Beyond the Marriage Metaphor: Nation, Violence, and the Fallen Woman in *The Canadian Brothers*

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> "Tell me," she added more quickly, "was not the blow well aimed. Marked you how the traitor fell. Villain, to accuse the woman whose only fault was loving him too well, with ignominious commerce with a slave!"
>
> — Richardson, *Canadian* 453

In John Richardson's *The Canadian Brothers* (1840), a historical novel set during the War of 1812, Matilda Montgomerie, the American lover of one of the titular brothers, is constructed as sexually and morally fallen. However, Matilda finds a power not usually attributed to the fallen woman, and her representation interrogates nineteenth-century stereotypes of both female morality and, conversely, female sinfulness. Moreover, as her reference to "traitor" in the passage quoted above hints, she raises yet problematizes issues of national affiliation in a novel about Canadian-American conflict. In early Canadian fiction, women are often configured as representing their cultures or nations, but Matilda resists such categorizations, pointing to both gendered and national identities as "performative" (in Judith Butler's terminology), and demonstrating the fallen woman's potential to subvert sexist and nationalist claims.

The Canadian Brothers, the sequel to *Wacousta* (1832), has received far less attention than its predecessor. Those critics who have paid attention to Matilda see her merely as a demonic woman representing the sinful nature of the United States. I propose, however, that Matilda actually invites a rethinking of contemporary assumptions about early Canadian literature and one of its dominant motifs, that of the national allegory, as well as putting a colonial spin on the fallen woman in English literature.

Nineteenth-century Canadian fiction is teeming with the national allegory, or what Carl Murphy terms "the marriage metaphor" (1).[1] In such narratives, the hero and heroine are from different cultures, and when they eventually marry, their erotic attachment is meant to symbolize some form of national unity. John Lesperance's *The Bastonnais* (1877) employs the marriage metaphor to explore Canadian-American and English-French relations during the 1775-78 invasion of Quebec; Gilbert Parker's *The Seats of the Mighty* (1896) uses it to present an ideal union of British and French in Canada. As several critics have pointed out, in the marriage metaphor the inequalities of the gender hierarchy are transferred to the cultures represented by the hero and heroine. Carole Gerson notes that in nineteenth-century Canadian fiction, a marriage between a French-Canadian woman and a British man usually carries oppressive political meaning: "Such a union predicates the absorption of the female partner into the dominant culture of the male, the sexual submission of the individual symbolizing the political submission of the group" (120).

In many early Canadian novels that employ the marriage metaphor, the romantic heroines are paragons of chastity and morality who ultimately find their "power" in earning the love and protection of a man. They exemplify Nancy Armstrong's notion of the Victorian "sexual contract," where women give up political rights for control over domestic and emotional worlds (41).[2] Of course, within the same time period a concurrent set of beliefs about the nature of women ran counter to the ideology of the sexual contract: that of the sinning woman, the daughter of Eve. This sinful, "other" side of femininity appears in Victorian discourse about the fallen woman, which, as Amanda Anderson notices, is derived from Biblical contexts but becomes increasingly secularized in the nineteenth century (2-3). In *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces*, Anderson notes that the sexually compromised woman in Victorian literature is often presented as lacking the capacity for self-regulation (36). Because, like the seduced and seducing Eve, the fallen woman is a victim of external or internal forces that she cannot control, she has quite literally lost her character (Anderson 9). This vulnerability is not limited to fallen women, but to all women, whose training in submissiveness and passivity makes them less able to determine their own fates, and thus more prone to fall than men (Anderson 37). Mary Poovey takes the connection between fallen women and their supposedly moral counterparts even further when she describes the "moralized

angel" and the "carnal magdalen" of Victorian ideology as two sides of the same coin; woman's physicality could give her moral authority, as in motherhood, or make her a threat when she evinced her own sexual desire, but in either case, her lack of reason made her subordination to men necessary (11).

While the fallen woman in British Victorian literature has received much critical attention, the same figure in early Canadian literature has received far less. Mariana Valverde's chapter on anxieties about white slavery in *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water* is a useful examination of Canadian attitudes towards prostitution around the turn of the century during the social purity movement, and Wendy Mitchinson's *The Nature of their Bodies* considers the relationships between Canadian women and their doctors in the Victorian era, with much discussion of sexuality and morality. Misao Dean's *Practising Femininity* is a useful analysis of gender and early Canadian literature, with some consideration of women who might be viewed as fallen, as in her discussion of Rosanna Leprohon's *Antoinette De Mirecourt* (1864) and Joanna Wood's *The Untempered Wind* (1894). I wish to further develop the consideration of the Canadian fallen woman by thinking about her in relation to the specific context of the marriage metaphor's implications for gender and nation.

