GATHERING UP THE THREADS: GENERIC AND DISCURSIVE PATTERNS IN CATHARINE PARR TRAILL'S THE BACKWOODS OF CANADA

by

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Brian Roach, for loving support and countless cups of coffee, and to my son, Levi Roach, who has only vague memories of when his mother wasn't writing her thesis and has grown to be my most reliable stylistic critic.

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CHAPTER 1

The Work of a "more complex writer than has heretofore been assumed"

In 1836 and 1852, respectively, Catharine Parr Traill and her sister Susanna Moodie published accounts of their experiences as nineteenth-century British immigrants to Upper Canada. Both texts were popular and influential, though not commercial successes. Yet, while Moodie's Roughing It in the Bush has maintained a prominent status in Canadian literary histories and critical studies of nineteenth-century literature, and is widely taught in university survey courses, Traill's The Backwoods of Canada has received significantly less acclaim and attention. How do we account for this critical neglect of a text which is neither less significant as a cultural and historical document than Moodie's work, nor less textually rich?

Undoubtedly, Traill's text has been diminished by arbitrary dichotomies frequently posited between Roughing It and Backwoods. Many twentieth-century critics valorize Moodie's work at the expense of Traill's, reading Roughing It as an appealingly emotional and "subjective" account of pioneer life while dismissing Backwoods as too "objective" and non-literary.[1] A typical binary opposition is suggested in W. J. Keith's comparative analysis of the two texts: "Unruffled and unassuming, she [Traill] treats herself almost as an external character, observed like everyone else, while Moodie is always conspicuously at the centre of her narrative" (Canadian Literature in English 20). Although Keith's analysis is neither irrelevant nor imperceptive, Traill's self-representation, and her text as a whole, are far more problematic and less monologic than he and many other critics imply. Establishing arbitrary dichotomies between the works of Moodie and Traill has become a reductive process, a critical cul-de-sac which glosses over textual ambiguities and sites of contestation, effectively discouraging more subtle readings of The Backwoods of Canada.

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[1] In her discussion of Susanna Moodie's Roughing It in the Bush, Gillian Whitlock suggests that "Susanna Moodie has been spectacularly successful in manoeuvring for a late twentieth-century readership" (42). Traill has been significantly less successful in this context.

We may also account for the relative neglect of Traill's text by its failure to fit conveniently into critical overviews and literary histories of Canadian literature focusing on thematic tropes, such as Northrop Frye's highly influential concept of the "garrison mentality." As Helen Buss suggests, Frye's generalization that immigrants to Canada face the experience of "being silently swallowed by an alien continent" (Frye, "Conclusion" 824) has acquired an almost biblical authority, elaborated at length by critics such as D.G. Jones, Laurence Ricou, John Moss, Margot Northey and Gaile McGregor between 1965 and 1985 (Buss, "Garrison Mentality" 123-25).[2] The concept of "Frye's garrison mentality has become . . . a big stick critics may wield to beat any writer whose reaction to the Canadian landscape is less than traumatic" (Buss 125). Not surprisingly, this critical "stick" has been employed against the author of The Backwoods of Canada: Traill is chastised for "taking refuge in the cheerful, short-range, domesticated view of the wilderness" in McGregor's 1985 study, The Wacousta Syndrome (McGregor 43; Buss 124-25). Yet, as Buss demonstrates, Frye's over-arching thematic interpretation of Canadian literature as representing a struggle between the individual and the wilderness is not supported by a wide or close reading of pioneer women's narratives; instead, these women's texts suggest "that being enclosed by the land is a somewhat more positive experience, one which demands metaphors of a more erotic and maternal nature" (Buss 133).[3]

Backwoods' deviation from modern generic conventions may also account for its relatively low literary status in the mid to late twentieth century. Traill integrates a number of generic forms – including travel narrative, settler's handbook and popular guide to natural history – into what may appear to be a problematic textual hybrid, especially since these genres are frequently undervalued and/or dismissed as non-literary. As well, the sometimes discordant discourses of femininity, domesticity, maternity, colonialism, Christianity and scientific rationalism which permeate The Backwoods of Canada, and which apparently contributed to its popularity in the nineteenth-century, may alienate readers. Perhaps, as Carole Gerson suggests,

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[2] I refer here, as does Buss, to D.G. Jones' Butterfly on Rock: A Study of the Themes and Images in Canadian Literature (1970), Laurence Ricou's Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Fiction (1973), John Moss' Patterns of Isolation in English Canadian Fiction (1974), Margot Northey's The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction (1976), and Gaile McGregor's The Wacousta Syndrome: Explorations in the Canadian Landscape (1985). Frye's theory of the garrison mentality has also been challenged by critics such as Susan Glickman, Mary Lu MacDonald and Patricia Jasen.

[3] I explore Annette Kolodny's more nuanced analysis of women's textual response to the wilderness in chapter five.

the neglect of Traill's work should also be attributed to an extraneous factor: a form of "cultural Darwinism" which has permeated Canadian literary studies. Accordingly, due to "the limited space allotted to women writers in the Canadian canon," the work of Susanna Moodie's "equally interesting sister, Catharine Parr Traill, goes largely unrecognized" ("Cultural Darwinism" 25). A final external determiner of Traill's relative exclusion from what has become the established Canadian literary canon has undoubtedly been the limited availability of her published work. Most of her books remain out of print and have been so for an extended period of time; until very recently almost all of the available editions suffered from serious abridgement and/or inept editing.

As Michael Peterman suggests, Northrop Frye's dismissal of Traill as "reminiscent of Miss Muffet" in his "Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada" (245) seems to have set the tone for much subsequent critical response to her writing ("Splendid Anachronism" 174). Only recently, through the work of critics such as Carl Ballstadt, Michael Peterman, Elizabeth Thompson, John Thurston, Misao Dean and Gillian Whitlock, and the meticulous scholarship of the Centre for Editing Early Canadian Texts (referred to hereafter as the CEECT), which has produced scholarly editions of two of her texts since its inception in 1979, has Traill's work begun to receive some of the attention it deserves. In a comprehensive overview of Traill's oeuvre included in the 1985 reference guide, Canadian Writers and Their Works, Ballstadt decries the paucity of in-depth critical studies of her work, suggesting that a "full assessment of Catharine Parr Traill's literary career must acknowledge the richness and variety of the cultural contexts which she knew and within which she wrote" ("Catharine Parr Traill" 1: 153). Critical studies by Peterman and Thompson in the 1980's and 90's contributed to the re-valorization of Traill's writing instigated by Ballstadt. In The Backwoods of Canada Peterman discovers "one of our most compelling reference-books to the lives of ordinary people and in particular to the lives of women in nineteenth-century Canada" ("In Search" 123), while Thompson suggests that Traill "defined an ideal pioneer" heroine, a distinctively Canadian "literary character type" (The Pioneer Woman 58-9). Projects such as the selected correspondence of Catharine Parr Traill, I Bless You in My Heart, and the CEECT critical edition of Backwoods, published in 1996 and 1997 respectively, began – in Germaine Warkentin's words – "dismantling the crude fictions we have built up about our literary past, and restoring to us some awareness of the nuances we need to capture as we re-evaluate it" (27).

Significantly, critics have also begun to move beyond an essentialist focus on the representational nature of Traill's work towards a more theoretically supported analysis of her

writing. In his 1995 article, "'Remember, My Dear Friend': Ideology and Genre in Upper Canadian Travel and Settlement Narratives," Thurston breaks new ground in his exploration of the generic features of Backwoods and related texts, classifying them as a unique genre "in relational and functional terms" which fuses elements of the traditional travel narrative and settler's guide (183). Using Traill's work as a key example, he focuses on the textual construction of the "narrative I" and on discursive strategies such as the "play of motherhood in her text" (185, 194). In a complementary manner, chapter one of Dean's Practising Femininity: Domestic Realism and the Performance of Gender in Early Canadian Fiction (1998) opens significant new directions for Traill studies through its thoughtful analysis of the interlinked discourses of femininity and domesticity in Traill's second Canadian text, The Female Emigrant's Guide, and Hints on Canadian Housekeeping. Most recently, Gillian Whitlock places Backwoods in the context of nineteenth-century colonial and domestic discourse, arguing that Traill's text "draws on the genres of the conduct book and the memoir" (53).

As I indicate in the title of this chapter, it is becoming increasingly obvious that Catharine Parr Traill represents, in Peterman and Ballstadt's terms, "a more complex writer than has heretofore been assumed" (Introduction to Forest and Other Gleanings 2).[4] I read her pivotal work, The Backwoods of Canada, as a noisy, hybrid text – a sometimes melodic, sometimes cacophonic blend of voices.[5] Encoded by gender, class, race, education and religion, filtered through, and to some extent produced by a series of generic and socio-literary conventions, these voices reflect, though do not necessarily "represent," the personal and social experiences of a bourgeois nineteenth-century British immigrant in colonial Upper Canada, and the exigencies of publishing in early Victorian England. On a deeper level, the voices of Traill's text participate in a series of overlapping and occasionally contradictory discourses, sometimes working in

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[4] This paragraph appears in a slightly different form in "The 'Indians' of Catharine Parr Traill's The Backwoods of Canada," an essay I published in The Rhetoric of Canadian Writing. Sections of chapter four and six are also included in this essay. I reprint this material with the kind permission of Rodopi Publishing House, The Netherlands.

[5] I allude here to Mikhail Bakhtin's account of discourse in the novel. As he explains, "[t]he novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. . . .The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types [*raznorecie*] and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions" (263-4). While Bakhtin specifically associates these voices with the novel as a genre, I would suggest that his distinctions apply equally to non-fiction works such as Traill's text.

harmony, sometimes struggling for what Nancy Armstrong terms "the authority to control semiosis" (23).[6] Backwoods poses a challenge to readers in part because of the gaps, tensions and ambiguities in the text, yet these same features make for a fascinating critical study.

In order to provide the theoretically grounded re-assessment The Backwoods of Canada merits, I strive to contextualize and decode its overlapping generic features and discursive strategies, taking into account the unique nineteenth-century Canadian/British milieu within which it was produced and received, while avoiding essentialist assumptions that Traill's narrative captures the reality of life in pre-Confederation Canada.[7] As Sara Mills reminds us, any such critical "work is necessarily a partial interpretation, unable to come to terms with the past" (Discourses of Difference 199).

Two key concepts underlie my critical approach in this study: genre and discourse. I employ the term "genre" in a relatively broad and pluralistic, rather than prescriptive or reductive sense, seeking in genre theory a tool for exploring the complexities of Traill's text. As Frederic Jameson suggests, "properly used, genre theory must always in one way or another project a model of the coexistence or tension between several generic modes or strands" (141). Yet my analysis is not limited to a delineation of "generic modes or strands." In Mary Gerhart's words, "[t]he issue . . . is not to identify the genre of a work correctly, but to come to an understanding of what genres inform the work and how the work changes by reading it in the light of different genres" (230).

The significance of generic structures and features lies not in their form, but in their function, as proponents of New Rhetorical perspectives – such as Carolyn Miller, Richard Coe, Amy Devitt and Terry Threadgold – emphasize. The function of a genre should be assessed in

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[6] I borrow this phrase from Desire and Domestic Fiction. Armstrong's critical analysis of domestic discourse, which applies as readily to autobiographically-based writings such as Traill's as it does to fiction, figures prominently in the development of the theoretical framework I apply to Backwoods. The phrase I have quoted comes from the following broader statement: "the internal composition of a given text is nothing more or less than the history of its struggle with contrary forms of representation for the authority to control semiosis" (23). Armstrong effectively places the "struggle" within the text, though what she identifies as "forms of representation" I choose to subsume within the categories of discourse and genre.

[7] Essentialism is, of course, a highly problematic issue, especially in the analysis of autobiographical writing. I agree with Gayatri Spivak that the important issue is the "acknowledgement of the dangerousness of something [essentialism] one cannot not use" (Outside *in the* Teaching Machine 5). One should "assert the importance of positionality" yet at the same time "refuse to essentialize it" (Ellen Rooney, quoted in Spivak 5).

terms of the social "action it is used to accomplish" (Miller 24), and more specifically, as "social process, discursive strategies for responding to rhetorical situations and adapting to contexts of situation" (Coe 186). As discursive strategies, genres are flexible, constituting a "dynamic response to and construction of recurring situation, one that changes historically and in different social groups, that adapts and grows as the social context changes" (Devitt 580). This dynamic response of genres, Threadgold suggests, can be delineated in specifically textual and political terms:

> Genres are not simply schemas or frames for action. They involve, always, characteristic ways of 'text-making' (what in systemic-functional terms we could call mode), and characteristic sets of interpersonal relationships and meanings (reader/writer relationships, and positions of power, writer/text orientations). (105-6)

Through the application of these theoretical constructs of genre, I explore the rhetorical complexities of Traill's work, reading and analysing The Backwoods of Canada as a richly layered and highly encoded text rather than as a realistic depiction of nineteenth-century pioneer life in Upper Canada or an inspirational feminist autobiography.[8]

As with the term "genre," I use "discourse" broadly in this study to delineate functions of language and a particular approach to textual analysis, rather than simply to mark or identify a unit of language. Michel Foucault, whose theories form the basis of much contemporary discourse analysis, deliberately sought to enlarge, rather than limit, the applications of the term "discourse":

> Instead of gradually reducing the rather fluctuating meaning of the word 'discourse,' I believe I have in fact added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements. (The Archeology of Knowledge 80)

Especially pertinent to my study of Traill's text is Foucault's analysis of the political function of discourse, which focuses on the ambiguous and shifting links between discourse and power. In The History of Sexuality, he emphasizes that we

> . . . must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but

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[8] I am inclined to agree with Alison Blunt that "[a]ttempts to reclaim feminist 'heroines' from the past perpetuate rather than challenge traditional masculinist and humanist categories of analysis by isolating individual subjects from their discursive contexts" (4-5).

> also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (1:100-101)

Approaching discourse, as Foucault does, in terms of knowledge and power relationships provides a means to assess critically the ways in which Traill positions herself textually as a writer, a woman, a wife, a traveller, an emigrant and a scientist – and to explore the ways in which readers and critics have positioned her.

From this perspective, I address a number of questions in the study which follows. To what extent are the personae Traill presents to the world in The Backwoods of Canada constructed by the genres and discourses she consciously and unconsciously exploits? How does she envisage, and perhaps help to create, an interpretative community[9] for her text? Can we discern evidence of the discursive pressures placed on Traill's work by the colonial environment in which it was produced and by the British society in which it was edited and published? To what extent does Backwoods participate in – and contest – British colonial expansion and the subsequent exploitation and suppression of First Nations people in nineteenth-century Canada? And most significantly, how can we bring together the diverse threads of this work to suggest a holistic reading which does not compromise its fluidity and multiplicity?

I am not suggesting that discourse and genre are exclusive entities; nor do I wish to posit a hierarchical relationship between the two. The interplay between generic conventions/processes and inter-generic discourses in Backwoods and the inherent qualities of specific genres and discourses remain my primary interest.

Mary Louise Pratt's critical analysis of travel writing in Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing

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[9] "Interpretative communities" as Stanley Fish explains, "are made up of those who share interpretative strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around" (171). John Guillory provides a thoughtful critique of Fish's concept of a consensual community of readers, arguing that "[l]iterary culture in general, and the university in particular, are by no means structurally organized to express the consensus of a community; these social and institutional sites are complex hierarchies in which the position and privilege of judgment are objects of competitive struggles" (27). Yet, despite its problematic over-generalization, Fish's concept provides a useful starting point for an exploration of the diverse ways in which Traill's text has been read and interpreted in a range of historical, cultural and institutional contexts since its publication in 1836.

and Transculturation, which is founded on the theoretical work of Michel Foucault and Edward Said, serves as one of the starting points and exemplars for my study. In particular, Pratt's conceptualization of "'contact zones,' social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (4) is pivotal to my analysis of Backwoods as a travel narrative. Overt signifiers of one such contact zone – Traill's descriptive accounts of the manners and customs of First Nations people – are sprinkled throughout her text, yet the contact zone between British settlers and Canada's Indigenous population is certainly not the only site of cultural clash she explores. As John Thurston suggests, "unique[ly] in the annals of empire" the contact zone in nineteenth-century Upper Canada was not centred exclusively on the clash of Indigenous and British colonial cultures. Instead, it principally reflected a zone of contact between "two linguistically homogenous but politically opposed cultures": British social and political norms of the 1820's and 30's in a state of "uneasy contiguity" with cultural and ideological influences emanating from the relatively new republic of the United States ("Toryism" 77).

The contact zones in The Backwoods of Canada, as I interpret them, are even more multi-facetted than Thurston suggests, reflecting tensions between four major cultural groups – upper-middle class English settlers such as Traill, First Nations people, republican Americans, and to a lesser extent, lower-class Irish and Scottish emigrants. In a somewhat superficial sense, Traill's work became the product of the most prominent of these contact zones, between English settlers and Aboriginal peoples, with the publication of The Young Emigrants, a fictionalized settlement narrative she wrote for children six years before her actual emigration to Canada. Certainly, for the next twenty years all of her major publications – The Backwoods of Canada, The Female Emigrant's Guide, and Canadian Crusoes – were highly referential products of English/First Nations/republican American/lower class Scottish and Irish cultural contact zones (in several different configurations).

To this mapping of the contact zones inherent in Backwoods, I wish to add an additional layer, which functions as a subtext to my text – that of the contact zone between Traill, the nineteenth-century emigrant writer, and myself as an early twenty-first century reader and critic. I am intrigued by the nineteenth-century historical, social and cultural context of Traill's work, by its twentieth-century reception, and by its shifting critical reception over the last one hundred and seventy years. I seek to identify the differing strategies of writing, reading and interpretation, of historically encoded textual constructions of the self and experience – of textual "meaning-making" in a broad sense – employed by the different interpretative communities who have

interacted with the text of Traill's The Backwoods of Canada. Each interpretative community employs culturally and historically bound strategies to read meaning in, into, and through the work, thus recreating the text. In this context, the evaluative and interpretive responses of twentieth-century critics and readers – which I explore along with those of their nineteenth-century counterparts in the next chapter – become subjects of analysis, read as indications of socially-sanctioned decoding strategies applied to Traill's text. These decoding strategies are not imposed arbitrarily, however, and this is where I attempt to integrate genre and reception theory. The generic conventions which figure so prominently in the creation of Traill's work, I argue, predicate a number of reading and interpretative strategies. Yet these strategies are neither absolute, nor have they remained constant in the century and a half since the publication of Backwoods.

Inseparable from an exploration of interpretative strategies and generic conventions in Traill's text is the issue of gender. One of the underlying assumptions of my thesis is, in simplistic terms, that gender matters. Traill wrote self-consciously as a woman, projecting a predominately female audience for her text, and her work has been read throughout its history as a woman's text. Backwoods is permeated with gendered discourse, and concepts of femininity influenced Traill's utilization of genre and generic conventions. As Mills asserts, "gender always makes a difference, particularly within the imperial context that is produced as a profoundly gendered environment" ("Knowledge, Gender, and Empire" 30). Yet gender is not the only issue in the text, or my study, and I do not wish to posit absolute distinctions between women's and men's writings. Gender does not define; instead, it "shapes the parameters of the possible textual structures within which writers construct their work," and should be approached in relational terms (Mills 30). As Sherry Ortner reminds us, "ultimately gender cannot be adequately understood except in relation to other structures of social asymmetry" (116). Hence, I am interested in assessing the play of gender in Backwoods and its relationship with other discourses, rather than assuming the extent of its significance in advance.

The organizational framework of my study may seem rather eclectic at first glance, though my primary intention is to provide as broad a critical interpretation of the text as possible. With this purpose in mind I move from a contextual foregrounding to a series of interconnected "readings" of the book. In chapter two, entitled "The Backwoods of Canada as Cultural and Literary Artefact: A Reception History of the Text," I historicize the work, providing an overview of critical responses and an analysis of its literary and cultural impact. This exploration of the interpretative communities which have determined the readings of Backwoods opens with an

analysis of initial responses to the text after its publication in 1836. Along with reviews, I consider references to the work in personal correspondence and memoirs, and the inclusion (probably unauthorized) of sections of the text in other books on immigration. In these early responses, Backwoods is assessed primarily as a settler's handbook and Traill is lauded for her optimistic attitude towards pioneer life: one critic was impressed by its "sound practical views" (Spectator 133), while another praised Traill's focus on "minute particulars" and the text's "spirit and truth" (Athenæum 139).

From the mid-1800's through the early twentieth-century, the text is increasingly valued for its historical and biographical content. In the later years of the nineteenth century, Traill gained belated formal recognition as a writer in both Canada and Britain,[10] and critics often focused on her personality and the feminine qualities she embodied. As one journalist explained, "My first thought, on meeting her [Traill] some years ago, was that had I been the father of a family of girls I should bring them to see her without delay, so large a share does she possess of that gentleness and dignity of mind and heart, which is at once the charm and pre-eminence of womankind" (Burnham 388).

As twentieth and twenty-first century responses to Backwoods are far more extensive, I deal selectively with these, focusing on critical articles and books during four broad time periods, distinguished by the different editions of the text in common use: 1900-28 (Backwoods was out of print; a limited number of nineteenth-century copies were available), 1929-65 (first Canadian issue of the text), 1966-88 (New Canadian Library abridged version), and 1989 to the present (unabridged NCL version and definitive CEECT version). In the first of these periods, Traill was praised as a representative pioneer figure and an authoritative chronicler of a passing era. The Backwoods of Canada, we are informed, includes "animated descriptions of most of the activities which went to make up the busy life of the enterprising settler from the time he left the old country to the day when he could see his original clearing surrounded by well-cultivated, open far country, and could reckon his pioneering days as past" (Robins 263).[11] Following this, especially

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[10] In 1893 she was given Polly Cow Island in Lake Katchewanook; in 1896 she was made honorary president of the Peterborough Historical Society and honorary member of the Canadian Women's Historical Society of Toronto; in 1897 she received a grant from the royal Literary Fund in England, and in 1898 she was honoured by a public testimonial and a gift of $1,000 (Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman xviii-xix).

[11] Particularly interesting here is Robins' masculinizing of Traill into an "enterprising settler" in "his pioneering days," presumably in order to elevate her status and the significance of her writing. I deal with both Traill's gendered self-presentation and gendered readings of her text

in the 1940's and 50's, Traill's work – like that of most nineteenth-century Canadian writers – was widely ignored or dismissed on aesthetic grounds. As one critic concluded, "Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill were not conscious artists; they possessed no great genius" (Scott 58). In the 1960's, 70's and 80's, Clara Thomas, Sara Eaton and Carl Ballstadt produced biographical studies of Traill, but Backwoods was, for the most part, relegated to the status of a footnote to Moodie's Roughing It in the Bush (which was revived and popularized as a result of Atwood's poetic re-creation in The Journals of Susanna Moodie). Finally, in the 1990's, a number of theoretically based analyses of Traill's work appear which analyse and contextualize the scientific passages of Backwoods, interpret the work as a travel narrative and settler's guide, and (harkening back to the 1920's) read the text as an embodiment of the values of an archetypal pioneer woman.

I follow the reception history of The Backwoods of Canada with an in-depth analysis of one of its key paratextual features: the introduction Traill produced for the first edition. Generally overlooked by critics, this introduction is an intriguing piece of writing. Here Traill self-consciously positions herself in terms of gender and class, while marketing her text in a manner which is only partially supported by the work as a whole. Discourses of colonialism and capitalism vie with those of femininity and domesticity as Traill seeks to assure readers of her personal expertise and credibility, and to validate the text which follows as useful – and perhaps even a little entertaining.

Chapters four through seven of my study provide an analysis of what could be considered the meta-genres[12] of Backwoods: travel narrative and settler's guide. I focus most extensively on the travel narrative features of Traill's work, analysing her travelling persona, landscape descriptions and presentation of encounters with the Other – First Nations people, Americans, and the lower-class Scottish and Irish immigrants from whom she carefully distinguishes herself. I then consider the settler's handbook features of her work, one of the most frequently overlooked components of Backwoods. In these sections, Traill most overtly exploits discourses of femininity, domesticity, class and colonialism – sometimes in quite interesting permutations. As well as exploring generic features and conventions, I also investigate the interconnectedness of

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in later sections of this thesis.

[12] Hans Robert Jauss argues that however extensive one's analysis of the "*various* generic aspects of a text . . . such a division does not relieve the critic from posing the question of the 'generic *dominant*' of a work" (81). His "generic *dominant*" corresponds to the concept of meta-genres I raise here.

these genres and their overlapping discursive strategies and discourse threads. As previously indicated, I am interested in the implications of Traill's generic choices in terms of how she structures her text, the rhetorical strategies she employs and the ways in which genre predisposes certain readings and interpretations. I also explore the differing generic conventions of these meta-genres in their nineteenth and twentieth-century contexts.

My next "reading" of Traill's text, in chapter eight, focuses on her use of rational and scientific discourse. The most obvious sites of such material are the detailed descriptions of plants integrated into Backwoods, yet Traill's utilization of scientific discourse to hypothesize about disease, meteorological phenomena and geographical features is equally fascinating. In passages such as the following – prefaced with the qualification that "I regret I know nothing of geology" – she moves from general landscape description into the realm of measurement and scientific theorizing:

> Just below the waterfall I was mentioning there is a curious natural arch in the limestone rock, which at this place rises to a height of ten or fifteen feet like a wall; it is composed of strata of grey limestone, lying one upon the another; the arch seems like a rent in the wall, but worn away, and hollowed, possibly by the action of water rushing through it at some high flood. (106)

Traill's use of the term "curious" in the opening clause of this brief passage is both typical and significant; Marianne Ainley, the critic who has paid the most serious attention to Traill's scientific writing, argues that "her unrecognized forte was her interest in the *process* of science" ("Last in the field?" 28).

In my discussion of the scientific passages and undercurrents of Backwoods, I once again consider the implications as well as conventions of the discursive strategies Traill adopts. For example, does a close textual analysis of Traill's work support Ainley's claim that her deliberate blending of maternal and scientific discourse, her confident naming of unfamiliar species and her integration, rather than marginalization, of "nonwestern scientific information and practices" constitute a subversive challenge to "the paternalistic system of western science"? ("Science" 91, 93). Positioning herself as a scientific inquirer and creating inventories of useful plants, could Traill not be accused of participating in the elite discourse of imperialism in which, as Suzanne Zeller explains, "science was a tool . . . [used] to locate sources of material wealth" and impose a Eurocentric social order in the colonies (56)? Or, following Peterman's lead, should we perhaps read Traill's natural history as "a kind of autobiography" ("Splendid Anachronism" 179) and classify her scientific approach, in Carl Berger's terms, as a "splendid anachronism" (35)?

My categorization of Traill's Backwoods according to generic templates and discursive patterns is intended to serve as an organizational principle for this thesis, rather than a rigid delineation or a reductivist approach to the text, and to preface a series of diverse and interconnected readings. A serious exploration of Traill's utilization of scientific discourse is, for example, impossible without a consideration of the specifically Christian rhetoric which permeates the text.

In the concluding chapter of this study I attempt to synthesize and integrate the readings I have proposed of Traill's text. The result is not a tidy road map of The Backwoods of Canada; rather, it is an attempt to weigh the significance of the various discourses embedded in the text and to provide a holistic consideration of its generic features. I also strive to contextualize and compare the way genre and its corresponding interpretative strategies have predisposed readers to approach and assess Backwoods in significantly different terms over time. Social and historical discourses, as well as generic conventions, I argue, influence both the creation and reception of the text, but to differing degrees and in differing ways.

Before proceeding to an in-depth analysis of Backwoods, I will now provide a brief biographical overview of Traill's life. Given my focus on the construction of the text and the writer's textual personae this may appear theoretically problematic; however, I intend to demonstrate that an awareness of key events and influences in Traill's life, especially in the period of time before the production of the work under analysis, is crucial to an appreciation of the contextual – and extra-textual – constraints placed on her work. Certainly, ignoring the experiences from which Traill drew material and inspiration for her narrative would limit the scope of the multi-facetted appraisal I seek to provide, as would the naïve assumption of a strict correlation between experience (however we may choose to delineate this term) and text. While evidence abounds of Traill's conscious framing of experience in Backwoods, I have discovered no indications of a complete creation or fabrication of events on the writer's part. As Sara Mills suggests in the context of travel writing, the problem is not with autobiographical criticism *per se*, since for very good reasons feminist critics may not be anxious to see the author "disappear," but with the assumption that the "experience of the writer . . . [is] unproblematically displayed and presented in the text, rather than that 'experience' is channeled into and negotiates with pre-existent schemes which are discursive in nature" (Discourses of Difference 39).

I recognize that by devising my own biography of Traill – however brief, and however cautious my approach – I foreground a personal reading of this historical woman and writer

distinct from the textually-constructed self conveyed in The Backwoods of Canada. Yet Traill's textual construction is not a distinct or fixed entity; instead, both the biographical Traill I portray and the autobiographical selves she conveys are subject to further critical interpretation. With this qualification and an awareness of the limitations and the constructed nature of all textual productions, narrative and critical, I will proceed.

Looking into the available details and "facts" of Traill's life story, we begin to understand why many nineteenth and twentieth-century readers have idealized her as an exemplary woman and writer, as well as a model of pioneer virtue. Catharine Parr Traill (née Strickland) survived for more than ninety-seven years, outliving her husband and five of her nine children. The first of her books was published when she was only sixteen; the last when she was ninety-three. After having spent the initial thirty years of her life in the protected environment of an upper-middle class British family, she abruptly moved with her new husband to an isolated area of Upper Canada. There, on a series of rural homesteads, Traill ran a pioneer household, cooking, cleaning, gardening, sewing, making soap, sugar and vinegar, and learning to fulfill numerous tasks for which her genteel upbringing had little prepared her.[13] Over the course of the next fifteen years, she gave birth to nine children, nursed her growing family through a series of illnesses and her husband through bouts of serious depression (while herself suffering from indifferent health), briefly operated a small school, taught her children basic literacy skills, served as a midwife in the local community *and* contributed to the family income by publishing four books and numerous short pieces in magazines and journals.[14] Somehow, she also found the time to make detailed observations of plants, animals and birds, and to befriend members of the local First Nations community.

Traill's personal tragedies included the loss of two infant children (one shortly after birth,

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[13] Admittedly, the insistence of Traill's parents that she and her sisters learn to be self-reliant and responsible, along with instruction from her mother in homemaking skills such as sewing and cooking, served her well in the backwoods of Canada, enabling her to adapt to her new life far more successfully than her older, more aristocratic husband.

[14] In The Frontier and Canadian Letters, Wilfrid Eggleston indicates how impressive Traill's writing career was given the "hostile conditions for the production of literary works in the backwoods country" (73). Given the high cost of postage, shortages of paper (Traill's letters home were often "crossed") and even candles, the disparaging social attitudes towards writers, and the lack of social and cultural stimulation, few individuals pursued writing careers (74-6). "The adverse influence of frontier life, in short, was capable not only of blocking the emergence of native artists, but also of killing off the literary ambitions of experienced writers among the immigrants," Eggleston concludes (73).

the other in the second year of life), a devastating fire which destroyed the family home and most of their possessions (including her books and manuscripts), widowhood after twenty-seven years of marriage (to which she responded by donning mourning for the next fifteen years), and the brutal murder of her son at the hands of two penitentiary prisoners (earning him the dubious fame of being the first prison guard in Canada to be killed on duty). For most of her life in Canada she faced financial hardship, and she and her family depended a great deal on the small amounts of cash she gained through writing, sewing, and preparing collections of flowers, ferns and mosses for sale. Yet, despite hardships which would have driven most people to despair, Traill remained amazingly positive and unselfish throughout her long life. Members of her extended family, including the children of her sister, Susanna, were obviously devoted to her, and the letters she wrote in her final days, at the age of ninety-seven, indicate an intense concern for others and bear witness to the vibrancy of her personality.

Until the recent publication of Charlotte Gray's Sisters in the Wilderness: The Lives of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill, extant biographies of Traill consisted of little more than rewritten accounts of material from The Backwoods of Canada, from the autobiographical essays included in her 1894 collection, Pearls and Pebbles, and from the introduction to the latter text (produced by Traill's niece, Agnes Fitzgibbon). Gray's biography, although written for a popular rather than critical audience, provides fresh perspectives on her life as well as a thoughtful, and even at times provocative, reading of the relationship between Traill and her sister Susanna Moodie. Yet, for the purpose of detailed critical consideration, Traill's extant letters continue to provide some of the richest biographical material currently available. I Bless You in My Heart: Selected Correspondence of Catharine Parr Traill, edited by Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman, includes both a comprehensive selection of her letters and a series of detailed introductions to periods of her life. These introductory sections – which highlight events in her family life and writing career, presenting a multi-facetted portrait of Traill as a writer, a wife and a mother, while raising relevant biographical questions – assisted significantly in the following brief biographical overview.

