ILLUSTRATIONS FOR *THE BACKWOODS OF CANADA*

Elizabeth Thompson

In 1836, Charles Knight published Catharine Parr Traill's *The Backwoods of Canada* as part of the Library of Entertaining Knowledge series. The twenty-two illustrations included in the original text (and reproduced in contemporary editions of the text[1]) were, like all illustrations in the series, to be "real illustrations of the text instead of fanciful devices—true eye knowledge, sometimes more instructive than words" (*Passages* II 262). While this may be true for other works from the Library of Entertaining Knowledge, Traill's *Backwoods* seldom achieves Knight's goal. The woodcuts commissioned by Knight from the London firm of Messrs. Sly and Wilson[2] were most likely derived from a number of sources.[3] They include representations of picturesque landscape, cartography and topography, as well as zoological and botanical sketches of birds, animals, plants, and reptiles. While the illustrations initially seem poorly integrated with (sometimes even unconnected to) Traill's text, they should not be entirely dismissed; they may not accurately depict Traill's unique personal experiences, but many comment on and illustrate Traill's cultural assumptions and point of view. Moreover, the various types of illustration provide an interesting visual approach to Upper Canada. Finally, the many disjunctions between illustration and text are useful for discussion since they graphically point up the difficulties faced by the Old World in its attempts to see and to understand the New World.

Before moving on, it is necessary to examine briefly the types of illustrations found in other books of the period, notably those produced by Charles Knight and The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (1826-1846). Allied in purpose to Mechanics Institutes and the reading societies of nineteenth-century Britain, The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge under the leadership of Lord Henry Brougham set out to provide educa-

tional and entertaining reading material for the uneducated working man: representing what Harold Smith terms "paternalism in action" (Smith *SDUK* 6). As a result of its philanthropic mandate, the SDUK initiated a number of publishing ventures, one of which was the Library of Entertaining Knowledge—a series of illustrated books published by Charles Knight,[4] and including works on natural history, history, and geography.

In other books from the series, the illustrations work extremely well—often because of a close connection between author and artist. Of his text, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836-7), Edward William Lane says:

> With regard to the engravings which accompany the work, I should mention, that they are from drawings which I have made, not to embellish the pages, merely explain the text. (xv)

R. Mudie's *A Description and History of Vegetable Substances, Timber Trees, Fruits* (1829) contains straightforward verbal descriptions of the properties of trees and fruits along with accurate and relatively simple botanical drawings. In a work with a consistent and obvious focus, engravers are able to draw upon many sources without compromising the integrity of the text; the acknowledged sources for birds' nests in J. Rennie's The Architecture of Birds (1831) include the majority of eighteenth and nineteenth century experts, but the limited focus ensures a certain textual consistency.[5] Even when the sources for engravings are diverse,[6] there is an obvious effort to place appropriate illustrations either beside and facing, or integrated into and framed by relevant text. George Craik's *The New Zealanders* (1830) includes engravings designed from Cook's Voyages, from a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds, from artefacts in various museums, and so on. Yet integration is aided by direct textual reference to the illustrations; the author is aware of the exact placement in the text and in effect points to them verbally.

Certain problems arise for Sly and Wilson in the production of engravings for Traill's *Backwoods of Canada*. Although Traill often entertained herself by sketching her surroundings, she could not, apparently, provide the original drawings for the engravings (as did Lane, for example). The illustrators could not confer with the author; nor could Traill comment on the illustrations in her text. As a result, a certain discrepancy between text

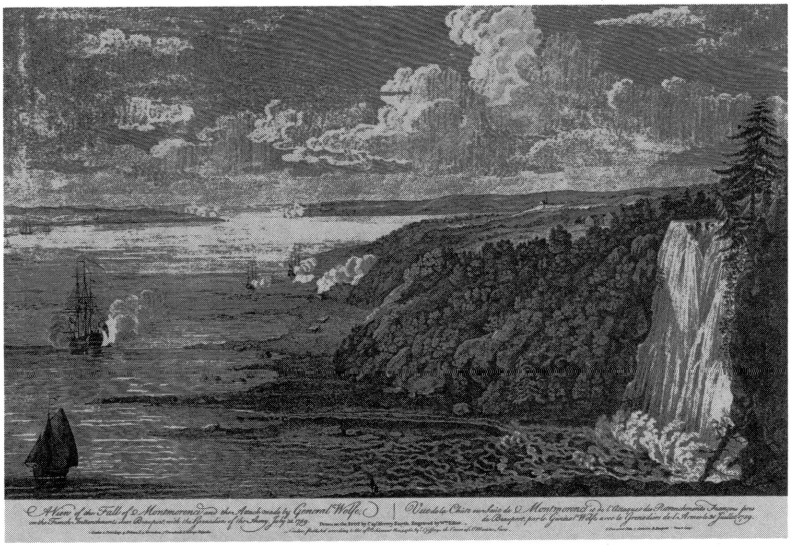
and illustration is inevitable. Also, the book defies easy classification. Traill lists and describes the plants and animals she sees; therefore some botanical and zoological illustrations are appropriate. But the work is not merely a scientific study: Traill uses pictorial terms to describe the Canadian landscape so that picturesque landscapes are also suitable for inclusion. Finally, *The Backwoods of Canada* is a personal account of one woman's experiences as a pioneer, and this latter point presents further challenges. Although Sly and Wilson regularly drew on a number of sources—botanical works, zoological gardens, explorer literature[7]—and thus had the multifaceted background necessary to illustrate such a diversified book, none of the illustrations chosen can accurately express Traill's specific knowledge of Canada and its landscape. William Sturtevant says that when the artist relies on the written descriptions of other, "he cannot transform words into forms without some visual preconceptions"("First Visual Images" 418); even if the engraver has access to sketches, water-colours, or oil paintings of Canada done by persons who have been there, variations, whether "intentional or accidental are inevitable," especially when a "shift in medium is also involved" (Sturtevant 417). Last, but by no means least, many of the illustrations upon which the woodcuts are based were not created with *Backwoods* in mind. Despite being capable of creating their own designs, Sly and Wilson would, whenever possible, draw on existing paintings, sketches, or engravings—a general pool of common material;[8] indeed, some of the woodcuts had already been used elsewhere: the Baltimore Oriole defending her nest appears in *The Penny Magazine* (a SDUK venture) in October 1832 along with an article about birds and snakes.[9] Once made, the woodcuts were reused: a passage from *Backwoods* appears in *The Penny Magazine* in January 1836 accompanied by "Papouses"; other illustrations—"Bullfrog," "Log House," "Falls of Montmorenci," "Sleigh-Driving"—appear elsewhere in *The Penny Magazine* from 1836 to 1838 and are paired with articles by other writers. Compounding the problems and contributing to the distortion of images is the fact that of the work available to Sly and Wilson for reference, none represents the settler's experience—most illustrators merely passed through on their way somewhere else. Given the situation, and the lack of control exercised by Traill, discrepancies are inevitable.

