THE JOURNALS OF SUSANNA MOODIE: A TWENTIETH-CENTURY LOOK AT A NINETEENTH-CENTURY LIFE

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In the Afterword to *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Margaret Atwood writes that when she read *Roughing It In the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings* she was disappointed. "The prose," she tells us, "was discursive and ornamental and the books had little shape: they were collections of disconnected anecdotes." The only interesting aspect of the books was Mrs. Moodie's personality, a personality which "reflects many of the obsessions still with us."[1] Armed with what she believes are new truths to be revealed about Mrs. Moodie, Atwood sets out to translate the failed autobiographies into *The Journals of Susanna Moodie.* Whether or not Mrs. Moodie's books are in fact failed autobiographies, however, depends entirely upon one's definition of the art of autobiography, a definition which, a comparison of the two writers makes clear, differs substantially as we move from the nineteenth century to the twentieth.

The twentieth century tends to value autobiographies for the psychological truths that they reveal. Atwood in particular seems to regard Mrs. Moodie's autobiographies as a kind of dream: the meaning is displaced, the dreamer unprepared to deal with the true significance of the experience. Not only is Atwood prepared to play psychoanalyst in this fashion, but she willingly announces herself to be a specific kind of psychoanalyst. That is, because Atwood believes that the national mental illness of Canada is paranoid schizophrenia, she is delighted to discover numerous hidden dichotomies in Mrs. Moodie's vision of reality:

> Mrs. Moodie is divided down the middle: she praises the Canadian landscape but accuses it of destroying her; she dislikes the people already in Canada but finds in people her only refuge from the land itself; she preaches progress and the march of civilization while

1. Margaret Atwood, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 62.

> brooding elegiacally upon the destruction of the wilderness; she delivers optimistic sermons while showing herself to be fascinated with deaths, murders, the criminals in Kingston Penitentiary and the incurably insane in the Toronto lunatic asylum. She claims to be an ardent Canadian patriot while all the time she is standing back from the country and criticizing it as though she were a detached observer, a stranger.[2]

Here we have the terms of reference with which Atwood is going to decode the dream of Mrs. Moodie's life. As the passage demonstrates, Atwood is not interested in the documentary component of Mrs. Moodie's books, nor is she even prepared to grant that such a component plays a very central role in the autobiographies that she is about to interpret for us. Rather, Atwood is primarily interested in the psychological dimension of the immigrant experience in Canada, the ways in which the encounter with the unexplained wilderness precipitates a psychological reaction which is irrational and symptomatic of something larger than the reality at hand. While not denying the possible validity of Atwood's approach, one cannot help noticing that the dichotomies which she identifies are largely illusory, the results of a twentieth-century consciousness looking back on a nineteenth-century life. Any divisions in Mrs. Moodie's perceptions can be explained in concrete objective terms that have nothing at all to do with paranoid schizophrenia.

Mrs. Moodie, unlike Atwood and the twentieth century in general, had very little use for the unconscious, either as the repository for valuable truths about the human personality or as the wellspring of the creative urge. She believed that an autobiography was a document with a social purpose. She wrote *Roughing It In the Bush* to warn prospective British immigrants of her own class "not to take up grants and pitch their tents in the wilderness, and by so doing reduce themselves and their families to hopeless poverty,"[3] and she wrote *Life in the Clearings* because she had been "repeatedly asked, since the publication of 'Roughing it in the Bush,' to give an account of the present state of society in the colony, and to point out its increasing prosperity and commercial advantages."[4] Both her books illustrate the early Victorian interest in the importance of the moral influence of autobiography, an

2. Afterword, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, p. 62.
3. "Canada: A Contrast," *Roughing It In the Bush* (1913: rpt., Toronto: Coles, 1980), p. 5.
4. Susanna Moodie, Introduction to *Life in the Clearings* (1853: rpt., Toronto: Macmillan, 1959), p. xxxiii.

importance which Thomas Carlyle articulates at some length in his article, "Biography":