Catharine Parr (Strickland) Traill (1802-99) was the fifth of eight children – six girls and two boys – born to Thomas and Elizabeth Strickland into what was to become an amazingly literary family. Over the course of the nineteenth century, six of the Stricklands became published writers. Agnes, Catharine's second oldest sister, became the most famous member of the family with the publication of a twelve-volume popular history of The Queens of England (this was actually co-authored with her sister Eliza, whom Carl Ballstadt suggests did most of the

research and writing, but chose to stay out of the literary limelight) and also developed a reputation as a poet.[15] Jane, the fourth daughter, wrote a history of Rome and a biography of her sister Agnes, while Catharine's youngest sister, Susanna (Moodie) published poetry, novels and sketches, as well as her best-known travel/settler's narrative, Roughing It in the Bush. All of the Strickland girls, except for Sara, also worte children's stories. Perhaps inspired by the success of his sisters' publications, and encouraged by Agnes whom he was visiting at the time (Gray 215-16), Traill's younger brother Samuel also produced an account of settler life in Canada, entitled Twenty-Seven Years in Canada West.

As was the case with many pre-twentieth-century women writers, the literary achievements of the Strickland sisters were rooted in their father's idiosyncratic determination to provide his daughters with the kind of solid academic education usually reserved for boys, and the controlled use he allowed the girls to make of an extensive personal library which included annotated books that once belonged to Sir Isaac Newton, a great-uncle of Thomas's first wife.[16] The academic programme he designed for the girls included the study of classics, mathematics, science, literature, geography and history, and probably French and Italian as well (Ballstadt, "Catharine Parr Traill" 1:150). This "masculine" education was not conferred at the expense of more conventional feminine achievements, however: Eliza, Agnes, Jane, Sara, Susanna and Catharine were all required to study "household management, deportment, needlework, sketching, and other skills befitting a lady of the times" (Morris 18). As well as teaching their children scholarly and practical skills, the Strickland parents also insisted on a high degree of self-reliance. Rather than purchasing toys for his children, for example, their father would provide them with the materials and tools to complete a suggested project, and then leave them to "find out the right way" to proceed (Thomas, "The Strickland Sisters" 44). Catharine and her sisters also had to "learn to raise and care for their pets, and monitor their own gardens" (Peterman, "A Tale of Two Worlds" 97). While the girls were encouraged to freely discuss and debate ideas, they were

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[15] Ballstadt explores the professional relationship between the Strickland sisters in detail in his 1965 thesis, "The Literary History of the Strickland Family."

[16] Elaine Showalter explores the close relationships of many women writers with fathers who "supervised their daughters' education" in A Literature of Their Own (62). Traill drew a parallel between the Strickland childhood and that of the Brontes in one of her journals: "Began reading for the second time the life of Charlotte Bronte. There is so much in this book that reminds me of our own early years – were I to write a history of the childhood of the S—to family which I am often prompted to do, how many things there would be that would remind the reader of the early days of the Brontes" (Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman 264).

"never suffered to abandon a point until they understood its meaning" (Susanna Moodie, "Rachel Wilde" 114[17]). As Peterman suggests, "independence, Anglicanism and puritanism" – the "legacy of eighteenth-century middle-class values" – were deeply instilled in all of the Strickland children ("A Tale of Two Worlds" 96).

The fragmentary accounts of Traill's early years which one can glean from brief autobiographical pieces composed near the end of her life suggest that she was a favoured child of her father. Long shared walks through the Suffolk woods and fishing expeditions to the Waveney River apparently nurtured a strong bond between the two, as well as developing a life-long scientific curiosity and environmental[18] sensitivity in Traill. Two of her father's favourite books from this period of time influenced her writing greatly: Izaak Walton's The Compleat Angler, which her father read to her while fishing, became a treasured possession after his death; Gilbert White's The Natural History of Selborne proved so inspirational that Traill later wrote optimistically of her work becoming, like his, "a household book" (Plant Life in Canada xvii).

Although intensely concerned about his daughters' education and liberal in his encouragement of intellectual debate, Thomas Strickland also possessed a strong puritanical streak and maintained a rigid control over the members of his family. Agnes, Catharine's older sister, was chastised by her father for her inclination to write poetry rather than scholarly essays, and Catharine herself recalls secretly writing stories which, when discovered, she was required to tear up and use as curling paper for her hair. Certainly, the output of stories and poems by the Strickland sisters in the years following their father's death suggests a loosening of constraints as well as a financial incentive. Thomas Strickland's illness and death were apparently hastened by financial losses, and although his widow was able to retain the family home, she was not left with sufficient funds to support the family adequately.

At the age of sixteen, Catharine was the youngest Strickland to see her work in print and to receive remuneration for her writing.[19] Published with the assistance of a family friend in

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[17] Although technically a short story, I take the liberty of assuming a strong autobiographical element to this text, as do most critics. I am indebted to Michael Peterman for identifying the association between these lines in Moodie's short story and the attitudes of Traill's father, Thomas Strickland ("A Tale of Two Worlds" 97).

[18] I use the modern term "environmental" here, though "natural history" would probably be more appropriate in a nineteenth-century context. I discuss the conventions of natural history discourse at some length in chapter eight.

[19] She was not, however, the first Strickland to see her work in print, as biographers and

1818, The Tell Tale: An Original Collection of Moral and Amusing Stories, a compilation of children's tales, earned her five guineas (Peterman, "Catharine Parr Traill" 26). This work was followed by more than a dozen books over the next twelve years,[20] along with short stories and poems contributed to the very popular English "annuals" of the 1820's (one of which was co-produced by the Strickland sisters). While most of Traill's published work from this period of time – between her fifteenth and thirty-first birthdays – consists of rather derivative moral stories written for children, several of the texts provide early workings of material revisited in The Backwoods of Canada. The most significant of these, The Young Emigrants, can be seen as an imaginative precursor of Traill's major travel/settler's narrative: written in a similar epistolary form, it provides a somewhat unrealistic yet detailed depiction of pioneer life, and radiates an equally optimistic mood (Peterman, "Catharine Parr Traill" 25). The other works of particular relevance from this early period of Traill's writing career consist of three scientific overviews for children published in 1830 and 1831: Sketches From Nature, Sketchbook of a Young Naturalist and Narratives of Nature. These are interconnected texts, containing a significant amount of overlapping material. Their relevance lies in Traill's detailed descriptions of wildlife and domestic animals observed in the Suffolk countryside, and in the early articulations of one of the themes of The Backwoods of Canada: the concept that in all works of nature we find "the impress of a divine original" (Narratives of Nature 1).

When Catharine Parr Strickland married Thomas Traill in May 1832, she initially appeared to have left her writing and publishing career behind her, just as a few months later she would bid farewell forever to the country of her birth and board a ship bound for Canada. Yet she kept a journal throughout her journey and early years in the colony, and when her growing family faced financial hardship in 1834, she readily resumed her writing career, using this journal and

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critics, including Carl Ballstadt, have generally assumed. Charlotte Gray's research for Sisters in the Wilderness led to the discovery of a poem about Queen Charlotte's death published by Agnes in 1817, the year before the appearance of Traill's first book (22).

[20] Disobedience; or, Mind What Mama Says and Reformation, or the Cousins (1819); Nursery Fables (1821); Little Downy; or, the History of a Field Mouse: A Moral Tale (1822); The Flower-Basket; or, Poetical Blossoms: Original Nursery Rhymes and Tales (1825?); Prejudice Reproved; or, the History of the Negro Toy-Seller and The Young Emigrants; or, Pictures of Life in Canada (1826); The Keepsake Guineas; or, the Best Use of Money and The Stepbrothers: A Tale (1828); Sketches from Nature; or, Hints to Juvenile Naturalists (1830); and Sketchbook of a Young Naturalist; or, Hints to the Students of Nature and Narratives of Nature, and History Book for Young Naturalists (1831).

letters written to family members and friends as source material. The full title of the book – The Backwoods of Canada: Being Letters From the Wife of an Emigrant Officer, Illustrative of the Domestic Economy of British America – the identification of chapters in the published text as "Letter" 1, 2, 3, etc, and a number of epistolary rhetorical features scattered throughout the text have traditionally led critics to assume that the work consists primarily of a compilation of letters sent to friends and relatives. However, some sections of Backwoods bear more resemblance to an edited journal prepared for a public audience than to a series of letters, and an edition of the text recently acquired by Michael Peterman suggests that Traill used her personal journals extensively as she prepared the work for publication. In Peterman's copy, identified on the opening pages as the property of Traill's daughter, Annie Atwood, Traill crossed out the subheading "Letter 1" on the opening page of the main text, and replaced it with the words "Extracts from my diary begun July 1832." Admittedly, the distinction between a diary entry and a letter remains loose. Archival evidence suggests that at times Traill drafted letters in her journal, or copied out portions of letters she wished to preserve before posting them,[21] and we know that Lucy Peel, a contemporary of Traill's who settled in Lower Canada in 1833, posted "letter diaries" home to friends and family in England (Little 1). Yet, as I argue throughout this thesis, Backwoods consists of far more than either a series of letters or an edited journal. Instead, the text should be read as a relatively complex blend of genres and discourses. And since we possess little extant material from the period of Traill's life when she composed the text, we can only surmise about the sources and authorial decisions involved in its production.

Given what we know about her previous successful experiences as a writer, it may seem almost irrelevant to question *why* Traill produced The Backwoods of Canada when she was desperate for a source of income to alleviate the poverty of her growing family. Yet Michael Peterman makes some interesting assumptions in his introduction to the CEECT edition of the text. He speculates that Traill may have been inspired to write Backwoods by her sister and brother-in-law, Susanna and John Moodie, who settled on a piece of land only a mile away from the Traill family home in February of 1834. By that time, Susanna had already begun to publish poetry in Canadian and American journals, and John's book, Ten Years In South Africa: Including A Particular Description Of The Wild Sports Of That Country, had just been submitted

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[21] Evidence of this practice is found in Traill's later journals and a letter she wrote to James and Emma Bird in January 1834 (Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman 39-42), which contains material very similar to that published in letter six of Backwoods. I deal more specifically with the epistolary features of Traill's text in chapter three.

for publication in London (Peterman, Editor's Introduction xxvi). Given the extensive publication of Traill's early work, and the professional attitude she demonstrated towards the placing and publication of her writing during the 1820's,[22] she probably required little encouragement to take pen in hand. Peterman postulates that Traill's experiences helping Susanna adapt to pioneer life may also have prompted her to share her advice with the general public in book form (Editor's Introduction xxvi). In her recently published biography of Traill and Moodie, Gray speculates that Agnes Strickland may have played a role in encouraging Traill to prepare the text of Backwoods, as well, recognizing "that Catharine's letters home would make an attractive publication" (114).[23] We know that Agnes suggested in an earlier letter to Susanna that the two sisters consider editing a Penny Magazine "made up of selections of a useful nature from various authors on subjects of History Natural History Ethics moral and instructive anecdotes etc" and that she negotiated with Traill's publisher on her behalf after the initial publication of Backwoods (Peterman, Editor's Introduction xxxi, xxxvi).

The subtitle Traill appended to letter one of the copy of Backwoods currently held by Michael Peterman – "Extracts from my diary begun July 1832" – and the date given at the beginning of the letter in the first edition of the text, July 18, 1832, clearly indicate a gestation period for the text dating back to the onset of her journey to Canada. Yet whether Traill had any intention, at that point in time, of publishing this journal, or of writing about her experiences for an adult audience (since most, though not all of her previous work had been directed at juvenile readers), we can only surmise. She had achieved moderate success with her publications in the previous fifteen years, receiving financial remuneration for all of her work, and in none of her extant journals or letters does she give any indication of perceiving writing as merely a pastime. Looking back at the nineteenth century from a modern feminist perspective, we might be tempted to assume that marriage and motherhood would mark the end of a writing and publishing career for an upper-middle class woman of her time (although Traill was not pregnant during her ocean

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[22] Traill adopted a very businesslike manner towards the practical exigencies of writing and publishing, submitting and re-submitting manuscripts for publication in a variety of formats, always with the expectation of financial remuneration. In a letter addressed to Susanna in the spring of 1830, for example, Traill writes specifically of the money she hopes to earn for several short stories, and outlines a number of possible outlets for her writing (Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman 32).

[23] Interestingly, Gray adopts the usual assumption that Traill based Backwoods on letters, rather than journal entries or a combination of the two.

crossing, she soon would be); yet there is no indication in her published or archival writings that she expected her writing career to come to an abrupt halt, or felt anything other than satisfaction at being able to contribute to the family income as a married woman.[24]

At the same time, Backwoods – a text marketed as both a guide for prospective emigrants to Canada and a travel narrative – marks a significant shift in Traill's publishing and writing career. Her previous publications had all been in low-status genres: short fictional works and scientific overviews aimed exclusively at children, and stories and poems for popular "annuals" which targeted a female audience. Emigrating to Canada seems to have provided Traill with the impetus and confidence to address her work, for the first time, to a mixed audience of adults, and later in life to move into the realm of adult natural history writing, comparing herself to a writer beloved of her father, Gilbert White. Yet we should not assume that Traill wrote without constraints, or outside of social and generic frameworks: as Alain Viala reminds us, "[t]he choice of subjects and ways of treating them . . . represents [only] a relative freedom with a margin to maneuver equal to whatever is permitted by the prism of the field of possible positions" (264). In Traill's case, "the field of possible positions" was constrained by – to mention just a few biographical and social factors – her gender, cultural milieu, social position, educational background and religious beliefs.

Although Backwoods proved to be popular text, "reissued at least eight times" (Peterman, Editor's Introduction xl) the process of finding a publisher did not prove easy. In a letter written at the end of her life, Traill mentions that the book was "twice rejected" and that "[i]t was considered a mere chance that . . . [it] found any firm bold enough to take the risk of its publication" (Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman 401). Through exhaustive research into the publishing history of Backwoods, Peterman unearthed the first specific mention of the work in the

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[24] Susan Coultrap-McQuin makes a convincing case that nineteenth-century women faced few conflicts as professional writers. In particular, she argues that women writers dealt quite comfortably with editors and publishers, many of whom adopted the pose of the "Gentleman Publisher" who was expected to combine a profit motive with values of public service. Most women writers held equally contradictory motives: while "[e]conomic gain was important . . . their socialization as women had encouraged them to value moral, spiritual, and cultural aspects of life" (44). Since both writers and editors/publishers sought to balance business skills with non-commercial motives, they understood one another and often worked effectively as a team. As well, "[t]he espousal of noncommercialism in the marketplaces seems, paradoxically, to have allowed for the development of some very commercial skills on the part of [women] writers" (45). As I mentioned previously, Traill certainly lacked neither the determination nor the contacts to find publishing outlets for her writing.

records of Traill's publisher, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, a British educational organization which "sought an inexpensive means of putting well-written educational material into the hands of that vast sector of the British public that could not afford to buy the books then available" (Editor's Introduction xxix). In the summer of 1835, the publication supervisor for the society, Charles Knight, informed the Publications Committee "that he had perused a work which had been transmitted to him by Mrs. Traill containing a Journal of her residence in the Back settlements of Canada" (SDUK Papers, 10: 302-3).[25] As Peterman explains in his introduction to the CEECT edition of Backwoods, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge was a logical outlet for Traill's work, and Knight appears to have promoted the book with a reasonable degree of conscientiousness (xxxiii-iv). At the same time, Knight's editing was more than a little heavy-handed – in Peterman's words, he "distorted" the work "in several ways" (xxxiii).

Of more immediate interest to my study, however, is the actual text of Backwoods – and specifically, its underlying generic characteristics and rhetorical structures. Given that Traill set out to produce a publishable text in 1834, and given that she decided to base it on her recent experiences as an emigrant in Upper Canada, what *kind* of text did she produce? How did this text produce knowledge? To what extent is the story of her emigration a product of textual and rhetorical conventions, constraints and choices?

For the purpose of this thesis, I analyse The Backwoods of Canada as it was written, amended and packaged between 1834 and 1836 by Traill and her British editor, Charles Knight, perhaps with the editorial assistance of her sisters Agnes and Jane Strickland.[26] I have relied extensively on the scholarly edition of the text published by the CEECT in 1997, which uses the 1836 first edition as a copy-text. There are a few limitations to this source material, however, and certain gaps in knowledge which can only be bridged speculatively.

First, relatively little archival material has survived from either the period in Traill's life which provided the autobiographical experiences on which the text is based, or the period of time during which she composed and compiled the material which actually appears in the text (I refer here to her journey from Scotland and her early settlement in Upper Canada between 1832 and 1834, and to the year 1834, when she created the text in manuscript form). Relevant biographical

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[25] Again, the term used is "Journal" rather than "Letters."

[26] Since her older sisters edited some of Traill's later works, Gray suggests that they had a hand in editing this text as well (115).

material is limited to one, previously mentioned, extant letter written to James and Emma Bird, dated 7 January 1834 (Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman 39), which echoes letter six in Backwoods, the manuscript of Traill's notebook for 1887-1894, held in the National Archives, which includes a detailed outline for an autobiographical narrative based on her early years in Canada which was never published (TFC, 3:4054-124), and a few short sketches included in Pearls and Pebbles. In one of the pieces from the latter collection, "Sunset and Sunrise On Lake Ontario: A Reminiscence," Traill refers to a diary for 1832 which she apparently still possessed in the 1890's (9), although no trace of it can be found in any of the available archival material. All biographical accounts of Traill's life, therefore, rely extensively on The Backwoods of Canada for source material about her early years in Canada, and we can only surmise about the authorial decisions made in the construction of her text.

An even more significant lacuna, for the purposes of textual analysis, is the absence of extant copies of Traill's manuscript or pre-publication forms of the text. Hence, one has to rely extensively on the first published edition. We know from comments in letters written later in Traill's life that her editor, Charles Knight, made both omissions and additions to the original text during the editing and publishing process. While no records of the omitted material exist, the CEECT edition provides a carefully justified indication of editorial additions made to Traill's work. In this edition, Knight's additions, which were integrated into the first edition, have been deliberately removed from the body of the text.[27] However, material which Traill forwarded in 1835, and which Knight included in an appendix in the first edition – since the text itself was already in the process of being printed – has been integrated into the CEECT text in the form of endnotes printed at the conclusion of each letter/chapter. Authorial additions and corrections made by Traill over the course of her life (luckily, we do have some documentation of these) have either been incorporated into the text, or cited in endnotes. Thus, the CEECT edition provides as accurate a version as possible of the text as Traill conceived it, indications of how her perspective

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[27] Items such as a digest of contents which opened each letter, but were obviously not written by Traill, a statistical appendix, and a series of woodcuts incorporated into the text by Knight, are not reprinted in the CEECT text. Michael Peterman, the editor of this edition, argues that the digest of contents and appendices added to Traill's text effectively changed it from "an account chiefly written for women . . . to one that aimed at emigrants of both sexes and all classes" and that the woodcuts "deflected information from them [the letters which comprise Traill's text] by providing a series of visual images that had little relevance to what the author was verbally depicting as her actual experiences" (Editor's Introduction lviii). I would suggest that the question of Traill's intended audience is less clear-cut than Peterman implies, an issue I will consider in some depth in the chapter dealing with her introduction to Backwoods.

on certain material included in the original changed at later points in her life (and how she, presumably, would have changed the original, had that been possible), and a relatively complete version of the published text as it appeared in 1836.

Although having Traill's manuscript available for analysis would obviously be fascinating, for the purposes of exploring the published text as a generic artefact and considering its reception history, the CEECT edition proves more than satisfactory.

In summary, my goal in this study is to broaden the discussion of Catharine Parr Traill's work, and specifically to propose a re-evaluation of The Backwoods of Canada – not in traditional evaluative terms (*is this 'good' literature?*), but as a fascinating and complex textual response to immigrant life in the "New World" of pre-Confederation Upper Canada produced by a nineteenth-century woman. As Antony Easthope reminds us, "[l]iterary value is a function of the reader/text relation, and cannot be defined outside the history in which texts – some more than others – demonstrably have functioned intertextually to give a plurality of different readings transhistorically" (59). Such a plurality of readings is what I propose to provide.

CHAPTER 2

The Backwoods of Canada as Cultural Artefact: A Reception History of the Text

I: The "Horizon of Expectations"

The reception history of The Backwoods of Canada is a fascinating one, reflecting the social mores and literary tastes of the shifting interpretative community of Traill's readers and critics as well as the corresponding generic conventions and expectations placed on the text. As Hans Jauss so aptly explains, a "literary work is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period. It is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence. It is much more like an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers" (21). Accordingly, the goal of a reception history should be the "reconstruction of the horizon of expectations, in the face of which a work was created and received in the past" (Jauss 28). The "horizon of expectations" is, as Paul de Man explains, an open-ended concept devised by Jauss which stems from an assumption that

> . . . the historical consciousness of a given period can never exist as a set of openly stated or recorded prepositions. . . . The term, which derives from Husserl's phenomenology of perception in its application to the experience of consciousness, implies that the condition of existence of a consciousness is not available to this consciousness in a conscious mode, just as, in a perception, conscious attention is possible only upon a background, or horizon, of distraction. Similarly, the "horizon of expectation" brought to a work of art is never available in objective or even objectifiable form, neither to its author nor to its contemporaries or later recipients. (Introduction xii)

Yet, although not strictly objectifiable, a reconstruction of the "horizon of expectation" of a work "enables one . . . to pose questions that the text gave an answer to, and thereby to discover how the contemporary reader could have viewed and understood the work" (Jauss 28).

In my analysis of the horizon of expectations of Backwoods I follow Sarah Mills' example, distinguishing between two major sites of extra-textual influence: "discourses which affect the production of a text and those which affect its reception" (Discourses of Difference 31).

Although these categories are far from exclusive (for example, discursive influences on the composition of a text – such as socially constructed views of femininity – may influence both its production and reception, as is the case with Backwoods), Mills' delineation provides a useful organizational framework. In this chapter I focus exclusively on the reception history of Backwoods, though I include a brief analysis of later editions of the text within this context, assuming that editorial changes to the work can be read as indicators of its initial and on-going reception history. Discourses which affected the initial production of the text, such as the ideological basis of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, which sponsored the publication of Traill's work, are explored in chapter three, "Predisposing the Reader: The Title and Introduction of The Backwoods of Canada."

As well as analysing specific indicators of the text's reception history, I also attempt to delineate the interconnected interpretative communities which have recreated Traill's work over the last hundred and seventy years. One of the implicit questions of this enquiry is why Backwoods has received more critical attention in the past ten years than in the previous century and a half. Obviously, the growth in academic literary studies – especially Canadian and, more specifically, nineteenth-century Canadian studies – as well as the ongoing search among critics and teachers for novel subjects of analysis and research, play a key role in the revival of interest in the text. Yet this does not adequately account for the critical attention Backwoods has received; by comparison, Twenty-Seven Years in Canada West, a settlers' narrative produced by Samuel Strickland, Traill's brother, which received positive reviews and sold well at the time of its publication (Gray 217), has remained largely unread and unnoticed since it initially went out of print in the nineteenth century.[28]

Following Jauss' lead, I seek the answer to my query in the ability of Traill's text to pose a series of relevant, yet shifting, questions and answers. As he explains,

> . . . a past work survives not through eternal questions, nor through permanent answers, but through the more or less dynamic relationship between question and answer, between problem and solution, which can stimulate a new understanding and can allow the resumption of the dialogue between past and present. (70)[29]

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[28] Strickland's text was reissued in 1970 by M.G. Hurtig, but its reappearance failed to spark a revival of critical interest. As Carl Klinck suggests, Strickland's "[e]arnest but somewhat old-fashioned adherence to literary conventions . . . [results] in passages of stiff exposition, awkward rhetoric, stock diction, or narrative which lacks immediacy" (Introduction x).

[29] Jauss builds on the critical theories of Roland Barthes here, particularly the latter's

The questions a work provokes in subsequent readers, and "the answer or meaning expected," are often not foregrounded in the historical text; they may "have been ambivalent or have remained altogether indeterminate in the original work" (Jauss 69). With reference to Roland Barthes, Jauss suggests that the "implicit question . . . in fact is what first awakens our present interest in the past work," yet this question "can be obtained only through the answer that the aesthetic object, in its present materialisation, holds or seems to hold ready for us" (68-9). Hence, a new, or later critical reading may allow "something to be found [in a text] that one previously could not have sought in it" (35).

Yet by what means might one access the implicit questions posed by a text such as Backwoods to generations of readers? Where should one begin a broad, theoretically-based and historically-sensitive analysis of the manner in which this work has been read and interpreted, particularly in literary and aesthetic terms? As Barbara Herrnstein Smith suggests, one of the major difficulties inherent in any re-creation and analysis of the critical reception of a text is the complexity and range of the factors involved. These include

> . . . the innumerable implicit acts of evaluation performed by those who, as may happen, publish the work, purchase, preserve, display, quote, cite, translate, perform, allude to, and imitate it; the more explicit but casual judgments made, debated, and negotiated in informal contexts by readers and by all those others in whose personal economies the work, in some way, "figures"; and the highly specialized institutionalized forms of evaluation exhibited in the more or less professional activities of scholars, teachers, and academic or journalistic critics – not only their full-dress reviews and explicit rank-orderings, evaluations, and revaluations, but also such activities as the awarding of literary prizes, the commissioning and publishing of articles about certain works, the compiling of anthologies, the writing of introductions, the construction of department curricula, and the drawing up of class reading lists. (25)

Recognizing the range and significance of the factors in this impressively comprehensive list is vital; yet assessing all of these would prove impractical, if not impossible.

Hence, I have narrowed my discussion in this chapter to a consideration of the following external indicators of textual reception: advertisements and reviews, references to the text in personal correspondence and memoirs, the inclusion of selections from Backwoods in compilations, critical appraisals, later reprints and editions of the text, and inter-textual references or allusions. In my analysis of the nineteenth-century reception of the text, I discuss all of the

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analysis of Racine's work (Jauss 67-8 and 204, footnotes #57-59).

above; in the twentieth-century section, I refer only to significant editions, a selection of reviews and influential critical responses to Traill's work.[30] Paratextual features of Backwoods, such as the title, title page and author introduction – all of which contribute to our understanding of the interpretative community of readers envisaged by Traill and her editor – are explored in chapter three. Chapters four through seven of this thesis provide a focused analysis of the generic conventions and templates foregrounding the creation and reception of the text, and will add a further dimension to this composite, though inevitably incomplete, portrayal of the "horizon of expectations" of The Backwoods of Canada.

II: 19c Reception

For a number of practical reasons, the initial reception history of Backwoods has been the hardest to recreate and remains, at best, fragmentary and tentative. Historical and critical overviews of the nineteenth century abound, but these provide no more than a backdrop to social and cultural norms, while I am interested in a particular text and its readership. The limited primary sources available for this section of my study consist of archival material concerning Traill's publisher and editor (in which one can locate only a few references to the editing and printing of the text), announcements and reviews from 1836, revisions and editorial additions to subsequent editions of the text, excerpts from Backwoods reprinted in other works, references to Traill's work in biographical and historical overviews (increasingly common towards the latter part of the nineteenth century), a few allusions to the work in Traill's private papers and correspondence, and passing references in other published works. More indirectly, a number of travel/settler's narratives appear to have been influenced by Traill's text: most obviously, the two works subsequently written by members of her family – Susanna Moodie's Roughing It in the Bush and Samuel Strickland's Twenty-Seven Years in Canada West – but also works such as Emily Beavan's Sketches and Tales Illustrative of Life in the Backwoods of New Brunswick.[31]

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[30] An analysis of material from Backwoods selected for inclusion in anthologies of Canadian literature – using Carole Gerson's research in "Anthologies and the Canon of Early Canadian Women Writers" as a starting point – might also prove relevant, but remains beyond the scope of this chapter.

[31] Anne Innis Dagg, in "Canadian Voices of Authority: Non-Fiction and Early Women Writers," indicates that Backwoods was followed by eight books dealing with immigration to

Michael Peterman includes a carefully documented overview of the initial reception history of Backwoods in his introduction to the CEECT edition of the text, an invaluable resource which provides a starting point for my analysis here. Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent references to Peterman in this chapter are to the editor's introduction.

Let me begin my re-creation of the nineteenth-century reception history of Traill's text with a few concrete details concerning its initial printing.[32] After a process of consultation and editing over the course of 1835, The Backwoods of Canada appeared in print in January 1836, bundled together as Parts 57 and 58 of the Library of Entertaining Knowledge. This series, published under the auspices of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, was edited by Charles Knight and printed by William Clowes of London.[33] Backwoods was sold at a cost of 2s each for the two parts, or 4s.6d for a one-volume, cloth bound issue (Peterman xxxiv). As Simon Eliot explains, "the price of a book is a very revealing piece of information. According to circumstances, it can suggest something of the costs of materials and production, the nature and size of the publication, the length of the print run and often, and most important, the market at which the book was aimed" (59). At a cost of 2s, each of the two parts of Backwoods falls within what Eliot identifies as the lowest of three price categories (texts priced from 1d-3s6d), though the combined one-volume text moves into the mid-price group (3s7d-10s) (60).[34] Eliot's figures for 1835 suggest that Traill's work fell into the most common price category for full-length books (62). (As a point of comparison, the conventional price for a three volume novel at the time was

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Canada, written by women, over the next hundred years (118). In her extensive research into early women's writing in Canada, Carole Gerson unearthed no non-fiction accounts of pioneer life published before Backwoods (Canada's Early Women Writers 10). As I suggest in my analysis of Backwoods as a settler's guide in chapter seven, Traill appears to have recognized a viable publishing opportunity and created a limited niche market for such works.

[32] My key source here is Peterman's aforementioned introduction, though I have also consulted the papers of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge at University College, London, as well as scholarly accounts of this organization.

[33] For an account of the SDUK and of Traill's relationship with her editor/publisher, see chapter three of this thesis.

[34] Eliot uses nineteenth-century trade journals to identify book prices. While these journals are unrivalled as sources of information, they are not without limitations, "offer[ing] an interesting and important but far from random sample of publications. Trade journals will, inevitably, tend to concentrate on those publications which would be sold through booksellers and other more or less conventional outlets" (60).

31s6d, almost eight times the cost of Traill's text – Elliot 63). In this context, Backwoods was very competitively priced, targeted to appeal to a broad rather than elite market.[35]

Certainly, the printing and publication of Backwoods was not an overly modest venture: eleven thousand copies were produced in the initial print run,[36] followed by at least eight reissues over the course of the next twenty years (Peterman xli). In 1846, Knight published a newly edited version of Backwoods which was then reprinted and repackaged along with a text on the Oregon territory, and – in the hands of a different publisher – bundled with a text on the Pacific Northwest in 1862. Backwoods was also translated twice in these initial years: into German in 1837 and French in 1843 (Peterman xl-xli). The existence of multiple issues and editions attests to the commercial viability of the text, indicating that it effectively found and sustained a significant reading audience for more than twenty years after its initial publication.[37] The only obvious blot on the recorded nineteenth-century publishing history of Backwoods is the fact that William Clowes and Sons, the company which oversaw the initial printing of the text, was left with 2,802 unsold copies in 1846.[38] However, as Michael Peterman suggests, these were probably sold to the London bookseller, Michael A. Nattali, who subsequently reissued them under his imprint (xl).

In order to assess the initial impact of Backwoods, I will now focus on the announcements and reviews which appeared in early 1836. The publication of Traill's work was marked by brief notices in two London papers, the True Sun and the St. James Chronicle, on January 15 and 16, 1836 (Peterman lxv). Following this, as was common practice among nineteenth-century publishers, sections from the text were reprinted by Traill's editor, Charles Knight, in an inexpensive weekly journal which he edited under the auspices of the SDUK – the

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[35] This market is likely to have been larger than indicated by the number of copies sold. As with most SDUK publications, a significant number of copies would have been purchased by Mechanics' Institutes and lending libraries, rather than individuals. I discuss the purpose and publishing policies of the SDUK and Mechanics' Institutes in chapter three.

[36] This appears to have been a fairly typical print run for the series. According to Monica Grobel, an average twelve thousand five hundred copies were sold of each text in the Library of Entertaining Knowledge series (679).

[37] I am not, of course, suggesting that Backwoods failed to find a readership after these initial editions, merely indicating that the work maintained a relatively high profile from its publication in 1836 through the 1860's.

[38] Peterman acquired this information from the Ledger Book of William Clowes and Company, 1846-1862, p. 35 and 44, held in the Clowes Museum in Beccles, Suffolk (lxvi, footnote #54).

