted manifestation of the same impulse that ostracizes the Dempsters and precipitates the first of Dunstan's crises. While the exclusion of the Dempsters is ostensibly based on collective Christian norms, the hanging of the Kaiser is a grotesque parody of those norms; both involve an individ-

ual punished by a collective as the result of that individual's moral or military transgression. Each retributive act has the same effect on Dunstan, disgust and horror, as both reflect the dark side of the imperatives of unanimity, whether moral, political, or national; the majority revels in both its dominance and its opponent's defeat. What before was portrayed as Dunstan's moral unorthodoxy as a result of his refusal to acquiesce to "Deptford morality" is, during the anti-masque, fully articulated as direct opposition to the collective and unconcealed cruelty that is another part of such unexamined conformism. At this moment, Dunstan would most like to distance himself from the actions of his fellow townsfolk, yet this moment marks the reaffirmation of his shared identity with the town as he calls the Deptfordians "my own people." Dunstan thus rejects the special role into which he has been thrust, that of hero, as he can no longer be a representative icon of what he is witness to. By rejecting this role, Dunstan negates the heroic status that both distinguishes him from the rest of Deptford and renders him beholden to it through that role's attendant obligations. This rejection also dissolves the narrative's slip into Mariposan convention, as Dunstan can no longer maintain the cultural/temporal distance resting between his imperial identity and the peripheral town. As Dunstan and Deptford's colonial roles dissolve, Dunstan again witnesses the town's propensity for communal punishment.

The instability of Dunstan's temporary ironic distance from the town points to the instability of the very archetypes it helps construct; the village before Dunstan's eyes is composed of complexities, some noble and some sinister. His earlier desire to escape the clutches of "Deptford morality" first turns into a simplistic re-view of village life and characters, which then translates into his more mature realization that, as his own origins rest within this village, to render it with anything less than an understanding of its complexity is doing the village and himself a disservice. The convention presented by *Sunshine Sketches* emerges from a colonial mentality that perceives out-of-the-way places as the antidote to modern anomie; Dunstan discovers differently, as the emergence and subsequent dissolution of that convention in his own narrative signals his transcendence of an immature flirtation with a colonial mentality that condescends to the imagined periphery. To write of a village with a kindliness generated through perceived cultural/temporal distance is to write of it falsely and, at least for Dunstan, this

narrative technique cannot maintain itself in the presence of its literary subject.[12]

Conclusions

The instability of Dunstan's retrospective hints at the increasingly difficult distinction between the provincial and the cosmopolitan in the modernizing post-war world. Dunstan's description makes special mention of Deptford's new interest in global affairs (85), a result, perhaps, of the ongoing technological dissolution of the spatial-cultural divide between the rural and urban spheres in an age of rapid communication. Particularly revealing of this nascent modern homogeneity is the behaviour Dunstan witnesses in both cultural centre and outpost. Immediately after the war, Dunstan watches a disturbing spectacle in London: "I saw some of the excitement and a few things that shocked me; people, having been delivered from destruction, became horribly destructive themselves; people, having been delivered from license and riot, pawed and mauled and shouted dirty phrases in the streets" (77). These depictions of post-war rampage indicate that both imperial centre and periphery are affected by, and respond to, the same global events, news of which is now transmitted instantaneously along transatlantic cables. Deptfordians and Londoners fight in the same war and celebrate its conclusion in similar degraded fashions. These increasingly globalized experiences deflate the notion of essential difference inherent in romantic conceptions of rural identity, as modernity collapses spatial relations and disrupts the idea of cultural difference facilitated or maintained by distance. The divide between the rural and urban spheres, however productive in *Sunshine Sketches*, is shown to be increasingly tenuous in *Fifth Business*.