It makes sense to consider Matilda in relation to the Victorian fallen woman, even though Richardson's 1840 novel was published fairly early in the tradition (perhaps one of the first Victorian fallen women is Nancy in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, serialized 1837-39 and published as a novel in 1838).[3] *The Canadian Brothers*, like its precursor, *Wacousta*, contains elements of the Gothic, and many reviewers have viewed Matilda as simply a demonic villainess typical of that genre: Donald Stephens calls her "satanic" (xxxv), Dennis Duffy refers to her as an "American witch" (116), and Michael Hurley calls her a "vampire-queen of the dead" (118). However, Richardson's novel also shares certain characteristics with realism and the tradition of the fallen woman. One can see this most clearly if one briefly compares Matilda to her fictional and Gothic predecessor, a character of the same name in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). As Stephens notes, Lewis's novel is an important source for Richardson, and the two Matildas share certain characteristics (xxxv). They both save their lovers from snakebites, they both take part in transgendered behaviour, and they both have sex outside of marriage and are later rejected. The big difference between

them, though, which Stephens does not note, is that Lewis's Matilda is eventually revealed to be a demon in the service of Satan, who has been working to bring about the damnation of Ambrosio, the monk of the title. Richardson's Matilda, on the other hand, is obviously human. Similar to fallen women such as Dickens's Nancy, she is immoral within the ideology of the time, but still somewhat sympathetic. When Matilda tells the story of her betrayal by her fiancé, she evokes readers' understanding, and the truth of her betrayal is verified after her death, with one of the characters lamenting, "she was indeed a much injured woman" (456). The perspective of Richardson's Matilda as a sympathetic, if fallen, character, is perhaps further supported by the fact that, according to Richardson's biographer, David R. Beasley, she was likely partly based on a close friend of Richardson's, a widow with whom he shared a mutual attraction (32-33). Richardson also had a self-proclaimed interest in characters that did not fit into models of either pure good or pure evil (Beasley 56). These aspects of Richardson's work generally and Matilda's characterization specifically suggest that she should be somewhat distinguished from the depraved Gothic villainess. The fact that she, innocently in love, was seduced and abandoned by her fiancé makes her like a Victorian fallen woman, even as she also subverts this role, due in part, I believe, to the novel's Canadian setting and the author's interest in the ambiguity of identities in the colonial context.

In *The Canadian Brothers*, Matilda's acts of violence and sexuality raise questions about essentialized feminine identities, moral or fallen, and also re-interpret the national allegory. Matilda's violence becomes especially important in relation to issues of female agency. Anderson argues that "it is crucial to understand that fallenness was predominantly defined in opposition to a masculine ideal of rational control and purposive action" (36). Valverde presents a similar viewpoint, indicating that "Purity was not simply the absence of lust: it was an active, aggressive process of self-mastery that could be likened to a military campaign" (31), a self-mastery to which a fallen woman would not have access. However, rather than simply being a depraved and wild murderer, or losing control in her lack of sexual purity, Matilda actually employs her fallenness to her own advantage. In her "loss" of an essentialized and virtuous identity, Matilda discovers much more freedom of purpose and action. In this sense, she shares certain attributes with the fallen woman as analyzed by Nina Auerbach: the fallen woman is an outsider less constrained by social bounds than other women,

and is thus capable of critiquing the society that damns her.[4] However, as I will show, Matilda's violence takes her beyond the noble resignation of many of the women Auerbach discusses, and also differentiates her from Anderson's passive fallen women. Furthermore, by shifting in and out of different gendered roles throughout the text, Matilda resists what Auerbach identifies as the fallen woman's "psychic integrity" and "singleness of being" ("Fallen" 40). Rather, Matilda's behaviour indicates that gender is not an internal essence with an outward manifestation, but, as Judith Butler has it, an outward act which creates the illusion of an inward essence (173). As in Butler's analysis of drag (174-77), Matilda demonstrates a dislocation, where gender is a performance that hints that all gender, and perhaps all identity, is imitative.

Moreover, Matilda complicates the hierarchy of power between cultures that is presented in the marriage metaphor. On the surface, and in the context of the War of 1812, Matilda initially appears to represent the dangerous temptations the United States offers to Canada, but in the literal and figurative boundary-crossing of the novel's colonial and wartime setting she ultimately destabilizes notions of an American-Canadian dichotomy, and of essentialized national/gendered identifications altogether, "performing" different identities as they serve her purposes. At times in early literature, the fallen woman appears to represent a fallen nation — here the US — against which English Canada defines itself, but Matilda eventually complicates this national strategy. In fact, the novel's setting may allow for a particularly "Canadian" version of the fallen woman, a version more unstable and more subversive than that found in British literature.

In his introduction to *The Canadian Brothers*, Stephens argues that the narrative is "neither a sentimental idyll about the world of one's youth, nor a nostalgic elegy for a prelapsarian world. It is, rather, a sombre tragedy about the fallen one" (lxx). *The Canadian Brothers* continues *Wacousta*'s preoccupation with the fall of humanity, exhibiting in this case an Eve who threatens to corrupt her lover. Matilda Montgomerie — an American who is a descendant of Wacousta and Ellen Halloway — entices Gerald Grantham — one of the Canadian brothers of the title — to sin. Matilda has already committed the sin of premarital sex, and she now wishes Gerald to murder the lover, Colonel Forrester, who has abandoned her. In return, she promises Gerald "possession" of her body and self (438). Gerald becomes more and more infatuated by her, until "his determination to secure entire possession

of that beauty, even at the accursed price of blood, became but the more resolute and confirmed" (440). Gerald, however, does not realize that the man he is to murder is Colonel Forrester (to whom he owes his life) until the moment before he is to plunge the knife into him. And when he does realize it, he stops himself before he completes the attack. Forrester excuses Gerald because he understands "the arts of the woman who seems to have lured [Gerald] into the depths of crime" (445-46).