Penny Magazine – on January 16th. Not a review in any formal or evaluative sense of the word, this reformatting of a lengthy passage from letter ten of Backwoods served as an announcement cum advertisement for the text, which Knight identified as "From the 'Backwoods of Canada,' by the Wife of an Emigrant British Officer. Just published in the 'Library of Entertaining Knowledge'." By selecting this particular passage to reprint, which he entitled "The Canadian Indians," Knight highlighted Traill's descriptions of First Nations' people, one of the distinctly travel narrative features of the text and an aspect which a reader might be unlikely to expect based on the work's title or the introduction which Traill provided (features which I explore in some depth in the next chapter).[39] This account of "Indians" reprinted from Backwoods is quite diverse, encompassing observations about their trading practices, generalizations about their disposition, an account of a boy whom Traill characterizes as a "sort of Indian Flibbertigibbet," praise for their "scrupulous . . . observance of the Sabbath" and an empathetic description of a woman identified as "the hunter Peter's squaw." Knight also reprinted one of the woodcuts he commissioned for the original text, a drawing of two "papouses" who look to be of considerable size and age and, rather comically, seem to be glancing with some anxiety at a very friendly dog (24).[40] The overall impression conveyed by Knight's announcement in the Penny Magazine was that Traill was a sensitive observer of culture and customs and that Backwoods would provide a lively and varied account of the Indigenous people of Canada.

This announcement was followed by three major reviews. Published in English and Scottish journals, these articles provide more than just an elite response to Traill's work. As Reina Lewis suggests in her study of nineteenth-century women's writing, reviews "constitute part of the social reality of the texts, contributing to how they were read . . . . the periodical press was constitutive, rather than simply reflective, of Victorian opinion (on cultural, political and social issues)" (31). Reviewers normally wrote anonymously,[41] employing an editorial "we" and positioning themselves as "guardians and inculcators of artistic, ethical, and cultural standards, thus confirming and perpetuating the unconscious assumption that the Victorian views of gender, class, and morality were not ideological, but natural, not relative to nineteenth-century England,

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[39] In contrast, two of the three major reviews of Backwoods published in the months which followed downplayed or ignored the travel narrative features of the text.

[40] The Prospero facsimile edition of Backwoods includes this illustration on p. 165.

[41] At least until the 1860's, when – as Nicola Thompson explains – identifying reviewers become a more common practice (11).

but trans-historical" (Nicola Thompson 4).[42] During the 1830's, and increasingly towards mid-century, England was awash with periodicals aimed at an expanding reading public: a wide range of weekly, monthly and quarterly publications (varying in terms of cost, quality and specialization) were produced and consumed in households where reading journals or newspapers had become a daily norm (Lewis 30-1). The three weekly journals which printed full reviews of Backwoods – the Literary Gazette, the Spectator and the Athenæum – were all well established and reputable, falling into a category of texts identified by Walter Houghton as concerned primarily "with the formation of opinion" rather than the provision of entertainment (8). The last of these, the Athenæum, was particularly prestigious, often described as "the single most important literary periodical of Victorian times" (Nicola Thompson 9).

The first full-length review of Backwoods appeared in the London Literary Gazette on January 23, 1836. The Literary Gazette, which in spite of its somewhat misleading name extended its scope far beyond literary reviews and concerns, was not London's most significant weekly journal, yet its tone was learned and its content sometimes quite influential.[43] Of the three full-length reviews of Traill's work, this is the shortest and appears to be the least carefully composed. Most of the article consists of extensive quotations from Backwoods: only ten percent of the text (227 of the total 2373 words) was actually written by the reviewer. (Admittedly, quoting large sections of a work was standard practice in nineteenth-century reviews. Still, by comparison, in the two other major reviews of Traill's work the reviewers produced 640 and 543 words respectively: 24% and 20% of the total articles[44]).

As well as being the shortest, the Literary Gazette review is also the least positive. Like most reviews, it sets out "to place the literary work in a certain framework in order to come to terms with it . . . to label, name, and put the work in context before it can proceed to analyse and

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[42] The editorial practices of writing anonymously, or using a pseudonym, and of employing a generic "we" can also be linked, as Kelly Mays suggests, to "the corporate character of the periodical text" in Victorian England (167).

[43] For example, the Literary Gazette printed accounts of a number of important scientific lectures in the field of fossil and dinosaur research during the 1840's and 50's (Cadbury 241, 287, 353).

[44] The exact word counts are as follows:
Literary Gazette review: 2373 words in total, 2146 quoted, 227 reviewer's words (10%).
Spectator review: 2683 words in total, 2140 quoted, 543 reviewer's words (20%).
Athenæum review: 2674 words in total, 2034 quoted, 640 reviewer's words (24%).

evaluate it" (Nicola Thompson 10). Perhaps taking his/her[45] cue from Knight's announcement in the Penny Magazine the week before, or from publicity material forwarded by Traill's editor, the reviewer begins by contextualizing Backwoods within the Library for Entertaining Knowledge series: "It is a long time since we have seen any issue of the Library . . ." (51). After this neutral opening, the anonymous reviewer begins to disparage the text: ". . . and we do not think the present volume one calculated to bring its operations vividly into public recollection." Backwoods, s/he proceeds to inform us, starts off "smartly enough" and is "full of promise" but the "vivacity soon disappears" and the factual material which follows fails to "contribute in any important measure to increase the knowledge already in the possession of every inquirer" (51).

The reviewer's allusion to the over-abundance of material on emigration available in the mid-1830's is significant, and is reinforced by statements in the two more positive reviews Backwoods received. Knowing that Traill choose to write for a potentially saturated market – yet one with demonstrated commercial possibilities – raises interesting questions about her approach to her audience and her material, as well as Knight's choice of this text for his series.[46] In my analysis of Traill's introduction in the next chapter, I argue that she consciously positioned Backwoods for a potential readership, stressing the uniqueness of her perspective as a woman and the appeal of her work for both armchair travellers and emigrants. Traill and her editor were undoubtedly aware of the danger of having her text summarily dismissed as yet another emigration handbook claiming to provide an authoritative account of conditions in British North America, while in reality proffering little more than familiar advice and predictable anecdotes. By all indications, the author of the London Literary Gazette review interpreted Backwoods in just such terms, though s/he does admit that although the text includes no new material, it would be possible for an emigrant to "obtain some useful information from the work" (51). The

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[45] I deliberately emphasize the indeterminate gender of these writers because both men and women produced reviews for nineteenth-century journals. Nicola Thompson makes a convincing case that when analysing such reviews we should be more interested in gendered perspectives than in gender *per se*: "It seems more productive to examine the operations of reviewers' preconceptions about gender in literary reviewing than to focus (or speculate, in the case of the numerous anonymous articles) on the sex of the individual reviewer" (13).

[46] A perusal of the minutes of the Entertaining Knowledge [series] Committee indicates that a number of proposals from writers were considered and rejected. In particular, a proposal from a Mr. Picken for a work with obvious similarities to Backwoods – a text "which should serve as a guide to Emigrants to the British Colonies in North America" was submitted for consideration at least twice, yet was not accepted for publication (20 November 1832, Minutes of the Entertaining Knowledge Committee 61).

reviewer also suggests, paraphrasing a sentence from Traill's introduction, that Backwoods may "afford some amusement to those whose purpose is to stay at home."[47]

After this initial assessment of Backwoods – taking Traill's work to task for its lack of novelty and vivacity – the Literary Gazette reviewer briefly outlines the course of the journey described in the book and then provides a series of long quoted passages touching upon such diverse topics as Yankee manners and expressions, Upper Canada's bad roads, the difficulty of acquiring provisions, the Traills' house-raising bee and the irritating nature of mosquitoes and black flies. These selections, drawn from four letters in the middle of Backwoods, focus largely on the discomforts and difficulties of pioneering. Although Traill's characteristic cheerfulness surfaces on occasion, the overall impression and tone is more negative than that suggested by the work as a whole. Completely absent are Traill's enthusiastic descriptions of scenery, her detailed accounts of plants and animals and her empathetic anecdotes of First Nations people. Instead we are provided with material such as tame witticisms about backwoods cooking: for example, she poses the rhetorical question, "What think you of a rice pudding seasoned plentifully with pepper, mustard, and may be, a little rappee or prince's mixture added by way of sauce?" Although in that particular passage, Traill writes of traditionally feminine domestic concerns, in general the Literary Gazette review places little emphasis on her gender. In the opening paragraph we are informed that Backwoods "is full of promise as to teaching females" and a descriptive passage is identified as "our countrywoman's picture," but no further mention is made to either Traill's gender or to the supposedly feminine nature of her perspective, although Traill emphasizes these qualities in the introduction to her text, and elsewhere.

The Literary Gazette reviewer's less than enthusiastic response to the selections s/he chooses to quote and to Traill's text as a whole is summed up in a rather sarcastic conclusion: "These extracts will suffice to afford a fair idea of the volume; and we have only to add, that we have selected the most descriptive and novel passages we could pick out of 'the bush'" (52). The rest of Backwoods is evidently less impressive in the reviewer's eyes, though one may speculate as to whether the reviewer actually read Traill's book in its entirety, since quoted passages are drawn from a section of less than sixty pages.

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[47] Traill writes in her introduction that, "[f]or those who, without intending to share in the privations and dangers of an emigrant's life, have a rational curiosity to become acquainted with scenes and manners so different from those of a long civilised country, it is hoped that this little work will afford some amusement"(5). Traill's concluding phrase, "and inculcate some lessons not devoid of moral instruction" is not referred to in the review, however.

The Literary Gazette review must have appeared harsh to Charles Knight, Traill's editor, and I assume that he responded with pleasure and relief to the longer, more positive review of Backwoods which appeared two weeks later in the Spectator of London. The Spectator, a popular English "family journal" – i.e. one from which "selected excerpts were often read out loud" (Nicola Thompson 9) – provided a far more congenial reception for Traill's text, praising it as "equally delightful and instructive" (133). And, as we might expect from such a journal, the reviewer emphasizes Traill's gender. Backwoods, we are informed in the opening paragraph, "is written by a lady . . . a delicate, refined, and accomplished female, who has cheerfully sacrificed the comforts and pleasures of her native country, and the ties of kindred and friendship, to share with her husband the hardships and privations of a settler's life" (133). The published "letters" of the "fair authoress" are the "gracefully written" products "of an elegant and cultivated mind, in which sensibility and a love of the beautiful approaching to enthusiasm, are admirably blended with good sense and sound practical views" (133). After quoting a section from Traill's introduction to Backwoods, the reviewer emphasizes the relevance of the text "to the female members of the families of . . . colonists" (133).

In spite of the attention drawn to Traill's gender and potentially female audience in the opening paragraphs of this review, the passages selected for inclusion cover a range of topics and styles: an evocative description of a November storm; a dialogue between two speakers, one of whom functions as a naïve character foil for a worldlier individual who expresses Traill's values and narrative perspective, pronouncing on the necessity of hard work and self-sacrifice; a section dealing with "the necessary qualifications of a settler's wife"; an optimistic account of economic development; and a passage in which Traill writes of her love for Canada, explaining that she is "as happy in . . . [her] humble log-house as if it were courtly hall or bower." The Spectator reviews ends with what Peterman describes as "a paean to the new world" (xxxiv) in which the reviewer reflects metaphorically on the contrasts between "the melancholy musing of old age and decay" (typified by Great Britain) and the "bright anticipations of youth" (exemplified by British North America).

The most significant question arising from the Spectator review is one of sincerity: was this glowing account of Backwoods perhaps dictated by Traill's editor? "Puffery," the marketing practice of placing enthusiastic reviews for newly published works was a common, though far from universal, practice in nineteenth-century England. According to Royal Gettmann, publishers defended puffery on the grounds that with "a bit of pressure" potential readers would become "book buyers" (60). Seemingly, the reading public needed to be enticed into purchasing books,

and since the practice worked, with only limited coercion, it was deemed acceptable. Based on the material I have located, I cannot provide a definitive answer as to whether the Spectator review presents an unbiased or unsolicited response to Backwoods. The highly laudatory tone of the reviewer's introductory comments – with the possible exception of the phrase "The reader will bear in mind, we quote from letters" which seems to ask us, tentatively, to excuse some informality of style or hastiness of composition – certainly appears excessive to a modern reader. Yet the inclusion of a variety of passages from Backwoods suggests a careful reading of Traill's work – assuming, of course, that these quoted passages were not provided to the reviewer.

Although not as enthusiastic as the Spectator article, the third major review of Backwoods was undoubtedly the most significant. It was printed in the Athenæum, a well-respected journal with a wide circulation and a reputation for printing honest and balanced, rather than promotional reviews,[48] and reprinted in both Canadian and American papers (the Montreal Gazette of April 23, 1836 and the Philadelphia Museum Of Foreign Literature, Science and Art #28, 1836). Like the Spectator review, this one begins by contextualizing Backwoods within the popular genre of settlers' guides. The reviewer satirizes works which provide either "stirring anecdotes" of lions and snakes or "rose-coloured pictures of life and scenery . . . [and] would have us believe the wilderness a perfect park" (138). In contrast, Traill's "little book," which delineates the experiences of one "obviously endowed with life's best blessings – an observant eye, joined to a cheerful and thankful heart," we are assured, "belongs to the *juste milieu*" (138).

The selections quoted in the Athenæum article follow a somewhat different pattern than either of the other reviews. To begin with, the reviewer quotes at some length from letters four and five of Backwoods, sections of the text which deal with Traill's experiences before arriving at the site of her backwoods home. Significantly, the material quoted focuses on interesting and entertaining anecdotes rather than practical advice about pioneering. The range of content in the passages quoted in this review is also broader, covering such diverse topics as burial grounds, clay ovens, picturesque spinning-wheels, the interior of a log cabin, a house-raising bee, a good-humoured account of difficulties which arose during the construction of their house, and a long section from letter thirteen describing some of Traill's acquaintances among the local First

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[48] As Nicola Thompson explains, "[p]art of the journal's reputation stemmed from its claim to be rigorously fair and independent in literary criticism at a time when many journals succumbed to the practice of 'puffery', producing flattering reviews that pandered slavishly to publishing houses or friends" (9). In the title to his study of the Athenæum, Leslie Marchand refers to the magazine as "A Mirror of Victorian Culture."

Nations people.[49] In general, the passages reprinted in the Athenæum review are also more carefully crafted and more stylistically effective than those selected by the other reviewers. The narrative persona Traill conveys in these passages is an observant and lively interpreter of events, far less didactic than the one suggested by the Spectator review, and less inclined to make self-consciously witty statements than the author portrayed in the Literary Gazette article.

In his/her summation, the Athenæum reviewer praises Backwoods for its "spirit and truth." Significantly less emphasis is placed on Traill's gender here than in the Spectator piece, though many of the discursive structures employed by the reviewer indirectly attribute conventionally feminine qualities to both the author and the text. (For example, we are informed that in this "little book," Traill, the "delicately nurtured" writer "finds compensation for the difficulties and rudenesses of an emigrant's lot in the strange and beautiful natural objects which surround her new home").

Apart from these three major reviews (and a reprint of the Athenæum piece in two North American journals), Peterman located only two other references in print to Backwoods in 1836, the year of its publication. On the 27th of February, selections from letters fourteen and fifteen of the text were printed in Chambers's Edinburgh Journal,[50] a publication which – in line with the ideals of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge – sought "to include the poor in its educating mission" (Nicola Thompson 9).[51] The selections from Backwoods are introduced by two relatively neutral sentences:

> The following gleanings, illustrative of the arrangements of the settlers and their families in Upper Canada, are from a work just published, entitled "The Backwoods of Canada," and forming a volume of the Library of Entertaining Knowledge. The writer is the wife of an emigrant officer. (38)

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[49] In fact, almost half of the quoted material in the Athenæum review consists of descriptions of First Nations individuals and cultural practices, and a personal account of a visit Traill paid to an Indian camp. Generically, the selections are rooted in the tradition of ethnographic descriptions commonly found in travel narratives.

[50] In the Works Cited, I refer to both this article in the Chambers's Edinburgh Journal and the notice in Tait's Literary Bulletin For April as reviews for the sake of easy identification, though they are not reviews in a twenty-first century use of the term.

[51] The Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, launched in 1832, was very similar in terms of aims to the Penny Magazine, in which Backwoods was initially advertised. Both publications were aimed at middle-class readers and sought to provide a "panoramic program of instruction" for their readers (Altick 333).

The passages which follow are drawn from three sections of Traill's text and, as one might expect in an journal with an "educating mission," are didactic in tone, emphasizing the characteristics of an ideal settler's wife and outlining – through the voice of a resident clergyman – some of the "trials and shifts" a settler's family might face during the first few years in rural Canada. Though different from the passages included in other reviews, these selections are reminiscent of those in the Spectator article in terms of tone and general content.

The final journalistic reference to Backwoods from 1836 takes the form of a brief statement in Tait's Literary Bulletin For April. In a concluding summary of new works, the reviewer describes a book by Dr. John Davy, The Civil War in Portugal, as the "most valuable and interesting book of last month . . . and pleasant enough reading withal." Following this statement, Traill's book is introduced and assessed: "So is the Backwoods of Canada; for it is written by a lady, who has set a stout heart to a steep hill, in encountering Life in the wilds; and who, by spirit, activity, and good humour, has surmounted her difficulties, or converted them into pleasantries" (272).

Based on these reviews, "gleanings" and announcements, what impressions would a potential reader in 1836 have gained of Traill's work? Most prominently, each of these reviewers implicitly categorizes Backwoods as a settler's handbook. The text's most consistently emphasized feature is the advice offered to potential emigrants to Canada, especially female members of colonists' families. For most nineteenth-century reviewers, Traill's gender appears to have been both a distinctive and marketable feature of Backwoods. In a competitive market, her feminine perspective differentiated her work from other settler's handbooks and because a number of the concerns in her text were domestic, she embodied, rather than challenged, accepted norms of feminine behaviour.[52] Another significant aspect of Traill's work in these reviewers' eyes was the positive attitude conveyed in her descriptions of pioneer life. This optimistic perspective was inevitably linked to the author's personality, sometimes to the extent that the reviewers seemed to be responding to Traill as if they knew her, rather than to the work she had written.

After these initial reviews, indicators of the reception and possible impact of Backwoods become scarcer. One indirect indication of the text's popularity was the appearance of a number of additional "sketches" written by Traill in the late 1830's and 1840's. Linked by style and

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[52] As Nicola Thompson explains, "[f]or the most part, [nineteenth-century] literary critics admired and endorsed writing by women that formed an extension of their domestic role" (16).

content to Backwoods, these pieces appeared in popular British and North American journals such as Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, Sharpe's London Magazine, the Home Circle and the Anglo-American Magazine. Yet, publishers were not sufficiently impressed by these sketches to produce a book-length companion text to Backwoods, which had been Traill's desire. During the late 1830's, when the Traills' financial situation was particularly desperate, Agnes Strickland attempted to find a publisher for her sister's new work. When this proved impossible, she divided the text, selling individual sketches to magazines (Peterman and Ballstadt, Introduction to Forest and Other Gleanings 7).[53]

Michael Peterman has tracked down a number of references to Backwoods in personal correspondence and memoirs from the mid-nineteenth century, all of which attest to its popularity and influence. The most positive of these comes from the Reverend George Wilson Bridges, who claimed in a privately published memoir that Traill's text saved his life by enticing him to leave Jamaica and move to Canada (Peterman xlii). In a personal letter to Traill, F. Lawson, a carriage maker, wrote that his family's copy of Backwoods "was highly prized . . . [and] was read and read by all us boys" (Peterman xlii-iii). Agnes Strickland, Traill's sister, also passed on accolades for the work, recounting how Colonel Blois, an "aid de camp" to Sir John Colborne, former lieutenant governor of Upper Canada, praised Backwoods for providing "a beautiful picture of life in Canada" (Peterman xlii). Yet none of this archival material, nor the other testimonials Peterman has located, provides more than a fairly general, superficial response to Traill's text.

A further indicator of the influence of Backwoods can be found in the inclusion, probably unauthorized, of sections from Traill's work in two books on emigration: James Inches' Letters on Emigration to Canada (1836) and N.P. Willis' Canadian Scenery Illustrated, volume 2 (1842). Inches quotes a passage from letter eight of Backwoods which deals with seasonal activities related to land clearing and the lengthy process involved in securing a good harvest, but then proceeds to dismiss Traill's text as "a publication far too favourable towards encouraging Emigration" (90). More positively, N. P. Willis's quotes quite extensively from Traill's text in Canadian Scenery, introducing her work as follows:

> We have presented the views of almost every class of observers on this interesting country; but there yet remains unquoted an observer of the difficulties, toils, and trials to which woman is subjected in Canada; and from her admirable, graphic and womanly record we make large

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[53] These sketches have been recently published in Forest and Other Gleanings: The Fugitive Writings of Catharine Parr Traill.

> extracts. The book is the "Backwoods of Canada," and the authoress the wife of an emigrant officer. (2:58)

After having alluded three times to Traill's gender in this brief introduction, Willis quotes extensively from letters six through ten of Backwoods. With only a few minor changes and excisions, Willis reprints all of letters six, seven and eight and most of the material from letters nine and ten. All of the passages quoted in the Literary Gazette review appear here, as do two of the five sections used in the Spectator review. Not surprisingly, the impression conveyed by reading these letters outside of the context of Traill's entire work is – as with the Gazette and Spectator reviews – that we are dealing with a somewhat eclectic account of a settler's experiences in rural Upper Canada, liberally spiced with practical advice. In keeping with the title of his work, Canadian Scenery Illustrated, Willis includes some of Traill's detailed descriptions of the woods and the local environment. He also quotes from some of the more emotionally-charged passages from these letters – dealing with Traill's personal reactions to the difficulties she faced – which early reviewers were inclined to ignore.

But what can we surmise about the reception history of Backwoods from Canadian Scenery Illustrated? As he informs us, Willis chose to reprint large sections of Traill's text because he felt that it presented a unique "womanly" perspective on Canadian life in the 1830's, though the letters he quotes from do not focus exclusively – or even extensively – on pursuits or concerns which are identifiably feminine. Quite significantly, we do not know how much material Willis had at hand to select from when compiling this collection. Did the appeal of Traill's text perhaps lie, at least partially, in the fact that by 1842 the copyright was no longer owned by the Society For the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, thus decreasing the chances of complaints being raised about Willis's "borrowing" of significant sections of the original work? Or, more positively, should we treat Willis' extensive use of Traill's material as a testimony to the high profile and appeal of Backwoods? Technically, Traill's text was not out of print at that time, and a newly edited version appeared in 1846, four years after the publication of Canadian Scenery Illustrated. Perhaps the inclusion of passages from Traill's book in Willis's large-scale, two volume text helped to maintain a relatively high profile for the original work.

Two final references to Backwoods surface in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1848, a brief reference appears in an unusual source: John Russell Bartlett's A Glossary of Words And Phrases, Usually Regarded As Peculiar To The United States. Bartlett cites Traill's analysis of

three distinctive American terms: "to fix," "maskinonge" and "supawn."[54] Four years later, Agnes Strickland – in her preface to Traill's novel, Canadian Crusoes – suggests that Backwoods has achieved "too wide a popularity as a standard work for me to need to dwell on" and then praises the text for its "*naïve*, charming style" as well as the author's "modesty and uncomplaining spirit" (323).

After mid-century, references to Traill's work undergo a subtle shift as Backwoods is increasingly valued for its historical content, rather than practical advice. At the same time, Traill's optimistic persona, often commented upon by reviewers as an enlivening aspect of the work, now becomes a dominant feature as she is frequently credited with having encouraged immigration and enabled immigrants to adapt successfully to life in Canada. Writing in 1861, Mrs. Edward Copleston associates Backwoods with a period of personal naïveté:

> My picture of North America was principally drawn from that charmingly written book The Backwoods of Canada. I never stopped to look at the date of publication, but concluded all Canada was all in the wild woods, little knowing that what was perhaps then "dubbed" under the *sobriquet* of "Dirty Little York" was now the "queen city" of Toronto. (5)

Four years later, Traill is fêted in a collection entitled Sketches of celebrated Canadians and persons connected with Canada: from the earliest period in the history of the province down to the present time, written by Henry J. Morgan. Backwoods, the sketch devoted to Traill assures us, "presents a truthful picture . . . of the hardships of an *early* settler's life" (744 – italics mine). A brief biographical overview of Traill's life is followed by praise for the "lady" who did "more towards inducing people of condition and capital to settle in Canada, than any other writer of this country" (745). This presentation of Traill as a pre-eminent Canadian is echoed even more strongly in James Ritchie's 1885 work, To Canada With Emigrants. Ritchie suggests that Traill "has done much to commemorate the beauty of Canadian forests," concluding that "[s]he is a wonderful old lady, and Canada must be a wonderful country for such" (103). After expressing amazement at how Traill and her sister Susanna Moodie, such "tenderly nursed" ladies, could "have survived the hardships they were called to endure," Ritchie focuses on Traill's career as a writer. He emphasizes "the literary vocation to which she had dedicated her early youth" and then suggests that she "and her sister may claim to have been the pioneers of Canadian literature"

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[54] Once again, I am indebted to Peterman's detailed editor's introduction to the CEECT edition and his careful research into the reception history of Backwoods (xliii). The relevant words and phrases in Bartlett's text are found on pages 141-42, 221 and 344.

(100).

This final comment of Ritchie's is particularly significant. Although a number of reviewers and writers praised the gracefulness and charm of Traill's writing in the 1830's and 40's, this is the first specific reference I have located which identifies her work as "literature."[55] The use of this honorific label may be linked to shifting attitudes following Confederation in 1867, when Canada experienced a wave of patriotism and national self-consciousness. During this period Canadians sought to identify and codify a distinct national identity which would help to solidify the country's newly acquired independent status. One means of entrenching a national identity was through the articulation of a shared history and the identification and development of national literary and artistic traditions. In this context Traill's work seems to have functioned as both an historical document and a cultural/literary artefact.

Following a chronological progression, the next print reference to Backwoods occurs in a late nineteenth-century Canadian publication entitled Woman, her character, culture and calling . . . .[56] Mrs. Traill's work, we are informed, "gives an insight into the primitive domestic life and the privations and toils of the early settler" (Austin 105). Significantly, these brief comments on Traill are included in a section entitled "Woman in Literature" in which the author[57] describes her as having "benefitted science and literature in two volumes on the Plant Life of Canada – the favourite volumes alike of the literary student and the botanical scientist" (105). In a similarly adulatory manner, Mary Agnes Fitzgibbon, Traill's great-niece, wrote in a biographical sketch which served as an introduction to Traill's 1894 collection of essays and sketches, Pearls and Pebbles, that the writer's "cheerful, happy spirit robbed the backwoods of its terrors" (173). Echoing other nineteenth-century critics and biographers, Fitzgibbon praises Backwoods for its "valuable information," "graphic fidelity" and "cheerful and optimistic" perspective (173). We are informed that as well as being a faithful recorder of pioneer life, Traill also possessed "a far-seeing eye into the future capabilities of the country" (173).

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[55] As John Guillory reminds us, "[t]he ontological groundlessness of literature in no way diminishes its social effects as a means of marking the status of certain texts and genres" (65).

[56] The more complete title is Woman, her character, culture and calling: a full discussion of woman's work in the home, the school, the church and the social circle, with an account of her successful labors in moral and social reform . . ..

[57] Probably not Austin, the editor, since the full title includes the phrase "By A Galaxy of Distinguished Authors In The United States And Canada." The actual authors remain anonymous.

Another interesting portrait of Traill appeared in an article published in the February 1895 issue of the Canadian Magazine. In this essay, which is part-biography, part-overview of Traill's oeuvre, and part-review of Pearls and Pebbles, Hampden Burnham writes that,

> My first thought, on meeting her [Traill] some years ago, was that if I had been the father of a family of girls I should bring them to see her without delay, so large a share does she possess of that gentleness and dignity of mind and heart, which is at once the charm and pre-eminence of womankind. (388)

Although Burnham's article does not specifically mention Backwoods, I have chosen to quote from it because it provides a reflection of the increasing emphasis paid, as the nineteenth century drew to a close, to Traill as an exceptional woman and an intrepid historical pioneer, a living symbol of Canada's recent past as a pioneer colony. Burnham is also the first nineteenth-century critic I have encountered who specifically addresses the botanical elements of Traill's writing.[58] In an indirect reference to Backwoods and her other works from mid-century, he suggests that "the novelty of Canadian life and the wild beauty of Canadian scenes caused her to turn to the natural rather than to the intellectual" (390). While I am inclined to question Burnham's interpretation of the intellectual nature of Traill's earlier writings, which were produced almost exclusively for a juvenile audience, the serious attention he pays to her botanical writing is unique, prefiguring by a hundred years Marianne Ainley's critical appreciation of Traill's scientific methodology.

Traill also receives brief mention in two nineteenth-century biographical works: Allibone's A Critical Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors, 1898 (3:2444), and the anonymous Women of Canada: Their Life and Work, tentatively dated 1900 by the Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions (179). Both books provide a few factual details about Traill's life and list some of her publications. Neither of these references from the close of the century is particularly significant; they merely indicate that Traill the author continued to maintain a prominent position within the limited field of Canadian writing – and more specifically, within the field of Canadian women's writing.

The final puzzle piece available to complete this rather fragmentary and tentative nineteenth-century reception history of Backwoods consists of the various reprints and editions of the original text which have survived. The first edition was by most indications a rather hasty

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[58] In Woman, her character . . ., Traill's botanical writing is praised, but not dealt with analytically.

affair, and Traill later complained that it was "badly edited and brought out, as to appearance and type and illustrations" (Forest and Other Gleanings 54). The illustrations added by Traill's editor are one obvious flaw in the first edition: as Michael Peterman suggests, they "deflected attention from them [the letters which comprise Backwoods] by providing a series of visual images that had little relevance to what the author was verbally depicting as her actual experiences" (lviii).[59]

Another aspect of the first edition which may well have frustrated Traill was that material she forwarded in 1835, at Charles Knight's request, was placed in an Appendix at the end of the work instead of being integrated into the text. This extra material – which included recipes, references to other works, factual details, Latin names for plants, explanations and clarifications of statements, and a number of informative "updates" on changes in conditions between the time when the letters were written and the date of publication – was clearly intended by Traill to be integrated into the various letters of the book, perhaps as footnotes, but by the time it arrived, the text was already partially printed (xxxiii). The editor also cut material from Traill's original manuscript while adding tables of official statistics and data such as the sale of Crown lands in Canada, emigration statistics, transportation routes and the value of Canadian currency.[60] These additions served to emphasize the practical, rather than narrative and literary aspects of Traill's text,[61] while changing Backwoods "from an account chiefly written for women . . . to one that aimed at emigrants of both sexes and all classes" (Peterman lviii).

After this first edition, which was reprinted numerous times over the next fifteen years, Backwoods underwent a serious re-editing and was reprinted in a modified version in 1846. This edition (which we would call the second edition, though it is simply identified as a "New Edition"[62]), Knight includes an "Advertisement" in place of Traill's introduction. He opens this

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[59] Elizabeth Thompson provides a thoughtful analysis of these illustrations and their relationship to the core text in an article entitled "Illustrations for The Backwoods of Canada."

[60] Admittedly, such editorial practices were not uncommon in nineteenth-century England. As Alan C. Dooley points out, "[d]eliberate deviations from an author's approved text were commonplace in the Victorian era" (54).

[61] Knight introduced the second Appendix of Backwoods (containing material other than Traill's) with the following statement: "In the wish to render this Work of more practical value to persons desiring to emigrate, some official information is subjoined, under the following heads: . . ." (1840 edition, p. 326).

[62] As Alan Dooley explains, "the word *edition* was used by Victorian publishers and authors to signify any identifiable separate group of copies of a title" (89). Separate print runs or issues of Backwoods are identified, somewhat inconsistently as "editions." For example, two

"Advertisement" with the following comments: "This volume was published in the 'Library of Entertaining Knowledge' in 1836. Neither its usefulness nor its interest are diminished in 1846" (Peterman xli). This claim leads into an abridged version of Traill's original introduction. As Peterman explains, the other major amendments to this edition consist of corrections of obvious typographical errors, the repositioning of Traill's material from Appendix A in appropriate letters and the removal of Appendix B, since the factual material it included had presumably become outdated (xli).