Leacock was, of course, self-aware in his depiction of the "good old days" of the small town, and his narrator's incessant irony continually draws attention to the more idyllic aspects of his depictions. The danger, however, is in simply disregarding the irony and viewing Mariposa as a veritable representation of Canada's golden age of the small town, as various critics have nostalgically done (see Thomas and Mantz, in particular). Nostalgia, says Jonathan Steinwand, relies on distance, either temporal or spatial, to help "fashion a more aesthetically complete and satisfying recollection of what is longed for" (9). In order to read Mariposa, we must first acknowledge the source of its depiction: deep

within a melancholic, urban club for wealthy businessmen. Mariposa is a nostalgic consolation projected onto a distant past in order to help soothe the effects of urban anomie. At the margins of Leacock's text rests the reality that Mariposa's community idyll is not a memory, but a fabrication prompted by the dominance of an urban sphere and its attendant features: anonymity, industrialism, and impersonal commerce. Dunstan's resistance to, in the words of Eli Mandel, the "process of perception" (115) that allows the small town to be viewed as an innocent or bucolic urban antitype is effected by his continued spatial and cultural propinquity to his hometown; in other words, his physical return dispels any small-town illusions distance may protract.

Life in Mariposa offers an imagined escape for those urban titans of capitalism. Mariposa is remembered from a distance, a distance in both time and space, allowing life in the community to be re-imagined as that of the idyllic, organic community. Because its purpose is to provide imagined escape and consolation, Mariposa exists as the direct polarized counterpart to the urban sphere, a town wholly separate from the economic and cultural systems of modernity (apart from those it chooses to involve itself in), as that is exactly what its creators in the urban club desire; they want to remember other, better selves, and this imagined past accommodates that fantasy. Dunstan's similar illusions of Deptford as a parochial complement or antitype to urban modernity rapidly dissolve upon his return to the town. Deptford, Dunstan's reminiscences suggest, is fully implicated in the economic, cultural, and martial forces that shape the globe, and it is hardly a home place within which the core of a cultural identity supposedly resides.

Deptford's post-war international concerns reflect its movement from what Benedict Anderson would define as a "primordial village," a community defined by "face-to-face contact" (6), to its entrance into a larger imagined community in which the townsfolk see themselves as full participants in global affairs. For their part, the townsfolk would not be incorrect in discerning a place for themselves and their village within the fabric of a global modernity; Dunstan's experiences in both the war and London are testament to those dissolving spatial boundaries. However, just as important as Deptford's changes is Dunstan's response to those shifts. Rather than remembering his rural childhood hometown as the antitype to the forces of modernity, as the safe space of childhood embedded in the surety of the past, Dunstan perceives

the ease with which its traditional moralism transmutes into a modern martial nationalism; the latter, Dunstan suggests, does not corrupt the former, but rather both are expressions of a similar impulse.[13]

Yet as boundaries appear to dissolve, the effect on cultural and place-based identities can be paradoxical: "The more global our interrelations becomes . . . and the more spatial barriers disintegrate, so more rather than less of the world's population clings to place and neighborhood or to nation, region, ethnic grouping, or religious belief as specific marks of identity" (Harvey 427). David Harvey's statement proclaims that cultural identification becomes firmer as spatial boundaries become increasingly fluid; it may also suggest that Mariposa as home place, or any home place recalled fondly, is, in some measure, a nostalgic response to broader cultural exposure. Mariposa is not a vision of a past, either cultural or individual, but a study in how the past is reshaped as an alternative to the culturally dislocating present. In *Fifth Business*, however, this process is far less benign. Dunstan's observations suggest that the town's pioneer morality has been shaped by an influence whose stress on the collective is perhaps even stronger, and whose reach extends to any who have access to modern forms of communication: modern nationalism. In that shift, the town's process of cultural identification has become intransigent, muscular, not only exclusionary but also vindictive. Deptford is no home place; it merely refracts its dominant influence, whether that stems from a pioneer past or a transnational modernity.