A good portion of the illustrations are landscape scenes,

most appearing in the first half of the book. Despite the evidence of similar aesthetic conventions in both text and illustration with respect to landscape, an early and obvious disjunction of text and illustration occurs with the woodcut "Falls of Montmorenci." These falls were popular with illustrators (see Thomas Davies or George Heriot, for example) and commented on by travellers whose books were not illustrated (see Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*). Unfortunately for her illustrators, who would have a wide range of illustrations from which to choose for engravings, Traill passes by the falls at night; she strains to see but, sadly, cannot. The reader of *Backwoods* suffers no such disappointment, however, for Sly and Wilson provide a picture. On the one hand, this seems inappropriate; on the other hand, with closer examination we can see how text and illustration interact—at this early point in the narrative, author and illustrator show similarities in artistic sensibility.

The illustration chosen by Sly and Wilson is a standard representation of nature and is most likely taken from a drawing by Hervey Smyth, published in London (1760).[10] In the Backwoods woodcut we see Canadian scenery fitted into a picturesque mould.[11] Elements are those of sublime nature—awe-inspiring heights of land, a powerful waterfall, jagged and dangerous-looking rocks, pine trees leaning at precarious angles towards the torrent (in effect pointing to the water).[12] Yet this is also an inhabited landscape. A ship dwarfed by the height of the falls indicates a human presence. From the turbulent water at the foot of the falls in the foreground, the eye travels back and away to the middle distance to discover the ship at a safe vantage point and in calm water. The awe-inspiring, sublime waterfall, then, can be viewed from a place of safety and perspective. Nor is the viewer intimidated by nature's force, for the vantage point of the viewer/artist is midway up and across from the falls, in essence putting him/her in a position of power—what Albert Boine refers to as the "gaze of command" (20) or the "magisterial gaze" (21).[13] Thus, the wild Canadian landscape is shaped, interpreted, and dominated by a European sensibility, tamed and made picturesque. I must point out here, however, that Smyth's portrayal of Montmorency includes a battle taking place in what is shown as a safe haven in Sly and Wilson's derivation: in Smyth, the sublime power of the waterfall on the right is balanced by Wolfe's attack on the French

on the French forces (July 1759) on the left. Obviously this scene is too far removed from Traill's text[14]—even for illustrators who regularly stray from the story.



While "Falls of Montmorenci" does not recreate *what* Traill sees in her voyage, it is entirely faithful to *how* she sees and reports on the world around her. As she journeys towards her new bush home, she is a spectator, like Hervey Smyth a traveller past sublimely picturesque landscape. Looking at Canada from this perspective, Traill consistently uses the language of the picturesque. At Quebec, for example, she comments on the "most superb view" (29), the "imposing" situation, the "magnificent" rock formations, the "romantic situation" (29), and concludes that the whole scene is "highly picturesque" (29), applying her preconceived way of seeing the world to a new place which may not warrant such language. Thus, the aesthetic sensibilities of author and illustrator and engraver work together, at least in the early stages of *Backwoods*. With their choice, Sly and Wilson may have strayed from the facts of the text but have remained true to the feelings of the author.

Other illustrations which fit into the genre of the picturesque follow. "Rice Grounds" in letter five, like "Montmorenci," may echo the writer's sensibilities, but has little direct connection with the text. It shows neither the Rice Lake Plains nor Rice Lake nor the Otanabee River as described by Traill, and is likely derived from Captain Basil Hall's "Rice Fields in South Carolina."[15] In Traill's words, the plains feature "a fine elevation of land" and a "park-like appearance" (57) while Rice Lake itself is "prettily diversified with small wooded islets: the north bank rises gently from the water's edge" (59). What we see in the illustration and in Hall's etching is a slow-moving river, recreating William Hogarth's "line of beauty"[16] in its gentle s-curve towards the horizon. Sly and Wilson have dotted scenic clumps of trees along the river, and man's presence is noted with a human figure in the foreground, buildings and fields in the mid-distance. None of this domestic picturesque comes close to the Otanabee and its wild rice as described by Traill:

> The Otanabee is a fine broad, clear stream, divided into two mouths at its entrance to the Rice Lake by a low tongue of land, too swampy to be put under cultivation. This beautiful river (for such I consider it to be) winds its way between thickly wooded banks, which rise gradually as you advance higher up the country. (63)

And the human presence in Traill's scene is not the dominant force of Sly and Wilson's woodcut. Here, then, the reader is hard pressed to connect text with picture despite an umbrella covering of "picturesque" nature: we are witnessing the failure of the book's publisher and illustrator.