In her seduction and corruption of Gerald, Matilda's representation seems at times designed to emphasize women's tendency towards sinning; however, the narrative as a whole is more ambiguous about women's "nature." Matilda might be seductive and deceitful, but so is Colonel Forrester: Matilda compares him to "some venomous reptile" (414) and refers to him as "diabolical" (419); that is, if she is Eve, perhaps he is the serpent in the garden. In this way, Matilda may demonstrate Auerbach's notion of the fallen woman's "transforming power" in her ability to critique her society ("Fallen" 34). Just as Matilda's grandfather Wacousta claims that Colonel De Haldimar's betrayal has made him into the monster he has become (*Wacousta* 428), and just as her grandmother Ellen also blames the garrison for her misery (*Wacousta* 156), so does Matilda point out Colonel Forrester's betrayal. While she was engaged to him, Colonel Forrester had sex with her, but he abandoned her when he caught her embracing a man he thought was a slave. In truth, the man was her father in disguise, but Forrester would not believe this. Thus, Matilda claims to be "the victim of the most diabolical suspicion that ever haunted the breast of man" (419). Not only that, but Forrester shared his suspicion with a colleague, who used the information to his advantage to try to elicit sexual favours of his own from Matilda (421). Colonel Forrester, a man who claims to be concerned with honour, seduces Matilda, abandons her, then slanders her. In sharing her story with Gerald (and the readers), Matilda proves that the ruling order is not immune to hypocrisy.

Part of this ruling order is the patriarchal system that values women's chastity even as it sets out to corrupt it. Anderson notes that the fallen woman's vulnerability can reflect that of all women; their receptivity to influence, as the supposedly weaker sex, makes them more prone to falling (37-38), and Matilda's behaviour reflects this to some degree. Matilda loves Forrester initially, and believes she can trust him: "confiding in *his* honor, and in the assurance that our union would take place

immediately, I surrendered to him *mine*" (415). However, she points out his hypocrisy in his subsequent betrayal:

> I could not but be conscious that the very act of having yielded myself up to him, had armed my lover with the power to accuse me of infidelity, and the more I lingered on the want of generosity such a suspicion implied, the more rooted became my dislike, the more profound my contempt for him, who could thus repay so great a proof of confidingness and affection. (419)

This is where Matilda differs from the common portrayal of the fallen woman. Anderson observes, "As a victim, the fallen woman may come metaleptically to symbolize those forces that determined her, but she does not typically function as a villainess or vicious agent" (41). Rather than remaining passive, however, Matilda bristles with indignation and plots her revenge. In this way, she also differs from the fallen women Auerbach discusses, who appear to find their power most often in quiet resignation, like Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, or death at someone else's hands, like Browning's Pompilia (see Auerbach, "Fallen" 37-38, 30), rather than in violently resisting the men responsible for their suffering.[5] When Gerald hesitates to kill Forrester, Matilda grabs the knife and attacks Forrester, so that "Before he could make an attempt to shield himself, the fatal steel had entered deep into his side" (446). She denies the helplessness of the fallen woman, and will not settle into stereotypes of female passivity (moral or otherwise); nor, in the justness of her complaint (if not her solution), can the narrative dismiss her as merely a sinful woman. Richardson, who in a later novel wrote against what he viewed as the slavery of women (see Beasley 48), might well have some sympathy for Matilda's position.

Matilda's power raises an interesting question: could violence be a response to the powerlessness a (fallen) woman feels? In *Intimate Violence*, Laura E. Tanner argues that in acts of violence, the violator "appropriates the victim's subjectivity as an extension of his own power" while the victim is "a human being stripped of agency and mercilessly attached to a physical form that cannot be dissolved at will" (3). Victorian women were, in many senses, "attached to a physical form" due to the ideology that affiliated them with nature and emotion rather than reason. Mitchinson writes that, in nineteenth-century Canada, "Women, because of their bodies, were considered closer to nature than men and less able to escape its thrall" (31). Moreover, the very fact of

women's biological sex rendered them far less powerful than men in a society that was very much a patriarchy. The fallen woman, then, who has lost her morality through the loss of her virginity or through marital infidelity, is even more defined and trapped by the actions of her body; in the eyes of others, her sexuality defines her character, even as that character is presented as ruptured. Matilda's act of violence, while perhaps partly due to the Gothic influence on Richardson's text, may also reflect Richardson's awareness of a Canadian-Victorian anxiety about the power of the fallen woman; with nothing to lose, she might resort to violence, regain power, and resist the way her society has constructed her. If violence traps the victim in his body, then Matilda's attack of Forrester turns the sexual tables, doing to a man what men in many aspects of society do to women: he is reduced to a body that is defined and controlled by another.