Dunstan's "horror" during the evening celebration is the expression of an individual against not simply Deptford's collective moral voice, but the calcification of stringent cultural nationalisms, and the reduction of political-cultural understanding to simplistic personifications, the "two John Bulls, Uncle Sam" and the Kaiser: simplifications that facilitate the acquiescence of the mob to the national will. Dunstan's refusal to see Deptford as the bucolic village of his birth is, at the same time, a refusal to engage in an aestheticizing of the rural past as something other and better. Dunstan's "horror" may be based on an elitist impulse, but it is a message of critical and independent thought that will be crucial to that dark age of political polarities about to begin, an age of extremes that is replacing Deptford's moral conformism with a seemingly more potent and collectivizing message of post-war cultural nationalism. Dunstan's inability to gaze lovingly upon that small vil-

lage from which he emerged, a figure that for others constitutes a core cultural identity, is the type of sober and independent historical consciousness needed to think clearly about the "biggest outburst of mass lunacy" (171) the first war precipitates, a conflagration even larger than the one Dunstan was fortunate enough to have survived.

Notes

[1] Apart from Davies's Deptford Trilogy, Gerald Lynch suggests that Thomas King's *Medicine River* and even some of Munro's stories of small-town Ontario, despite her statements to the contrary, contain echoes of Mariposa (*The One* 183).

[2] It should be clear that this essay does not consider Mariposa as a Jungian or Frygean "archetype." In *A Smaller Infinity: The Jungian Self in the Novels of Robertson Davies*, Patricia Monk offers a thorough exploration of Davies's work in the context of Jung's influence. If Mariposa is a manifestation of an unconscious pattern or deep cultural symbol, it is not my goal to discuss it as such. Rather, Mariposa is an archetype in a culturally conscious (or for the Canadian context, a culturally self-conscious) sense, in that it constitutes a prototype for subsequent literary renditions of small-town Ontario. Some suggest Mariposa has a permanent status as intertext, intended or not; see, for instance, Lynch's discussion of Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?* in *The One and the Many* (182-85).

[3] In contrasting the towns, R.D. MacDonald argues that Deptford is a "revised" version of Mariposa. The towns' similarities, he suggests, lie in their subtleties as opposed to their surfaces: "In *Fifth Business*, one finds little or nothing of Leacock's loving evocation of the surfaces of Mariposa. A similar ironic whimsy is at work in *Fifth Business* but the play of imagination is more darkly sinister than that of Leacock, perhaps even darker than Davies himself suspects" (74-75). The narrative, MacDonald argues, is a product of Dunstan's "devious and conscious logic" (67), an attribute that shapes and moulds the reader's perception of the narrator through Dunstan's utilization of "silences, unbroken spaces, deliberate confusions, and ambiguities" (66). While Thomas vouches for Deptford's apparent "authenticity" through Davies's historical fidelity to his own small-town childhood in Thamesville, Ontario, MacDonald disputes "reality" as the wellspring of Deptford's creation; rather, that imaginative source rests in Dunstan's own fanciful self-perception. Verisimilitude, MacDonald suggests, is a defining feature of neither Mariposa nor Deptford, yet the nature of their fantasy is oppositional; Mariposa is an atemporal ironic ideal celebrating collectivity, while Deptford is introduced as the staging area for a lifelong battle between the Id (Boy Staunton) and the Ego (Dunstan).

[4] Patricia Monk states that a central concern of Davies's "*telos*" is "an understanding of the nature of human identity" (*Infinity* 17). She later states that one of Dunstan Ramsay's central struggles is "towards self-knowledge and individuation" (83) and that this process is often situated in terms of escape from the physical and moral restrictions of Deptford. Monk identifies the Jungian process of "Individuation," or the development of the autonomous self, as a recurring theme in Davies's novels, and argues in chapter 4 of *The Smaller Infinity* that this process in *Fifth Business* occurs largely through Dunstan's evolving "religious belief." Using Monk's identification, this essay examines the relationship between Dunstan's process of individuation and the nature of his childhood memories of Deptford.