> A scientific interest and a poetic one alike inspire us in this matter. A scientific: because every mortal has a Problem of Existence set before him, which, were it only, what for the most part it is, the Problem of keeping soul and body together, must be to a certain extent *original*, unlike every other; and yet, at the same time, so *like* every other; like our own, therefore; instructive, moreover, since we also are indentured to *live*. A poetic interest still more: for precisely this same struggle of human Freewill against material Necessity, which evey man's Life, by the mere circumstance that the man continues alive, will more or less victoriously exhibit,—is that which above all else, calls the Sympathy of mortal hearts into action; and whether as acted, or as represented and written of, not only is Poetry, but is the sole Poetry possible.[5]

For Carlyle, the artistic merit of an autobiography is in direct proportion to the extent to which the experience represented therein functions as a moral influence on the community which reads it. Atwood objects to this explicit moral purpose which she finds hypocritical because it is primarily a statement of what Mrs. Moodie brings with her to Canada, and, because it remains in conflict with the actual experience, it has contributed to the split that Atwood believes that we have inherited today. One might argue, however, that Atwood's poems are just as explicitly moral as Mrs. Moodie's books, but the content of the moral vision has changed its emphasis from ameliorating social conditions to focusing on the healing of the individual self. Clearly, in the century between Carlyle and Margaret Atwood, the definition of the *art* of autobiography has undergone a vast change. For Atwood, Mrs. Moodie's books lack artistic merit for precisely those qualities which the nineteenth century would have valued.

What makes the relationship of these two authors particularly interesting, however, is not simply the conflicting claims of a nineteenth and a twentieth-century point of view: each must be allowed its own legitimacy. If *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* were simply a brilliant book of poetry inspired by a nineteenth-century text, it would not matter in the least that the book does not represent an accurate portrait of nineteenth-century Canada. Atwood herself maintains that "although the poems can be read in connection with Mrs. Moodie's books, they

5. Thomas Carlyle, "Biography," *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays: Collected and Republished* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1847), pp. 1-2.

don't have to be: they have detached themselves from the books in the same way that other poems detach themselves from the events that give rise to them."[6] With this insistance on the autonomy of her artistic creation, Atwood has presented us with a clear and widely-accepted aesthetic which enjoys the support of academic respectability.

But, Atwood's statement notwithstanding, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* is not simply a brilliant book of poetry inspired by a nineteenth-century text. Atwood is as much a critic as she is a poet, and her Afterword demonstrates that she is a critic throughout this book of poems. The poems are the exact embodiment of the critical position articulated in the Afterword, and both the poems and the Afterword are consistent with the approach to *Roughing It In the Bush* which is laid out in *Survival.* Moreover, Atwood's poetic reading of Moodie's texts has been adopted by other critics (Marian Fowler, for example, in *The Embroidered Tent)*[7] and brought to bear on *Roughing It In the Bush* in such a way that we are forced to conclude that anyone reading the poetry before reading Mrs. Moodie's books will take a point of view back to the originals which will totally obscure their authentic meaning, and valuable social and cultural documents will be lost to us.

The actual poems that comprise *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* enact with remarkable faithfulness the critical position which is articulated in the Afterword. Atwood's Susanna as we find her throughout the journals is indeed a victim of paranoid schizophrenia and she is divided quite decidedly down the middle. In Journal I, Atwood describes Susanna as she first arrives in the new land. At this point, she is fully formed by reason, civilization, and man-made order (I use the term "man-made" in both its sexually-discriminating and its generic sense). When she encounters the world of nature, where man's definitions of good and bad, order and chaos, no longer exist, she suffers great psychological torment. In Journal 2, Atwood presents Susanna as she reaches a kind of comprehension of the nature of the duality from which she suffered in Journal 1, and she realizes how and why she has adapted to the physical environment of Canada. Finally, in Journal 3, Atwood gives us a fully self-conscious Susanna, one who tells us that she is now able to communicate to the rest of society what she has learned about

6. Afterword, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, p. 63.
7. Marian Fowler, *The Embroidered Tent: Five Gentlewomen in Early Canada* (Toronto: Anansi, 1982). Fowler, who argues that *Roughing It In the Bush* is really a sentimental romance, has created for us a perfect Atwoodian Moodie, complete with garrisons, victims, and split personalities.

man's destructive refusal to abandon his reason-dominated ways of perceiving.