Backwoods remained in print until at least 1862, frequently bound together with one of two works on Oregon: either The Oregon Territory: Consisting of a Brief Description of the Country, an anonymous work published in conjunction with Backwoods by M.A. Nattali in 1846 and 1849, or The Oregon Territory: A Geographical and Physical Account, a work written by the Reverend C.G. Nicolay of King's College, London, and published by Charles Knight in conjunction with the revised (second) edition of Traill's text, in 1846 and 1862 (Peterman, "Published Versions" 295, 297-8). The number of nineteenth-century reprintings of Backwoods – Peterman has unearthed eleven issues of the first edition, and three issues of the second edition – clearly attests to the influence and commercial viability of Traill's text for almost thirty years after its initial publication.

III: 20c Reception

Twentieth-century responses to Traill's work are far more extensive and varied than those which have survived from the nineteenth century, and of necessity I deal more selectively with these. In order to facilitate the task of analysis, I have divided the critical articles and books according to four broad time periods, distinguished by the different editions of Backwoods in common use: 1900-28, 1929-65, 1966-88, and 1989 to the present. From 1900 through 1928, the availability of the text was limited, since the last print run took place in 1862; hence articles about Traill's work focused mostly on biographical information and on her publications from the 1890's (Cot and Cradle Stories and Pearls and Pebbles). In 1929, the first Canadian issue of Backwoods

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"Third Editions" of Backwoods appeared, one in 1838, and another in 1846. Admittedly, in the second "Third Edition" Backwoods is bound together with The Oregon Territory; still, there is no indication that this is a third edition of the latter text (Peterman, "Published Versions"294, 296).

appeared, a distinctive version of the text which attracted some critical attention and remained the standard version until the 1960's. Then in 1966, the New Canadian Library series published a relatively inexpensive, abridged version of Backwoods and the ready availability of this text, along with a steady growth of interest in Canadian literature, prompted a series of critical appraisals, some of which ignored the incomplete nature of this version. The appearance of an unabridged edition of Traill's text in 1989, with a significant "Afterward" by D.M.R. Bentley marked the beginning of the final distinctive period. In the 1990's a number of critical reappraisals of Backwoods appeared, and Traill criticism became more theoretically grounded, highlighted by the definitive CEECT edition of the text published in 1997.

As previously indicated, towards the end of the nineteenth century, when Traill was more famous for being the Empire's oldest living author than for the books she had published, print references to her work focus primarily on biographical information, usually providing overviews of her long life and stressing her virtues as a Canadian pioneer. This trend continued into the twentieth century, yet following James Ritchie's example, some writers also began to treat Backwoods as a work of literature. Fittingly, the first significant piece – Lawrence Burpee's "The Last of the Stricklands" (1900) – opens with an announcement of Traill's death the previous year and then places her work within the context of the literary Strickland family. In his only specific reference to Backwoods, Burpee praises the way in which "the hardships and hard-won pleasures of pioneer life are admirably set forth" in the text (214). He is also impressed by the fact that there is "no note of complaint . . . in any of Mrs. Traill's writings" (214). Although Burpee praises her positive attitude and her "close and loving" observations of nature, he obviously harbours a few reservations about the stylistic qualities of Traill's writing. His attempt to qualify this weakness, while obviously sincere, appears quite damning to a twenty-first century reader: Traill's literary work, he informs us, "even where most weak, was always sincere and its tone always elevating" (217).

In 1909, Burpee republished his article on Traill in a collection entitled A Little Book of Canadian Essays, shortening and slightly amending the original piece. His admiration for Traill's pioneer virtues is even more evident here: he drops the slightly negative reference to the literary qualities of her work and adds a phrase explaining that "her description of the new home in the bush is vivid in its revelations of the hardships of the early settlers" (62). In a similar vein, Emily Weaver's article in the March 1917 issue of The Canadian Magazine of Politics, Science, Art and Literature focuses on Traill's life story and pioneer virtues. Like Burpee, Weaver describes the publications of other members of the Strickland family, and – as was to become common practice

in the mid-twentieth century – she pairs Traill's publications with those of her sister, Susanna Moodie. The chief value of Traill and Moodie's work, Weaver suggests, is historical rather than literary: "[t]he work of both sisters, though according to modern standards, too leisurely and diffuse, contains much of historical interest, especially in relation to social conditions" (475).

In his 1920 overview, A History of English-Canadian Literature to the Confederation, Ray Baker classifies Backwoods as a memoir and, most significantly, analyses (rather than simply assesses) its literary features. Pairing Traill and Moodie's publications, Baker suggests that while their writings were "largely conditioned by English romanticism," they "must be given credit for the new aesthetic impulse which sweetened the lives of Canadian people" (123). A few years later, in Appraisals of Canadian Literature, Lionel Stevenson writes about Moodie's, Traill's and Samuel Strickland's writings as if they were interchangeable, emphasizing the historical value of these works: they are "[e]qually authoritative" and valuable as "'original sources' regarding the pioneer days in Ontario almost a century ago" (201-2). The final study of Traill's work from the 1920's takes the form of a biographical "supplementary reader," The Strickland Sisters, designed for use in the public school system. This short book by Blanche Hume offers nothing new: Traill and Moodie – who have now become "Grandmothers of a Canadian literature" – are praised for their "fascinating records of pioneer days and pioneer ways" (32). Yet more significant than the book itself is the fact that the lives of these two writers were deemed sufficiently important to merit study in Ontario schools.[63] The Backwoods of Canada may have been long out of print, "for most commentators, a forgotten or inaccessible volume, a collector's item rather than a valued text" (Peterman and Friskney 85), but Traill the author and pioneer woman had obviously not disappeared from the public consciousness.

1929 is an especially significant year in the reception history of Backwoods because it marks the first appearance of a Canadian edition of the text. Although Traill had hoped for such a publication during her lifetime and continued to make corrections and annotations to one or more copies of the text through to the 1890's, as well as corresponding with a Toronto publishing house, nothing concrete came of these hopes (Peterman xlix-l). No written records have been found identifying plans for a re-publication of Backwoods before 1923, when McClelland and Stewart began to consider issuing a new version based on an amended copy of the text forwarded

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[63] In Cultural Capital, Guillory emphasizes the significance of the school as an institution of reproduction "which utilizes the literary canon as a discursive instrument of 'transmission'" (56).

to the company by Florence Atwood, Traill's granddaughter[64] (Peterman xlix). When the new edition finally appeared, six years later, it included two chapters of additional material written by Traill after the original publication date, and until the scholarly CEECT edition appeared in 1997, most readers and critics treated this additional material as an intrinsic component of the work.[65]

The 1929 McClelland and Stewart edition has been described as "a labour of love" on the part of its editor, Edward Caswell, who had a friendly and professional relationship with Traill in the later years of her life (Peterman and Friskney 85). In addition to the two extra chapters previously mentioned, this edition includes several additional explanatory footnotes, corrections of errors in the original edition, changes to chapter headings, new illustrations, and, in the words of Michael Peterman and Janet Friskney, "it attempted to frame her [Traill's] experiences retrospectively" (85). The resulting text was "a book of 'then and now' rather than a book about early nineteenth-century pioneering" (85).

In his introduction to the 1929 edition, Edward Caswell sets the critical tone by emphasizing the veracity and historical value, rather than the literary merit, of Backwoods. After expressing his general enthusiasm about the re-publication of the text, he suggests that, of the available accounts of pioneer times, "it is doubtful if any gives a more intimate, faithful and informative picture of life in the clearings than is presented in these letters of Mrs. Traill's" (11). Like Burpee, Caswell makes no mention of the financial difficulties faced by Traill and her husband; he even implies naïvely that the publication of Traill's "letters" was simply a fortuitous coincidence: "While doubtless written without any thought of publication, they found their way into the hands of Charles Knight, the London publisher" (11). Specific aspects of Backwoods singled out for praise by Caswell include Traill's accounts of "Christianized Indians . . . [among whom] the white lady visitor found welcome" (12), and her descriptions of flora and fauna, written "with an intimacy that at once engages the reader's pleasurable interest" (15). He is also impressed by the additional material provided by Traill's grand-daughter, suggesting that the account of the Mackenzie Rebellion which took place during "the stirring years 1837-8 make[s] a most interesting and welcome addition" to the text and "reveal[s] the intensity of the political

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[64] This copy of the text has unfortunately disappeared (Peterman lxi).

[65] The additional material consists of "The Mackenzie Rebellion," which was drawn from Traill's journal for 1837-38 and is therefore chronologically misplaced in the text (Peterman and Ballstadt, Introduction to "The Mackenzie Rebellion" 111), and "Bush Wedding and Wooing," a sketch Traill initially published in Sharpe's London Journal in 1851 (Peterman and Ballstadt, Introduction to "Bush Wedding and Wooing" 180).

feeling of those days" (18). Caswell positions Traill's book as a valuable record of Canada's pioneer past, classifying it as a reliable and interesting memoir and praising some of its stylistic qualities, yet making no reference to it as a work of literature.

The 1929 edition of Backwoods was reviewed in three journals, two Canadian and one British. John Robins of The Canadian Forum is most interested in Traill's text as an account of the "pioneering era" which "is not yet past," although his review says almost as much about Anna Jameson's Winter Studies and Summer Rambles and Susanna Moodie's Roughing It in the Bush as it does about Backwoods. Echoing Caswell's introduction, Robins praises both the "accuracy and attention to detail" found in Traill's accounts of plants and animals and the "animated descriptions of most of the activities which went to make up the busy life of the enterprising settler" (263). Raising the issue of gender, Robins suggests that since "[p]ioneering is home building . . . [it is] not a matter of surprise that three of the best accounts of early days in Ontario should be written by women" (262-3). The second review of Backwoods, published in the Times Literary Supplement of London in the following year, focuses mainly on Traill's biography, stressing her familial ties to her literary sisters and suggesting that the letters of the text have "a properly literary and Strickland touch" ("Canada Old and New" 70). The anonymous reviewer describes Traill's style as "diffuse and chatty" in a text composed of "letters . . . full of enthusiasm" (70). The final review of the 1929 edition of Backwoods is definitely the most interesting as it addresses changes made to the original text, closing with James Talman's reservation that, "[s]tudents of history would be well advised to use an early edition for reference when reading the Backwoods of Canada, for many descriptions in this later edition are coloured by the writer's knowledge gained after publishing the first edition" (77). Yet the reviewer still praises the new edition for "its excellent introduction, illustrations and printing" (77).

Some interesting comparisons can be drawn between the initial reviews of Backwoods from the 1830's and the reviews of its re-publication in the late 1920's. On both occasions, Traill's text was heralded for its veracity and the cheerfulness of the authorial persona, and reviewers accepted without question the biographical accuracy of the work and its basis in genuine letters. Perhaps because the letters in Backwoods are assumed to be personal and authentic – i.e. not created or revised for publication – neither set of reviewers treats the text as a work of literature. Both the original and the 1929-31 reviews also refer to the potential usefulness of Backwoods, but in quite different contexts. In 1836, the work was assessed in terms of the relevance of the advice and factual information it offered to prospective immigrants to Canada, one reviewer suggesting that it added little to the information already available while the others

were more impressed by its informativeness. In contrast, in 1929-31 the utility of Backwoods is presented as strictly historical: thoughtful Canadians will, by implication, gain a valuable understanding of the past and an appreciation of the trials of pioneer life through reading Traill's work. This text, once implicitly classified as a settler's handbook, written with the authority of an officer's wife and possessing some of the appeal of a travel narrative, has now become a pioneer memoir describing the not-too-distant past, produced by a hardy "lady" naturalist who lived to be almost one hundred. For reviewers in the late 1920's and early 1930's, Traill's personal history – both her experiences as a pioneer settler and her familial ties to Agnes Strickland and Susanna Moodie – now takes precedence over the scientific rationality and homespun practicality earlier readers discovered in the text.

The re-publication of Backwoods in 1929, and the subsequent reviews it received, is followed by a long gap[66] until the 1950's when a number of works appear which group Traill together with one or more pioneer writers who settled in the same area of Ontario, and two critical studies, Desmond Pacey's Creative Writing in Canada (1952) and Wilfrid Eggleston's The Frontier and Canadian Letters (1957), include brief assessments of the writing of Traill and her contemporaries.

G. H. Needler's Otonabee Pioneers (1953),[67] Florence Partridge's "The Stewarts and the Stricklands, the Moodies and the Traills" (1956), Edwin Guillet's The Valley of the Trent (1957) and Lloyd Scott's "The English Gentlefolk in the Backwoods of Canada" (1959) provide similar biographical accounts of Traill's life – most commonly in conjunction with details about Susanna Moodie – stressing the value of her writing as a reliable record of pioneer trials and tribulations. Alongside its historical relevance, the "purpose" of Backwoods is an evident concern for many of these critics, and one which they interpret quite differently. Scott assures us that "Mrs. Traill

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[66] Edwin Guillet includes brief quotations from Backwoods in his 1933 social history, Pioneer Days in Upper Canada, but makes far less extensive use of her text than he does of Samuel Strickland's Twenty-Seven Years in Canada West. In 1948, J.L. McNeil, a graduate student at Queens University, prepared a thesis entitled "Mrs. Traill in Canada," yet this was a fairly pedestrian and insubstantial piece of work. After presenting the results of initial bibliographical research carried out in Ontario and in the lists of the British Library collection and exploring the influences on Traill's writing, McNeil announces that "Backwoods may well survive as a permanent record of the hardships and privations involved in the first years of pioneer life" (82).

[67] Chapter six of Needler's text initially appeared in a slightly different form seven years earlier: "The Otonabee Trio of Women Naturalists: Mrs. Stewart – Mrs Traill – Mrs. Moodie" (The Canadian Field-Naturalist September-October 1946): 97-101.

passed along much advice to help, but chiefly to discourage, the prospective settler" (67), a contention supported by Pacey who claims that Backwoods and Roughing It "were written to counteract the illusory propaganda about the advantages of Canada which was being put out by unscrupulous land companies and their agents" (24). However, Partridge and Needler insist that the intention of Traill's text was to encourage immigration. Needler does not attribute this purpose to Traill: instead, echoing Edward Caswell, he claims that she merely "*allowed* her letters to her family to be published" (88) (italics mine) – in spite of the fact that the biographical information he provides about Traill's earlier writing and publishing career suggests that she sought financial remuneration for her work.[68] However, Needler's claim that Backwoods only found its way into print by chance is consistent with his assertion that works such as hers are "valuable mainly as authentic records . . . of the early history, the social and economic life of Upper Canada" (146). As an historical work, Traill's text is validated by the authenticity of the letters it contains; by implication, letters written or edited for publication would be significantly less valuable. Traill's botanical descriptions also merit specific praise from Needler and Guillet: to the former these are the work of a "systematic botanist" deserving of "more extended notice" (146), while to the latter they are "her greatest contribution to Canadian literature" (367).

Pacey and Eggleston adopt a more literary approach to The Backwoods of Canada. Pacey praises the "homely unpretentious style" of Moodie and Traill (he does not distinguish between the two) which "is most apt for their purpose." Both writers, he suggests, possess "a dry, quiet sense of humour" (24). Wilfrid Eggleston provides a far more disparaging criticism of the work of Traill and her contemporaries. Although the historical background he conveys, outlining the deterrents and economic constraints on writing in the early and mid-nineteenth century,[69] is highly relevant to a contextual understanding of Backwoods and the conditions under which it was produced, in his overview he proceeds to dismiss single-handedly the writings of Traill, Susanna Moodie, Alexander McLachlan, Isabella Crawford and William Kirby as "not really products of the Canadian environment in any significant way" (69).

In terms of critical responses to Traill's work, the 1960's begin rather slowly. The most

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[68] In Needler's words, "It was a great satisfaction to Katie when from the proceeds of her pen she could transmit to her mother even a small contribution to the upkeep of the home at Reydon" (Otonabee Pioneers 78)

[69] Incidental expenses such as paper, postage and candles were surprisingly high, for example (Eggleston 74-5).

significant year in the decade is obviously 1966, when a second Canadian edition of Backwoods appears – a highly edited version, yet one which influences critical responses throughout the 1970's and 1980's. But before I discuss this abridged edition, I would like to briefly consider two important scholarly works which appeared in the preceding year. In 1965, the University of Toronto Press published the Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English, a lengthy overview of Canadian literature which was to become extremely influential, not least because of Northrop Frye's oft-quoted Conclusion, later reprinted in The Bush Garden. Produced under the direction of the general editor, Carl Klinck, the Literary History consists of a series of essays on Canadian literature organized both by historical period and genre. As Frye explains in his summative chapter, one intention of the work was to convey the "maturity of Canadian literary scholarship and criticism . . . [which had] outgrown the view that evaluation is the end of criticism, instead of its incidental by-product" ("Conclusion" 821).

The significance of the Literary History of Canada cannot be downplayed, though it did little to enhance Traill's reputation. After classifying Traill's writing as an exemplification of an idyllic version of the pastoral myth – one which espouses "[t]he Wordsworthian sense of nature as a teacher" – Northrop Frye dismisses her "somewhat selective approach to the subject [of nature] reminiscent of Miss Muffet" (845). A somewhat warmer reception is accorded to Backwoods in Carl Klinck's chapter, "Literary Activity in the Canadas: 1812-1841," however. He asserts that,

> Mrs. Traill brought a sense of immediacy, cheerful realism, controlled sentiment, shrewd comment, and a delightfully honest style to the series of autobiographical letters (addressed to her mother and friends in England) which made up the Backwoods volume. She established the image of the settler in the bush. (143-44)

The only other reference to Traill's work in the Literary History echoes Frye's analysis: "Mrs. Traill was a fairly accurate observer, but, influenced by the romantics, tended to sentimentalize and moralize her natural history" (Lucas 368).

The second significant critical text from 1965 deals at considerable length with Traill's work, yet its immediate impact was almost non-existent. I refer here to Carl Ballstadt's unpublished doctoral thesis, "The Literary History of the Strickland Family," a work which – as Michael Peterman explains – provides "a mine of data drawn from extensive research of British and Canadian magazines and from close checking of the various surviving editions of books by the Stricklands. Ballstadt's careful work outstripped anything available in print" ("In Search" 116). Ballstadt takes Traill seriously as a writer of depth and diversity, identifying textual and generic influences on her work. In one particularly insightful statement, he classifies Backwoods

as a work of "domestic literature": "Mrs. Traill's book is, at least partially, the New World Equivalent of such English guidebooks as Mrs. John Sandford's Woman in her Social and Domestic Character (1831)" (197).[70] Ballstadt also identifies previously unrecognized parallels between Backwoods and Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's Letters from an American Farmer, a text which Traill refers to in her earlier children's work, The Young Emigrants (201).

The 1966 edition of Backwoods, which appeared as #51 in the McClelland and Stewart New Canadian Library series, is identified on the front cover as "An extraordinary record of pioneer life by one of Canada's most remarkable women." Sections of Traill's original text were excised from most letters, yet this editorial pruning is obvious only to the reader who takes careful note of the word "Selections" on the inside title page (printed in approximately a size eight font) or in the opening line of Clara Thomas' introduction. Although Thomas alludes to the editing process of the original manuscript – "[t]he letters themselves bear strong, if negative evidence of editing: no extraneous family chit-chat, above all no emotional imbalance, disturb their calm and lucid gentility" (8) – she provides no rationale for the condensing deemed appropriate to prepare Backwoods for publication in the New Canadian Library series.[71] Neither does she mention her reliance on the 1929 edition, which incorporated newer material into the original 1836 text. Yet since the 1966 NCL edition rapidly became the standard text for university use (the market targeted by the series), and McClelland and Stewart did not print an unabridged edition until 1989, this abridged version of the text gained an unmerited authority.[72]

However, what is most significant for an analysis of the critical reception of Backwoods is not textual reliability, but textual interpretation. The most pertinent question therefore becomes: to what extent is the 1966 edition positioned to, in the words of Roger Chartier,

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[70] In so doing, Ballstadt foreshadows the work of Marian Fowler, Misao Dean and Gillian Whitlock.

[71] The absence of an explanation for cuts to the text may not have been Thomas' decision, though it may indicate her unease with the abridging process. In a 1972 article, "Journeys to Freedom" Thomas declares that "for a really just assessment of . . . [Traill's Backwoods and The Canadian Settler's Guide, as well as Moodie's Roughing It and Life in the Clearings] we need the complete editions" (12). She then elaborates in footnote #1 to this article: "The New Canadian Library editions of [Anna Jameson's] Winter Studies and Summer Rambles and The Backwoods of Canada were massively cut to the requirements of that series" (19).

[72] A facsimile version of the original 1836 edition of Backwoods was printed by Coles in 1971, and several critical articles from the 1970's and 80's refer to this particular edition. However, its availability never equalled that of the NCL edition.

"inscribe the text in a cultural matrix that was not its original destination, thereby permitting readings, understandings and uses" other than those originally envisaged by its writer, editor or nineteenth-century readers? (56).[73]

At this point, I would like to consider two key aspects of the 1966 edition: the introduction provided by Clara Thomas and the specific nature of the excisions made to the text. Thomas opens her introduction by contextualizing Backwoods within the "significant trilogy" of three nineteenth-century texts: Moodie's Roughing It, Jameson's Winter Studies and Summer Rambles and Backwoods itself (in that order, though the publication dates of the three texts – 1852, 1838 and 1836 respectively – in no way correspond). The rationale for linking the three texts is two-fold: gender (each one provides a "feminine report") and subject ("together [they] reveal a comprehensive composite picture taken from three widely ranging angles of vision"). Exactly what this "composite picture" encompasses remains vague, though the implication is clear: the realities of nineteenth-century pioneer life in Upper Canada. More explicit is Thomas' claim that the three texts provide a "report" – i.e. a compact, verifiable account of reality. This interpretation of Backwoods dominates the introduction: we are informed that the writing is "unfailingly simple, clear and factual," that the text provides "an admirable monument" to Traill's purpose of "honestly representing facts," that the letters contain "no emotional inbalance," and that "every line evidences the maturity and common sense of the author" (7-9).

Thomas also emphasizes the conservatism of the social attitudes conveyed in the text: Traill "had a healthy respect for property and a strong sense of family position and solidarity," (9) we are informed. Even the writer's Christian sentiments are presented as suitably genteel and controlled, so that "[c]onventional pieties do not impinge on the reader" (9). When Thomas encounters rhetorical flourishes in Traill's descriptions of natural scenery, she suggests that these do not reflect a personal extravagance on the writer's part – merely "an apt, but conventionally romantic technique" (10). Not surprisingly, Thomas admires the fact that Traill "disposes of her attack of cholera" in two paragraphs, yet devotes eighteen pages to "record[ing] with the precision of the scientist and the fresh delight of the discoverer the wild flowers she finds around her new home" (10-11). Similarly, Traill's depiction of the "Indian" way of life is characterized by control, evidencing "a keen eye for its colour, a full realization of its transience, and notably

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[73] Chartier refers here to nineteenth-century American editions of Shakespeare and to the French Bibliothèque Bleue series, but his statement can be applied in a broader context to subsequent editions of any text which significantly reformat and reposition the original work.

without emotional case-making" (11).

After sketching this verbal portrait of Traill as inherently "rational, empiric and scientific," Thomas concludes her introduction by confidently asserting the transparency of the text which follows: "The Backwoods of Canada provides none of the histrionics which are so much a part of the writing of Susanna Moodie or of Anna Jameson; it gives us instead a portrait and a record of the woman Catharine Parr Traill was and wished to be . . ." (11). By replacing the original introduction written by Traill – which stresses the practicality of the text, carefully positioning it for an 1836 British readership – with one which focuses mostly on Traill's life and praises aspects of her personality, this new edition asks us to read Backwoods in order to discover its author, "a pioneer gentlewoman, superbly equipped for her rôle" (11).

Not surprisingly, when we look at the text itself we discover that few of the passages excised include descriptions of Indigenous peoples or of specific plants and animals, since such passages reinforce Thomas' portrayal of Traill's authorial persona – or as she confidently asserts, "the woman Catharine Parr Traill was and wished to be" (11). While the abridgement follows no strict pattern, the eliminated passages are fairly evenly spaced throughout the text: with the exception of the last two letters, material is cut from each letter, mostly at the beginning or end. Opening phrases and addresses to Traill's mother are often eliminated, as are a number of Traill's negative evaluations – such as those dealing with features of Canadian buildings or individuals who fail to impress her. Although the differences are subtle, one effect of this abridged edition is to make Traill's persona seem more moderate or, in David Jackel's terms, "less fully human" and more the "rational botanist" (14). Another related effect of the excisions is to minimize digressions, streamlining the narrative of Backwoods into a more linear and tightly organized format.

Despite the significant cuts made to the text, the 1966 NCL edition of Backwoods proved influential. Publication in this McClelland and Stewart series, which was aimed at an undergraduate university audience, made the text readily available to teachers and students and, perhaps most significantly, clearly positioned Traill's work within the growing academic field of Canadian literature and literary studies. As #51 in the series, Backwoods comes after both Roughing It (#31) and Winter Studies and Summer Rambles (#46), but before Tiger Dunlop's Upper Canada (#55) or such nineteenth-century fictional works as Wacousta (#55) and The Golden Dog (#65). Clara Thomas' role as editor of the text may well have prompted her critical interest in Traill's work: over the next six years, she contributed a chapter on "The Strickland Sisters" to Mary Quayle Innis's collection of essays about significant Canadian women, The Clear

Spirit: Twenty Canadian Women and Their Times, edited the NCL edition of Traill's The Canadian Settler's Guide and published an article entitled "Journeys to Freedom" in which she compares the lives and works of Anna Jameson, Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill.

Yet in spite of the growing academic interest in Canadian literature in the 1960's, the focus of Traill criticism remained predominantly biographical. The most prominent work from this period was Audrey Morris' Gentle Pioneers, a study of "Five Nineteenth Century Canadians": Thomas and Catharine Traill, John and Susanna Moodie, and Samuel Strickland. Morris covers much the same biographical ground as Thomas does in her introduction to the NCL edition, but includes far more detail and appears more muted in her admiration. As Morris explains,

> [t]he object here is to describe and re-evaluate their lives, not as literary figures nor as historical personages, but as real people whose stories are intrinsically interesting and heroic in a vital sense – heroic because of their weaknesses and prejudices. In this way we grant them the respect that they and the rest of our ancestors deserve – not as sterling characters from folk-lore or myth, but as ill-equipped fighters in a difficult battle, burdened by human failings, clumsily helping and hindering each other, but somehow surviving and out of it all, achieving a modicum of greatness. (16)

And unlike Thomas, who praises Traill's botanical descriptions, Morris remains unimpressed by such accounts: "When Catharine wished to obscure something, she went off on long and expert botanical discussions," she informs us (xl).[74].

From this point onwards, the amount of critical material published in the field of Canadian literature expands almost exponentially; hence, of necessity I will begin to deal more succinctly with critical responses to Traill's work, referring to dominant trends and an occasional interesting example rather than dealing comprehensively with the increasing number of books and articles which refer to Backwoods.

As Traill criticism begins to shift away from a predominantly biographical perspective in the 1970's, we encounter critical studies which deliberately seek out new ways to read and interpret her work, often – though not always – in conjunction with Susanna Moodie's Roughing It. William Gairdner opens his 1972 article, "Traill and Moodie: The Two Realities," by lamenting the tendency of critics to dismiss Backwoods as a non-literary "collection of letters

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[74] Although this is an interesting assertion by Morris, it is not backed up by any significant degree of textual support.

written . . . by a dowdy pioneer to her mother" (75).[75] He challenges this overly simplistic reading by analysing some of the text's structural and linguistic features and linking these to Traill's philosophical and religious perspective. Gairdner concludes that while "in Mrs. Traill's attitudes we see the play of tension between the two opposing forces of Christian and scientific belief so dominant in European thought," for her "the world is simply a testing ground, a place created for man by God and therefore amenable to reason, where scientific investigation and puritan belief go hand in hand" (75, 77). He finds this ideology reflected in both Traill's landscape descriptions and her self-censorship: "she describes flowers endlessly, but never the feelings she has in their presence" (77). Another comparative, but far more focused essay explores the Crusoe motif in Backwoods and Moodie's Roughing It. In this 1976 study, T. D. MacLulich argues that the "attitude which emerges [in these works] is an ambivalent one, containing elements of a 'journey to freedom' myth and elements of the more sombre cautionary fable which underlies the surface of the Crusoe story" (117).

Working in the shadow of the Literary History of Canada, the 1965 overview which played such a significant role in both the legitimization and canonization of Canadian literary studies, many critics in the 1970's and 80's either apply the analytical framework and evaluations of Northrop Frye and his fellow contributors in more depth, or challenge the validity of their broad categorizations and assessments. In his 1979 article, "Mrs. Moodie and Mrs. Traill, and the Fabrication of a Canadian Tradition," David Jackel adopts the latter tactic. He begins by outlining the extent to which Traill's and Moodie's reputations had become codified by the late 1970's – no doubt due, in part, to their treatment in the Literary History. Jackel is particularly incensed by the way in which Traill's work had been unjustly dismissed by Frye and Eli Mandel, and indirectly devalued by Margaret Atwood's championing of Moodie's work in her poetic re-creation, The Journals of Susanna Moodie. Unlike Gairdner, who sought to re-position both Traill and Moodie, Jackel is clearly biased towards Traill's writing. He challenges critics who dismiss Traill's work as a quaint historical artefact, while praising Moodie's writing for its mythic and emotive qualities. Jackel concludes that while Roughing It "is a questionable choice for inclusion in the canon of classic Canadian literature," Backwoods "shows us the beginnings of a valuable Canadian tradition" (10, 20). In particular, he admires Traill's work for its "intellectual

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[75] The pagination indicated here is from the Summer 1973 publication of Gairdner's article. It first appeared in the same journal (The Journal of Canadian Fiction), Spring 1972, without footnotes.

substance" and "commendable style" (2) and the manner in which her personal growth and development "gives her book a principle of order that transcends mere chronology" (18).

Gairdner and Jackel's rather extreme, and not always convincingly substantiated, critical interpretations are followed by a series of calmer and more critically consistent responses to Backwoods in the 1980's. While critics such as Michael Peterman, Eva-Marie Kröller and Rupert Schieder contribute to a broader interpretation of Traill's work during this decade, the most significant critical study prior to 1989 (when a new edition of Backwoods appears) is Carl Ballstadt's comprehensive overview of Traill's life, her publications and the critical reception of her works, published in volume one of Robert Lecker, Jack David and Ellen Quigley's Canadian Writers and Their Works. In this forty-four page overview, Ballstadt identifies "balance" as "the chief structural and thematic principle of Backwoods" and analyses this feature both on a linguistic/rhetorical level and in terms of narrative development (1:164-8). His implicit claim, that Traill's text is a carefully crafted product, is well-documented and convincingly presented. Ballstadt closes by identifying a strain of irony in each of Traill's major works – Backwoods, The Canadian Crusoes, The Female Emigrant's Guide and Pearls and Pebbles – since, "[w]hile celebrating the achievement of a new home, each draws its energy from her own fascination with the primeval forest and its resources. She laments its passing and expresses her own ambivalence . . . . [an] ambivalence she shares with many other Canadian writers" (184).

Although not as comprehensive as Ballstadt's overview of Traill's work, Marian Fowler's The Embroidered Tent (1982) also contributed significantly to the development of a corpus of critical responses to Backwoods. In this study, Fowler provides a comparative biographical and thematic analysis of the writings of five nineteenth-century "Gentlewomen in Early Canada": Elizabeth Simcoe, Catharine Parr Traill, Susanna Moodie, Anna Jameson and Lady Dufferin. In spite of the somewhat forced thematic motif of embroidery, which Fowler exploits as a symbol of traditional feminine decorum and "old world refinement," contrasting this to practical pioneer skills and "frontier roughness" (represented by the "tent" in the title), and the work's rather shrill tone – she accuses Traill of "hypocrisy" and "frivolity" and condemns her for retreating into "her tight bright little domestic circle" (81) – The Embroidered Tent provides a thoughtful contextual analysis of Backwoods. Fowler considers the Crusoe motif in Traill's text and explores in some depth nineteenth-century "conduct guides" as a generic template for the work. She also provides a relevant analysis of evangelical religious discourse in Backwoods and comments, without condescension, on Traill's "scientist's interest in process" (67).