"Sleigh-driving"[17] which appears in letter five moves even further from Traill's experiences, not being related in time, place, or activity to what she describes. First, the illustration of a winter scene, a horse-drawn sleigh in the style of the French Canadian cariole drawn by John Lambert,[18] represents travel as a leisure pursuit. Next, its placement in the text occurs as Traill moves up the Otanabee river in late summer toward her new home. For her, and others like her in the bush, travel is a chore and a necessity, not a leisure activity; the roads are quite simply too bad—or even non-existent—for one thing, and for another, time generally does not permit recreational travel. "Sleigh-driving" is actually one of

two woodcuts that bear no relationship to the text. "The Prairie," taken from Basil Hall's "Prairie at the Confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi," is the second.[19] This gap between verbal and pictorial representation illuminates the difficulty experienced by the immigrant or the traveller whose previous experiences have not prepared him or her for North America. Initially the newcomer—whether Traill or Hall—has no vocabulary with which to describe the New World and must resort to a familiar frame of reference; in many cases the conventions of the picturesque come to the rescue. Accordingly, Hall assumes an elevated position, balances the wide-open prairie with background trees and a rail fence in the middistance to create a picturesque scene. Traill, however, becomes increasingly unable to create a verbal picturesque; even now, at this early stage in her pioneering, Traill's perception has changed as she adapts to circumstance—the text reveals this change as Traill begins either to focus on small foreground details rather than on broad landscape vistas or to consign the picturesque to the future. But the gulf between past and present realities of landscape (as well as the ultimate failure of the picturesque in America) is starkly conveyed by the illustrators' inability to follow Traill's metamorphosis, as they match Hall's work with Traill's; in fact, Sly and Wilson add details to make their prairie scene more picturesque rather than less.

"Log-house," which appears in letter six, might be better placed in letter nine where Traill talks about her own log home. Even so, it fits fairly well into the narrative since it sits facing the description of a log house Traill examines out of curiosity. In a number of its details, though, the picture, like the other landscapes, deviates from Traill's verbal representations of a similar site and fails to capture her pioneer experience. In the picture, trees tower over and encircle the small hut. The isolation and the size of a typical cabin are faithfully rendered, and the viewer gets a sense of the dominating power of the tall and thick wall of trees.[20] Even here, elements of the picturesque appear, as for example, in the removal of the "odious stumps that disfigure the clearings" (93) which so annoy Traill. There is a logical reason for their absence from the picture: their presence would preclude the picturesque by cluttering up the cleared space surrounding the cabin. There are a couple of small, relatively innocuous stumps—but nothing to indicate the reason for Traill's intense and often reiterated dislike. Also, although the cabin is surrounded by the forest, the

dense trees are lighter in one area to create the sense of opening out, leading the eye up and back to an opening in the treetops. Moreover, the artist/viewer's vision is not obscured—while the artist is a little too close to the scene for picturesque purposes, the clearing's exaggerated size underplays the forest's domination of a typical backwoods farm. The house itself, while small, is snug (almost a tiny fort), its vigorous right angles offering a place of security and refuge from the bush. It, and not the natural landscape, is the focus of the scene. Certain domestic pastoral elements are added as well: the woman with washing on the line (no indication of where or how she has washed her clothes), the peaceful cattle looking at the house. The cattle are not like the real bush animals who have wilder and more republican tastes than Traill is used to. In letter nine, she writes of the loss of a yoke of oxen:

> Not regarding the bush as pleasant as their former master's cleared pastures, or perhaps foreseeing some hard work to come, early one morning they took into their heads to ford the lake at the head of the rapids, and march off. (113)

What emerges from the illustration is a determined effort to see elements of the picturesque in the landscape while what emerges from the written text is a wistful desire to create the picturesque in the future:

> We cannot help regarding with infinite satisfaction the few acres that are cleared round the house and covered with crops. A space of this kind in the midst of the dense forest imparts a cheerfulness to the mind, of which those that live in an open country, or even a partially wooded one, can form no idea. The bright sunbeams and the blue and cloudless sky breaking in upon you, rejoices the eye and cheers the heart as much as the cool shade of a palm-grove would the weary traveller on the sandy wastes of Africa. (161)

Traill knows the realities of the bush—the stumps, the towering trees, the republican oxen—all of which preclude the picturesque at the current time. The woodcut may represent Traill's anticipation of the appearance of the bush at a later date—what it will be like once the land has been cleared—but it bears little resemblance to her present circumstances.

Others of the landscape illustrations deviate from Traill's reports as well. "Log-Village—Arrival of a Stage-coach" features the

arrival of a coach (American in design and strikingly like Hall's close-up detail in "American Stage Coach," Plate XL in *Forty Etchings*) in a small town and is based on the assumption that the Canadian roads are suitable for a coach and a team of horses. Although George Heriot's "Stage Coach from West Farnham, Vt. to Farnham, Quebec" shows a similar coach pulled by four galloping horses—on a cleared, flat road—this has not been Traill's own experience. She arrives in Peterborough by water rather than by land, in a succession of boats: from a steamboat to a scow with eight rowers to a skill propelled by a single "surly Charon" (69). And finally, she makes her way by foot through what appears to her a trackless maze. The point is that for Traill the primary road is the river; the bush roads are poor at best, suited to a heavy cart, a "waggon and span" (92), not to a coach and horses.