Now Atwood's fascination with the psychological dimension of human experience has led her to write numerous books about man's consciousness. The structure of many of these books is based upon a pyschological journey from madness to sanity, a journey which posits the existence of an unhealthy duality in society between the conscious and the unconscious, reason and emotion, mind and body, civilization and nature, men and woman. Because Atwood believes that modern man has repressed his animal nature and exalted his reason, she often allegorizes this journey into the unconscious in terms of an actual physical journey into the Canadian wilderness. Consequently, she finds in the experiences of Mrs. Moodie the perfect metaphor for a psychic journey in search of the Jungian self-knowledge that is necessary to achieve the integrated personal self.

Mrs. Moodie herself is the perfect symbol of one half of Atwood's duality. Mrs. Moodie is from England, the civilized nation. She is upper class and literary, the true exponent of man's belief in the supremacy of reason. She becomes to Canada, a country which perfectly symbolizes the other half of the duality. Canada is natural, untamed, and demands a physical life of its inhabitants. How does an English gentlewoman, accustomed to the world of cultivated gardens and intellectual pursuits, react to the unfenced animal world of the wilderness? According to Atwood, she suffers a kind of alienation which makes at least temporary madness unavoidable. She becomes the paranoid schizophrenic of Atwood's Afterword, and she ceases to be the real Mrs. Moodie of *Roughing It In the Bush*, a lady whose actual experiences lose all their significance—social, historical, and cultural—and become nothing more than metaphors for a troubled twentieth-century consciousness.

Atwood's life of Susanna Moodie opens with "Disembarking at Quebec," a poem which introduces us to Mrs. Moodie's arrival in Canada. We are told that Atwood's Susanna is immediately isolated from her surroundings by the trappings of civilization that she brings with her from the Old World—her clothes, books, and knitting—for these objects symbolize her "own lack/of conviction."[8] Remembering the legitimately traumatic encounter with cholera that Mrs. Moodie describes in *Rough-*

8. Atwood, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, p. 11.

ing It In the Bush, we realize that we have left behind the world of nineteenth-century autobiography and have entered the world of twentieth-century poetry written in the autobiographical mode. While we recall Mrs. Moodie's description of a near shipwreck, of the missing husband, Tam, and the grieving wife, Maggie, while the fellow travellers in Atwood's poem shout "freedom," Atwood's Susanna ponders the uncaring landscape of rocks and water which, because it is so foreign to her sensibility, refuses to confirm her own reality. She tells us, "The moving water will not show me / my reflection." She is not an English-speaking immigrant arriving at a French-speaking settlement, but a person speaking the language of order and reason in a land which only understands the language of nature.

This split between man's sense of order and reason and the challenge to that conception of reality which nature presents is crucial to an understanding of the terms according to which Atwood portrays Mrs. Moodie's experiences in order to encourage a certain interpretation of significance upon us. Because Atwood envisions the split as the all-defining entity, she leads us to accept a definition of the word "nature" which relies extensively on a sense of something which is "other" or alien to civilized man, something to which one must be reconciled, something which might well trigger madness.

In the poem "Two Fires," Atwood beautifully captures the effect on her Susanna of the split between rational understanding and irrational nature. Here Atwood shows the burning of the house occasioning in Mrs. Moodie a realization that clinging to one's idea of civilized order is no way to survive in the new landscape. It is at this moment that Susanna begins consciously to connect man's fear of nature to his exaltation of reason.

As Atwood's Susanna recalls her house catching fire, she concentrates on the differences between two similar occurrences. Atwood portrays one fire, the fire of summer, as being natural because it occurs outside, where only the trees melt. The second fire, on the other hand, is the fire of winter, and Atwood presents it as being unnatural and particularly threatening because the roof of a man-made house disintegrates. Susanna herself is depicted as embracing the world of reason for sanctuary in the middle of the wilderness. Atwood writes that her Susanna concentrates on the products of reason, on "form, geometry, the human / architecture of the house, square / closed doors, proved roofbeams / the logic of windows" when she is confronted by the

summer fire.[9] But ultimately this "charm" fails, for even the man-made house catches fire. With the second fire, the house becomes less a sanctuary than a threat, and Susanna is forced to seek refuge in the menacing winter wilderness. At this point she is gaining new knowledge about her own relationship to nature. Winter is not determined to destroy her; it is simply an entity she has failed to understand. Nature can no longer be perceived exclusively as a threat, just as human logic can no longer be trusted to provide adequate protection from the illogical power of nature.