In other ways, too, Matilda refutes the lack of agency that Anderson notices is often attributed to the fallen woman. During their time together, Matilda, "profiting by her knowledge of the past," performs a kind of striptease in order to keep Gerald determined to kill for her, so much so that there are times when he looks for his sexual reward before the deed is done (438). Matilda, however, manipulates her status as fallen woman to further her own ends and fend him off, and thus expresses a subjectivity which Anderson does not impute to the fallen woman: "on these occasions the American would assume an air of wounded dignity, sometimes of deep sorrow; and alluding to the manner in which her former confidence had been repaid, reproach him with a want of generosity, in seeking to make her past weakness a pretext for his present advances" (Richardson 438). Matilda "assumes" an air of virtue so that she can keep Gerald under her control by resisting him, promising him an eventual reward in return for his own act of vice. The very notion of her vulnerability as a fallen woman here becomes the agent of her power.

Matilda's assumption of a role might point to the fallen woman's artificiality. Anderson notes the link made between "lacking freedom and being false: if one has no controlling self capable of orchestrating or influencing circumstances, then one is merely an artificial product" (61). Matilda eventually admits to Gerald that her feelings for him were not genuine: "Hitherto I have played a part, but the drama approaches to a close, and disguise of plot is no longer necessary. Gerald Grantham, you have been my dupe, — you came a convenient puppet to my hands,

and as such I used you until the snapped wire proclaimed you no longer serviceable" (450). Matilda exhibits knowledge of the romantic heroine, besotted with love for the hero, as a role, and she manipulates it in order to gain control over men, in this case Gerald, to get him to kill for her.

On the one hand, the fact that Matilda is "performing" may only demonstrate the artificiality of fallen women. On the other hand, Matilda is consciously using patriarchal images of the sinning woman and the love-besotted female in order to wield her own kind of power and strike back against the individual who has dishonoured her. Valverde points out that Canadian social reformers portrayed fallen women "simultaneously as 'sinned against' *and* as a 'menace to society'" (103), without the contradiction being particularly subversive. Poovey, on the other hand, argues that the co-existence of the moral and seductive female roles pointed to an inconsistency that threatened to destabilize Victorian ideology about gender (12). Matilda, however, as an embodiment of two contradictory figures, takes this destabilizing even further. Her intentional acting suggests that there is a motivating will where, as a fallen woman, there is not supposed to be one; her artificiality indicates strong agency rather than a lack of such. Yet, she finds this agency without the "singleness of being" that Auerbach sees in the fallen woman ("Fallen" 40). In deliberately playing up the roles of women, she indirectly suggests that they may be constructions rather than "natural" categories. That is, she hints at gendered identities as "performative" in the sense that Butler uses the term in *Gender Trouble*: "Consider gender, for instance, as *a corporeal style*, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where '*performative*' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (177). While Matilda's performativity is perhaps more conscious and willful than the version Butler describes, Matilda's behaviour, shifting as it does in and out of different female roles, similarly hints that gender is a "dramatic and contingent construction" rather than stable and essential.

Anderson's main premise is that fallen women in Victorian culture were "uneasy reminders of more general cultural anxieties about the very possibility of deliberative moral action" (2), registering "extreme threats to cherished notions of private selfhood and autonomous self-control" (47). Similarly, Butler's notion of performativity refutes the idea that there is an essential self that causes one's actions, suggesting rather that identity is a series of actions which create the fiction of an

inward identity, actions which are a strategy of survival in a society of compulsory heterosexuality (Butler 177-78). Matilda's "camping" of female roles gestures towards Butler's viewpoint, for her enactments do not point to a coherent self that is deliberately masked in these roles, but rather begins to break down the notion of "inside" and "outside," soul and body. The very capability of woman as, at "essence," vulnerable to rupture, provides in this case the possibility for a refutation of the idea of an essence, for readers cannot be certain whether some warp in Matilda's character led to her fall; or, conversely, if her fall degraded her character; or, indeed, if Forrester, rather than she, should be considered morally fallen.

Matilda also refutes the idea of a gendered essence in that she is not confined only to "female" roles. Perhaps because, as sexually experienced, she is exempt from the idealized morality of the Victorian woman, and is thus free from the pressure to live up to it, she is able to slip in and out of different genders. Her attack on Forrester associates her with a physical violence commonly associated with men more than women. In fact, after the attack, Gerald's passion is repulsed by this "masculine and practical display" of Matilda's "energetic hate" (449). Initially, though, Gerald is attracted to her masculinity. Noticing her coolness during a battle between the Canadians and Americans, he later remarks with admiration, "passively courageous she was to a degree I could not have supposed possible in woman" (156).