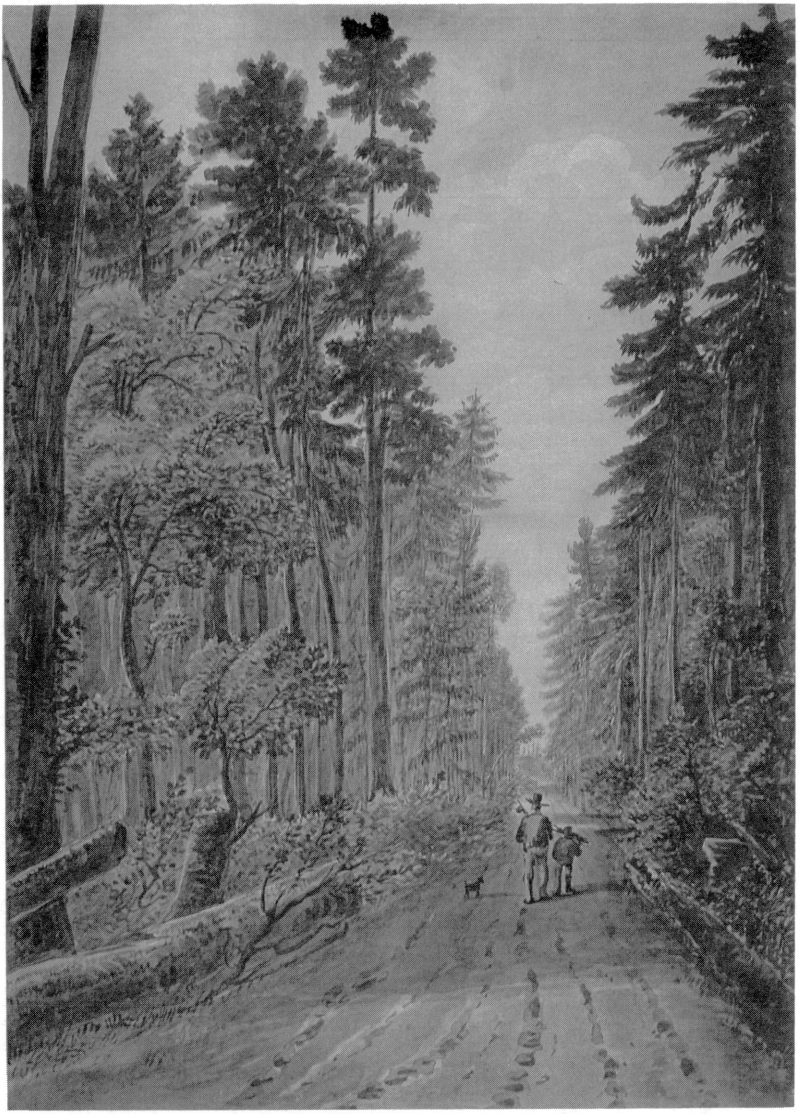
"Road through a Pine Forest" is similarly misleading. In itself, the illustration is an interesting allegory of pioneer life, but it bears no resemblance to Traill's verbal descriptions of bush roads. In the engraving, a straight, flat, wide road splits apart the impenetrable forest, moving directly to the horizon and to a clearing in the cloudy sky. This is not the road travelled by Traill which is marked only by "blazes":

> There was no palpable road, only a blaze on the other side, encumbered by fallen trees, and interrupted by a great cedar-swamp, into which one might sink up to one's knees, unless we took the precaution to step along the trunks of the mossy, decaying timbers, or make our footing sure on some friendly block of granite or limestone. (92)

Yet the allegorical elements of the illustration are close to Traill's understanding of her role as a pioneer. There are two human figures in the picture, one in the foreground clearing, the other on the road. Both are dwarfed by the immense natural world around them. The foreground figure is carrying an axe and is standing beside a felled tree, reminding the viewer that man has the ability to change the wilderness by untangling the maze, opening up the horizon, straightening the lines. As settler, Traill is bound to carry out this sort of "civilizing" mission and makes a number of references similar to the one cited above to "opening" the landscape. James Pattison Cockburn's "The Road Between Kingston and York, Upper Canada" (1830)[21] is closer to Traill's experiences yet

is strikingly similar in composition to Sly and Wilson's design: the two figures walking towards the cleared space in the horizon, the straight road slicing the dense forest into two sections. Cockburn does not utilize the elevated stance of the viewer/artist demonstrated in the *Backwoods* woodcut; nor is there a clearing in the foreground of his work, putting the viewer in the midst of the bush. Basil Hall's "Pine Barren of the Southern States," Plate XXIII of *Forty Etchings* also shows a road through a pine forest, and despite its lack of human figures, it too is similar to Sly and Wilson's design; unlike Cockburn, though, Hall clears out the foreground of the scene—even though he writes of a "vast ocean of trees, stretching, without a break, in every direction" (Plate XXIII), he moves his pictorial description in the direction of the picturesque. Given the propensity of those artists who have been in the New World to redesign what they have seen to fit a more familiar mode, it is no wonder that engravers like Sly and Wilson are unable to recreate Traill's experiences.