For the real Mrs. Moodie, however, the burning of the house lacked such psychological significance. During one of the fires, Mrs. Moodie, who is alone with her children at the time, is forced to drag single-handedly what she can of her belongings out of the cabin. She must choose what to rescue and what to sacrifice in a land that promises few replacements, and she must summon the strength and the courage to execute the rescue. As she thinks back, her emotions are two-fold, regret for the loss of invaluable necessaries and a modest sense of her own accomplishment. She tells us,

> "*What shall I save first?*"was the thought just then uppermost in my mind. Bedding and clothing appeared the most essentially necessary, and without another moment's pause, I set to work with a right good will to drag all I could from my burning home.[10]

And:

> The news of our fire travelled far and wide. I was reported to have done prodigies, and to have saved the greater part of our household goods before help arrived. Reduced to plain prose, these prodigies shrink into the simple, and by no mean marvellous fact, that during the excitement I dragged out chests which, under ordinary circumstances, I could not have moved; and that I was unconscious, both of the cold and danger to which I was exposed while working under a burning roof, which, had it fallen, would have buried both the children and myself under its ruins.[11]

Mrs. Moodie remembers yet another fire, one that is not recreated by Atwood, as a time when she believed one of her children to have died. Her recollections, made particularly vivid by the possibility of such

9. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, p. 22.
10. Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It In the Bush; or, Life in Canada* (London: Richard Bentley, 1852), II, p. 163.
11. *Roughing It In the Bush*, II, p. 167.

tragedy, prompt a speech on the hazardous ways in which houses in Belleville are built. Her concern fastens on the social ramifications of fire and is directed away from herself and into the community. She writes:

> The number of wooden buildings that compose the larger portion of Canadian towns renders fire a calamity of very frequent occurrence and persons cannot be too particular in regard to it . . . As long as the generality of the houses are roofed with shingles, this liability to fire must exist as a necessary consequence.
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> * * *
>
> So many destructive fires have occurred of late years throughout the colony that a law has been enacted by the municipal councils to prevent the erection of wooden buildings in the large cities. But without the additional precaution of fire-proof roofs, the prohibition will not produce very beneficial effects.[12]

Atwood's Susanna, on the other hand, never has a social response to anything. After her experience with fire, rather than worry about the dangers inherent in the Canadian shingle, Susanna is busy immersing herself in the landscape. When she looks in the mirror, she sees an image of herself in terms of natural metaphors. Her skin is "thickened / with bark and the white hairs of roots." Her hands have grown stiff, "the fingers brittle as twigs." Her eyes are like "buds" and her mouth "like a rock in fire." She realizes that

> (you find only
> the shape you already are
> but what
> if you have forgotten that
> or discover you
> have never known)[13]

That is, the natural, organic self that Susanna discovers has always been a part of her. Man is originally a natural animal. But because of his exaltation of reason, he has repressed his animal qualities, qualities which Susanna is just beginning reluctantly to discover. And, if you have "forgotten" or "never known" this element of your psyche, its reappearance is bound to have a traumatic effect on your consciousness.

By the time we reach "Dream 1: The Bush Garden," the imagery is totally organic and Atwood signals that Susanna is no longer locked

12. *Life in the Clearings*, p. 16.
13. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, p. 25.

into a reason-defined sense of order. No more does Susanna talk in terms of squares and "proved roofbeams." Now she speaks of potatoes like "pale grubs," radishes with "fleshy snouts," beets with "amphibian hearts." Her own hands come away from the garden "red and wet" as if with blood.[14] Plants, animals, Susanna are all becoming one. She is successfully merging with the landscape in a way which would have been impossible for the woman who first arrived from England, and the merging is hastened by death, as it has been in earlier poems. As more of her children die, Susanna's bond with the earth becomes terribly real and vital:

> The body dies
> little by little
> the body buries itself
> joins itself
> to the loosened mind, to the black-
> berries and thistles

And:

> Everywhere I walk, along
> the overgrowing paths, my skirt
> tugged at by the spreading briers
>
> they catch at my hells with their fingers[15]

Who are "they"? The briers? The children? It no longer matters. Unity has been achieved; the children and the briers are one.