As Manina Jones notices, Ellen Halloway in *Wacousta* also evinces transgendered behaviour when she disguises herself as a drummer boy in order to attend her husband's execution. Jones views this behaviour as "initiating a masquerade of gender that threatens the preserves of the male military" (49), and Ellen herself, in multiple ways, is "a textual locus where anxieties about the colonial project of administering both the frontiers of empire and the frontiers of gender reveal themselves" (47). Given Ellen's union with Wacousta, which is not sanctioned as a European marriage, she might be considered another Victorian fallen woman. In fact, in her eventual madness she might more easily than Matilda be categorized as lacking "rational control." While both women commit acts of violence (Ellen attacks Clara De Haldimar), and both seek revenge on colonial authorities (Ellen curses Colonel De Haldimar and his family for the death of her husband, Frank), Matilda is more subversive of the fallen woman figure in that she acts with a calculation

and calmness that is less apparent in Ellen, deliberately putting on and off female roles to achieve her own ends.

Matilda is not the only participant in the gender switch in *The Canadian Brothers*. If Gerald risks his own soul for Matilda, is not he, too, a ruptured being? He becomes Matilda's puppet (450), and after he stops short of murdering Forrester, Matilda views Gerald as "feeble" with a "vacillating character," in contrast to her own feeling of "Triumphant vengeance, unmixed with any apprehension of self" (449). The contrast aligns Gerald, more than Matilda, with the artificiality and lack of control supposedly exhibited by the fallen woman. And the belief in Gerald's lack of control is not only Matilda's: the implication of Forrester excusing Gerald's behaviour is that Gerald is too innocent and passive to blame for his own actions; he is the victim of an external force, namely Matilda. Moreover, Gerald "had gazed on the witching beauty of the syren [*sic*], until judgement and reason had yielded the rein to passion" (403); that is, he has forfeited "masculine" logic for "feminine" emotion. While Gerald's destabilized self might be intended to stress Matilda's role as villain, it underlines Butler's notion that gender is not inherent, and also demonstrates a possibility for resistance to reified constructions of identity: the normative masculine identity can also be ruptured, and ruptured by a woman.

Matilda's representation of "performative" gendered identities might be surprising given other, more essentialized versions of femininity in early Canadian literature. Richardson's portrayal of her suggests an awareness on his part of the instability of gendered identities, and can broaden and complicate critical knowledge of nineteenth-century Canadian attitudes towards gender. Moreover, while it is important to avoid the glorification of violence, one might read Matilda as saying something about resistance to patriarchy: while some early Canadian suffragists resorted to notions of moral female influence in order to press for women's political rights, Matilda instead locates her agency not in spite of a lack of stable identity, but because of such "lack"; in the very notion of women's vulnerability to rupture, Matilda finds the possibility for action and escape from stereotypes.

Matilda's willfull performativity, which differentiates her from most British fallen women, takes on a greater significance in relation to nation. In fact, I believe it is the novel's New World setting that allows for Matilda's destabilizing of gender. Homi Bhabha theorizes in *The Location of Culture* that the colony creates "hybrids" of identity,

where the distinction between colonizer and colonized breaks down. In *Wacousta*, Richardson demonstrates this process through a character that blurs European and Native cultures. As Gerson notes of Wacousta, "As a pseudo-Indian he outdoes the natives in savagery, indicating how closely Richardson intuited the critique of colonialism later articulated as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" (87). Similarly, Michael Hurley writes that in *Wacousta* and *The Canadian Brothers*, Richardson, who is "obsessed with locating the metanarrative of an emergent nation, finds over and over . . . a disturbing set of contradictions, paradoxes, fragments, double-hooks, and discontinuities" (22). In *The Canadian Brothers*, I believe the colonial context, where identities are not certain, allows for a more ambiguous sketching of the national allegory as well as of the fallen woman. Richardson was writing the novel before, during, and in the aftermath of the 1837-38 Rebellions, a period in which Canada's national identity was undergoing redefinition. One of the novel's early Canadian reviewers read it as a suitable analogy for the country's current condition, because it shows "the readiness with which all classes and creeds flocked round the standard of their common country in an hour of doubt and danger, ready to gage life and limb to maintain the supremacy of Britain, over these fair and extensive colonies" (qtd. in Stephens lii), and Stephens views the novel as indicating Richardson's "patriotism to Canada as an emerging nation with strong British connections" (lxx). However, in the novel's setting, the War of 1812, Canadian affiliation with Britain is questioned and threatened, and the physical and figurative boundaries of Canada are open to penetration. While Douglas Ivison sees war in the novel as enforcing and stabilizing previously porous boundaries (169-70), I see the novel, at least at times, as highlighting ambiguous national identities. Richardson's characterization of Matilda at times undermines the division he elsewhere sets up between Canada and the United States, so that the marriage metaphor in the novel, if it stands at all, indicates only that national identities, like gendered ones, are unstable.

Matilda simultaneously evokes and defeats readings of her as a figure in a marriage metaphor, in a way that contrasts her not only with moral heroines, but with other fallen women. Auerbach views the fallen woman as often tied to ideas about a corrupt national society ("Fallen" 30), and Valverde points out that in late nineteenth-century Canada, "The links between sexual excess, mental and moral degeneration,

and the decline of the nation were made repeatedly" (106). At times, Richardson appears to anticipate this view of sexuality and nation by suggesting that Matilda represents the United States and its relationship to Canada. At the same time, because, as I have argued, Matilda's identity is constantly shifting from romantic heroine to fallen woman to would-be murderer, the national allegory she is a part of is also problematized. While critics such as Hurley, Ivison, and Daniel Coleman have argued that Matilda is a symbol of American immorality, the possibility of the reader empathizing with Matilda, and her critique of both Canada and the US, complicates such readings.