A similar allegory set up in "Newly Cleared Land" deviates from Traill's present experience but not from her plans for the future. The scene draws on the picturesque, shaping its distinctively New World features within an Old World frame of reference. Here the cleared land dominates the forest. The trees in the foreground act as shade trees or stand in clumps; two men, one with an axe, stand in the foreground, serving to remind the viewer how the forest is conquered. Although there are many stumps in the picture, the forest has been shoved far into the background. Moreover, the stumps on the cleared land are certainly less dense than the trees in the remaining forest; in reality such stumps would "take from seven to nine or ten years to decay" (110). The artist, therefore, has taken the liberty of ignoring at least some of the highly unsightly stumps. There is a wall of trees between the cleared land and the horizon, but the sun breaking in on the cleared land diminishes its threat. A further sign of man's presence is the rail fence which serves no practical purpose (there is no field) but zigzags in Hogarth's s-curve to the background, leading the eye to the horizon and the rising sun. It also acts as a man-made barrier between the clearing and the forest. The whole picture, then, is designed to show man's ability to dominate and to change the natural wilderness—pointing the way to the de-



velopment of a picturesque scene once the land is cleared. This engraving is most likely derived from Basil Hall's "Newly Cleared Land in America," Plate IX in *Forty Etchings*. Hall's etching has a corresponding division into three stages of develop- ment. In the background, there is a solid wall of trees: the original state of the New Land. There are also two sections of cleared land: a log house is elevated in the right foreground, with cleared land fronting the cabin; a log fence which separates the house and surrounding farm land from more recently cleared land runs from left foreground to right background, leading not to the sun (as in Sly and Wilson's derivation), but to another cabin. If Sly and Wilson have indeed used Hall's etching as source, they have both retained and heightened the orignal artist's desire to create a recognizable scene from a "bleak, hopeless aspect" (Hall IX). On the one hand, this is not the bush described by Traill; on the other hand, Traill's prose demonstrates a desire to see the world as picturesque; thus, when the picturesque fails her in the present (due to lack of per-spective of lack of suitable components), she assigns it to the future.

Traill has more resources at her disposal, however, and when she is faced with the impossibility of "seeing" the landscape as picturesque, she also turns to details in the landscape: what I would term the "fragmentation of the picturesque." Traill's "scientist's eye"[22] notes the elements of the world around her, and the descriptive passages in the text turn from landscape to small details in the landscape.[23] In this fashion Traill makes sense of her surroundings even when she cannot step back and look at a sweeping vista. There is a gradual progression in the text towards a smaller focus which parallels Traill's movement towards and settlement in the backwoods. On the one hand, the illustrators seem to sense this change in focus and, for the most part, begin to select smaller, less picturesque illustrations, gradually turning *Backwoods* into a botanical or zoological text. For the second half of *Backwoods* the scientist's perspective dominates both text and illustration. On the other hand, many of the illustrations are inappropriate, as well as lacking the energy of Traill's verbal descriptions.

As she travels up the Otanabee with its "thickly-wooded banks," shut in as she is by the "thick wall of pines on either side" (63), Traill adjusts her gaze:

> To the mere passing traveller, who cares little for the minute

> beauties of scenery, there is certainly a monotony in the long and unbroken line of woods, which insensibly inspires a feeling of gloom almost touching on sadness. Still there are objects to charm and delight the close observer of nature. (63)

Heeding her own counsel, Traill comments favourably on such "minute beauties" as the grape vines, flowers, and hawthorn bushes along the river. Appropriately, the engraving which accompanies this part of letter five is "Silver Pine"—a close-up examination of a particular object. While the tendency to move towards botanical accuracy accords well with Traill's changing focus, there are still some jarring inconsistencies. First, although the pine is a Canadian tree, it is the wrong tree for this section; it is not one which is described in detail by Traill. Nor does it appear in the illustration as part of a "thick wall" of pines, standing, rather, in a clearing with another and larger clearing indicated in the background. Finally, attention is diverted from botanical study by the picture's narrative element:[24] the hunter in the foreground is shooting at a bird. The eye follows the line of the gun to see the bird flying into the opened up landscape. The viewer's eye moves away from the shadow cast by the tree and up into the light. Thus, although the original impulse to botanical accuracy may honour Traill's work and her changing artistic focus (from the long-range picturesque to the close-up scientific detail), very little else coincides with the text.

A companion piece to "Silver Pine" appears in letter six. In "Spruce" the focus is on a single object which is rendered with scientific exactitude, yet like "Silver Pine," "Spruce" contains elements of the picturesque. The tree stands in a cleared space which permits perspective and is backed by a river; density of growth may be suggested by a second tree entwined with the first. The landscape is inhabited as well, and a man on a raft appears in the background. Isolation is hinted at since the man is moving away, out of the scene, but the point made is that this is a cleared, inhabited landscape. In both illustrations, botanical accuracy wars with the desire to shape the picturesque or to tell a story. Traill, however, can no longer "see" and describe her surroundings as picturesque, but as before, if we combine present and future, the illustrations become a more accurate rendition of Traill's perspective: landscape as she wishes it to become.

Other letters feature descriptions of birds, animals, reptiles.

Letter ten, for example, which includes a section on frogs, has two pictures, "Green Frogs" and "Bull-frog," standard textbook illustrations with some attention to background detail to give a sense of size and/or habitat. The bullfrog is taken from Catesby's *Natural History* II with the background details added, possibly by Sly and Wilson—who as we have seen, regularly changed artists' designs to suit their purposes. Traill's verbal descriptions of the frogs are as accurate as the scientific illustrations but are also multi-dimensional, including appearance, customs, and voice (she recreates a sort of frog conversation). She is not writing a zoological textbook but an account of her personal experience of frogs. By way of contrast, the engravings seem flat on the page.

Letter eight contains a lengthy passage on birds, and accompanying the verbal descriptions are four illustrations: "Red-bird," "Blue-bird," "Snow Bunting," and "Baltimore Oriole defending her Nest against the Black Snake." With the exception of the last, these fit with Traill's method and purpose, and even "Baltimore Oriole" has a certain aptness. But once again there are problems. Here as elsewhere, Traill isolates the inhabitants of the landscape, trying to make sense of her world by sizing up its components. Her desire to send a specimen "fit for stuffing of our splendid red-bird"(180) home to her sister Sarah is an expression of dominance; she observes, names, and captures the red-bird (the cardinal, also known in the nineteenth century as the Virginia nightingale).[25] The standard ornithological engraving of the bird demonstrates a similar purpose: to capture, to understand, to instruct. Unfortunately, Sly and Wilson have chosen to use an American robin (and, I think, the "American Robin" is actually a British thrush)[26] to illustrate the redbird, evidently misunderstanding Traill's description.