[5] Further connection between Davies and Leacock is suggested by the cover of Davies's slim biography of Leacock, issued by the New Canadian Library in 1970. This volume

also forms the introduction of *Feast of Stephen*, a selection of Leacock's writing edited by Davies. Graham Pilsworth's cover drawing for this volume shows Davies and Leacock shaking hands while Davies appears to be slapping Leacock's back. Davies's eyes peer out at the reader and his gesture could be construed as one of introduction. The current comedic laureate (Davies) seems to be reintroducing the former (Leacock), someone with whom we thought we were quite familiar.

[6] And this notion is particularly apparent in discussions of both *Sunshine Sketches* and *Fifth Business*. For Leacock's text, see Douglas Mantz (1977) and Gerald Lynch (1988, 2001). For Davies's text, see Patricia Monk (1992) and Barbara Godard (1984-85).

[7] Raymond Williams uses this phrase to refer to the common practice of associating a receding rural past with disappearing traditions and the "timeless rhythms" of an agricultural past: "Is it anything more than a well-known habit of using the past, the 'good old days', as a stick to beat the present? It is clearly something of that, but there are still difficulties. The apparent resting places, the successive Old Englands to which we are confidently referred but which then start to move and recede, have some actual significance, when they are looked at in their own terms" (12).

[8] John Watt Lennox reads a division between Deptford and Dunstan through linguistic signifiers, as voice occupies Lennox's discussion of the "division between the 'homespun' or the plain speaker and the social civilized being" (29). Therefore, he sees Dunstan's struggle against Deptford largely in terms of class, as his "careful, magisterial voice" (28) claims "international citizenship" and is set off by Davies's "satiric use of the Canadian voice," possessed by those who remain in Deptford: a juxtaposition Lennox claims "perpetuate[s] a traditional, graceless dichotomy in Canadians' view of themselves" (29).

[9] Like Monk, F.L. Radford reads the book in terms of its Jungian influence, particularly Dunstan's relationship with mother figures. Quoting Jung's *Symbols of Transformation*, Radford writes, "the Jungian pattern is centred on the theme of individuation typified in the myth of the Hero and the Mother, in which every obstacle on the ascendant path of the hero 'wears the shadowy features of the Terrible Mother, who saps his strength with the poison of secret doubt' while every victory 'wins back again the smiling, loving and life-giving mother'" (66).

[10] In the rural past–urban present dichotomy, the former is associated with cultural origins. In Coleman's model, the site of origins has been reversed since the cultural influence flows from the imperial centre. However, if one reads Mariposa's defining ethos as really the product of the urban sphere, the two cultural models are similar.

[11] This is not to say that Leacock was unaware of this process. As he wryly notes in his sketches toward an autobiography, *The Boy I Left Behind Me*, nostalgics often rebuild their rural childhoods "not with an ax but with an architect" (49).

[12] This line of thinking would suggest that the narrative tone of *Sunshine Sketches* is maintained only because the image of Mariposa dissolves before the narrator and his auditor can re-enter the village.

[13] The alteration of Deptford's traditional moralism into a force reflecting broader political-cultural concerns is on full display during the evening celebrations in honour of its war veterans. This type of shift, suggests poet-critic Jeff Derksen, should not be seen as the triumph of the global over the local. Rather, Derksen speculates that the "discourses" of the local and global are not contradictory, but that the "discourse" of globalization can utilize "aspect[s] of place" (110) in order to conceal the constitutive effects of the global on the local. The nighttime parade of nations in Deptford, while conducted by the exceedingly local cast of Deptfordians, enacts a type of transnational narrative that incorporates the idiosyncrasies of the village, both past and present, with the fluid cultural exchange of a transnational modernity. This event is a conflation of its exclusionary moral past and the synchronous events occurring on the other side of the ocean.

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