In 1989, Backwoods was re-published in an unabridged NCL edition, accompanied by a

scholarly article – a particularly significant event which validated the text in its entirety.[76] Traill's work, from which large sections had previously been excised in order to meet the demands of the general editors of the NCL series, and perhaps to increase accessibility and "speed up" the narrative, was now presented to the academic community in a form closer to that of its original published version. As became standard practice with the series, McClelland and Stewart commissioned a new critical article to accompany the text, thereby granting it an increased scholarly legitimacy. D.M.R. Bentley's essay was presented not as an introduction designed to provide a general background to the work, but as a critical "Afterward." Assuming a familiarity with Traill's biography and the historical context of Backwoods, Bentley opens by establishing a generic and symbolic framework for interpreting and evaluating the text:

> The Backwoods of Canada is a record of adaptation and emerging identity. It is a guide to making habitable and learning to inhabit one part of Canada, a tale of the developing bond between an English "lady" and her portion of the Canadian "bush." And because it is these things, the book can also be read as a fable about the emergence of a self and a society that are distinctly and recognizably Canadian. (291)

After establishing this critical framework, in which he reads Backwoods through the lens of Frye's The Bush Garden, an application of archetypal theory to Canadian literature, Bentley focuses on the "balance" of Backwoods. Like Ballstadt, he analyses the structure of the text; he then proceeds to outline a series of binary oppositions which surface, such as industry versus idleness and utility versus artificiality. Bentley also raises a number of provocative questions about Traill's presentation of Native people and annotates significant passages from the text, drawing our attention to the author's exploitation of the "picturesque aesthetic," to the allegorical and religious dimensions of her descriptions of the natural environment, and to her allusions to Pilgrim's Progress and Robinson Crusoe. In his conclusion, Bentley returns to the symbolic value of Traill's book – a value which he defines in terms of Canada's national identity: "More than the 'useful,' 'amusing,' and morally instructive book that she intended to write, The Backwoods of Canada is a reflection of an emerging culture and a distant mirror of what that culture has become" (301).

While the 1970's and 80's were significant for the appearance of the first truly analytical

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[76] A second German translation of Backwoods, with an afterword by Marianne Müller, also appeared in 1989 (Peterman liii). The simultaneous publication of both the NCL unabridged edition and this new translation emphasizes the significance of 1989 as a turning point in the reception history of Traill's text.

responses to Traill's text, in the 1990's critical responses began to take several distinctive directions. The first, and least interesting for my study, involves interpreting Backwoods as an embodiment of the values of an archetypal pioneer woman. Exemplified by Elizabeth Thompson's The Pioneer Woman: A Canadian Character Type (1991), which devotes a chapter to Traill's "Non-fiction" (most of which focuses on Backwoods), this critical approach harkens back to biographically and thematically based studies such as Fowler's The Embroidered Tent (1982), Morris' Gentle Pioneers (1966), and earlier articles such as Scott's "The English Gentlefolk in the Backwoods" (1959) and Weaver's "Mrs. Traill and Mrs. Moodie: Pioneers in Literature" (1917).

A second distinctive trend in recent Traill criticism involves analysing and contextualizing her scientific work. Although on a number of earlier occasions critics praised Traill's botanical descriptions, and Fowler dealt briefly with her scientific approach in The Embroidered Tent, it is only with the appearance of three articles in the 1990's that the scientific discourse in Backwoods and Traill's other texts begins to receive the analytical attention it merits. Written by critics from quite diverse backgrounds – Michael Peterman, a literary scholar specializing in Canadian literature, and Marianne Ainley, a feminist historian working in the field of mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century natural history – these pieces explore the nineteenth-century background to Traill's botanical writings and assess the significance of her work within the scientific community of her time. Using Carl Berger's Science, God, and Nature in Victorian Canada as one of his starting points, Peterman defines Traill scientific work as a "splendid anachronism," the product of a "nineteenth-century woman given an eighteenth-century education" ("Splendid Anachronism" 178).[77] "[A]n outsider to the emerging, self-conscious and self-promoting world of science in colonial Canada," Traill's contribution lies in her "originality . . . the gentle way in which she blended her scientific and literary interests" (179, 183).

Yet, turning to Ainley's critical work, one begins to suspect that Peterman overly downplayed Traill's scientific capabilities and contributions. In a 1990 essay entitled "Last in the Field? Canadian Women Natural Scientists, 1815-1965," Ainley provides a concise assessment of her scientific abilities: "Traill's unrecognized forte was her interest in the *process* of science. She was curious about events leading to observable geological formations, and she can be considered

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[77] Peterman's article was published in 1990 in Re(Dis)covering Our Foremothers, a seminal collection for nineteenth-century Canadian literary scholarship, and for Moodie and Traill studies in particular. Two of the articles referred to over the next few pages – Bentley's "Breaking 'The Cake of Custom'" and Buss' "Women and the Garrison Mentality" – also appeared in this collection.

one of the first Canadian ecologists, because she observed and described plant succession after forest fires" (28). In the late 1990's, in an essay published in Natural Eloquence: Women Reinscribe Science, Ainley develops her analysis of Traill's scientific writing, calling for a re-evaluation of Traill's work, and directly challenging the social and academic forces which have "minimized" her scientific writing. Ainley attests to the remarkable "accuracy of most of her observations," especially given that Traill "had no access to . . . collections for comparative study" (84). Most significantly, she argues, Traill "quite consciously . . . both distanced herself from the European centers of botany and defined herself as a *woman* botanist" (86). Ainley praises Traill's "easy and informative writing" style and her use of "familiar and maternal metaphors and scientific terminology interchangeably," commending the fact that she "integrated rather than marginalized nonwestern scientific information and practices" (86, 91). Although neither Peterman nor Ainley focuses extensively on the text of Backwoods, their essays are highly significant because of the different critical approach to Traill's oeuvre they propose – an approach I consider in more depth in chapter eight.

A third direction taken by Traill criticism in the 1990's involves applying a generically-based analytical model to Backwoods, and then, more specifically, considering the text as an immigration and/or travel narrative. In "Breaking the 'Cake of Custom': The Atlantic Crossing as a Rubicon for Female Emigrants to Canada?," his contribution to Re(Dis)covering our Foremothers, Bentley uses sections of Backwoods to exemplify distinctive narrative features of immigration accounts written by women. He analyses these features within three broad categories – the departure, the voyage and the arrival – and suggests that Traill's text provides "[p]robably the most engaging and complex account by an emigrant woman of the crossing to Canada" (103). Bentley also briefly explores the generic conventions of the epistolary format utilized in Backwoods, arguing that the book "throws into relief the gender-dimension of the long letter home to mother, a type of writing that affirms a female connectiveness of the blood and heart across enormous geographical barriers" (104).

This trend of generic criticism is developed further in two articles by John Thurston published in 1995: "'Remember, My Dear Friend': Ideology and Genre in Upper Canadian Travel and Settlement Narratives" and "'The Dust of Toryism': Monarchism and Republicanism in Upper Canadian Travel and Immigration Texts." In the first of these pieces, Thurston argues that works such as Traill's Backwoods constitute a unique "genre not in ontological but in relational and functional terms" ("Remember" 183). Dominant features of Canadian travel and settlement narratives include a "stress [on] the naked subjectivity of the recording 'I'," intertextual

references, a concern with "the represented words of others," and hierarchized landscape descriptions in which "picturesque scenes that most recall old-country pastoral" are most highly valued (184 -188). Like Bentley, Thurston discusses the function of epistolary conventions in works such as Backwoods and comments on the "play of motherhood in Traill's text" (194), though his analysis of these features is more deeply developed. In "The Dust of Toryism," Thurston also adopts a generic perspective, but with a different focus. Using Mary Louise Pratt's concept of a "contact zone" between cultures as a starting point, he argues that "unique in the annals of empire . . . this particular zone [in nineteenth-century Upper Canada] was determined by the uneasy contiguity of two linguistically homogenous but politically opposed cultures" (77). In texts such as Backwoods, Thurston identifies a tension between "a language of political equality and unalienable rights" which had spread north from the republican U.S.A. and "the discourse of deference, hierarchy and rule by an elite," a product of the monarchical system in which British settlers to Canada had been raised (84-5).

In "Nobler Savages: Representations of Native Women in the Writings of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill," a 1997 article which adopts a theoretical approach similar to these genre-based studies of travel and settlement narratives, Carole Gerson explores the portrayal of Canada's First Nations people in Moodie and Traill's work. Like Thurston, Gerson utilizes Pratt's concept of a "contact zone," though she applies it specifically to the relationship between immigrant and Aboriginal women in the written accounts of these two writers. Gerson identifies the "mother-to-mother connection" Traill and Moodie establish with Native women in the "marginal space . . . [they share] on the outskirts of frontier culture" (10). In this contact zone, these pioneer women writers "negotiated past the silences imposed by Victorian decorum, especially upon middle-class women, by expressing some of their own publicly unspeakable desires and concerns through their literary representations of Indian women" (11).

Gerson's critical response to Backwoods, which – like Ainley's – embraces a feminist theoretical approach, is also linked to another significant direction in Traill criticism: a gendered analysis of Traill's writing within the context of domestic and feminine discourse. The groundwork for this critical trend dates back to Helen Buss's 1990 article, "Women and the Garrison Mentality: Pioneer Women Autobiographers and their Relation to the Land" in which she challenges the application of Frye's concept of the garrison mentality to Canadian women's writing. Of particular relevance to Traill's writing, Buss argues that we need to "broaden our idea of the literary canon" beyond fiction or poetry in order "to enlarge our vision of the entire

tradition" (126).[78] In a later article, "Listening to the 'Ground Noise' of Canadian Women Settlers' Memoirs: A Maternal Intercourse of Discourses," Buss develops her analysis of the linguistic features of pioneer women's writing by exploring the overt absence of "the maternal body . . . in the discourse of these women's memoirs" and its subtextual presence, which is evident in what Buss terms "ground noise" (200).

A concern with maternal discourse leads to the final two critics whose work on Traill I summarize here: Misao Dean and Gillian Whitlock. While their critical studies suggest a new approach to Traill's text, they also bring us full circle, back to nineteenth-century readings of Backwoods and to its cultural context. In Dean's full-length study of early Canadian writing, Practising Femininity: Domestic Realism and the Performance of Gender in Early Canadian Fiction (1998), she begins by challenging feminist readings which have sought to uncover the hidden reality of women's lives in the texts they analyse. Implicit in such critical approaches is "the premise that the role of language is to obscure or express already constituted feminine selves and so reproduce feminine experience in texts, bringing the real lives of women to witness in their fight for social equality" (5). Instead, Dean sets out to interrogate "historical texts within their historical contexts to suggest how they function ideologically to produce and naturalize femininity" (6). Although Dean's chapter on Traill focuses on one of the writer's lesser known works, The Female Emigrant's Guide, the discussion of "pioneer conduct literature" and "domestic ideals" in Traill's writing is highly relevant to Backwoods, laying the groundwork for my analysis in chapter seven.

Starting from the perspective of colonial discourse analysis, Gillian Whitlock, the most recent critic to engage seriously with Traill's work, seeks to provide a "specific, historical and contextual reading" (3) of a range of women's autobiographical writings from across the former British empire, including Traill's Backwoods. Although Whitlock's critical approach in The Intimate Empire: Reading Women's Autobiography differs from Dean's, and the texts she analyses are far more diverse, her reading of Traill's work within the context of the generic conventions of conduct books and "the emergent discourses of domesticity" (57) effectively

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[78] Although I have not specifically mentioned it in this chapter, Carole Gerson's 1995 article on canonicity, "Cultural Darwinism: Publishing and the Canon of Early Canadian Literature in English" is, like Buss' article, indirectly relevant to a reception history of Backwoods. While Buss argues for the inclusion of autobiographical works in the Canadian literary canon, Gerson focuses on the factors which have marginalized the work of writers such as Traill.

complements Dean's study. At the same time, Whitlock's concern with autobiographical writing leads to some perceptive comments about Traill's "autobiographic persona"; in particular, she discusses the manner in which Traill "authorizes herself as the competent, optimistic spouse of an emigrant officer" (52).

Before closing my analysis of the reception history of Backwoods, I would like to return to the broader issue of the interpretative communities which have read, assessed and re-interpreted Traill's text throughout its publishing history. One distinction I have deliberately not made up to this point is between responses in the general press, and those which are more specifically scholarly, though my analysis moves from a focus on the former, in terms of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century responses, to an almost exclusive concern with the latter in the selective overview I provide of recent responses to Backwoods. While this shifting emphasis reflects the increasingly academic nature of Canadian literary studies, it is also indicates a significant change in Traill's reading audience. As her brief appearances as a shadowy ancestor in Margaret Laurence's 1974 novel, The Diviners,[79] and as one of "Britannia's Daughters" in Joanna Trollope's 1984 popular history, Britannia's Daughters: Women of the British Empire, and – more significantly, the success of Charlotte Gray's 1999 Sisters in the Wilderness – indicate, Traill continues to be a figure of some biographical and historical interest to the general public. Yet in the last twenty years her publications have been consigned – in a manner which would have surprised the author a great deal – to the university classroom and the scholarly library.[80] A search in the popular Canadian press of the 1980's and 1990's for references to Catharine Parr Traill or Backwoods uncovers reviews of Gray's biography in the major national newspapers, and a few pieces in Beaver magazine, but nothing of any depth or significance. In one brief, but unusual reference, J. L. Granatstein, in a 1998 Macleans article entitled "Thinkers

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[79] For a discussion of the "resurrections" of Traill, Moodie and Carr as "literary ghosts," see Eva-Marie Kröller's 1981 article (45). Fiona Sparrow and Ann Boutelle also briefly explore Laurence's use of Traill in The Diviners: Sparrow analyses Traill's role as Morag's "interlocutor" (36), while Ann Boutelle characterizes the fictional Traill as "a summoned presence, a granted vision" ("Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence and Their Nineteenth-Century Forerunners" 45).

[80] The National Library of Canada has created a Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill website (<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/moodie-traill/t1-3300-e.html>), yet, as one would expect, this is merely a somewhat more accessible form of scholarly response to the life and work of Traill and her sister.

and writers: Canada's best, they made us think, and laugh" grants Traill a surprising degree of prominence. In a brief paragraph, he describes Traill as a "loving observer of nature and people" and briefly quotes from Backwoods. Unusually, Traill is the one Canadian "thinker and writer" Granatstein chooses to cite between Father Jean de Brebeuf, the Jesuit priest, and Stephen Leacock. Yet Granatstein's reference remains brief, and is hardly a "popular" response to Traill's text. In the eyes of the general reading public in the twenty-first century, Backwoods has become a work one studies for its historical content or its significance as an early example of Canadian literature. In John Frow's terms, Traill's initial readers engaged in "a 'first-order' practice of everyday culture" while reading the text, in contrast to her more recent audience who adopt a "'second-order' practice of analysis . . . conducted by a reader endowed with significant cultural capital" (87).

IV: A Definitive Edition: The 1997 CEECT Edition of Backwoods

The 1997 Centre for Editing Early Canadian Texts edition of Backwoods, which served, in part, as an inspiration for this thesis,[81] grants Backwoods an authority and canonical position it previously lacked, yet at the same time contributes to the increasing academicization of a text which once had a broader popular appeal.

The weightiness which Traill's work had acquired by the late 1990's is epitomized by the format and design of this scholarly version. At 335 pages, 156 of which consist of paratextual material such as a Foreword, an Editor's Preface, a lengthy Editor's Introduction, Authorial Perspectives, Explanatory Notes, a Bibliographical Description of Copy-text, an annotated account of Published Versions of the Text, a list of Emendations in Copy-text (indicated by page and line), and six Appendices consisting of excerpts from the correspondence of Catharine and Thomas Traill, this edition of Backwoods demands to be taken seriously. As Julie Beddoes explains – in reference to the CEECT edition of Moodie's Roughing It, but equally relevant here – the "book's size, appearance, and apparatus will not make it attractive to non-specialist readers, but it will almost certainly become the basis for critical readings . . . in the future" (374).

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[81] As this statement makes clear, I am deeply indebted to the CEECT edition with its extensive notes and extra-textual material so valuable to a student and critic. This edition of Backwoods far outstrips anything which preceded it in terms of reliability and comprehensiveness.

Michael Peterman, the editor of this definitive edition, identifies his aim as "to provide the reader with a reliable text of this influential work" (lvii). In general, the CEECT approach to textual bibliography is based on the theoretical "concepts of authorial autonomy and authorial intention" (Thurston, "Rewriting Roughing It" 198). Yet identifying Traill's authorial intention in Backwoods proved to be a complex task since neither a manuscript nor any pre-publication proofs have survived. In Peterman's assessment, "the first London edition is the version that most fully transmits Catharine Parr Traill's work, [yet] it does not perfectly reflect what is known about her intentions" (lvii). Hence, the core text presented in the CEECT edition is a compilation of features from both the 1835 and 1846 editions. With a few minor exceptions, the body of the text is based on the first edition. However, Peterman made an editorial decision not to reproduce a number of features of the original published text which he classifies as "non-authorial": "Knight's notes, the digest of the contents that appears at the beginning of each letter, and the appendix of statistics and other official data" (lvii-lviii). The only illustration reproduced is a chart by Frederick Preston Rubidge; a series of woodcuts, which Peterman deems irrelevant and which Traill complained about in a personal note,[82] are eliminated (Peterman lviii). At the same time, to correspond to the 1846 edition, material which was printed as an appendix in the first edition is now integrated into the core text as notes at the end of each letter.[83] In keeping with the scholarly tenor of the CEECT edition, all such changes, however minor, and textual variants are carefully documented in three lists which follow the core text: "Emendations in Copy-text," "Line-end Hyphenated Compounds in Copy-text" and "Line-end Hyphenated Compounds in CEECT Edition" (p. 303-16).

The resulting core text is comprehensive, yet clear. The relatively large format and font, as well as the generous margins, make the CEECT edition highly amenable to scholarly note-taking and photocopying (unlike the cramped New Canadian Library editions of Backwoods). Although the book includes forty-seven pages of detailed notes produced by Peterman, these are not allowed to disrupt the integrity of the core text – in fact, they are not even footnoted (instead, one finds specific references to pages and lines in the distinct explanatory notes section). The

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[82] In reference to the illustrations, Traill wrote ". . . the designs were wretched prints many of them miserable reprints from the Penny magazine and not one descriptive of Canadian scenery" (Peterman xlix).

[83] Peterman provides a detailed rationale for his editorial practices and decisions in the final section of the editor's introduction to the CEECT edition (lvii-lxii).

notes themselves expand upon and support Traill's text while implicitly positing a distinctive reading and evaluation of the work. Explanations of historical incidents and individuals alluded to in the core text emphasize the historical reliability and accuracy of Backwoods; references to related passages in published and archival works by Traill highlight the extensiveness of her oeuvre; and the identification of a range of intertextual references (mostly to other literary works, the Bible and contemporaneous[84] settlement narratives) makes an implicit claim for the significance and centrality of Traill's work. These explanatory notes, by virtue of their detail and quality, increase the weightiness of the text, delivering the message that Backwoods is a complex work embedded with a range of historical and literary allusions.

Within the impressive textual framework of the CEECT edition, Michael Peterman's editor's introduction holds a dominant position, second only to the core text itself. As one might expect, Peterman takes for granted Backwoods' position within the canon of serious Canadian writing. In Julia Beddoe's words, "when a text is considered worthy of appearance in a critical edition it is incorporated into the realm of literature, whatever position it had occupied before" (363). Peterman opens by providing a carefully documented biographical overview of Traill's life up until the publication of Backwoods and then moves into an area virtually ignored by previous critics of Traill's work, the actual publication history of the text. On the basis of extensive research in London libraries and archives, Peterman traces the history of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge which initially published Traill's text, and then follows the work through its many printings and editions. He provides an impressively comprehensive overview of reviews and critical responses to the text through to 1992 and closes by concluding that, "[s]uch responses emphasize the uniqueness of The Backwoods of Canada as a foundation work of Canadian literature" (lvii).

Clearly, The Backwoods of Canada has come a long way, from a 4s.6d, rather hastily produced text, to a definitive critical edition, the product of several years and countless hours of scholarly endeavour. A text once read principally as a practical handbook for emigrants or an anecdotal narrative for armchair travellers has gained a plethora of readings and interpretations over time and space. In the readings which follow I strive to add another layer of interpretation to the growing body of critical material which enriches, enlarges and recreates Catharine Parr

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[84] Throughout this thesis I use the adjective "contemporaneous" to refer specifically to events, works or individuals existing at the same time as Traill's text. Unless otherwise indicated, "contemporary" refers to recent events, works or individuals.

Traill's creation, The Backwoods of Canada.

CHAPTER 3

Predisposing the Reader: The Title and Introduction of The Backwoods of Canada

Very few references to the preparation and publication history of The Backwoods of Canada exist, either in archival or published material.[85] However, we can reasonably assume that Traill had no input into the design, lay-out or illustrations which accompanied the first or subsequent editions of the text as she was residing in rural Upper Canada during the editing and printing process.[86] On the basis of an undated note stored in the National Archives in Ottawa, we know that she was unimpressed by the format of the published text: "it was very carelessly edited and badly got up the designs were wretched prints many of them miserable reprints from the Penny Magazine[87] and not one descriptive of Canadian scenery."[88] Even the title of The Backwoods of Canada may well have been an editorial decision rather than the author's conception.[89]

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[85] In his introduction to the CEECT edition of Backwoods, Michael Peterman cites the few references he unearthed after extensive research (xxv-xxxiv). Subsequent citations to Peterman in this chapter refer to the editor's introduction unless otherwise indicated.

[86] Traill's sister, Agnes Strickland, appears to have served as her English representative (Grobel 429). In a letter dated 12 March 1842, addressed to Lord Brougham, the Chairman of the SDUK, which published Backwoods, Traill states that "Mr Knight [her editor] gave my sister Miss Agnes Strickland reason to hope that the Committee [of the Society] would in all probability grant an additional sum for succeeding editions – " (Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman 45).

[87] The Penny Magazine (1832-1845), a highly successful weekly publication aimed at working class readers, consisted of engravings and informative essays (Harold Smith 12, 31-2). Since Charles Knight edited both this journal and the SDUK's Library of Entertaining Knowledge series, it would have provided a free and readily available source of prints to accompany Traill's text. (For an assessment of the relevance of the illustrations to the first edition of Backwoods, see Elizabeth Thompson "Illustrations.") As mentioned in chapter two, selections from Backwoods were printed in the Penny Magazine in early 1836 as a form of advertisement for the text.

[88] Traill Family Collection, MG29, D81, TFC, vol. 6, 8687-8688.

[89] In the CEECT introduction, Peterman traces the history of the title. The first specific reference to the text, found in the Minutes of the Publication Committee of the SDUK for 2 June

Yet the finer points of how little input Traill had into the production of Backwoods, or the extent to which Charles Knight may have distorted her work through his heavy-handed editing and packaging of the text, which are dealt with at some length by Peterman in his excellent introduction to the CEECT edition, are not my immediate concerns.[90] The issue of author intentionality can be problematic at best; I have chosen to take the published text as a given and focus in this chapter on the discursive strategies employed in the title and introduction to the first edition, analysing the means by which these often underrated components predispose readers to particular interpretative approaches. I am deliberately seeking to bring, in Gillian Whitlock's terms, "the marginalia into the framework of the reading, rather than placing it as a distraction from the main gain" (13).[91]

Book titles, especially lengthy nineteenth-century ones which favour information over wit, rarely receive more than a cursory glance from contemporary critics. Yet an analysis of the complete title of Backwoods and the title page to the first edition provides a crucial starting part for an exploration of the rhetorical positioning and authorizing of the text, as well as the

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1835 refers to "a work transmitted . . . by Mrs Traill containing a Journal of her residence in the Back settlements of Canada" which is "descriptive of an Emigrant's settlement and residence in Canada" (302-3). In a letter dated 15 November, one of the committee members refers to the manuscript as "the book on Canada" and by December 1 of the same year, it has become "Letters from the Backwoods" in the Minutes of the Publication Committee (Peterman xxxii, SDUK Minutes 340). Using the terms "Letters" in the title seems to have been an editorial decision: in a hand-written amendment made by Traill to a copy of Backwoods recently acquired by Peterman (referred to in chapter one of this thesis), she has written "Under the Pines – The First Eleven Years of My Long Life in Ontario [illegible word] of Canada" above "The Backwoods of Canada," followed by "Extracts from My Diary begun July 1832." I discuss some of the generic implications of the use of the term "letters" in the title later in this chapter.

[90] It is only fair to note that, in spite of her complaints, Traill was not treated in an atypical fashion by her editor/publisher. As Allan Dooley indicates in his fascinating study of the relationship between authors and printers in Victorian England, "[a]uthorial control over first editions was often limited, and reprints provided opportunities for revisions that may have been denied, overlooked, or impossible during the printing of the first edition" (91). Charles Knight's inclusion of extra material forwarded by Traill in an appendix to the first addition can be interpreted as an attempt to develop the text with as much of her work as possible, although he did add other material, including a second appendix "inserted at the request of the Commissioners for Emigration" (Grobel 430).

[91] In this statement Whitlock refers to different editorial versions of The History of Mary Prince, in which there is significant interpretative interplay between lengthy introductions and the work itself. However, the marginal features of Backwoods predispose particular readings and interact with Traill's core text in a similarly significant, if less overt, fashion.

marketing strategies employed by Traill's editor. The title page to Backwoods fulfills four main functions: it affiliates the work with a specific educational/literary institution, provides a general delineation of its genre and format, specifies its content – while making a claim for its inherent usefulness – and identifies the social position of the author.

In "Prismatic Effects," a sociological analysis of literature, Alain Viala argues that "institutions of literary life" provide the first of a series of "prisms" which, considered collectively, lead to an appreciation of the social significance of a text. Such "institutions of literary life . . . act as mediators between literature and other social activities and function within the literary field and for the discourse about literary works" (261). The institutional affiliation of Backwoods is indicated in the initial heading on the title page: "The Library of Entertaining Knowledge." This series of texts, published by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge between 1829 and 1838,[92] was a practical offshoot of the liberal adult-education movement which became active in the 1820's in Britain. The movement, most prominently represented by mechanics' institutes,[93] embraced the "belief that the new knowledge associated with the Industrial Revolution, and notably science, should be more widely disseminated" (Roderick and Stephens, "Steam Intellect" 21). Mechanics' institutes sought to provide increased education and opportunities for members of the British working class through the provision of lecture programmes, classes and reading or lending libraries (20). Although the SDUK was a large and highly successful organization[94] sponsoring a range of publications, it might seem an

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[92] In the strict sense of the word, as a matter of policy, the SDUK did not publish books. The role of its committee members consisted of "read[ing] the plan or outline of any proposed book," inspecting manuscript proofs, approving publication and establishing the author's fee (Harold Smith 7). However, the distinction is a fine one. Charles Knight, SDUK's publisher from 1827 onwards, was responsible for superintending all of the Society's publications and participated in its decision-making committee (Smith 7). Hence, he was involved in the entire publication process from selection, through editing to printing, binding and the distribution of texts.

[93] The term "mechanics' institute" may be somewhat misleading to a modern reader. In the 1820's, the term "mechanic" was used broadly to refer to any craftsman or manual worker (Roderick and Stephens, Education and Industry 57).

[94] In a survey of 747 mechanics institutes published in 1851, J. W. Hudson lists 1200 members of the SDUK. Only six similar organizations in the country claimed larger memberships; the average size was 173 members and 42% had memberships of less than 100 (224-38). Hudson's classification of the SDUK as a mechanics' institute is somewhat misleading, however, as its focus was different: it "was conceived of as an ally of the Mechanics' Institutes and the reading societies" with the goal of promoting "the writing, publication and distribution of

unlikely publishing avenue for a text such as Backwoods, which was aimed at a primarily genteel audience of potential emigrants. However, a brief examination of the nature and development of the nineteenth-century popular education movement which sparked the creation of the SDUK (and which was commonly, though disparagingly, referred to as the "steam intellect movement"[95]), as well as a consideration of Traill's ideological leanings and former social circle in England, helps to explain her association with this publisher.[96]

The steam intellect movement, in spite of its ostensible goal of educating the working class, was supported largely by members of the middle class who possessed sufficient literacy to benefit from the public lectures, classes and library facilities it provided (Roderick and Stephens, "Mechanics' Institutes" 62, and Harold Smith 33). Such individuals might well become potential emigrants to British North America or, if they subscribed to the idealistic goal of improving their education and social status which mechanics' institutes superficially promoted,[97] might be expected to respond positively to Traill's sometimes didactic authorial stance and the scientific information provided in Backwoods. Furthermore, an examination of the publication list of the SDUK suggests a far broader audience for its publications than members of mechanics' institutes. The published texts in its first Library of Useful Knowledge series included such challenging

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. . . books" aimed at adult self-improvement (Harold Smith 5).

[95] The term "steam intellect" has an interesting history. Initially used satirically in Thomas Love Peacock's novel Crochet Castle to ridicule the SDUK and its chairman, Brougham (Harold Smith 10), it has been revived by modern historians such as Ian Inkster as a convenient umbrella term. Inkster, whose example I follow, adopts the term because its "ambiguity" reflects "the nature and function" of adult education in the nineteenth century. (Preface, no pagination, and Scientific Culture 309).

[96] Peterman provides a more detailed account of the SDUK and outlines Traill's ideological and (possibly) personal links with the organization in his introduction to the CEECT edition. It is interesting to note that the Society was apparently not Traill's initial choice of a publisher. In the last extant letter she wrote, just two days before her death, Traill mentions that Backwoods was "twice rejected" before, by "a mere chance . . . [it] found any firm bold enough to take the risk of its publication" (Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman 401).

[97] Not surprisingly, Marx and Engels suggested that these institutes were designed as a means of social control rather than emancipation: "Here the natural sciences are now taught, which may draw the working-men away from their opposition to the bourgeoisie, and perhaps place in their hands the means of making inventions which bring in money for the bourgeoisie" (On Britain, Moscow: 1962, p. 275 – cited by Inkster, Introduction 7). In his closing assessment of the SDUK, Harold Smith argues that in spite of being "a pioneer in much of its work" the Society proved to be "socially impotent and educationally a failure" (40).

works as Henry Brougham's Introductory Discourse Upon The Objects, Advantage, and Pleasures Of Scientific Pursuits. The second series, in which Backwoods was published, was known as the Library of Entertaining Knowledge. Although it was designed to be "less rigorous and more accessible" than the previous one (Peterman xxix), it included volumes on biography, geography, history and natural history – and most famously, Edward William Lane's An Account Of The Manners And Customs of the Modern Egyptians, published in the same year as Backwoods.[98]

At a time when books were prohibitively expensive for much of the population, the Library of Entertaining Knowledge series was sold as cheaply as possible and was distributed through mechanics' institutes, SDUK committees, and booksellers (Peterman xxix). The Society's understanding was that writers of this second series would, in the words of the Chairman, "maintain a strictly rational and even learned tone – avoiding all childish matter – as well as ambitious ornament – and giving as much science as may be given plainly. But within these limits the more popular and attractive the better . . ."[99] Although both Charles Knight, who had become publications supervisor for the society in 1827 (Peterman xxxix), and the Publications Committee of the SDUK considered Traill's text suitable for this second series, one senior member of the committee expressed reservations, arguing that Backwoods "seems rather below the class of books . . . in the Entertaining Knowledge Library" (Grobel 429-30). It seems quite possible that this negative evaluation was influenced by either Traill's gender or the gendered perspective she adopts towards her subject matter. All editorial decisions were made by SDUK committees, and, as Harold Smith emphasizes, "there were never any women active in the society" (7). An examination of the publishing list of the Library of Entertaining Knowledge series indicates seventeen authors, only one of whom, Sarah Porter, was a woman.[100] She wrote Vegetable Substances: Materials of Manufactures, one of a three-part series published in 1833 (the other two parts were written by Robert Mudie and Edwin Lankester).

Traill's association with the SDUK may be accounted for, in part, by her admiration for

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[98] See Harold Smith, Appendix B, 48-9 for a complete list of the society's publications. As Smith indicates, "[t]he dividing line [between the two series] was not always clear." The Library of Entertaining Knowledge, "[i]n its appeal to working people . . . was far more popular than its predecessor but at the same time it issued some outstanding reference books which, by their authoritative nature, could well have appeared in the Library of Useful Knowledge" (30).

[99] Henry Brougham to A.T. Thomson, 19 August 1828, quoted in Grobel, vol. 2, 388.

[100] Grobel includes this list in volume four of her dissertation, in the bibliography (unpaginated).

Henry Brougham, who instigated the foundation of the society in 1826 and served as its sole chairman throughout its twenty years of existence (Harold Smith 7). Brougham was an immensely popular and significant public figure in the first half of the nineteenth century. By 1830 "[h]e had helped with the founding of the London Mechanics' Institute, been elected Rector of Glasgow University, published his pamphlet Practical Observations [on public education], launched London University, founded and been made chairman of the SDUK . . . [been] created Baron Brougham and Vaux and made Lord Chancellor" (Harold Smith 20). Although Traill never met him personally, a portrait of Brougham hung in the living room of her backwoods cottage in Canada and she wrote to him in March of 1842, expressing her personal admiration for his work and requesting his assistance in claiming remuneration for subsequent editions of Backwoods (Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman 41, 45). Like Brougham, Traill supported social causes such as the abolition of slavery and the improvement of public education (Peterman xxx).