Matilda is often referred to as "The American," especially in her interactions with Gerald, who, as the novel's title suggests, may be a representative of Canada. Gerald and Matilda's erotic relationship gestures towards the "marriage metaphor" of other early Canadian fiction, but the results are very different: Matilda and Gerald are eventually emotionally alienated from each other, and then die. As Ivison argues, "Engagement with the Americans can only lead to the destruction of Gerald's understanding of self, and *The Canadian Brothers* is clearly a warning about the dangerous temptations presented by the United States" (171).

The temptations offered by the US might include democracy, an anxious issue in the post-Rebellion community in which Richardson published the novel. Coleman, in an essay on loyalist literature, notices that in novels such as Richardson's, "The Canadian brother's enlightened attitude towards Africans is presented in the allegory as support for the loyalist claim that true liberty can be found only under the British constitution" (144). By the War of 1812, slavery had been outlawed in Upper Canada.[6] Matilda, on the other hand, lives on an estate with several slaves, and her sense of betrayal regarding Forrester's accusation seems to derive not just from the imputation that she would be unfaithful, but would do so with a slave, "one of those vile beings" (421). Coleman argues that the white Canadians in the novel are presented as virtuously acting "on behalf of" Natives and Africans (144), but the oppression of African peoples also becomes a sign for the possible fate of Canada generally when Gerald exclaims to Matilda at one point, "how devotedly I could be your slave for ever" (251). The racializing of eroticism here suggests that, for Richardson, this "Canadian brother" would be enslaved to the Americans in such a union as much as African-Americans are in the novel.

However, reading Matilda as a symbol of a tyrannical United States is sometimes more problematic, given her roles as both fallen woman and would-be murderer. Her relationship with and subsequent attack on Colonel Forrester, a fellow American, is difficult to reduce to national allegory: if Matilda is the United States, she is not only a perpetrator of violence but a victim. But if Matilda is the US, who is Forrester? Why would the US slander itself, attack itself? Even if their relationship is meant to signify internal struggle within the United States, the elements of her character that might evoke sympathy at the very least suggest a more complex allegory in the novel than one where the US is designated as evil and Canada as good.

Reading Matilda within the context of some of Richardson's other writings also complicates matters. While Hurley reads the novel as pitting a chaotic and selfish American individualism against Canadian community (146-48), Richardson himself had a strong interest in personal honour, praising "that high sense of individuality with which [God] has endowed the most intellectual of his creatures" (qtd. in Beasley 48), and Wacousta, who is also highly individual, gains some degree of the reader's empathy when he tells the story of how he was betrayed, just as Matilda does. Furthermore, while Matilda is definitely an individual, she is not entirely removed from a sense of family community, filled with love for the man who adopted her, whom she calls her "kind, good, excellent, more than father" (423).

More importantly, though, Richardson's interest in blurring identities, both personal and cultural, in his fiction, which Hurley discusses at length, makes it difficult to read Matilda as only a representation of a corrupt United States. Margaret E. Turner points out that in the figure of Wacousta "Richardson blurs the boundaries between civilization and nature, noble and savage" (41), and Hurley terms Wacousta "The Enemy of Boundaries," comparing him to Trickster in Native ideologies (183). Similarly, Hurley admits in his discussion of *The Canadian Brothers* that "Despite a final declaration that Gerald has been her dupe, Matilda remains a shadowy, elusive, ambiguous figure" (142). There is much in *The Canadian Brothers* that is allegorical, using individual relationships to explore the relationships between cultures, but Matilda's ambiguity, created out of Richardson's own interest in or confrontation with the uncertainty of identity in the colonial space, whether conscious or not, somewhat undermines his allegory.

While Coleman views loyalist discourse, including novels such as *The Canadian Brothers,* as attempting to distinguish Canadian identity from both the British imperial centre and the American republic (144-47), Matilda complicates this separation. Although the Americans have rebelled, they share British ancestry with the Canadians, and Matilda sometimes compares the Canadian and American nations. For example, not only does Matilda point out the dishonourable actions of a high-ranking, supposedly "honourable" American man, Colonel Forrester, but she also critiques the war of which he and Gerald are both a part. She taunts Gerald for being unable to murder Forrester even though he kills as a soldier, an action she views as much worse: "In cold blood, and for a stipend, do you put an end to the fair existence of him who never injured you in thought or deed" (411). When Gerald argues that his profession is approved of by God and man, but the kind of murder she asks for is sanctioned by neither, Matilda retorts with skill:

> Worldly policy and social interests alone have drawn the distinction, making the one a crime, the other a virtue; but tell me not that an all wise and just God sanctions or approves the slaying of his creatures because they perish, not singly at the will of one man, but in thousands and tens of thousands at the will of another. (411)