When Traill turns to the bluebird there is another obvious discrepancy:

> The blue-bird is equally lovely, and migrates much about the same time; the plumage is of a celestial blue; but I have never seen one otherwise than upon the wing, so cannot describe it minutely. (181)

The subject eludes Traill: she sees it only on the wing. Yet the reader suffers no such handicap. The picture is a detailed representation of a bluebird planted firmly on the ground, with none of the hints

of narrative and movement which distinguish Traill's written observations.

A similar situation occurs with the snow bunting. The picture of the snow bunting presents five birds in various attitudes so that a sort of discussion group is formed with the birds facing each other, beaks open as if chatting. Most are in extremely unlikely and apparently uncomfortable postures, undoubtedly to convey such technical details as wing-span. (While the actual composition is evocative of J.J. Audubon's regular use of grouping, the attitude of one particular bird at the top of the tree suggests A. Wilson's depiction of a snow bunting.)[27] Although the birds may be accurately detailed, one is unlikely ever to happen on such a scene, and indeed, the illustration does not represent Traill's encounter with the snow bunting:

> I had heard much of the snow-bunting, but never had seen it till the other day, and then not near enough to mark its form or colours. The day was one of uncommon brilliancy; the sky cloudless, and the air almost warm; when, looking towards the lake, I was surprised by the appearance of one of the pine-trees near the shore: it seemed as if covered with stars of silver that twinkled and sparkled against the blue sky. I was so charmed by the novelty, that I ran out to observe them nearer; when to my surprise, my stars all took flight to another tree. . . . About mid-day they went away, and I have seen them but once since. They never lit on the ground, or any low tree or bough, for me to examine them nearer. (182)

Traill has not had a close look. Moreover there is a sense of magic and mystery about her experience as conveyed in her prose that clashes resoundingly with the flat, accurately detailed engraving. For the most part, the ornithological illustrations lack the range and the subtlety of Traill's personal observations.

An even more glaring departure from the text occurs with the illustration of the oriole and the snake. First, the baltimore oriole is not mentioned by Traill.[28] Next, Sly and Wilson had already used the engraving in *The Penny Magazine* (1832) to illustrate an article which borrows freely from Dr. Benjamin Barton's "A Memoir concerning the Fascinating Faculty which has been ascribed to the Rattle-Snake, and other American Serpents" from *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* (1799). The engraving, which draws on Mark Catesby's picture of a black snake[29]

and possibly on Albert Sebo's depiction of the oriole's nest,[30] is admirably suited to illustrate Barton's memoir, but the appearance in *Backwoods of a small oriole defending her nest against an enormous* and wicked-looking snake is inappropriate—and seems a desperate attempt by the illustrators to fill in space. On a more positive note, the narrative aspect of the illustration suits Traill's layered and anecdotal writing style. In letter nine, for example, Traill watches a small bird (a swallow) attacking a larger foe:

> I was looking out of my window one bright summer-day, when I noticed a hawk of a large description flying heavily along the lake, uttering cries of distress; within a yard or two of it was a small—in the distance it appeared to me a very small—bird pursuing it closely, and also screaming. (187)

There is a moral common to this story and to Sly and Wilson's oriole: they are versions of the unlikely hero who perseveres against all odds. Significantly, this is Traill's projected image of herself in the backwoods.[31] The illustrators' choice of a similar moral assumption may be coincidental, but it points up a common pre-Darwin tendency to seek Christian purpose in nature. A portrait of the age emerges in the commonality, despite the evident disjunction of story and illustration.

Although Traill talks about squirrels in letter fifteen, neither "Red Squirrels" nor "Flying Squirrel" suit her purpose. Traill describes red squirrels narratively through a story of sunflower seeds; two "wicked red squirrels" (214) amuse her one day by taking away whole heads of her sunflowers. Yet the picture features two squirrels, one large and one small, sitting on and eating a sunflower. These cute, cuddly creatures are not the rascals encountered by Traill. Of the flying squirrel Traill says:

> I was agreeably surprised by the appearance of this exquisite little creature; the pictures I had seen giving it a most inelegant and *bat-like* look, almost disgusting. (216)

The picture, ironically, is of a bat-like creature, caught in the act of flying. Granted, this particular flying squirrel is less bat-like than other contemporary illustrations,[32] having a longer and thicker fur coat, but its positioning is designed to display the "wings," something that Traill wishes to downplay.

There are other types of illustrations in *The Backwoods of*

Canada—related only indirectly to the landscapes and to the scientific drawings; one such type is represented by the two pictures of Indians: "Peter, The Chief"[33] is the frontispiece; "Papouses" appears in a section on Indian customs. The two illustrations mirror Traill's verbal descriptions in attitude if not in narrative accuracy. In addition, both honour Traill's attempts to feature close-up de-tail in the backwoods landscape; one is a portrait, the other a sentimental, narrative scene. The Old World reaction to native Canadians has always been problematic; Traill, for one, finds the Indians and their customs fascinating and uses Indian names when she can. For example, she introduces, defines, and uses the word "papouse" in letter ten, and goes on to describe the carrying cradles of the Indian babies. Her description utilizes accurate detail—"a sort of flat cradle, secured with flexible hoops" (137)—expanded through the use of analogy—"the passive prisoner stands, looking not unlike a mummy in its case" (137). By means of analogy, Traill renders a new object familiar to her readers but retains some exoticism through the choice of the mummy as basis for comparison. Then, in a second analogy, Traill adds greater depth to her description. With a reference to Christian art, she takes the papouse and its cradle from being an exotic curiosity to a religious icon:

> I have seen the picture of the Virgin and child in some of the old illuminated missals, not unlike the figure of a papouse in its swaddling-clothes. (137)

Traill respects the Indian and wishes to convey her attitude to her readers; unfortunately her choice of analogy involves putting a European veneer on a North American object.