A more specific link between Traill and the SDUK may be found in her sister Susanna's close relationship with Thomas Pringle, a Scottish poet and noted abolitionist.[101] In the early 1830's, Susanna resided for several months in London and moved in the Pringles' social circle; through Pringle she met her future husband, John Moodie (and Traill, in turn, met her husband through John Moodie). Since Pringle and Charles Knight were good friends, and Knight published a sketch of Moodie's prior to publishing Backwoods, it is likely that at the Pringles' London home Traill met the man who later became her editor (Peterman xxx). Knight was unlikely to have considered Traill's work if she were not an acquaintance; as Janet Percival explains, authors published in the SDUK series "were selected by the General Committee, where they had to be known to at least one member" (2).

Michael Peterman and Carl Ballstadt suggest that Charles Knight's acceptance of Backwoods may have been partly an act of desperation, since the text was evidently rushed into publication to meet an overdue production deadline (Introduction to Forest and Other Gleanings 15-16). Yet Harold Smith's study of the SDUK leads him to conclude that "the prestige and influence of the Society were such that, despite all the difficulties [including the submission of an outline and a "rigorous process" of approval], there was rarely a shortage of eager authors waiting to have their work published by the Society" (35). As well, "[m]any of the Society's publications

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[101] As Charlotte Gray suggests, Susanna "adored" Pringle and he, in turn, "indulged" her, "praised her poems and encouraged her to question convention . . . . It was an intoxicating relationship: a mix of paternal and erotic affection" (23).

were pioneers in their particular field of knowledge and were often models for later works" (38). Still, for the purpose of my study, the crucial fact remains that Backwoods was approved for publication by the SDUK, subject to a number of unidentified corrections, in December of 1835 (Minutes 340). Its inclusion in the Library for Entertaining Knowledge series granted the text authority while associating it with the liberal cause of educating members of the working class – however limited the book's relevance may have actually been for such an audience.

Let me return at this point to the original title page of Traill's published text, bearing in mind Gerard Genette's apt analysis that the title of a work is directed

> . . . at many more people than the text, people who by one route or another receive it and transmit it and thereby have a hand in circulating it. For if the text is an object to be read, the title (like, moreover, the name of the author) is an object to be circulated – or, if you prefer, a subject of conversation. (75)

The complete title of the first edition of Traill's text, a highly specific "object to be circulated," reads as follows: "The Backwoods of Canada: Being Letters From the Wife of an Emigrant Officer, Illustrative of the Domestic Economy of British America." Positioned prominently on the original title page, the opening phrase of the title, "The Backwoods of Canada," places the text geographically in rural Canada.[102] Presumably, Traill's 1836 readers would contextualize Backwoods as yet another work on pioneer life in Canada; as Carl Ballstadt points out in the overview of Traill's work included in Canadian Writers and Their Works, "[o]ver one hundred non-fiction accounts of emigration were published in Britain during the 1820s and 1830s" ("Catharine Parr Traill" 1:185).

Given the abundance of such accounts, the identification of the author of Backwoods as a "wife" becomes an important distinguishing feature of the text, reinforced by the phrase "domestic economy" in the final line of the subtitle.[103] The appellation "wife" would also have granted Traill a social authority at a time when, as Elaine Showalter explains, critics regarded wives and mothers "as *normal* women; the unmarried and the childless had already a certain sexual stigma to overcome. In the early part of the [nineteenth] century, attacks on the barren

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[102] The fact that Traill resided in *Upper* Canada was apparently not deemed an important distinction. The only locational reference in the opening section of the text consists of a vague statement about "the loneliest part of our Western wilderness" in Traill's introduction (4).

[103] The introduction Traill wrote for the first edition, which I discuss later in this chapter, includes numerous references to the uniqueness of her gendered authorial perspective.

spinster novelist were part of the common fund of humour" (70). Perhaps Traill should also be seen as exploring and exploiting her relatively new role as a married woman in this text; as Gillian Whitlock suggests, "Traill chooses to write as a wife . . . she authorizes herself as the competent, optimistic spouse of an emigrant officer" (52). This was obviously a novel, and significant, role for Traill: her marriage was a relatively hasty affair, and it is reasonable to assume that prior to meeting her future husband she had considered the possibility of remaining permanently single. At thirty she would no longer have been viewed as a particularly eligible marriage partner, and the decline in the Strickland family's financial and social status since the death of her father would have all but precluded the possibility of acquiring a wealthy husband. Traill's self-consciousness as a newly married woman is indicated in a personal letter written in May of 1832 to her friend James Bird. She begins to sign her maiden name at the close of this letter, but catches herself after writing "Str" and tacks on her new name, "Traill." In a brief explanatory note, she adds, "It is so new to me I forgot my maiden name was signed away" (Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman 39).

The emphasis placed on Traill's social position in the title of Backwoods, established through her formal link to an "officer"[104] and reinforced by her use of the term "economy" to describe the management of her household, bestows an authority on the text as a whole. Presumably, Traill's rank is also sufficiently authoritative to negate the necessity of including her name on the title page, although this absence is not particularly surprising. She had not yet earned a reputation as a writer under her married name, and a number of her earlier works had been published anonymously.[105] Traill's output during the 1820's consisted primarily of children's books, references to which would have held little relevance for readers of the Library of Entertaining Knowledge series. In fact, given the relatively low status of children's literature, such references may have diminished rather than enhanced her credibility with potential readers.

The most prominent generic marker in the title of Backwoods is "letters," a term which

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[104] Her husband, Thomas Traill, an officer in the 21st Scottish Regiment of Fusiliers, had retired on half-pay after the Napoleonic wars. This position qualified him for a land grant in Britain's North American colony.

[105] Anonymity was not limited to women's texts. As Susan Coultrap-McQuinn points out: "[m]any of the behaviors that sometimes have been identified as evidence of women's anxiety of authorship – anonymity or pseudonymity, claims of writing for the good of humanity, denial of professional status, postures of moral superiority or of self-effacement – actually were common among men as well as women and, when expressed by women, are indications of their understanding of the expectations of the nineteenth-century marketplace" (xii-xiii).

warrants critical attention. In general, critics prior to Carl Ballstadt interpreted this generic label literally, reading Backwoods as a compilation of genuine letters collected and published a few years after they were written. Yet anything more than a cursory glance at the format and content of these "letters" renders such a classification problematic, as does a comparison of the published text with Traill's personal letters. As I suggested in chapter one, Traill may well have used correspondence from her early years in Canada as source material for her work, perhaps even keeping copies of letters with this purpose in mind. However, this remains conjecture as only one extant letter from this period of time is currently available. Dated 7 January 1834, and addressed to two of Traill's Suffolk friends, James and Emma Bird, the letter includes a description of the interior of the family's log cabin which is reasonably similar to that found in letter nine of Backwoods (a textual "letter" apparently addressed to Traill's mother or sister[106]). Here is a brief extract from the Bird letter:

> In the parlour we are kept warm and cheered by a Franklin stove a very handsome adornment to our room. The floor is covered with an Indian mat plaited by my friends the squaws from the inner bark of the c[edar]. We have a handsome sofa with brass railing which also s[erves] as a bed for one or even two persons. (Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman 41)

Now here is the similar passage from letter nine of Backwoods:

> Our parlour is warmed by a handsome Franklin stove with brass gallery, and fender. Our furniture consists of a brass-railed sofa, which serves upon occasion for a bed, Canadian painted chairs, a stained pine table, green and white muslin curtains, and a handsome Indian mat that covers the floor. (103)

Evidently, material transposed from genuine letters such as the above into the text of Backwoods was quite extensively edited. As Clara Thomas, suggests, "[t]he letters themselves bear strong, if negative, evidence of editing: no extraneous family chit-chat, above all no emotional imbalance, disturb their calm and lucid gentility" (Introduction 8). The lack of attention paid to formal sentence structure in the passage quoted from Traill's unedited letter to the Birds is, for example, typical of her correspondence with family and friends, as is the inclusion of multiple personal greetings, information about family members, and messages to be delivered on behalf of others.[107]

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[106] Although it includes no formal salutation or closing, letter nine contains specific requests, presumably made to family members: "The first time you send a parcel or box, do not forget to enclose flower-seeds" and "I should be grateful for a few nuts from our beautiful old stock-nut trees" (107).

[107] An interesting contrast to Traill's personal and public writings can be found in the

And like the intimate letters of her sister, Susanna Moodie, Traill's "personal letters record emotions which could not be overtly articulated by Victorian ladies even when recounting their hardships in the Canadian wilderness, such as their constant anxiety about the health of their family and friends as well as their own frequent physical pain and psychological distress" (Gerson, Canada's Early Women Writers 21-22). No such emotional passages appear in the "letters" of Backwoods.[108]

Further evidence of the constructed nature of the letters in Backwoods can be provided. Although Traill purports to provide an accurate autobiographical account of her experiences – "The simple truth, founded entirely on personal knowledge of facts related, is the basis of the work" she announces in the introduction (4) – she alters a number of events to suit the narrative structure of her published text, and changes the names of places and people, presumably to protect their privacy. Peterman has documented the major discrepancies between the historical details of Traill's experiences and the narrative account in Backwoods in his introduction to the CEECT edition, so I will merely mention these in passing. To begin with, Traill avoids any mention of the hastiness of the decision she and her husband made to emigrate to Canada, the disapproval felt by her mother and her older sister Agnes, or the serious illness which almost postponed her departure.[109] Name changes include that of the ship she and her husband travelled on (from the *Rowley* to the *Laurel*) and those of people encountered on route (Peterman xxvii). As well as protecting individuals about whom Traill wrote, these changes help to reinforce the persona she seeks to convey through her writing. The narrator of Backwoods is a strong and forward-looking woman, not an individual who was beset by poor health before the onset of her adventurous

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recently published letters of the pioneer Lucy Peel (referred to briefly in chapter one). Peel's letters fall between the extremes of Traill's private correspondence and the "letters" of Backwoods: they include numerous references to members of the author's family and English social circle, are often quite emotional, and lack "the artifice of chronicles self-consciously produced for publication" (Little 2), yet they were devised for a specific audience, are quite carefully crafted and develop the writer's persona as a sensitive, yet capable pioneer woman (not unlike the persona Traill seeks to convey in Backwoods).

[108] I discuss the careful circumscription of descriptions of personal illness or weakness in Backwoods in my analysis of Traill's narrative persona in chapter four.

[109] According to her great-niece, Traill later admitted to having been so sick that she was "carried on board the brig *Laurel*" (Mary Agnes Fitzgibbon, 167). Interestingly, Fitzgibbon refers to the ship by the name Traill utilized in Backwoods, not the name of the ship she actually travelled on (the *Rowley*).

journey, or whose departure from England might be regarded as precipitous. Another significant contrast between Traill's actual and purported experiences is the shortening of the time period between the arrival of the Traills in Canada and their settlement in their backwoods home (Peterman xxvii). Through this temporal streamlining Traill maintains the momentum of the narrative and conveys a clear sense of progress.

A final piece of evidence supporting a generic, rather than literal interpretation of the term "letters" in the title of Backwoods has recently surfaced. As mentioned in chapter one, on an early copy of Backwoods acquired by Michael Peterman, Traill crossed out the word "Letter" at the beginning of the first chapter, replacing it with the phrase "Extracts from My Diary begun July 1832." She also added the words "Under the Pines – The first eleven years of My Long Life in Ontario ? [illegible word] of Canada. An Autobiography."[110] Yet, while this document provides an interesting piece of textual evidence, casting possible light on the generic characteristics of the text as Traill perceived them, one should not over-estimate its significance. As Allan Dooley suggests, when encountering authorial emendations to texts, "[t]he paramount matters are always when, how, and with what aim the author made the alterations" (134). Did the changes "arise from a concentrated reconsideration of the text . . .? Were they seriously intended as modifications to appear in the published form of the work, or were they trial readings, no more than artistic doodlings?" (134-5). At the moment such questions remain unanswered; without a close physical and textual analysis of the text held by Michael Peterman, the significance of the emendations made by Traill remains hypothetical.

But let me return to the issue of "letters." In the broader context of nineteenth-century travel narratives/settler's guides, John Thurston suggests that "[t]he exact status of many things called letters in this literature is difficult to determine" ("Remember" 189). In the "letters" of her text, Traill includes descriptions of people and places, conversations overheard or participated in, anecdotes (sometimes related second hand), practical instructions for household maintenance and food preparation, detailed accounts of Canadian plants and birds, reflections on the experience of emigration, ethnographical accounts of First Nations people and advice on a range of subjects. Some letters begin or end with specific addresses to the individual who was supposedly the original reader (such as the "Once more on terra firm, dearest mother" of letter four), some read

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[110] Traill also used the title "Under the Pines" in a manuscript – 'Notebook' for 1887-94 (now held in the National Archives: TFC, 3:4054-124) – in which she outlines plans for a fuller and more accurate autobiographical account of her early years in Canada" (Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman 11). I referred briefly to this autobiographical narrative in chapter one.

like sketches or essays, while others claim to consist of parts of an "original journal" the author kept (see letter six, for example).[111] Backwoods was also initially referred to by Traill's editor as "a journal of her residence in the Back settlements of Canada," although the final title of the published work became "Letters from the Backwoods" (Peterman xxv-vi).

The letter format functions as a loose generic template for Backwoods, allowing Traill a degree of formal freedom while associating the text with other successful works of "letters" by travellers and emigrants.[112] The practice of presenting informative texts in the form of supposed letters, rather than chapters, was common in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Traill had already used this format in an earlier fictional settlement narrative, The Young Emigrants, which consists of letters written from two emigrant settlers to a sister who has remained behind in England. This work was influenced by letters the Stricklands received from a family friend who had emigrated to Canada, as well as by two popular travel narratives, Francis Hall's Travels in Canada and the United States in 1816 and 1817 and John Howison's Sketches of Upper Canada (1821), both written in the form of "letters home" (Ballstadt, "Catharine Parr Traill" 1:163, 186). By the time Traill wrote Backwoods, we can reasonably assume that she had also read such popular texts as William Bell's Hints to Emigrants in a Series of Letters from Upper Canada and Thomas Magrath's Authentic Letters from Upper Canada (Ballstadt 1:185). She was certainly familiar with Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's Letters From an American Farmer (1782), having integrated several pages of this text into one of her earlier children's works, Narrative of Nature, and History Book for Young Naturalists (Schieder, "Catharine Parr Traill" 12).

Yet none of these works consists of "letters" in anything more than a vaguely generic sense of the term. Similarly, while we can assume that Traill used autobiographical material from a journal and some of her correspondence as source material for Backwoods, the final text should be read as a constructed narrative produced for a British reading public in the 1830's, not as a

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[111] The reference to an "original part of my journal" (61) corresponds with Traill's hand-written amendment to the edition held by Michael Peterman.

[112] And perhaps with the popular genre of epistolary fiction, which Janet Altman divides into "two basic categories — erotic and educational" (Epistolarity 196). Two manifestations of what Altman identifies as the "educational impulse" in epistolary works correspond to aspects of Traill's text: "In the first the letter writer functions almost uniquely as teacher, and the entire letter collection is perceived as a primer. . . In the second the letter writer functions as guide, and the novel assumes the form of a travelogue or compilation of essays on contemporary society" (196).

collection of letters. But before I leave the topic of letters, I wish to address one final question: given that genre functions as a dynamic process *in* and *through* texts, rather than simply a means of categorization, how can we delineate the function and effect of Traill's use of an epistolary framework in The Backwoods of Canada?

As John Thurston suggests, letters share with journals and sketches "both the potential for journalistic immediacy and personal engagement and the potential for familiar contact and informal style; perhaps above all they share an authenticity guaranteed by these other attributes" ("Remember" 192). In the first "letter" of Backwoods, Traill positions herself as a faithful and obedient daughter leaving home to begin a new life in Canada, yet maintaining a close emotional bond with her mother, and mother-land, through her writing:

> I received your last kind letter, my dearest mother, only a few hours before we set sail from Greenock. As you express a wish that I should give you a minute detail of our voyage, I shall take up my subject from the time of our embarkation, and write as inclination prompts me. Instead of having reason to complain of short letters, you will, I fear, find mine only too prolix. (6)

In this opening passage, Traill emphasizes the reciprocity of the epistolary gesture while positioning her reader as a patient and loving mother who will not only appreciate a detailed account of her daughter's journey, but has in fact requested such a narrative. As Janet Altman explains, the "epistolary form is unique in making the reader (narratee) almost as important an agent in the narrative as the writer (narrator)" (88). By definition, letters are "the result of a union of writer and reader" (88), even when the correspondence in the text remains exclusively one-sided.

Yet the epistolary framework of Backwoods functions as more than just a convenient generic marker, or a flexible format into which Traill can insert a range of narrative, expository and didactic material (although it certainly fulfills these roles). Equally importantly, the "letters" of the text articulate the disjunction between the dominant persona, *Mrs.* Catharine Parr Traill, Canadian emigrant and successful pioneer woman, and her former self, *Miss* Catharine Parr Strickland, successful British writer of children's stories, who has been left behind in the "old" country. Traill's former self is never directly referred to; rather she is embodied in the shadowy persona of her mother, who functions as the confidant and "internal reader"[113] of the opening

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[113] I use Altman's term here. She stresses the importance of the "simple distinction . . . between the internal and external epistolary narrative" (88). In this case, the internal epistolary narrative involves Traill and her mother (and in later letters her sister and an unidentified female

textual letters, and, in a broader sense, is symbolically represented by the writer's lost home/*mother*land. As well as articulating a sense of loss, the "letters" of Backwoods provide a permanent textual link between Traill and the world she has left behind. Stressing the psychological as well as functional role of this epistolary narrative, D.M.R. Bentley suggests that Traill's "long letter home to mother . . . affirms a female connectiveness of the blood and heart across enormous geographical barriers, and for both daughter and mother, mitigates the feeling of separation . . . that follows the removal of the child from home and family" ("Breaking the 'Cake of Custom'" 104). The somewhat contradictory functions of articulating a sense of loss and embodying interpersonal links in spite of physical displacement characterize epistolary discourse, according to Janet Altman:

> Epistolary discourse is a discourse marked by hiatuses of all sorts: time lags between event and recording, between message transmission and reception; spatial separation between writer and addressee; blank spaces and lacunae in the manuscript. Yet it is also a language of gap closing, of writing to the moment, of speaking to the addressee as if he were present. (140)

Not surprisingly, the final "letters" of Backwoods increasingly focus on distances and differences, while the opening ones stress the similarities between Traill's shipboard experiences and early impressions of the Canadian landscape, and the world she has left behind.

In the next chapter, I explore the link between the letters of Traill's text and her traveling persona; for now, let me proceed with an analysis of the introductory features of the text.

The introduction to the first edition of Backwoods fulfills a number of roles, and through its temporal positioning potentially frames the text which follows, predisposing a reader to employ specific interpretative strategies. As Carole Gerson explains, "[w]ritten last but strategically placed to be read first, the preface may record the author's final thoughts, yet it preconditions the reader's first encounter with the principal text" ("The Presenting Face" 57). However, the introduction to Backwoods – which like the title page is often overlooked by critics – may at a quick glance seem formulaic and ill-suited to, if not directly in conflict with, the material it precedes. Written in the third person (Traill refers to herself exclusively as "the writer"), this opening section is positioned to market and validate the text which follows through assertions of the author's integrity and experience, and affirmations of the work's educational value and usefulness. Yet the stance and tone of the introduction seem out of place with the

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friend), while the external narrative implicates Traill's reading public into the epistolary cycle.

reflective, first person account of Traill's journey which fills the initial "letters" of the book (although the text becomes somewhat more didactic, reminiscent of this introduction, as it progresses).

One critic, Judith Johnston, questions the authorship of the introduction to Backwoods, suggesting that its tone is uncharacteristically assertive for the work of a nineteenth-century woman writer; hence, she proposes that it was written by Traill's (male) editor (40). Charles Knight certainly added material to the text which Traill submitted for publication, expanding it with a series of footnotes and an appendix in order to "render this Work of more practical value to persons desiring to emigrate" (as he explains in the 1836 edition of Backwoods, p. [326] or [327]).[114] He also consulted with Traill about her text in 1835, and in response to his request for additional material, she provided "a number of recipes and instructions on domestic procedures that were meant to be added to the letters already in his hands" (Peterman xxxiii). While she may have forwarded the introduction along with this new material, this seems unlikely since the layout of the first edition indicates that the work was already in the process of being printed by the time Knight received Traill's additions.[115]

Rather than having this introduction written for her, in all likelihood Traill prepared it with her publisher in mind – perhaps even specifically targeting the Library of Entertaining Knowledge series. Johnston's suggestion that Knight wrote the introduction is not borne out by a close examination of its textual features, which bear clear markings of Traill's style and thematic concerns.[116] Although I recognize the somewhat ambiguous and inconsistent relationship between the introduction and the text which follows, I read its assertiveness as highly

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[114] Cited by Peterman lxv, Note #34.

[115] As a result, portions of the "new" text were included in an appendix with the editorial comment that the book was already "in progress through the Press" when the material was received (1836 edition, p. [315]. Cited by Peterman xxxiii).

[116] Here are two specific indications that the introduction is Traill's handiwork: 1) Her use of the Scottish term for "hold" in the phrase "to haud the house in order" in the opening sentence of the introduction recalls the fascination with Scotland she expresses in other writings. The first story Traill wrote was entitled "The Blind Highland Piper" and "Scotland was the dream of my youth," she informs us in Pearls and Pebbles (161). In Backwoods, Traill quotes from the poet Robert Burns in letter two (18) and includes a poem she wrote, partially in dialect, entitled "The Scottish Emigrant's Song" in letter four (37-39). 2) In one of the later letters of Backwoods, Traill refers to "Dr. Dunlop's spirited and witty 'Backwoodsman'," using almost the same wording as she does in the second sentence of the introduction.

characteristic of nineteenth-century women's writing in its claims to a gendered authority based on the specifically feminine attributes of the writer and her text, as does Misao Dean (19-20). As Sherry Ortner reminds us, "gender is itself centrally a prestige system – a system of discourses and practices that constructs male and female not only in terms of differential roles and meanings but also in terms of differential *value*, differential 'prestige'" (143). In this context, Traill is emphasizing – rather than masking – her gender, exploiting its differential value to enhance the authenticity and economic viability of her text.

Traill's introduction is a rhetorically and generically significant section of the text, providing indications of her subject-position within several overlapping discourses central to the work as a whole and including a number of generic markers. The two major discourses within which Traill positions herself are closely related: femininity and domesticity. These discourses, initially announced in the full title of the book – The Backwoods of Canada: Being Letters From the *Wife* of an Emigrant Officer, Illustrative of the *Domestic* Economy of North America (italics mine) – are now exploited by Traill in the introduction to establish the uniqueness of her work. As a wife, her femininity safely bound within the conventions of marriage, she can provide a unique perspective on emigration (none of the previously published settler's handbooks had been written by a woman), while her focus on domestic concerns endows her work with a practical utility. At the same time, Traill's writer/pioneer wife persona is no threat to male enterprise since the goal of her domestic management is to enable the man of the house to engage in larger-scale pursuits of politics and capitalist ventures outside the home.

Of course, Traill's work is not without political implications, nor does she neglect economic issues in a broader sense of the word. Discourses of colonialism and capitalism come into play in the introduction to Backwoods, although these are articulated almost exclusively within the constraints of a gendered perspective. Like femininity and domesticity, they are also closely intertwined. As the subtitle of the book indicates, Traill is the "Wife of an *Emigrant Officer*" (italics mine). Men such as her husband, described by Traill as "pioneers of civilization in the wilderness," possess the gentlemanly qualities and, by implication, the military discipline essential to the civilizing mission of colonialism.[117] The assumption that the success of the colonizing mission in Upper Canada would be achieved through capitalist economic development,

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[117] Obviously, the privileged discourse of class also interacts with discourses of colonialism and capitalism here. The ways in which Traill positions herself as a member of an elite social and intellectual class will be explored more specifically in the sections of this study dealing with Backwoods as a travel and settler's narrative.

which was treated as synonymous with progress, is as much a given in Traill's text as in the male-dominated discourse of nineteenth-century imperialism. Equally accepted in the society at large, as well as in Backwoods, is the link between domesticity and imperialism. As Anne McClintock argues in Imperial Leather, "imperialism cannot be understood without a theory of domestic space and its relation to the market" (17).

Traill begins the introduction to Backwoods, the first book-length work she produced in a genre which was not traditionally feminine, by claiming a gendered space for the text in relation to the dominant (masculine) settler's narratives published in the preceding decade:

> Among the numerous works on Canada that have been published within the last ten years, with emigration for their leading theme, there are few, if any, that give information regarding the domestic economy of a settler's life, sufficiently minute to prove a faithful guide to the person on whose responsibility the whole comfort of a family depends – the mistress, whose department it is "to haud the house in order." (1)

While safely feminizing her text, Traill endows the domestic sphere of feminine influence with great significance: the "responsibility" of a wife encompasses the "comfort" of the entire family; the house cannot be "haud . . . in order" without her. The task of maintaining "order" is sufficiently complex to necessitate a "faithful guide" which focuses on "minute" details. Typically, the domestic and the feminine are construed as miniature, like Jane Austen's description of her fiction as "the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush."[118]

Traill's opening statement is followed by a more specific reference to the most popular of the settler's guides available at the time, a reiteration of the significance of women's work, and a warning to prospective settler's wives:

> Dr. Dunlop, it is true, has published a witty and spirited pamphlet, "The Backwoodsman," but it does not enter into the routine of feminine duties and employment, in a state of emigration. Indeed, a woman's pen alone can describe half that is requisite to be told of the internal management of a domicile in the backwoods, in order to enable the outcoming female emigrant to form a proper judgment of the trials and arduous duties she has to encounter. (1)

Traill's reference to Dunlop's pamphlet is not surprising. Susan Morgan argues that the rhetorical positioning of women's books "in relation to the dominant and masculine discourse about the

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[118] This oft-quoted phrase is drawn from a letter written by Austen to one of her nephews, James Edward Austen-Leigh (A Memoir of Jane Austen 123).

particular places they visited" characterizes women's colonial texts (10-11). However, such positioning is not limited to women's texts. As Thurston emphasizes, the overlapping genre of travel and settlement narratives had become highly intertextual by the time Backwoods was published. "In the first fifth of her book, Traill cites six previous writers on the colony" ("Remember" 186).

More interesting is the dichotomy established in this brief opening passage. Dunlop's handbook for male emigrants is granted a pre-eminent authority and praised by Traill for its intellectual and adventurous stance. Yet "witty and spirited" writing is apparently not what female emigrants require. Their world is more mundane; hence, Traill's text will provide information about "the routine of feminine duties and employment" so that they may "form a proper judgment of the trials and arduous duties" ahead. As Gilbert and Gubar suggest in the context of nineteenth-century women novelists (a number of whom were Traill's contemporaries), "[o]n the one hand, . . . the woman writer's male precursors symbolize authority; on the other hand, despite their authority, they fail to define the ways in which she experiences her own identity as a writer" (48).

There is an evident tension in the paragraph quoted from Traill's introduction. On one hand, women are presented as passive: finding themselves "in a state of emigration" in which they "encounter" difficulties, they seemingly need to be schooled in how to conduct themselves. At the same time, Traill attributes women, by implication, with an innate superiority: "a woman's pen alone" can describe the many things essential to the "management" of a backwoods home (on which, we know from the opening sentence, "the whole comfort of a family depends"). The "wit" and "spirit" attributed to Dunlop's text seem almost trivial when placed against the "trials" overcome and "arduous duties" fulfilled by Traill's female emigrants.

Little attention is paid in the introduction, or elsewhere in the text, to male pursuits or concerns, and although Traill quotes men far more often than women as authority figures, she also attributes an element of childishness to their behaviour. For example, near the end of her first letter, which describes the ocean journey from Scotland to Canada, she generalizes quite candidly about the nature of men:

> I really do pity men who are not actively employed: women have always their needle as a resource against the overwhelming weariness of an idle life; but where a man is confined to a small space, such as the deck and cabin of a trading vessel, with nothing to see, nothing to hear, nothing to do, and nothing to read, he is really a very pitiable creature. (8)

As Northrop Frye suggests, in Backwoods "it seems to be assumed that a woman's life, however arduous the conditions, will show a relatively civilized balance between work and leisure, whereas the male . . . will merely oscillate between work and idleness" ("National Consciousness" 51). Tasks such as needlework – which Helen Buss argues "was literally and symbolically the very essence of femininity for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century leisured classes" (Mapping Our Selves 66) – and the many duties Traill outlines for women, are valorized within the text as "resources" unavailable to their more limited male counterparts.

A socially sanctioned concept of "feminine duties" is central to both the introduction and to Traill's gendered subject position, and the expectations for women which she proceeds to identify might well daunt a contemporaneous, as well as twenty-first century reader. In addition to the general home management skills already mentioned, the female emigrant must demonstrate an appropriate state of mind, "find[ing] a remedy in female ingenuity and expediency for some difficulties, and, by being properly prepared, encounter the rest with that high-spirited cheerfulness of which well-educated females often give extraordinary proofs" (1-2). She must adapt herself to her new circumstances, "discard[ing] every thing exclusively pertaining to the artificial refinement of fashionable life in England; and . . . devoting the money consumed in these incumbrances to articles of real use, which cannot be readily obtained in Canada" (2). Only by adopting such thrifty and puritanical habits will the female emigrant be able to contribute to the economic success of her family and "enjoy the pleasure of superintending a pleasant, well-ordered home" (2). As a "gentle and well-educated" female, her contribution to the moral climate of the community in which she finds herself will also be significant: she will "soften and improve" all those around her "by mental refinements" (3). Finally, lest our female emigrant find herself with too much free time on her hands, she can study "the natural history and botany of this new country," finding in it "a never-failing source of amusement and instruction, at once enlightening and elevating the mind, and serving to fill up the void left by the absence of those lighter feminine accomplishments, the practice of which are necessarily superseded by imperative domestic duties" (3).

Listed as such, the duties Traill outlines in the introduction seem impossibly idealistic. Yet what is significant here is the way in which Traill delineates and legitimizes both the "feminine" tasks she refers to and the text which follows. As Misao Dean suggests, femininity in this nineteenth-century context should not be construed as "a simple restriction upon free action," as modern readers all too frequently do (19). Instead, femininity "created a sphere of discourse in which women were granted authority, and generated a concept of the inner self which valued

women for their personal qualities rather than their sexual attributes or their fortunes" (19-20). For Traill, these personal qualities include ingenuity and expediency, as well as the ability to manage, judge, superintend and improve others – always conducting oneself in an "active and cheerful" manner.

I employ the term "conducting" deliberately, since Traill utilizes the language of late eighteenth/early nineteenth-century "conduct guides" quite extensively in this section of her text.[119] Typically, conduct guides (a popular genre of the time) delineated appropriate standards of feminine behaviour, emphasizing familial and social duties. Frivolous pursuits of society women were disparaged; decorum and self-reliance were promoted. In The Backwoods of Canada Traill applies these values to the specific context of pioneer life, focusing on the behaviour of the "settler woman as the wife: active, prudent, resourceful" linked to a husband who "is independent, physically and mentally strong, still in touch with the military ideals learned in the regiment" (Whitlock 55-56).

The discourse of religion – specifically, that of nineteenth-century evangelical Christianity – is implicit in Traill's outline of feminine and domestic responsibilities in a pioneer household. As Catherine Hall explains, "[i]t has been argued that Evangelical morality was probably the single most widespread influence in Victorian England" (76). As well as being associated with the abolitionist movement, evangelical Christians (who, unlike Methodists, sought to change the Church of England from within, instead of seceding from it) aimed to "redefine the available cultural norms and to encourage a new seriousness and respectability in life" (77). "Evangelicalism has been described as 'the religion of the household' and . . . the notion of home and family was central to their religious views" (84). A configuration of the home as a source of moral strength, as well as an economic unit, grants an authority to Traill and her female audience and a legitimacy to the domestic concerns of a text such as Backwoods. As Traill reminds her readers, "the whole comfort of a family depends" on the "gentle and well-educated females" whose task is to "superintend a pleasant, well-ordered home" and "soften and improve all those around them."