Throughout this journey, we have been locked firmly inside a consciousness which views all reality as metaphor. The ocean has been an illness, not a body of water used for transportation.[16] We have been told we "left behind one by one / the cities rotting with cholera, / one by one our civilized / distinctions / and entered a large darkness."[17] But the darkness Susanna entered was not physical; it was her own ignorance of how to exist in the world of the physical. We have been told that Mr. Moodie is "shadowy,"[18] that when he disappeared beyond Susanna's line of vision, he had no more existence, and we cannot help but compare this relationship to the vital and all-defining marriage that

14. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, p. 34.
15. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, p. 41.
16. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, p. 12.
17. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, p. 12.
18. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, p. 13.

we encountered in *Roughing It In the Bush*. The solipsism of the vision never lapses and reaches completion after Susanna achieves enlightenment. Near the end of the book, Atwood describes Susanna wondering how reality will continue without her:

> What will they do now
> that I, that all
> depending on me disappears?
>
> Where will be Belleville?
>
> Kingston?[19]

If we turn from *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* to *Roughing It In the Bush* to reassure ourselves that there is a legitimate basis for believing that the former enriches our understanding of the latter, we find that Atwood's mapping of Moodie's state of mind bears little or no resemblance to the actual terrain in *Roughing It In the Bush*. What we see, in fact, is that Atwood is consistently using psychological terms to mask important contradictions, the social origins of which Mrs. Moodie makes clear. In order to prove that Atwood's attribution of twentieth-century modes of perception to a nineteenth-century lady distorts the original experience by subsuming it into an ahistorical system of comprehension, it is necessary to look closely at Atwood's Afterword in light of the actual apprehension of reality that we encounter in *Roughing It In the Bush*.

Atwood begins her list of dichotomies by asserting that Mrs. Moodie "praises the Canadian landscape but accuses it of destroying her,"[20] a position which Atwood reaffirms in *Survival* where she marvels that the "two emotions—faith in the Divine Mother and a feeling of hopeless imprisonment—follow each other on the page without break or explanation. If the Divine Mother is all that faithful, we may ask, why are her children suffering? Mrs. Moodie copes with the contradiction by dividing Nature itself in two."[21] Now, there are two problems with Atwood's interpretation of Mrs. Moodie's response to Nature. First of all, the problem of reconciling the notion of a loving God with the reality of suffering children has been with mankind since the beginning of history and is in no way an unusual response prompted by Mrs. Moodie's

19. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, p. 53.
20. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, p. 62.
21. Margaret Atwood, *Survival* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 51.

unusual exposure to the Canadian landscape. It is a contradiction that is just as likely to occur to one wandering through the slums of London as fighting mosquitoes in the Canadian backwoods. It is a social, not a psychological, contradiction that Atwood is identifying, and one that is non-restrictive in its geography.

Second, Atwood's definition of the word "nature" is itself problematic. Significantly, the brief offending passage that she quotes from *Roughing It In the Bush* makes clear, when it is put back into the context of Mrs. Moodie's anecdote about setting up house in the wilderness, that for Mrs. Moodie, nature means scenery, not the social and physical realities that comprise her daily existence. Mrs. Moodie writes:

> In a few hours I had my new abode more comfortably arranged than the old one, although its dimensions were much smaller. The location was beautiful, and I was greatly consoled by this circumstance.[22]

For Atwood, who understands man's psychological problems to be rooted in his alienation from the animal part of his psyche, nature tends to be defined more loosely as that which is "other" to the rational human mind. Consequently, while Atwood may be surprised that Mrs. Moodie can speak in the same breath of the Divine Mother and the swamps and bugs, the yoking together of the two ideas is perfectly natural for Mrs. Moodie. Beautiful scenery is a constant solace, but it in no way lessens the actual physical hardships that Mrs. Moodie must confront daily, and she does not expect the sublime force behind the glorious scenery to help, as Atwood puts it, with the vegetable garden.