The accompanying illustration shows a similar inconsistency[34]—torn as it is between an impulse to define and to value the New World on its own terms and a desire to appreciate it through preconceived impressions. There is a strict attention to detail with respect to the carrying apparatus but the cherubic children, reminiscent of illustrations of the Christ-child mentioned earlier by Traill and the playful dog in front of them, seem sentimental and incongruous. The design for the cradle and the appearance of the children are taken from Basil Hall's "Mississauga Indians in Canada," Plate XIV in *Forty Etchings;* Hall has set a certain interpretive tone—Sly and Wilson have added to it. Their setting is

peaceful and Edenic, drawing upon picturesque tradition. The sheltering cradles lean against, and are shaded and protected by the background trees and their gentle curved lines. The *Backwoods* picture is not solely of native Canadians; the presence of European settlers is indicated as well. The boots and gun in the background leaning against a solid building and the stump in the foreground signify the disruptive power of man, specifically the settler who uses his axe to destroy the forest and his gun to kill the forest's inhabitants. Depending on one's point of view, of course, the human meddling might denote improvement. Just as Traill is often ambivalent about her role as pioneer (both anticipating change and regretting the loss of the natural habitat), so too this picture is ambivalent. In its ambivalence it echoes the elegiac tone often created by Traill:

> The race is slowly passing away from the face of the earth, or mingling by degrees with the colonists, till, a few centuries hence, even the names of their tribes will scarcely remain to tell us that they once existed. (179)

Because of the many close ties in point of view, this is one of the illustrations which works well in *Backwoods*. Notably, despite a sympathetic portrayal, neither artist, nor engraver, nor writer can remove a European perspective.

Although only one map is included in *Backwoods*, it is worth mentioning as a genre. The "Chart showing the Interior Navigation of the Districts of Newcastle and Upper Canada" appears in letter nine, and to a certain extent, allows the reader to follow Traill's route to the backwoods. Thus, it provides further shape and definition to her journey. But the map is not focused on Traill's personal comments, and therefore, this illustration, like others, fails to reflect accurately the recorded details of Traill's experiences. Once again, however, the illustration is true to the spirit of the text. Taken from the map drawn by F.P. Rubidge which appears in the Cobourg Star (c.1833),[35] the illustration features interior navigation. Therefore, rivers and lakes are prominent, and other forms of travel are absent: roads are not marked; railroads are "intended" or "contemplated" (123). The lack of roads on the map reminds the reader of Traill's sense of a trackless wilderness; she moves toward her backwoods destination by boat, by cart, and by foot. Moreover, the map has an extra dimension in that

not only space but also time is charted; the map looks to the future by anticipating the railways. Traill consistently uses a double time frame, discussing things as they are in the present and as they will become: the trees will gave way to prosperous farms; towns will thrive; immigrants will learn to love their new home.[36]

Sly and Wilson were faced with a daunting task when they undertook to illustrate *The Backwoods of Canada.* How could they be expected to understand the pioneer experience at all, let alone the experience of one middle-class gentlewoman? Oddly enough (and given the eclectic nature of the sources), the woodcuts are occasionally apt. Traill, her illustrators, and the various artists selected by Sly and Wilson all show a desire to recreate the world—whether American or European—in conventional terms. It is difficult to dislodge preconceived ways of seeing one's surroundings; the continued use of the picturesque as a shaping device by travellers and illustrators, even in the midst of wild Canadian forests, attests to this. Traill herself employs picturesque conventions in her writing for as long as possible, even relegating the picturesque to the future; when one convention fails, she turns to another and begins to rely on scientific reporting. The illustrators respond to this wavering and shifting focus, and as Traill abandons the wide angle of the picturesque, so too, Sly and Wilson begin to select standard botanical, ornithological, and zoological drawings. Though true in some ways to the spirit of the text, the illustrations nevertheless fail to delineate Traill's unique personal experiences; specific places, people, and events described by Traill are not accurately rendered. Sometimes the disjunctions are annoying and obvious—illustrations seem chosen only for the sake of expediency and to fill up a page. Yet in this era of global communications when pictures are transmitted instantly, it is sometimes difficult to remember that there was a time, not so long ago, when people had absolutely no idea of how anything appeared outside of their own immediate surroundings. The British engravers hired to illustrate Catharine Traill's *Backwoods* had to rely on imagination and on the pictures drawn by others—neither of which is entirely satisfactory.

NOTES

[1] The same illustrations are used in subsequent Charles Knight editions; in the Nattali edition, 1846; in the Coles facsimile edition, 1971; in the NCL edition of 1989. The McClelland and Stewart edition of 1929 uses the work of Owen Staples (among others).

[2] I am grateful to Professor Michael Peterman of Trent University for this information. According to Rodney Engen, Stephen Sly and Wilson (possibly Thomas Harrington Wilson?) formed a partnership from 1838 to 1840. B. Sly, draughtsman on wood, worked for Charles Knight; Stephen Sly engraved his work.