Coleman argues that Matilda's sense of justice is "explicitly coded as American" (135), but her critique here targets male-dominated governments, *both* American and British-Canadian ones, for the flawed reasoning that distinguishes war from murder. In this sense, Matilda seems to push at the boundaries of the national allegory. In criticizing both the United States and Canada for their roles in the war, she resists being reduced to a representative of the former. The war, which threatens national boundaries, becomes the means by which Matilda is able to point out and critique the similarities between the two countries. Jones views Ellen Halloway's madness and her affiliation with Natives in *Wacousta* as both subverting the colonialist project, by taking her beyond its rational authority, and enforcing it, by indicating the need for such authority (58). Matilda, however, may demonstrate a greater critique of authority, just as she is more subversive of the fallen woman figure, for while she is passionately vengeful, like Ellen, she also displays the same calm logic of government authority in her careful planning and reasoning for the "execution" of Colonel Forrester, and her critique of government systems.

Coleman views Matilda as the feminine enemy of the novel's loyalist and fraternal perspective (141), but the narrative also provides some justification for her critique of patriarchal war. While the Americans are the invaders, they are far from being the only perpetrators of violence, and Richardson presents a bloodier aspect of Canadian history. During one of the battles, Gerald's fire kills several officers, and in the room where they were destroyed, the walls are "completely bespotted with blood and brains, scarcely yet dry any where [*sic*], and in several places dripping to the floor" (207). The bodies in the gorge at Queenston Heights are "crushed and mangled in a manner to render them scarcely recognizable even as human beings" (470). Richardson's vivid imagery forces the reader to see the horrors of the war alongside its glories. Even if such imagery is simply meant to be titillating, Richardson also presents the emotional dangers of war when men who love each other must attack each other: Gerald is responsible for the serious injury of Major Montgomerie, a man for whom he holds a great deal of respect, and later, Henry kills Gerald, mistaking his own brother for an American soldier. As Stephens points out, Gerald's death "does not take place at the hands of Matilda or because of her actions" (xxxvi). It is the war, rather than Matilda, that threatens brotherhood.

The representations of the American soldiers further complicate Matilda's designation as American. Their lack of certainty and bravery at Queenston Heights is the opposite of Matilda's character in all her deliberate actions throughout the novel. In contrast to the heroic General Brock and the Canadian brothers, the defeated Americans are presented as cowardly: they are "dismayed" and "waver," "flying in despair" (470), "yielding to the panic which had seized them" (471). In fact, the soldiers' behaviour is more in line with the Canadian Gerald's "vacillating" character than Matilda's logical one. Moreover, the American invasion is described by the British characters as motivated by greed, and is thus considered unjust (89). Matilda, on the other hand, is almost obsessed with a sense of justice; in fact, she accuses Gerald, and all soldiers, of greed, when they kill "for a stipend." Moreover, her interest in justice is evoked when she twice calls Forrester a traitor (446, 453), a loaded term in the context of war, but Forrester is no traitor to nation, as far as readers know. Matilda employs military terminology, but it is personal honour and betrayal that concern her, perhaps representing not woman-as-nation, but a nation *of* women, who might embody, for Richardson, "the menace of the oppressed" (Auerbach, *Demon* 189) in their critique

of and threats to the dominant male nation. Matilda's sense of justice evokes the "moralized angel" of Victorian ideology, but also rewrites it, taking it to the extreme as she becomes a vengeful Fury.

I do not think Matilda should be valorized, because for all her critique of authority, she wields a tyranny of her own as a slave owner. However, it is important that despite Richardson's attempts to set her up as an American, he also has her resist this designation, partly through her performative enactment of gender. His interest in the fluid and sometimes contradictory nature of identities, and his awareness of the possible tyranny of colonial/republican authority, comes through in Matilda's characterization. She problematizes the ideology that configures woman-as-nation because she critiques the patriarchal vision that imposes the symbol of nation upon her. As a result, she inadvertently foregrounds the complicated position of settler women in a nation; on the one hand, as a white woman in the United States she enjoys the privilege of being a slave owner with a large estate, while as *woman* she is on the fringes of power, and thus must seek agency in destabilizing the very nation that allows her racial power.

As with its precursor, *Wacousta*, readerly sympathies, at least contemporary ones, may not know where to settle in the novel. Matilda is one moment the conqueror, and another moment the victim; Gerald is one moment the honourable Canadian paragon of masculinity, the next an alcoholic driven nearly insane by his love for Matilda, and viewed by his own brother as "fallen" (323). In *Wacousta*, Richardson manages to make the title character, a vengeful murderer, somewhat sympathetic when he is given the chance to tell his own side of the story and provide the reasons behind his awful transformation. Something similar happens to Matilda; her ability to justly critique the dominant order that has victimized her makes her an appealing character despite, or because of, her violence, undermining her role as a villainous American opposite an honourable Canadian; that is, Richardson ultimately defeats any reading of the novel as simply "othering" the United States. Just as Matilda's differing acts of gender interrogate the idea of an "inner" gender enacted upon the body, so do her shifty national identifications challenge the notion that there are inherent national characteristics inside the geographical borders. *If* Matilda represents the United States, and *if* Gerald represents Canada, their characterizations only suggest that the identities of both countries are always varied and in flux.