Atwood goes on to say that Mrs. Moodie "preaches progress and the march of civilization while brooding elegiacally upon the destruction of the wilderness."[23] Here Atwood is assuming a twentieth-century, post-Grantian understanding of progress. Civilization, especially in nineteenth-century Canada, did not necessarily mean what it means to Margaret Atwood and our generation as a whole. As Robert McDougall points out in his introduction to *Life in the Clearings*,

> Her experiences in the bush and her acquaintance with the great "practical" nation to the south have taught her to have this good opinion of resourcefulness and utility. Exhibits of machinery at Toronto draw from her a lyrical tribute to "mechanical genius".

22. *Roughing It In the Bush*, I, p. 138.
23. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, p. 62.

> She calls for a new line of votaries to celebrate "the grand creative power which can make inanimate metals move, and act, and almost live . . ."; and she herself pays homage, not simply to "the mind that conceived", but also to "the hand that reduced to practical usefulness these miraculous instruments". Elsewhere she points out with satisfaction, and with a glance over her shoulder at members of her class in England, that Canadians are "workers", not "dreamers". She has discovered new pleasures in her own triumph over the difficulties of baking bread and of hoeing a field of potatoes—even in her husband's award of a second prize for wheat.[24]

McDougall's judicious choice of examples makes clear that Mrs. Moodie's ideas of progress are informed by a combination of her pride in personal, unprecedented achievement and a very real appreciation of the ways in which technology can alleviate the physical hardships that have surrounded her since her arrival in Canada. Such an appreciation for progress in no way undermines her dismay that the "Canadian cuts down, but rarely plants trees, which circumstance accounts for the bland look of desolation that pervades all new settlements."[25] It did not occur to Mrs. Moodie, living in the thriving metropolis of Belleville in the middle 1800s that she could not have it both ways. She may have been wrong, but she was not schizophrenic. Again, Atwood has read a social contradiction as if it necessarily entailed a psychological split. Mrs. Moodie is more concerned with how one reaps the benefits of labour-saving technology while maintaining an unspoiled landscape than with how one resists becoming defined by one's will to technology.

Atwood then says that Mrs. Moodie "dislikes the people already in Canada but finds in people her only refuge from the land."[26] Again, one must object to an interpretation which bears so little resemblance to the actual books. "Dislike" is hardly the most appropriate word one could choose to describe Mrs. Moodie's reactions to her newly-discovered Canadians, although she does of course meet people she does not like. But overall Mrs. Moodie is simply fascinated by other people, all other people, those she likes, those she dislikes, those she pities, those she admires, and, as a novelist, she had developed a deft hand in the portrayal of character. *Roughing It In the Bush* opens with Mrs. Moodie's fascination with characters. Almost immediately we meet two health officials, one of whom is "a little, shrivelled-up Frenchman,"[27]

24. Editor's Introduction to *Life in the Clearings*, pp. xvii-xviii.
25. *Life in the Clearings*, p. 246.
26. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, p. 62.
27. *Roughing It In the Bush*, I, p. 1.

in confrontation with the ship's captain, "a rude, blunt north-country sailor, possessing certainly not more politeness than might be expected in a bear."[28] All the techniques are here in the opening anecdote: the careful physical descriptions, the detailed conversation, the attentive ear for dialect, the captured mannerisms that we come to look forward to as the book progresses. And, as we go on to meet Uncle Joe, his mother, Phoebe, even Mr. Malcolm, we realize that Mrs. Moodie does not dislike these people. Given the facts, she is, if anything, remarkably tolerant.