[3] Dr. E. Legge, University of Toronto Art Curator pointed this out to me. See also *One Hundred and Fifty Woodcuts* for some samples of Sly and Wilson's sources: some engravings are drawn from life; other sources include Wilson's *American Ornithology,* Le Vaillant's *Oiseaux de Paradis,* C. Landseer's *Dogs,* G. St. Hilaire et Cuvier's *Histoire Naturelle des Mammifers,* H.R. Shinz's *Natural History of Birds;* several engravings combine a number of unrelated sources.

[4] Unfortunately for the longevity of the SDUK, what the common man wanted to read (and was willing to pay for) often differed from what the SDUK thought he should read. In fact, many of the books in the first series, the Library of Useful Knowledge, proved too dry and difficult for many readers. The Library of Entertaining Knowledge sought to cater to popular tastes by combining instruction and amusement. In addition, all books were to be illustrated.

[5] Some of the sources are: Wilson's *American Ornithology,* Pennant's *British Zoology,* Bonaparte's *Continuation of Wilson's American Ornithology,* Bewick's *British Birds,* Willughby's *Ornithology,* Vaillant's *Oiseaux d'Afrique.*

[6] See *The Architecture of Birds* by J. Rennie. Sources for the depictions of birds' nests include Wilson's *American Ornithology,* Pennant's *British Zoology,* Bonaparte's *Continuation of Wilson's American Ornithology,* Bewick's *British Birds,* Latham's *General History of Birds.*

[7] See *One Hundred and Fifty Woodcuts* .

[8] Philip Hofer notes that while the designers of book illustrations are more important than the engravers, the designers cannot always be identified due to the frequent omission of names; also the artist's drawings may be poorly translated or changed by the engraver (iii).

[9] *Le Magasin Pittoresque* picks up "Baltimore Oriole Defending her Nest" from *The Penny Magazine;* see *Le Magasin Pittoresque* 1. 32 (1833): 256. The articles which accompany the picture are "borrowed" from Dr. Benjamin Smith Barton's unillustrated "A Memoir Concerning the Fascinating Faculty which has been ascribed to the Rattle-Snake, and other American Serpents" in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 4. Nor is "Baltimore Oriole" the only illustration that makes the rounds. "Papouses," minus some background detail appears elsewhere shortly after the release of *Backwoods;* see *Le Magasin Pittoresque* 4.7 (1836): 48.

[10] Drawn by Hervey Smyth, engraved by William Elliot, published by Thomas Jeffreys, London, 1760.

[11] See the many works on the picturesque in Canada by I.S. MacLaren (listed in bibliography).

[12] This is a standard effect. See also Weld's *Travels* (1799), especially his illustration of Cohoz Fall and Falls of Niagara.

[13] In *The Magisterial Gaze,* Boine comments on "the perspective of the American on the heights searching for new worlds to conquer" (21). He concludes that this "Olympian bearing metonymically embraced past, present, and future, synchronically plotting the course of empire" (1).

[14] Sly and Wilson's woodcut is more applicable to the article in *The Penny Magazine,* January 27, 1838 where it accompanies an account of Wolfe's battles in 1759.

[15] See Plate 19 in *Forty Etchings.*

[16] See Hogarth's *The Analysis of Beauty,* "Of Composition with the Waving Line," 48-50 and "Of Composition with the Serpentine Line," 50-67.

[17] "Sleigh-driving" is reused in *The Penny Magazine* in January 1838 accompanying an article about "Canada, and the Other British Colonies in North America."

[18] See Lambert's *Travels* I: 170.

[19] See Hall's *Forty Etchings* Plate XXXIX; see also *Catchpenny Prints* for some indication of common poses for hunters and deer.

[20] For another representation of a backwoods clearing see "A Log Cabin" in V. Collot's *Voyage dans l'Amerique* (1826) shown in *The Exploration of North America* 143. See also Basil Hall's "Log House in the Forests of Georgia," Plate XXII in *Forty Etchings.*

[21] See Mika's *The Shaping of Ontario* 145.

[22] See *The Pioneer Woman: A Canadian Character Type.*

[23] In *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875,* Barbara Novak discusses "the organic foreground" used in the depiction of sublime nature.

[24] While not all that common in botanical illustrations, the narrative aspect certainly appears in Thomas Bewick's tailpieces to his work on British birds and animals. It is also a standard part of Sly and Wilson's own designs of trees; see *One Hundred and Fifty Wood Cuts.*

[25] While the "Virginia Nightingale" does not often appear, references to it can be found in Dr. Benjamin Smith Barton's *Fragments,* xvii, 8.

[26] Jacques Berger, University College, University of Toronto, has provided this information. See also Mark Catesby's "Summer Redbird."

[27] See Wilson's "Snow Bunting," Plate XXI, fig. 2, volume 3 in *American Ornithology.*

[28] She talks about the oriole in *Pearls and Pebbles* (1894).

[29] See Catesby, Volume 2, 48. Sly and Wilson have changed the body position slightly, draping the snake around a tree.

[30] See the inside cover of Kastner's *The Bird Illustrated* where he includes a plate from Albert Seba's *Locupletissimi rerum naturalium thesauri.*

[31] See *The Pioneer Woman.*

[32] See for example Peter Kalm's *Travels in North America* (I 52).

[33] See also James Smillie's "Indian Chiefs at Jeune Lorette" (1830) as reproduced in *An Engraver's Pilgrimage* 91.

[34] See Gaile McGregor:

> Even as some voyagers were busy painting the American natives in terms reminiscent of the classical noble savage, other took great delight in detailing their barbarisms. Sometimes, indeed, selfrighteous diatribes against specific aspects of Indian conduct could be found side by side with conventional primitivistic panegyrics in a single piece of writing. (32)

[35] See the CEECT edition of Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush.*

[36] Alexander Ross mentions N.P. Willis's reference to the future as a way of seeing in his Introduction to *American Scenery.*

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