A distinctive stylistic feature of Traill's introduction is the extensive use of indirect and passive constructions. Such constructions allow Traill to claim authority and implicitly criticize other writers of settlement guides without appearing egotistical or unladylike. In the second

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[119] In their recent critical studies, Misao Dean and Gillian Whitlock explore this generic feature of Traill's text.

paragraph, for example, she hints at the limitations of Dunlop's popular text, and then implicitly attacks other works with statements such as, "it were cruel to write in flattering terms calculated to deceive emigrants" (1). Grammatically, this statement is agentless: we have not been told who writes in such manner, only its potential effect. As Janet Giltrow suggests, agentless expressions, as with many rhetorical devices associated with social politeness, have the "effect of withdrawing elements from the areas of contest, leaving contradiction with no focus" ("Ironies of Politeness" 221). Of course, deceiving emigrants is undesirable, and by implication, so is the individual who deliberately perpetrates such deceit. Yet Traill judiciously avoids specifying a target for her criticism.

This level of polite and circumspect discourse is maintained throughout the introduction. Even while proposing a dynamic role for a pioneer wife, Traill carefully qualifies her statements: she "prefers," "wishes," "is desirous of" and "would willingly" educate and prepare her reader for the hardships of backwoods life. Through such qualifying phrases, she positions herself as a genteel author desirous to guide her reader. The use of modalities in statements such as "[t]he writer . . . *would be* pleased to find that the simple sources from which she has herself drawn pleasure, have cheered the solitude of future female sojourners in the backwoods of Canada" and "to have had recourse to fiction *might have* rendered it [the text] more acceptable to many readers, but *would have* made it less useful" [italics mine] emphasizes hypothetical possibilities while suggesting a tentativeness in Traill's authorial stance. As Giltrow explains, "each modality is a reckoning . . . an estimate or an inference from a certain position" ("Ironies of Politeness" 223). Discursive techniques such as these enable Traill to distance herself from her text, while discretely directing her readers' response towards an appreciation of the usefulness of the work.

In a highly conventional and diffident manner, Traill closes the introduction by claiming – once again using a passive construction – that "it is hoped that this little work will afford some amusement and inculcate some lessons not devoid of moral instructions" (5). As Gerson suggests, referring to one's text as diminutive is a characteristic feature of nineteenth-century prefaces authored by women, along with "a recurring note of diffidence, expressed in language characterized by negative and passive phrasing" ("The Presenting Face" 58). By making such modest claims for her work, Traill may seem to be begging deferential treatment from potential critics; more significantly, she bows to convention by implicitly reminding us of the limitations of her gendered authority and downplaying the significance of a text she has just spent four pages confidently introducing.

Traill's polite and circumspect phrasing throughout the introduction raises the issue of the

somewhat ambiguous and inconsistent authorial stance she adopts in this portion of the text. Although her politeness can be seen as highly conventional and even humble, she does not adopt the apologetic mode which characterizes many nineteenth-century women's introductions, nor does she claim to have sought publication only at the bequest of friends or editors. Instead, Traill emphasizes both her honesty and her qualifications. In an introduction of just over 1400 words, she refers explicitly to the "truth" of her work four times (and implicitly many more), as well as repeatedly reminding her readers of her expertise. She characteristically claims in the final paragraph that "[t]he simple truth, founded entirely on personal knowledge of the facts related, is the basis of the work" (4). Her reference to "facts" with which she is personally familiar emphasizes her credibility; near the beginning of the introduction she stresses her comprehensiveness by claiming to have "endeavoured to afford *every* possible information" (1) [italics mine]. One senses a confidence, and even a self-righteousness in Traill's authorial persona in such passages.[120]

The issue of authorial positioning in an autobiographical text such as Backwoods is rarely straightforward; as Gillian Whitlock suggests, "autobiographic writing is part of an ongoing process of positioning the self in terms of intimacies, contiguities and distinctions, of recognizing the self in relation to others, and of producing, rather than reflecting existing identifications" (68). The "self" produced by Traill in her introduction is, in keeping with her oft-stated penchant for honesty, both "faithful" and "earnest": an experienced pioneer woman who will satisfy her readers' need for practical and "moral instruction" as well as their "rational curiosity." She is also a wife and a mother; but most significantly, she is a woman.

The introduction to Backwoods is permeated with the discourse of femininity, especially at the outset. In the opening six sentences, Traill repeatedly reiterates the gendered nature of her subject matter: she refers to the "mistress" of the house, "feminine duties," a "woman's pen," the "female emigrant," "wives and daughters," "the female part of the emigrant's family," "female ingenuity," and "well-educated females." Femininity, as Traill presents it, consists of an inherent delicacy, gentleness and mental refinement (these traits being either inborn or educated into the

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[120] At the same time, we should not ignore the generic constraints placed on this text. In Backwoods Traill observes many of the rhetorical conventions of travel writing – one of the most common being such claims to veracity. As Percy Adams reminds us, the Greek historian Thucydides declared, "'I have described nothing but what I either saw myself or learned from others of whom I made the most careful and particular inquiry,' a claim that would go echoing down the centuries from travel writer to travel writer" (46).

women of her social class), combined with the consciously acquired ability to be good-tempered, resourceful and responsible, to live without "artificial refinement," to "overcome hardships and difficulties," and to function as the "active and cheerful partner" of a man. The latter label, "partner," is especially relevant in this context. Although Traill's ideal pioneer woman, as she portrays both herself and her principal reader, is presented as capable of maintaining a household in the undeveloped backwoods of Canada and playing a crucial role in the vanguard of the civilizing mission of colonialism, her position remains defined by the man with whom she is associated. As Whitlock elaborates, Traill "authorizes herself as the competent, optimistic spouse of an emigrant officer, part of a couple where each partner has clearly defined responsibilities" (52).

However, Traill's authorial position is less consistent, and less circumscribed than Whitlock implies. Even if we remain focused on the introduction to Backwoods (ignoring, for the moment, the opening letters of the book in which Traill speaks predominantly as a traveller and a daughter rather than as a pioneer wife), we find her engaging with discourses of capitalism and imperialism, moving beyond the strictly domestic spheres of home and marriage. Although creating "a well-ordered home" is presented as the goal of every well-bred wife, the significance of this home extends beyond the family. Traill initially valorizes the task of home-making by couching it in the language of commerce: she concerns herself with "female *employment*" and with the maintenance of a "domestic *economy*" through the "internal *management*" of a home [italics mine]. In preparation for emigration, women should look beyond their own needs, to "apply every part of their time, and learn to consider that every pound or pound's worth belonging to any member of an out-coming emigrant's family, ought to be sacredly considered as capital" (2). The emphasis placed on "capital" here is a textual feature, not my interpretative addition, and as Traill proceeds, she increasingly implies that female emigrants, like money and possessions, must "make proper returns."[121]

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[121] In this, Traill diverges from the Victorian "cult of domesticity" as McClintock describes it. In Imperial Leather, McClintock suggests that one of the "central functions [of the cult of domesticity] was to disavow the social and economic value of women's manual and domestic work" (169). Yet in her introduction, and elsewhere in Backwoods, Traill continually emphasizes the significance of women's work, often marginalizing the role played by men in maintaining a pioneer home. Although there is a danger in biographical criticism, and of simply equating Traill's experiences with a rhetorically crafted text such as this one, the clear indication we receive from her personal letters, journals and archival material is that her husband Thomas was particularly ill-suited to the physical and psychological demands of pioneer life. This situation inevitably influenced Traill's text and authorial perspective, however much she avoids

The immediate capitalist goal of educated emigrants to the New World – those, who like Traill and her husband, possess "resources of both property and intellect" and seek to escape "a country where every profession is overstocked" – is to establish "a landed property" which can be transferred to the next generation (2-3). Yet Traill's rhetoric elevates this goal beyond the level of individual opportunism by its intimate link to the British colonial enterprise.[122] Educated emigrants are not only "most valuable colonists;" they are described as "the pioneers of civilization in the wilderness." Taking the trope of the civilizing mission even further, Traill attributes a moral superiority to former soldiers who bring wives to settle in the colony:

> . . . the half-pay officer, by thus leading the advanced guard of civilization, and bringing into these rough districts gentle and well-educated females, who soften and improve all around them by *mental* refinements, is serving his country as much by founding peaceful villages and pleasant homesteads in the trackless wilds, as ever he did by personal courage, or military stratagem, in times of war [emphasis in the original text] (3).

Thus colonization is elevated to a form of national service, and transforming the raw material of a colony into a civilized community through population and development becomes the equivalent of risking one's life on the battlefield. How could such a mission fail to appeal to half-pay officers such as Thomas Traill who had been demobilized after fighting in the famous Napoleonic wars?

Yet there are tensions underlying Traill's exploitation of colonial discourse in the introduction. Although she frames the emigration of herself and her new husband to Upper Canada as both a duty and an expression of allegiance to their mother country, she also writes of "the healthful ways of independence" and the "attraction" of "great personal liberty" experienced in the colony (qualifying the latter as available primarily to young men, however).[123] Another interesting subtext in the passage quoted in the previous paragraph is the issue of who will actually benefit from the "mental refinements" of the well-educated female emigrants Traill

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any overt criticism of her husband's role or behaviour.

[122] Or, perhaps more accurately, Traill's rhetoric attempts to negate the possibility that couples such as she and her husband might be motivated by desperation. Remaining in Great Britain would have entailed a reduction in social class and status for the Traills.

[123] Later in the text, Traill praises her new found personal freedom more expansively. "I must freely confess to you that I do prize and enjoy my present liberty in this country exceedingly" she writes in letter fifteen, ostensibly addressed to a friend in England (193).

addresses. In many colonial contexts, the individuals in need of "softening" and "improvement" would presumably be the Indigenous people of the country. But, as Thurston points out, a more significant contact zone in Traill's text occurs between lower-class settlers, many of whom were "Yankees," and men and women of Traill's class ("Toryism" 77). Ill-bred, lower-class settlers, who little appreciate the qualities of the gentility, are presented in Backwoods as in desperate need of an education in good manners. And of course Traill and her husband will readily provide such instruction. For example, in letter six, in the middle of a reported conversation with a "surly" young engineer characterized by "an affectation of equality," Thomas Traill pronounces: "A man can no more help being born poor than rich; neither is it the fault of a gentleman being born of parents who occupy a higher station in society than his neighbour." He then informs the young engineer with whom he is conversing that a "rich man or a high-born man, if he is rude, ill-mannered, and ignorant, is no more a gentleman than yourself." Traill closes the scenario by explaining that "the engineer had the good sense to perceive that rude familiarity did not constitute a gentleman" (64).

One final feature of the introduction to Backwoods, prefiguring a much greater emphasis in the latter half of the book, is Traill's utilization of the rhetorical structures of scientific and religious discourse – intrinsically linked together, as they frequently are in her writings. A strategic shift occurs in paragraph six of the introduction, from a focus on the domestic and colonial imperatives of pioneer life to more spiritual and scientific concerns. Traill begins this section by revisiting two key motifs: her authorial integrity, and the educational advantages and "mental" superiority of upper class women. As she informs us, "the writer is . . . earnest in recommending ladies who belong to the higher class of settlers to cultivate all the mental resources of a superior education" (3). She then proceeds "to induce them [upper class women] to discard all irrational and artificial wants and mere useless pursuits" (3). This is not the first allusion to artificiality or usefulness in the introduction, but the reference to irrationality is especially significant because it leads to a topic of passionate intensity for Traill: the aesthetic and spiritual value of studying "the natural history and botany of this new country" (3). Such "enlightening and elevating" pursuits could presumably expand the horizons of pioneer women beyond the domestic sphere; yet Traill avoids dealing with such implications. Instead, she rather ambiguously describes these studies as a "never-failing source of amusement and instruction" with the added advantage of "serving to fill up the void left by the absence of those lighter feminine accomplishments, the practice of which are necessarily superseded by imperative domestic duties" (3). Seemingly, "imperative" household tasks must pre-empt "lighter feminine"

pursuits, but why this would create a "void" remains unclear. Perhaps Traill construes the void as external, resulting from the isolation of pioneer homesteads, since she refers to the "loneliest part of our Western Wilderness" in her next sentence (4). Or, she may wish to imply that "lighter feminine accomplishments" fulfill an aesthetic or spiritual need – but if so, why the term "lighter"? In any case, a key feature of the practice of "looking abroad into the beauties of nature" is the correlative "adoring the Creator through his glorious works" (3-4). This romantic link between God and the natural world is so intrinsic to Traill's text that spiritual or religious concerns are rarely referred to overtly outside of the context of the natural environment.

Another interesting feature of this short section of the introduction devoted to natural history is the self-congratulatory tone Traill adopts. Not only is she more didactic here than usual, declaring her intention to "recommend," "induce," and "direct her reader"; she is also, by implication, the unidentified ideal pioneer woman of whom she writes:

> To the person who is capable of looking abroad into the beauties of nature, and adoring the Creator through his glorious works, are opened stores of unmixed pleasure, which will not permit her to be dull or unhappy in the loneliest part of our Western Wilderness. (3-4)

Yet even while indulging in such subtle self-congratulation, Traill couches her statements in the rhetorical structures of polite discourse. Although the confident superiority of the authorial persona predominates, the primary agent of the above sentence remains vague and the individual of the opening phrase remains unidentified.

Many of the underlying tensions and ambiguities of this introduction stem from what appear to be Traill's, or her editor's, conflicting intentions. While she feels obligated to provide a balanced and realistic account of pioneer life, she also recognizes the need of prospective emigrants for encouragement and optimism.[124] She positions herself as a gentlewoman, couching her statements in modalities and polite discourse, though she feels compelled to emphasize her expertise, even at times implying a superiority over male writers in order to enhance the credibility of the text which follows. She addresses herself predominantly to women of her social class and situation, yet she does not wish to preclude the possibility of a wider audience (and how could she, publishing her text through the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge which distributed texts via mechanics' institutes?).

This brings us to the interesting question: whom did Traill conceive of as readers of The

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[124] As I mentioned earlier, Peterman speculates that Traill may have been motivated to produce this text as a result of helping her sister, Susanna Moodie, settle in to pioneer life (xxvi).

Backwoods of Canada? The introduction provides several answers. In the opening two paragraphs Traill clearly addresses herself to "the mistress," "the outcoming female emigrant" and "the female part of the emigrant's family." Although these readers might do no more than "contemplate seeking a home amid our Canadian wilds," they are presumably in the process of educating themselves about the possibilities and realities of pioneer life, and would have at least a passing familiarity with Dunlop's Backwoodsman. (Of course, the decision to emigrate would be unlikely to rest in the hands of women. As I mentioned earlier, Traill emphasizes the fact that her female readers must prepare themselves for inevitable hardships, responding to – rather than instigating or controlling – the situations in which they might find themselves.)

Yet in the midst of this spate of gendered references to her readers, Traill also alludes to the possibility of a broader audience. She claims that it would be "cruel to write in flattering terms calculated to deceive emigrants into the belief that the land to which they are transferring their families, their capital, and their hopes, is a land flowing with milk and honey" in the third paragraph, and deliberately broadens her perspective in the fourth paragraph by referring to what "the English public may [mistakenly] consider" to be true of emigrants in general. Towards the end of the introduction she writes briefly of the "attractions" of pioneer life for young men, and then closes with an appeal to armchair travellers "who, without intending to share in the privations of an emigrant's life, have a rational curiosity to become acquainted with scenes and manners so different from those of a long-civilised country" (5).

Peterman suggests that Traill's editor, concerned about achieving a broader audience for her work, deliberately modified aspects of the text, transforming it into an account "aimed at emigrants of both sexes and all classes" (lviii).[125] While archival information supports this contention, I remain convinced that the introduction itself is the work of Traill's hand, rather than Charles Knight's. Material which Traill submitted in 1835, upon Knight's request (and which was attached to the first edition in the form of an appendix) may help to explain the occasional references to a broader readership in the introduction. The material submitted seems to have been directed at a diverse audience: recipes for making soap and maple sugar are specifically relevant to pioneer women, though word derivations and definitions are less easily classified. In one

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[125] We know from archival material that Traill felt that Charles Knight withheld "[s]ome of the most interesting portions of the original MS" (Peterman xlix), and that his additions to the text included an appendix providing statistical information and a series of woodcuts (the latter of questionable relevance and appropriateness, as Elizabeth Thompson argues in "Illustrations for The Backwoods of Canada").

appended passage, Traill even moves into the realm of political commentary: "It is to be hoped that some steps will be taken by Government to remedy these obnoxious laws [quarantine laws], which have repeatedly entailed those very evils on the unhappy emigrants that the Board of Health wish to avert from the colony at large" (20), she informs us. Certainly, the limited historical material available about the reception of Backwoods indicates a broad rather than gender-specific readership. In subsequent editions, the text was frequently packaged with other works about North America (none of which were written by women, or directed at female emigrants), and Peterman's research into the correspondence of the Strickland sisters has unearthed a letter from Jane Margaret Strickland which includes the assertion "that the Canada Company 'aided the success of Mrs. Traill's work . . . by their large purchases and recommendations'" (xlii).[126]

But let me return to the question implicit in the title of this chapter: how does Traill's introduction predispose a reader to approach her text? The key generic expectations established in the introduction, especially for a nineteenth-century reader familiar with such conventions, would centre on the conduct guide and the settler's handbook; indeed, these constitute the dominant discursive threads of this opening section of Backwoods. Here Traill positions herself confidently within the interconnected discourses of domesticity and colonialism, and more briefly, though with no less assurance, engages with the discourse of natural history – in so doing, intrinsically linking her passion for observing the natural environment to a resolute religious belief in a divine Creator. The only obvious absence in the introduction is the discourse of travel: although the work as whole relies extensively on the conventions of travel narrative, Trail includes a mere passing reference to "scenes and manners so different from those of a long-civilised country" in the final sentence of this section.

As a whole, the introduction to Backwoods raises as many questions as it answers, especially when one examines Traill's rhetorical constructions and discursive strategies in more detail. Tensions resulting from an uneasy balance between competing discourses and from a shifting authorial stance repeatedly surface. And while many of the discursive threads which wind their way through Backwoods are foreshadowed here, the text which follows is not, to any significant extent, the work one would expect to encounter after reading Traill's introduction.

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[126] Although Peterman uncovered no archival evidence which specifically supports this claim, numerous pamphlets on emigration were purchased by the company for distribution (xlii).

CHAPTER 4

"To me nothing that bears the stamp of novelty is devoid of interest": The Backwoods of Canada as Travel Narrative

I: Theoretical Perspectives

As we move from the introduction to the first letter of ~~The Backwoods of Canada~~, we seem to shift into another world, another text. The authoritative third person narrator gives way to a reflective traveller; lively descriptions, exclamations and personal asides frequently replace more formal rhetorical constructions; the general, as often as not, becomes the personal. Traill's authorial persona now appears younger, less emotionally constrained and less concerned about presenting herself as a sensible and experienced guide: she complains of a shipboard library full of "old novels and musty romances," of a journey as monotonous as "being weather-bound in some country inn" and of enduring "the horrors of *mal de mer*" (7). Metaphorical and romantic turns of phrase characterize the descriptive passages in the opening letters: the vessel they travel on is "dashing gallantly along" and "wanderers of the ocean [sea-birds] . . . rise and fall with the rocking billows" – the latter observation inspiring a pious quotation from "To A Waterfowl" by the American poet, William Cullen Bryant.[127] Traill's arguments now tend to be deductive rather than inductive: here she observes and generalizes, while in the introduction she pronounces and

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[127] "He who from zone to zone
Guides through the boundless air their certain flight
In the long way that I must tread alone
Will guide my steps aright." (7)
The section of the poem Traill quotes here may be slightly inaccurate. Michael Peterman has discovered a somewhat different version of these lines in an 1821 edition of Bryant's Poems (explanatory note 7.19-24, Backwoods 241), though this was unlikely to have been Traill's source. She quoted the entire poem in her 1830 children's book, Sketches from Nature, indicating in that text that she had encountered the work in "The American Literary Gazette" (Sketches 119-20). The version of the lines quoted in Backwoods is closer to the version printed in Sketches than to the one Peterman cites. The slight discrepancies in wording ~~suggest that Traill~~ transcribed lines of the poem from memory, instead of referring to a printed version.

then substantiates her claims.

Generically the text shifts, conforming less to the conventions of the settlers' handbook and the conduct guide as it moves into the realm of travel narrative. While one may argue, as John Thurston does, that Backwoods should be categorized as an example of a uniquely hybrid genre of travel narrative/settler's handbook popular in nineteenth-century Canadian letters rather than as a travel narrative *per se* ("Remember" 183), I find that such a blended generic classification proves less applicable to specific sections of Backwoods than to the work as a whole. Also, as Carole Gerson suggests, placing Traill's non-fiction work (and in particular, this text) within the genre of travel narrative "elucidates . . . [her] own self-placement within the spectrum of contemporary literary activity" ("Nobler Savages" 10). Hence, I will proceed to analyse the generic threads of Backwoods as distinct entities – focusing first on the work as a travel narrative and then as a settlers' handbook – an approach which allows me to explore the dynamic aspects of Traill's utilization of each genre. I hope to achieve a balanced consideration of both the extent to which generic conventions create and mediate meaning for Traill and her reading audience, and the underlying generic tensions and discontinuities in the work.

Critics have noted a number of shifts in the body of Traill's text as the narrative develops. Although perhaps a little too tidy in its classification, Carl Ballstadt divides Backwoods into four distinct sections. Letters one to seven, which deal with the hardships of travel, he classifies as "the journey." Section two, "the settlement" (letters eight to twelve), focuses on "present evils, the forces of expediency and necessity, the battle by fire and steel against the wilderness, trials by the elements of wind and fire" and similar concerns. In section three, "the naming" (letters thirteen to seventeen), Traill emerges as "namer and discover" and in the final section, "the expectation" (letter eighteen), she provides an appropriate resolution for the text and a "restatement" of her "contentment" ("Catharine Parr Traill" 1:166-7). While the shifts in Backwoods may not be as clear-cut as Ballstadt suggests, the organizational pattern he identifies in Traill's work corresponds loosely to the generic features of the text I analyse in this, and subsequent chapters. My initial reading of Traill's text as a travel narrative, in which I explore her travelling persona and landscape descriptions, focuses almost exclusively on letters one to seven. In chapter six, dealing with representations of the Other ("Yankees," Scottish and Irish emigrants, and First Nations people), I concentrate on the section Ballstadt labels "the settlement," though I extend it to include letter thirteen as well. Letters thirteen to seventeen, "the naming," provide the most extensive examples of Traill's use of scientific and rational discourse, and her text corresponds most closely to a settler narrative from letter eleven onwards.

Before specifically analysing Backwoods as a travel narrative, I will outline three theoretical issues which foreground my interpretative critique: the metaphorical nature of travel,[128] the link between gender and genre in the realm of travel writing, and the generic conventions of travel narrative.

The motif of travel as not only an impetus for change, but more importantly, a metaphor for change, has figured so extensively in our literary tradition – dating back to The Odyssey and narratives of the Old Testament, and continuing in such prominent Christian texts as Pilgrim's Progress[129] – that Van Den Abbeele refers to it as "among the most manifestly banal in Western letters" (xiii). In spite, or perhaps because of its banality, the literature of travel has continued to thrive throughout the centuries, providing discursive space for both writers and readers. It seems, as Van Den Abbeele suggests, that

> . . . the very banality or banalizing of travel to be found in literature both veils and unveils its importance for Western culture. The voyage is undoubtedly one of the most cherished institutions of that civilization, and banal as it may be, travel is persistently perceived as exciting and interesting, as liberating, and as what 'opens up new horizons.' (xv)

Paradoxically, while the rhetorical (re)construction of a voyage in narrative form may have become "a *topos* of the most fixed, conventional, and uninteresting kind," a genuine voyage "cannot be restricted to or circumscribed within a place unless it is to cease being a voyage – that is what necessarily implies a crossing of boundaries or a change of places" (xiv). Hence, however formulaic the text of a travel narrative, the journey itself must invariably be presented as involving change and risk (xiv). Van Den Abbeele interprets these risks in cultural terms: "[t]he dearest notions of the West . . . progress, the quest for knowledge, freedom as freedom to move, self-awareness as an Odyssean enterprise, salvation as a destination to be attained by following a

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[128] I am indebted to Alison Blunt's Travel, Gender and Imperialism (15-19) for drawing my attention to the metaphorical significance of travel in this context, and for directing me to Georges Van Den Abbeele's perceptive work, Travel as Metaphor.

[129] As Michael Peterman suggests, Pilgrim's Progress is of specific relevance to Traill's work as she was obviously influenced by Bunyan's narrative. Peterman argues for a fairly direct correlation between Backwoods and Pilgrim's Progress, interpreting Traill's work as a re-telling of Bunyan's symbolic tale, particularly when one considers the narrative structure of the text: "early letters stress difficulty and disappointment; the later letters emphasize adaptation and advancement" ("Catharine Parr Traill" 3:28). Traill's most overt reference to Pilgrim's Progress is found in letter seven where she describes their driver as "rather confounded at finding himself lodged just in the middle of a slough as bad as the 'Slough of Despond'" (83).

prescribed pathway," he suggests, are open to the "possibility of appropriation . . . [and] the threat of an expropriation. The voyage endangers as much as it is supposed to assure these cultural values: something can always go wrong. The 'place' of the voyage cannot be a stable one" (xv).

In a work such as Traill's Backwoods, the cultural risks posited by Van Den Abbeele take on a distinctly personal dimension. Overtly, the book recounts the story of an emigrant's journey to the New World, of the re-creation of home, of personal growth and development; subtextually, it can be read as a story of alienation and dispossession mitigated by the author's fierce need to maintain an optimistic outlook and her steadfast refusal to succumb to despair – or, heaven forbid, to admit that the venture of immigration may have been a mistake.[130] Certainly, Traill's enthusiastic engagement with the *topos* of travel remains dominant in the text: she writes not of the motherland she has left behind, but of acquiring knowledge through the investigation of a new environment, of delighting in an unexpected freedom from the constraints of fashionable society, of finding God in the woods of Upper Canada. Yet while travelling to her new home offers a tantalizing sense of liberation, the risk of losing all that is familiar and of being irreparably changed by living amongst strangers creates a subtly darker sub-current. The danger of being appropriated seems very real for an emigrant such as Traill: she, or members of her family, may become as "debased" as the lower-class Irish and Scottish immigrants from whom she carefully distinguishes herself; without the advantages of her education and upbringing, the children she bears may fail to become gentlemen and ladies.[131]

Even as Traill embraces the novelty of her new life, she strives to maintain what she

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[130] In this refusal, Traill contrasts sharply to her sister, Susanna Moodie, who opens her travel/settler's narrative, Roughing It in the Bush, by bemoaning the error in judgement which led the Moodies to settle in rural Upper Canada. Traill makes a point of never articulating such regret.

[131] Traill's private correspondence indicates serious concerns about the limited educational opportunities available to her children. In a letter to her friend Ellen Dunlop, dated 19 February 1855, she writes of arranging for her son William to attend a local school for four hours a day, and adds, "I hope my dear boy will feel the benefit of his assiduity – poor thing – he is painfully anxious on account of his deficiency in those useful branches which he should have acquired while he has been labouring so hard for us" (Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman 94). Yet Traill also expresses concerns that local schooling may promote an undesirable degree of egalitarianism. When describing the village school one of her daughters attends, she reassures her friend that the humble nature of the establishment will not lead to undesirable social contacts: "She [the schoolmistress] will not let Mary mix with the lower class of her pupils and keeps her with herself at meal-times" (Letter to Ellen Dunlop, 19 June 1853: Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman 82).

considers to be moral and social standards, avoiding undesirable changes in her conduct. As Van Den Abbeele reminds us, "real or imaginary, voyages seem as often undertaken to restrain movement as to engage in it, to resist change as to produce it" (xix). This tension between movement and stasis, change and conformity, surfaces on a textual level as well: since "both text and voyage raise the same set of problems . . . one finds with surprising frequency that the problems associated with one are posited or described in terms of the other" (xx). Hence the tensions inherent in Traill's experience of emigration, explored on a thematic and narrative level in Backwoods, are mirrored by textual discontinuities in the work.

Along with change, and a resistance to change, the concept of home is central to the trope of travel. As Alison Blunt indicates, "[t]ravel is bounded by points of departure and destination but in an arbitrary retrospective way defined by perceptions of 'home'" (17). The home of memory and imagination functions as a norm to which all else is compared: a writer's response to scenes, individuals and incidents encountered on a journey is arbitrarily predetermined or preconditioned by what Syed Islam identifies as his/her "place of enunciation" or "first city" (72). Even if – as in Traill's situation – "the one-way journey of permanent emigration is the actual experience of a writer . . . the round trip remains his ideal of a due course" and home retains its metaphorical pre-eminence (Giltrow, "'Painful Experience'" 132). Although the spatial concept of home permeates travel narratives, detailed descriptions of a writer's "place of enunciation" rarely surface. While general values of home are presumably shared by reader and writer, specific realities might detract from the universal appeal of this metaphorical concept.[132]

Closely linked to this generalized and universalised presentation of "home" is its historical dimension in travel narratives: in Van Den Abbeele's words, "the positing of a point we can call home can only occur retroactively. . . .The concept of a home is needed (and in fact can only be thought) only *after* the home has already been left. In a strict sense, then, one has always already left home, since home can only exist as such at the price of its being lost" (xviii-xix).

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[132] One way in which Traill maintains the centrality of the trope of home in Backwoods is through her descriptions of the homes of others. Her interest in such details as the construction of fences and the functioning of stoves might be considered more obvious generic features of settlement narratives, but are equally consistent with the genre of travel narrative in which observation and ethnographic detail are paramount. Traill's detailed descriptions of Canadian domestic arrangements (her own and others') also serve to anchor her in her new environment, at least textually, while the format of letters home helps to maintain a link with the world she has left behind.

Traditionally, home has occupied a highly gendered place in the western narrative tradition: ever since Odysseus parted from Penelope, adventurous men have travelled the world while women patiently wait, safeguarding the comforts of the hearth and the sanctity of the family. As Karen Lawrence explains, "[i]n the Oedipal narrative of travel,[133] home represents the safe, feminized space to be left behind for the terrain of adventure, home's own potential disturbances homogenized" (4). Indeed, "the plot of the male journey depends on keeping woman in her place. Not only is her place at home, but she in effect is home itself, for the female body is traditionally associated with earth, shelter, enclosure" (Lawrence 1). But what happens – as Lawrence repeatedly asks – when Penelope travels, and then proceeds to write about her exploits? Do the works of women travel writers constitute a unique tradition within the genre of travel narrative? Do they subvert the formal constraints of the genre, rewriting the traditional plot line of the heroic questor severing the ties of family, leaving behind the feminized space of home to find adventure and challenge in the masculine world? Or are women writers defined and confined by the rhetorical conventions and expectations of travel writing? What does a woman writer such as Traill gain by choosing to frame her experiences in this highly textualized and overdetermined genre?

While these are key questions, dealt with indirectly throughout this thesis, my inclination is to approach with caution the issue of whether one can – or should – categorize women's travel writing as generically distinct from texts produced by male writers. There is a danger in equating genre and gender: one may all too readily adopt a deterministic view of gender, accepting, in Leigh Gilmore's words,

> . . . a psychologizing paradigm . . . [which] reproduces the following ideological tenets of individualism: men are autonomous individuals with inflexible ego boundaries who write autobiographies that turn on moments of conflict and place the self at the center of the drama. Women, by contrast, have flexible ego boundaries, develop a view of the world characterized by relationships (with priority frequently given to the mother-daughter bond), and therefore represent the self in relation to "others." (xiii)

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[133] Dennis Porter's analysis of the masculinist European tradition of "grand tour" travelogues, Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing, demonstrates the ready applicability of Freudian discourse to the tradition of male travel narrative. Porter cites Freud's essay, "A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis": "I had long seen clearly that a great part of the pleasure of travel lies in the fulfilment of these early wishes, that it is rooted, that is, in dissatisfaction with home and family" (The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works vol. 22. London: Hogarth, 1955. 246-47. Cited in Porter 196).

Although Gilmore refers here specifically to texts produced as autobiographies, rather than works with autobiographical elements, such as Backwoods, many of the generalizations she cites have been all too liberally applied by critics to travel narratives produced by women.

There is also a danger in identifying features of women's texts, such as apologia or descriptions of Indigenous people which strive for reciprocity, as inherently feminine since such easy correlations ignore the conventional nature of these rhetorical devices and representational strategies. Still, I am not willing to adopt the extreme position of rejecting all links between gender and genre. I agree with Caren Kaplan that women share "a history of reading and writing in the interstices of masculine culture, moving between use of the dominant language or form of expression and specific versions of experience based on their marginality" (187). Accordingly, as Shirley Foster argues, there seems to exist "a common ground of apprehension and approach" among travel narratives produced by women, though not "a distinctly female tradition of travel writing" (174). Women's texts frequently focus on

> . . . topics not generally explored in any depth in male travel writing. These include the appearance, costume and manners of women; details of domestic life such as household management and culinary habits; behaviour towards children; marriage customs and female status; the importance of "space" in the physical environment. (Foster 24)

In terms of diction and perspective, "women writers of travel have tended to mistrust the rhetoric of mastery, conquest, and quest that has funded a good deal of male fictional and nonfictional travel" (Lawrence 20). Hence, the approach I will adopt is to read Traill's text "within circulating ideologies of gender and genre, and within a politics of difference" – an ideological approach utilized by Felicity Nussbaum in her analysis of eighteenth-century women's autobiographical narratives, The Autobiographical Subject (xviii).