But Mrs. Moodie does *use* these people. Each character that we meet in *Roughing It In the Bush* has been carefully chosen to illustrate some aspect of life in the backwoods with which her British gentle-folk would have to contend, should they elect to emigrate. It may be a recalcitrant servant like Bell, who refused to live in the same house with the Papist John Monaghan, or a borrowing neighbour such as Emily S , the Yankee damsel who brought the deceptive gift of a whiskey decanter, or a fellow-Englishman like Brian the Still-hunter who was driven to despair and suicide by his inability to adapt to life in the New World. The so-called "disconnected anecdotes" that Atwood believes are indicative of an obsessive personality, while not evidence of the successful achievement of unity of plot, are manifestations of unity of purpose, a perfectly acceptable unifying device in nineteenth-century autobiography.

The charge that Mrs. Moodie is also guilty of delivering "optimistic sermons while showing herself to be fascinated with deaths, murders, the criminals in Kingston Penitentiary and the incurably insane in the Toronto lunatic asylum"[29] is partly exonerated by the foregoing analysis of Mrs. Moodie's relationship to the people that she encounters. For one so interested in the vagaries of human behaviour and so intent upon using that behaviour to illustrate specific social mores, the mad and criminal elements of society are bound to be intensely engaging. Perhaps even more important, however, is the question of whether Mrs. Moodie's depiction of the extent to which death and the aberrational prevail in the colony is an accurate representation of the historical reality. She did, after all, arrive in Canada during a cholera epidemic and one of the first things she witnessed in the New World was a series of drownings. Yet, in two books consisting of forty-six chapters, one chapter is devoted to the habit of wearing mourning for the dead, one to

28. *Roughing It In the Bush*, I, p. 2.
29. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, p. 62.

the Toronto lunatic asylum, and one to Kingston Penitentiary. The other chapters are dotted with anecdotes concerning death, but these references are surely not unusually numerous, given the reality of life in colonial Canada and the total balance of Mrs. Moodie's preoccupations. Her accounts are not characterized by a morbid or obsessive tone and in no way suggest that her optimistic sermons, by which I presume Atwood means the explicit moral lessons that Mrs. Moodie draws in *Life in the Clearings*, are products of a divided mind. Rather, they are the responses of one who is fundamentally impressed, not depressed, by the way man cares for man in the colony.

Finally, while it is indeed true that Mrs. Moodie *eventually* comes to represent herself as an ardent Canadian patriot, one cannot help wondering where she criticizes the country as a detached observer. In fact, her criticism of the country seems to be very much the product of a life which is inextricably bound to the New Land, and is, if anything, in direct proportion to the growth of her patriotic feelings. Mrs. Moodie can never go home to England, and her awareness of this fact and her acceptance of Canada as her new homeland grew slowly but steadily. She even attempts to chart the change in her perceptions. She will write in one chapter:

> Dear, dear England! why was I forced by a stern necessity to leave you? What heinous crime had I committed, that I, who adored you, should be torn from your sacred bosom, to pine out my joyless existence in a foreign clime?[30]

And in the next chapter:

> Now, when not only reconciled to Canada, but loving it, and feeling a deep interest in its present welfare, and the fair prospect of its future greatness, I often look back and laugh at the feelings with which I then regarded this noble country.[31]

When Mrs. Moodie criticizes, she does so as a socially-concerned citizen, worrying about the health, the education, and the caring for others that exist as foundations to life in the colony.

A comparison of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* with *Roughing It In the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings* suggests to me that we must guard against a tendency to discard material which does not seem to

30. *Roughing It In the Bush*, I, p. 62.
31. *Roughing It In the Bush*, I, p. 85.

measure up to prevailing theories of aesthetics. If we accept Atwood's view of Susanna Moodie, complete with all the neuroses of the post-Freudian age, we shall soon convince ourselves that people from all times experienced things exactly as we do today. If we allow ourselves to believe that Mrs. Moodie's autobiographies are really just fiction, that therein lies the true and lasting art of autobiography, we lose much of our history and culture. We lose our sense of the *reality* of the horror of cholera, the brutal labour of making land, the various kinds of people who are our forefathers. We lose our sense of how Canada actually came to be what it is today and a fondness for what it was yesterday. We are left with a single consciousness (hardly a person), neurotic and alienated from the land, and we are asked to believe that this single neurotic voice is ours. Surely not.

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