Matilda complicates both the Canadian national allegory and the common representations of the fallen woman, due at least in part to Richardson's interest in the blurring of categorical boundaries that occurs in colonies. The "identity" of the Canadian colony, because it is a colony and thus on the margins of power, is less stable than the British centre or the independent American republic, and perhaps allows for a more radical, more performative sketching of gendered identity than that located in some other literatures. That is, Matilda may put a particularly "Canadian" spin on the fallen woman, even as she interrogates the term "Canadian." As a fallen woman who is both/neither a victim and/nor a victor, both/neither seducer and/nor seduced, she troubles any simple conflation of her with an "evil" American nation. Alan Lawson has argued that national identity is "formulated as a strategy of resistance toward a dominant culture" (30). In the past, for former British colonies, this dominant culture was that of Britain, but recently, says Lawson, the resistance has turned toward the US (30). I certainly do not support American globalization, but I also think, along the lines of Lawson's argument, that Canadian attempts to villainize the US might only serve to mask Canada's own history of violence. It seems to me that, if there is a national allegory in Richardson's novel, it suggests that the boundaries of national identities, like Matilda's gendered ones, are not ever clearly defined or essential: that nation, like gender, is performative.

The Canadian Brothers is one place to begin a further consideration of the fallen woman as a figure of resistance in Canadian literature to essentialized identities. Matilda might be one of the prototypes for sexual, violent women in contemporary Canadian novels, such as Grace in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996) and Elisabeth in Anne Hébert's *Kamouraska* (1970), who similarly confront and trouble patriarchal colonial ideas about both women and nation, partly by eluding simple categorizations. Grace explicitly points to the subversive potential of the fallen woman when she says, "I was never a lady, Sir, and I've already lost whatever reputation I ever had. I can say anything I like; or if I don't wish to, I needn't say anything at all" (103). Moreover, violent, fallen women in earlier Canadian novels, such as Angélique in William Kirby's *The Golden Dog* (1877) and Madame Cournal in Gilbert Parker's *Seats of the Mighty* (1896), might need to be re-examined for the way their ability to seize the violent power that is traditionally men's can force readings "beyond the marriage metaphor." The history of the fallen

woman, and her potential for subverting national and gendered narratives in Canadian literature, ought to be the subjects of further study, because the presence of such characters indicates a Canadian-Victorian awareness of women not merely as victims or survivors, not only as subjects of ideologies, but as *agents* of radical resistance, even as we need to further understand the way these same women might also contribute to and benefit from the very constructions of nation that threaten to oppress them. *Wacousta* has been an object of much scrutiny for researchers in nineteenth-century Canadian literature, and I would suggest that it is imperative that Wacousta's granddaughter now seize her own chance to speak.

Author's Note

Parts of this argument were presented at the ACCUTE conference in May, 2005. In this essay, I provide a larger context for Matilda as a fallen woman in Victorian literature, and in relation to Butler's theories of the performative, as well as give more detailed conclusions on Matilda's significance in Canadian literature.

Notes

[1] The marriage metaphor derives from British literature that presents, most often, unions between Scottish or Irish women and English men. Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814) and Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) are two well-known examples. For more information, see Mary Jean Corbett's *Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing, 1790-1870* (2000). For more on similar allegories in Canadian literature, see Misao Dean, Pilar Cuder-Dominguez, and Katie Trumpener.

[2] See, for example, Misao Dean's essay in *Practising Femininity* on Rosanna Leprohon's *Antoinette De Mirecourt* (1864) in relation to Armstrong's theories.

[3] Richardson, in 1842, announced his admiration for Dickens as "Nature's purest and most faithful painter" (qtd. in Beasley 133), so Nancy might well have influenced *The Canadian Brothers* and Matilda's critique of the forces that have shaped her, although Richardson makes no specific reference to *Oliver Twist* in the novel.

[4] Auerbach develops this premise in her essay "The Rise of the Fallen Woman," and later in more detail in *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*.

[5] Possible exceptions are Hardy's Tess Durbeyville and Thackeray's Becky Sharp, both of whom kill their lovers. However, Matilda's act of violence differs from Tess's in that it is premeditated, and from Becky's in that her weapon is a knife rather than poison. That is, Matilda's violence might interrogate female stereotypes more than the other two, in that it is planned with "masculine" logic and performed with a phallic weapon.

[6] The Emancipation Act of Upper Canada stipulated that any slave under six years of age in Canada in 1793 could be kept until the slave was twenty-five years of age, and all slaves over that age had to be given their freedom within six years. By the War of 1812, then, there would be few legal slaves left in Upper Canada. Thus, although Gerald has an old Black "servant" named Sambo, who has been in long service to the family, he is probably not technically a slave, unless he is kept illegally by the Granthams. However, there may have been little distinction between the conditions and treatment of a slave and a Black servant at this point in history.

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