Although fewer women have achieved prominence through published travel narratives than men, the genre has remained a popular and successful option for women writers over the last two centuries. Perhaps because of its underlying concern with home, both as a point of departure and the final goal of a journey, "the trope of travel . . . provides a particularly fertile imaginative field for narrative representations of women's historical and personal agency" (Lawrence 20). Predicated upon geographical mobility (though not necessarily at the instigation of the writer – in the case of women such as Traill and her sister Moodie travel became part of their unwritten marriage contracts[134]) and an ability to reflect upon change, rooted in socially constructed

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[134] One can argue for the existence of an entire sub-genre of "wive's of" travel narratives.

feminine forms of writing such as personal letters and diaries – but not requiring a classical education – travel writing was, and is, a highly accessible genre for female authors. And, for writers such as Traill, "travel *writing* . . . provided discursive space" while at the same time suggesting "alternative models for woman's place in society" (Lawrence 18). Within the realm of travel narrative, women – as the agents and subjects of their own stories – can move beyond the confines of home and family, enjoying a temporary liberation from domestic constraints without rejecting socially constructed values of feminine domesticity. In this sense, "travel writing by women creates a permeable membrane between home and the foreign, domestic confinement and freedom on the road" (Lawrence 19).

Lawrence's use of the phrase "permeable membrane" is especially pertinent. Although it may be tempting to assume, as Paul Fussell does, that every travel book is "an implicit celebration of freedom" (203), equally, each such work represents an attempt to constrain and delineate freedom. Travel narratives strive to conceptualize the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar, to subsume the foreign within the domestic (Blunt 17). Once again we encounter the paradox Van Den Abbeele addresses: although travel narratives recount potentially transgressive deeds and changes, one of their generic functions is the intrinsically conservative task of circumscribing such deeds and limiting such changes. Travel narratives thrive on the conceit that the unfamiliar and foreign are sites of adventure, yet their predictability and formulaic conventions potentially trivialize and contest notions of progress and of the inherent value of change.

Embracing the genre of travel narrative, Traill embraces a metaphorical framework for articulating and representing the personal changes instigated by travel, and, perhaps more significantly, for conceptualizing and validating the unsettling experiences of emigration. Transformed into a written narrative, Traill's travels from Scotland to Upper Canada become the central metaphor of Backwoods – and, as a metaphorical account of change, the journey itself becomes a product of the genre. Hence, rather than simply reading the text as an account of a journey, we must equally read the journey as a textual construction.

Framing her experiences – at least in part – as travel narrative proves to be an effective formula, providing Traill with a flexible format in which to produce a marketable text. The characteristic narrative stance of the genre – the roving "eye/I" who "constructs spatial and textual

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Critics such as Hillary Callan and Shirley Ardener utilize the phrase "incorporated wives" to emphasize the subject positionality of women identified as the "'wife of' a particular kind of worker: policeman, colonial official or colonist, soldier" (The Incorporated Wife 1).

difference"– suits her perspective as an Englishwoman encountering the landscape and people of Canada for the first time, encouraging a "critical distance and perspective . . . relate[d] both to seeing and knowing" (Blunt 21, 17). Although Traill writes comfortably within the confines of what Lawrence describes as a "hybrid and ambiguous" genre (23), it is important to remember that the genre of travel writing is not "as fluid and 'open' as is sometimes suggested" (Foster 18). By the time Traill utilizes this format in the 1830's, a number of fairly rigid conventions characterize travel narratives. Along with an assumption of cultural values and norms shared with one's reading audience, Mary Louise Pratt identifies tropes of arrival and departure, characteristic ways of observing and describing landscapes, the establishment of binary oppositions between the narrator and the Other, and descriptions of Indigenous people focusing on "manners and customs description" ("Scratches" 121). The authorial perspectives adopted by travel writers during the first half of the nineteenth century, although varied, gravitate towards two extremes: either the persona of the "objective" observer and decoder of signs, or that of the highly "subjective" narrator who immerses him/herself in novel experiences. Pratt classifies the former as scientific/informational and the latter as sentimental/experiential.

This distinction between scientific and sentimental narrative perspectives proves both interesting and relevant to an analysis of Traill's work. Scientific narratives, predominant in the early and mid-eighteenth century, attempt to efface the subjectivity of the authorial voice, focusing on information which "is relevant (has value) in so far as it attaches to goals and systems of knowledge institutionalised outside of the text" (Pratt, Imperial Eyes 77). In contrast, sentimental travel writing, emerging in the 1780's and becoming increasingly popular in the nineteenth century ("Scratches" 131), "explicitly anchors what is being expressed in the sensory experience, judgement, agency, or desires of the human subjects. Authority lies in the authenticity of somebody's felt experience" (Imperial Eyes 76). A sentimental authorial perspective of this kind predominates in the opening letters of Backwoods as Traill writes intensely of her sea journey and first impressions of North America. Yet sections of "objective" scientific description surface with increasing frequency as the narrative develops. One cannot pinpoint a specific moment in the text when the conventions of sentimental travel writing give way to more rationalist scientific discourse since the two narrative perspectives co-exist throughout much of the latter part of the book, the distinction tending to be one of emphasis. For example, Backwoods reads increasingly like a settler's handbook from letter eight onwards, yet Traill's descriptions of Canada's Indigenous people included in this portion of the work continue to conform to many of the generic conventions of travel narrative.

My application of Pratt's definitions will, accordingly, remain indirect as I focus on points of transition and on the choices Traill makes as she modifies her perspective to correspond to specific subject matter. When, for example, does she adopt a sentimental approach to the physical environment by providing a broad overview through picturesque and sublime landscape descriptions, and when does she utilize a more focused and rational approach to describing her environs? Moreover, as I consider in chapter six, can we consistently link Traill's religious commentary and her portrayals of First Nations people to a sentimental perspective, rather than a scientific orientation, or – as my analysis suggests – are the distinctions more subtle?

As I proceed with a more focused textual analysis of Backwoods, I will highlight three key "travel narrative" components of the work: the development and presentation of Traill's travelling persona, her descriptions of landscape and wilderness scenes, and her textual representations of the Others she encounters.

II: The Textual "I": Traill's Narrative Persona

In the opening pages of letter one, Traill develops her travelling persona: an artful blend of dutiful daughter, reliable observer and excited traveller on the brink of change. This textual "I" – shifting between wonder and condescension, openness and wariness, intensity and distance – becomes as much a marketing feature of the text as the practical advice and information proffered. For most twenty-first century readers the textual "I" becomes the almost exclusive focal point of the work, since the information and practical advice Traill offers have lost all but historical relevance; even in the nineteenth century, critics commented on Traill's travelling persona as often as on the relevance and potential usefulness of her text.

(For ease of expression, I frequently use the label "Traill" to refer to this textual "I" in the section which follows. Please read "Traill" as the constructed persona the author presents through a range of rhetorical strategies influenced by discourses of genre, gender, class, race and religion, and by the intersections of these discourses.)

Letters one through seven of Backwoods provide an account of Traill's travels by sea and land from Greenock, on the west coast of Scotland, to Douro township in Upper Canada, and, as one would expect, the forward progress of the journey provides a natural momentum for the narrative. Yet this momentum is balanced by a sense of stasis. Traill informs us that on the first day at sea she "remained on the deck until nightfall," impressed by the "wide expanse of water

and sky," but within a few lines complains of growing "weary of the voyage" (7).[135] An uneasiness, stemming from feelings of entrapment – of being frozen in time, powerless in the face of unpredictable weather and uncontrollable circumstances – resurfaces with some regularity in the opening letters as Traill finds herself at the mercy of an intransigent pilot, health and quarantine restrictions, a life-threatening bout of cholera, appalling roads, insensitive landladies and rude boatmen.

This sense of stasis in the initial letters provides an ironic subtext to the work's motif of growth and mobility. Traill's narrative persona, self-consciously exploring her new role as the wife of an officer (she had only been married for two months) and envisaging herself as a budding pioneer, longs for change and challenge but must resign herself to a state of passive waiting. As an individual in the process of immigrating she is – in Kerryn Goldsworthy's words – "not only a being in transition, but a transitional being; to be an emigrant is not just to be on the border, but to be the border itself" (53). At the outset, the borderline nature of Traill's existence is accentuated by a lack of visible progress in their sea journey; the seemingly endless ocean voyage emphasizes the spatial gap in which she finds herself: caught between two worlds (England and Upper Canada) and two lifestyles (bourgeois leisure and pioneer hardship).

Aside from occasional complaints about boredom, Traill's narrative persona responds to the indeterminacy of the journey with a somewhat paradoxical blend of relaxed passivity and impatience to embrace the future and confront whatever hardships it may bring. In the first letter, descriptions of her fellow passengers, two young gentlemen, and speculations about the birds which follow their vessel – "I often wonder whence they came, to what distant shore they are bound" (7) – convey a degree of calmness and contentment while allowing Traill to hint passively at an emotional distress she chooses not to articulate. One of the young gentlemen "amuses himself by singing as he paces the deck, 'Home, sweet home,' and that delightful song by Camoens, 'Isle of beauty.' It is a sweet song," we are informed, and she "can easily imagine the

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[135] This is merely the first of several comments Traill makes about the boredom of their journey. As D. M. R. Bentley suggests in "Breaking the 'Cake of Custom': The Atlantic Crossing as a Rubicon for Female Emigrants to Canada?", "the most common feature of the crossing (with the possible exception of seasickness and other illnesses) was boredom" (105). Noting a similar pattern in descriptions of sea journeys to Australia, Kerryn Goldsworthy suggests that "[t]his is the 'amplification of absence' discussed by Paul Carter in The Road to Botany Bay: the paradoxical use of language to turn nothingness itself into a point of interest, and to repel boredom by writing about it and thus reaffirming the self in the midst of all this nothingness" (56).

charm it has for a home-sick heart" (7). Similarly, Traill wonders if the birds "make the rude wave their home and resting-place during the long day and dark night" (7).[136] Her own home is never specifically described to her readers, neither is her parting from friends or family, most of whom Traill never saw again. Although the narrative opens with a reference to her mother's "last kind letter" received "only a few hours before we set sail" (6), Traill quickly moves into a description of the ship and her initial experiences of ship-board life, avoiding any reflections on the past or any articulation of the personal losses she experienced.

Traill's perspective, even when she is frustrated by illness, delays and prohibitions, remains resolutely forward-looking. As is conventional practice in travel narratives, she provides no specific details about her life prior to the voyage she commences at the beginning of letter one. Hence, travel becomes a metaphor for rebirth in the text – or, perhaps more appropriately, for the transition from childhood to adulthood.[137] Traill's narrative persona, reborn as a wife and prospective pioneer, is presented as consciously striving to learn the ways of a new life.[138] She enjoys writing with the authority of a wife (as she makes especially obvious in her introduction to the text), yet more significantly, adopts the pose of an excited traveller on the brink of change. At the same time, one senses Traill's anxieties about adjusting to an as-of-yet unfamiliar lifestyle which she realizes will mandate permanent adjustments in behaviour, attitudes and expectations. Unlike most travellers, she is an emigrant who is unlikely to return to her home country. What the genre of travel narrative allows her is the appealing illusion of return. As Janet Giltrow suggests, "[i]n its circularity – its obedience to the round trip" the goal of travel narrative becomes

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[136] Bentley provides a more developed analysis of Traill's identification with these wild birds and with the domesticated bird on the ship, suggesting that the author uses these creatures "to define herself in relation both to the external world and to the men travelling with her" ("Breaking the 'Cake of Custom'" 103).

[137] Obviously, in literal terms, Traill was an adult long before she set sail for Canada at the age of the thirty, and I do not wish to imply that she had been confined to a childish role in her twenties. What interests me is the manner in which she positions herself as a newly independent adult, an individual with a vast and promising future ahead and no unfinished business left behind.

[138] Developing the metaphor of rebirth one step further, Bentley suggests that "Traill allows herself to be born(e) along the St. Lawrence, entering the New World as through a birth canal" ("Breaking the 'Cake of Custom'" 109). While this is an interesting suggestion, I feel that Bentley imposes too much symbolic import on this section of the text. His metaphorical reading of Backwoods as "a fable about the emergence of a self and a society that are distinctly and recognizably Canadian" strikes me as more credible ("Afterword" 291).

"its point of departure" ("'Painful Experience'" 132).

A woman with no past, Traill remains linked to her former homeland and her mother only through the tenuous bond of letters. In these constructed letters, each of which functions as a chapter in the text, Traill limits herself to descriptions and explanations, never specifically seeking maternal consolation or advice – a logical omission given what would be the inevitable time lag between letters, the fact that Traill is moving (at least in a physical sense) beyond anything her mother could have personally experienced, and most importantly, because establishing an independent travelling persona is central to the success of the text as a travel narrative. Our interest as readers derives – to a significant extent – from observing Traill confront new experiences, from watching her learn, and from gaining knowledge ourselves through an autobiographical account which is socially construed as reliable. Rhetorically, the letters which comprise the text provide an outlet for the narrator's personal emotions, a means of recording and evaluating the changes she undergoes and (perhaps) a way of coping with the inevitable boredom of a lengthy journey by sea and land. The experiences shared in these letters enable Traill to maintain an emotional bond with her motherland while emphasizing the widening gap between what is presented to the reader as a virtually non-existent past and an open-ended future.

In keeping with the resolutely forward-looking nature of Traill's travelling persona, descriptions of illness or physical weakness remain carefully circumscribed within the text. For example, although biographical sources suggest that she suffered from such a severe case of sea-sickness that both the captain and steward feared for her life (Peterman, Editor's Introduction xxv), the account presented in Backwoods includes only the stoic phrase "I have endured the horrors of *mal de mer*" (7). Similarly, a bout of cholera which strikes Traill in Montreal – and which she admits brings her to the brink of death and confines her to bed for almost a week – merits an account of little over a page, much of which focuses on the kind consideration she receives from a number of women in the hotel where she and her husband are staying (33-4). While I am reluctant to speculate at any length about why Traill so obviously downplays what biographical sources suggest to have been a period of intense suffering, several plausible explanations come to mind. William Gairdner suggests that Traill, who subscribed to the Puritan belief that "human suffering must be borne silently in atonement for human sin," interprets her suffering as a test of God (77). Her declaration that, "I will not dwell minutely on my sufferings, suffice to say, they were intense; but God, in his mercy, though he chastened and afflicted me, yet gave me not over unto death" (33) supports this interpretation. Traill may also have been reluctant to describe her suffering in any detail because an emphasis on the negative aspects of her

experience would have potentially undermined her goal of providing encouragement (along with practical advice) for potential immigrants. As well, the genre of travel narrative, even at its most sentimental, eschews self-pity. The success of a traveller's account depends on the reader's positive identification with the narrator and a corresponding presentation of the narrator's experience as potentially universal – for example, a standard assumption of travel narratives is that the narrator travels alone, and even when this is not the case, the emotional interplay between individuals is traditionally downplayed in the text. Finally, as Karen Lawrence suggests was the case for Mary Wollstonecraft when she composed Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, "[t]ravel and travel writing serve as both strategies and metaphors for moving beyond the fixation of feeling" (84). Thus the genre of travel narrative both mitigates against extensive descriptions of personal suffering and provides Traill with a textual strategy for rationalizing and transcending what was evidently a particularly horrific personal experience.

Along with an optimism which rarely falters, Traill's travelling persona is characterized by a self-proclaimed curiosity: "nothing that bears the stamp of novelty is devoid of interest" she proudly informs us. Even "[t]he simplest weed that grows in my path or the fly that flutters about me, are subjects for reflection, admiration, and delight" (14). However, there are obvious limits to Traill's curiosity, and the aspects of her experience which receive no more than a passing reference – including the obvious lacunae in her text, such as pregnancy – often prove as significant as the birds and flowers to which she devotes pages of description. From a twenty-first century perspective, for example, the following passage from the opening of letter two seems particularly odd:

> So barren of events has that time been [the almost three weeks which had elapsed since the previous letter] that the sight of a party of bottle-nosed whales, two or three seals, and a porpoise, possibly on their way to a dinner or tea party at the North Pole, was considered an occurrence of great importance. Every glass was in requisition as soon as they made their appearance, and the marine monsters were well nigh stared out of countenance. (9)

Ignoring the anthropomorphic references to whale tea-parties and dinners (not at all surprising when one considers the style of the children's stories which Traill produced, and the anthropomorphism which remains standard fare in works of children's literature to the present[139]),

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[139] A few pages later, in a more overt reference to children's literature, Traill compares a seal pup to Sinbad, a character from the Arabian Nights (Backwoods 13. See also Peterman's

what strikes me about this passage is Traill's limited interest in – and almost disdain for – sea mammals. Presumably such creatures would have been a novel and exotic sight for an individual on her first sea journey, yet she assumes that we will share her impression that these "monsters" would, under normal circumstances, merit little of the attention they receive from Traill and her fellow travellers. In contrast, a few pages earlier, she imbues generic "sea-fowl" with an intensely personal value: "I love to watch these wanderers of the ocean" (7), she informs us, discovering in their behaviour an allusion to a highly sentimental poem by Bryant (quoted at the opening of this chapter). Such narrative posturing is, as I mentioned earlier, highly characteristic of what Pratt delineates as "sentimental" travel writing.

Traill appears so determined to present herself as practical and positive that she only permits herself the indulgence of sorrow or self-pity on a second-hand basis. On one occasion she includes an original poem in her narrative ("The Scottish Emigrant's Song") which she was apparently inspired to write after observing a series of burial grounds by the roadside. Written partially in Scottish dialect, and obviously derivative of the work of Robert Burns (from whom she quotes in letter two), Traill's poem hints at her own home-sickness and suggests the intensity of the loss she feels when contemplating her exile from her mother and her motherland. The woman in the poem sings "this simple lay: – / 'I think upon the heathery hills / I ay hae lov'd sae dearly, / I think upon the wimpling burn / that wandered by sae clearly'" (38). The poem closes with a highly sentimental stanza, written not in the dialect of the Scottish emigrant, but in the standard English of the reflective observer, our narrator:

> The mossy stone, or simple cross,
> Its silent record keeps,
> Where mouldering in the forest-shade,
> The lonely exile sleeps. (39)

Having displaced her personal sorrow by articulating it through the experience of the singing woman,[140] Traill now indulges, in this final stanza, in a nostalgic and sentimental posturing which seems inconsistent with both the persona of the forward-looking traveller and that of the practical pioneer woman who dominate in most sections of the text.

Although Traill seems anxious to avoid, or at least circumscribe, any excessive emotional unburdening in her narration, she periodically asserts a self-consciously feminine sensitivity,

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explanatory note 13.33-35, p. 242).

[140] In a similar manner, as I suggested earlier, Traill articulates her own home-sickness by referring to that of a fellow passenger in letter one.

emphasizing her role as a loving and caring daughter – an interesting contrast to the independent and sensible narrator of the introduction. She opens the first two letters of Backwoods with affectionate reminders of her social and familial role, and of the emotional reciprocity shared with her mother: "I received your last kind letter, my dearest mother," she begins her first letter; the second opens with the phrase, "I left off writing, my dear mother." Another interesting feature of Traill's narrative stance in the opening letters – and one which seems incongruent with both the sensible persona of the introduction who so avidly recommends "ingenuity" and "expediency" while exhorting her readers to "discard all irrational and artificial wants" (2-3), and the competent settler who offers so much practical advice later on in the text – is Traill's depiction of herself on several occasions during the sea voyage as a pampered woman who delights in the attention paid to her by her husband and the crew members. She describes in detail the "delightful bouquet" Thomas Traill selects for her, the china jar and fresh water "furnished" by the steward, and the green boughs brought by the sailors to "adorn the ship" (13). Significantly, though, these gifts are offered as an attempt to compensate for her disappointment at being denied the opportunity to visit the Isle of Bic.[141] Instead of going ashore with the men, as she had felt a "longing desire" to do, Traill "contented" herself "with leaning over the ship's side and feasting . . . [her] eyes on the rich masses of foliage" (12). Although initially piqued by the captain and her husband's refusal to allow her to accompany the shore party, she proceeds to announce that "I had soon reason enough to be thankful that I had not followed my own wayward will" (13). Traill speaks here as a child who has been chastised, though the chastisement seems self-imposed. Her "wayward will" – the temptation to transgress gender norms by leaving the safety of the ship after long, boring weeks at sea in order to join the first shore party – proves to have been rightfully thwarted as the men had to deal with swampy ground and "sunk over their ankles in water" (13).

The way Traill chooses to conclude her description of this incident is significant. Doubtless, the long layered dress and lightweight shoes or boots she wore would have proven highly unsuitable for trudging through muddy ground, but what is important here is not the physical circumstances, but the allocation of blame. Instead of drawing our attention to her mistaken impression of conditions on the island, or to the more experienced perspective of the captain, who accurately recognizes the inappropriateness of her attire, Traill chides herself for a

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[141] Bentley identifies a "pattern of male refusal" followed by "chivalric gesture" in such passages ("Breaking the 'Cake of Custom'" 111). I am more inclined to focus on the undercurrent of frustration in Traill's text than the construction of masculine chivalry, though the two are not unconnected.

desire to follow her own will rather than to immediately acquiesce to the decision of the captain and her husband. In a stance which, like that of the pampered lady, seems somewhat incongruent with the generically-sanctioned pose of the independent traveller, Traill symbolically bows to male authority, reprimanding herself for a misguided desire to transgress gender norms. At such focal points in the text the underlying discontinuities between generic and gender conventions are crystallised.

In another rhetorical shift, Traill deliberately presents herself in a gender neutral manner on a number of occasions in Backwoods. When providing practical details of transport in passages such as the following, she depersonalizes herself and employs the generic label "the traveller": "Certainly the travelling is arranged with as little trouble to the traveller as possible. Having paid your fare to Prescott you have no thought or care. When you quit the steam-boat you find a stage ready to receive you and your luggage . . ." (35). Paradoxically, although Traill self-consciously employs the term "the traveller" here, in her use of the second person pronoun as a rhetorical device to address and involve readers and her emphasis on practical details, this section observes more of the generic conventions of the settler's guide than those of traditional travel narratives aimed at entertaining armchair travellers. In these early sections of the text, though not in the introduction or later letters, Traill seems to associate the personal and the feminine with the conventions of travel narrative and exploit more gender neutral terms for passages of practical advice.

Traill's gender-neutral, self-consciously "objective" stance is also exemplified by the passages which are appended to each letter as notes in the CEECT edition, most of which add factual details or update information in the original text. In placing these informative asides outside of the main text, Peterman follows the general format of the first edition, though not Traill's presumed intent. In the original edition, the additional material provided by Traill in 1835 (as well as supplementary information including statistics, official data and notes written by Charles Knight) was presented in a series of appendices, presumably because the text was already in the process of being printed when this material arrived.

The multi-facetted nature of Traill's travelling persona is further emphasized by the manner in which she juxtaposes the voice of the naïve immigrant with that of the established settler whose perspective frames the narrative. Initially, the wide-eyed, sentimental narrator dominates and the opening letters revolve around her personal impressions and experiences. Statements such as "I was much pleased" (7), "I have some little difficulty in understanding Monsieur Paul" (12) and "This was very annoying" (15) typically open paragraphs in the first

and second letters; even simple declarative statements such as, "This morning we anchored off the Isle of Bic," quickly shift into a subjective mode as she describes "a pretty low island, covered with trees and looking very pleasant" (12).

The first overt challenge to the naïveté of this youthful perspective is presented through the voice of an officer serving in a local fort. Traill has just provided her readers with a description of a colourful scene of a group of newly landed emigrants on the beach. Impressed by what she perceives to be the evident felicity and industriousness of these emigrants, she waxes enthusiastic:

> You may imagine yourself looking on a fair or crowded market, clothes waving in the wind or spread out on the earth, chests, bundles, baskets, men, women, and children, asleep or basking in the sun, some in motion busied with their goods, the women employed in washing or cooking in the open air, beside the wood fires on the beach; while parties of children are pursuing each other in wanton glee rejoicing in their newly-acquired liberty. (17)

Traill's husband, obviously sharing her perspective, comments on "the picturesque[142] appearance of the scene" to the visiting officer. The officer's response is absolute:

> . . . he smiled sadly and replied, "Believe me, in this instance, as in many others, "'tis distance lends enchantment to the view." Could you take a nearer survey of some of those very picturesque groups which you admire, I think you would turn away from them with heart sickness; you would there behold every variety of disease, vice, poverty, filth, and famine – human misery in its most disgusting and saddening form. Such pictures as Hogarth's pencil only could have pourtrayed [*sic*], or Crabbe's pen described." (17)

Traill simply allows this quotation to speak for itself, but then moves into a second anecdote in which she, rather than her husband, is specifically rebuked:

> I petitioned the health officer's permission to go on shore at a wild spot far from the quarantine ground, but he was inexorable. I pleaded: "There is no one there; it will do not harm." "You think so, Madam, but you might see a redcoat with a bayonet among those green bushes to warn you off," he said with a grim smile. I was silenced. (17)

As before, Traill's personal desires are thwarted, though here she simply positions herself as corrected and acquiescent rather than wilfully rebellious.[143]

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[142] I deal specifically with the conventions of the picturesque and Traill's utilization of its discourse and conventions in chapter five.

[143] However disturbing the phrase "I was silenced" may appear to a feminist reader at the

A few pages after this incident, we begin to hear the voice of the older, more experienced Traill persona for the first time since the introduction. After expressing her regret at being unable to stand at the top of the fortress of Quebec and appreciate what had been described by others as a "superb view" and a "noble prospect," she comments that, "It would have been something to have thought on and recalled in after years, when buried in the solitude of the Canadian woods" (18-19). The nostalgia which creeps into the narrative at this point is novel, though the Wordsworthian endorsement of the value of natural beauty reflected in tranquillity becomes one of the motifs in Traill's landscape descriptions, the focus of my analysis in the next chapter.

Ignoring for the moment the additional material Traill provided in 1835, since we cannot be sure of her intentions with regard to its placement, the second appearance of the more experienced Traill persona occurs in letter four. Here – for the first time – Traill overtly amends her own statements, rather than simply citing divergent perspectives or relating statements in which other, more experienced, and inevitably male, individuals correct her. In this passage, Traill provides an optimistic glimpse of a future as successful pioneers which she idealistically envisions for herself and her husband:

> "We . . . are going to purchase wild land, and why may not we see our farm, in process of time," thought I, "equal these fertile spots. Surely this is a blessed country to which we have emigrated," said I, pursuing the pleasing idea, "where every cottage abounds with the comforts and necessaries of life." (37)

Whether Traill intends us to read these lines as private thoughts or as part of an ongoing dialogue remains ambiguous in the above passage (perhaps due to hasty composition or careless editing), but the statement that follows is precise in its criticism of the naïveté of that dream:

> I perhaps overlooked at that time the labour, the difficulties, the privations to which these settlers had been exposed when they first came to this country. I saw it only at a distance of many years, under a high state of cultivation, perhaps in the hands of their children or their children's children, while the toil-worn parent's head was low in the dust. (37)

Traill reiterates this lesson in the next letter, once again emphasizing the difference between the younger, less-experienced self who recounts recent events in the narrative and the experienced pioneer-woman of the introduction. What is interesting here is that for the first time, Traill

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beginning of the twenty-first century, the surrounding passages in no way support a symbolic interpretation of this line.

subjects her naïve narrator to a degree of gentle mockery. Near the beginning of a passage recounting a dialogue between Traill and an unnamed "elderly gentleman," she informs us that she "could see a smile hover on the lips of . . . fellow-travellers on hearing of our projected plans for the adornment of our future dwelling" (47). After her companion suggests that during their first five years in the bush they are unlikely to find time for creating attractive hedge-rows to replace the "offensive" and "unsightly" zig-zag fences which dot the countryside through which they are travelling, Traill indignantly replies, "'I thought,' said I, 'every thing in this country was done with so much expedition. I am sure I have heard and read of houses being built in a day'" (47). In response, we are told, "[t]he old gentleman laughed."

At this point, Traill's travelling companion becomes an authorial mouthpiece, not only offering advice for prospective pioneers but also presenting the writer's opinions of other travel narratives and settler's guides. As this occurs, the increasingly contrived nature of the dialogue becomes all too apparent:

> "But all the works on emigration that I have read," replied I, "give a fair and flattering picture of a settler's life, for according to their statements, the difficulties are easily removed."
>
> "Never mind books," said my companion, "use your own reason . . . . Never tell me of what is said in books, written very frequently by tarry-at-home travellers. Give me facts. One honest, candid emigrant's experience is worth all that has been written on the subject. Besides, that which may be a true picture of one part of the country will hardly suit another. The advantages and disadvantages arising from soil, situation, and progress of civilization, are very different in different districts: even the prices of goods and of produce, stock and labour, vary exceedingly, according as you are near to, or distant from, towns and markets." (48)

In its style and tone, this passage – distinctly reminiscent of Traill's introduction with its focus on reason, honesty, truth and the importance of a balanced perspective – stands apart from the surrounding travel-oriented narrative. It is interesting to note how Traill slips in both an advertisement for the text we are currently reading ("One honest, candid emigrant's experience is worth all that has been written on the subject") and a disclaimer for any errors it may include: what "may be a true picture of one part of the country will hardly suit another," we are told, since conditions "are very different in different districts." Yet this is not the first time Traill has qualified her statements. In the third letter of Backwoods she includes the disclaimer "[t]o my unpractised eye" (23) and then, more notably, informs her readers, "[r]emember, these are merely the cursory remarks of a passing traveller, and founded on no personal experience" (25). At this

point, Traill seems anxious to distinguish between the knowledgeable pioneer woman writing accurately and confidently about the region of Upper Canada in which she now resides and the attentive, but inexperienced traveller *en route* to her new abode. Still, the statement "founded on no personal experience" does seem rather ironic in light of her repeated claims in the text to the authenticity and value of first-hand experience.

Immediately after the passage in which Traill's anonymous companion lectures her on the value of facts and experience, the focus of the text reverts to the perspective of the inexperienced emigrant. However, through her use of the past tense one remains conscious of the mature Traill persona hovering in the background: "I began to think my fellow-traveller spoke sensibly on the subject, with which the experience of thirteen years had made him perfectly conversant. I began to apprehend that we also had taken too flattering a view of a settler's life as it must be in the backwoods" (48). Then, as she rounds off the anecdote, Traill positions herself as both youthful and wise, presenting, not for the first time, an image of the future as a trial requiring knowledge and forbearance: "Time and our own personal knowledge will be the surest test, and to that we must bow" (48).

As is evident in the passage I have just dealt with, Traill's handling of narrative perspective is at times quite clumsy. One could argue that her previous published writings – consisting almost exclusively of didactic children's stories – had little prepared her for the ambitious project of producing an autobiographical account which would blend the interest-value of a lively travel narrative with the practical usefulness of a guide to pioneer life in Upper Canada. Obviously, Traill's personal circumstances at the time of writing were also a disadvantage: striving to produce a marketable work for a diverse adult audience in England while struggling to establish a pioneer home and raise a small child in an isolated section of newly-cleared forest can only have been a daunting task.

Perhaps we also need to return, at this point, to a consideration of the generic conventions to which Traill seeks to conform. As I mentioned at the opening of this chapter, John Thurston argues that Traill, and similar writers, devised a distinctive, hybrid genre of travel narrative/settler's guide in their nineteenth-century writings about the experiences of emigration and pioneer life in rural Canada. While accepting this premise on a general level, I have chosen to focus on the distinctive, yet interwoven, generic threads in the text. The conclusion my analysis leads to is that competing generic demands and expectations, in conjunction with those imposed by a socially-sanctioned ideology of gender, create an underlying tension in Backwoods which surfaces on a stylistic level. This tension is one of the features I analyse in the following

chapter, which deals with a significant feature of Traill's travel narrative which I have, up until this point, skirted around rather than addressed directly: landscape descriptions.

CHAPTER 5

"I cannot but dwell with feelings of wonder and admiration": Landscape Descriptions in The Backwoods of Canada

Landscape descriptions are one of the most common generic features of travel narratives and Traill's detailed accounts of scenery are correspondingly one of the more conventional aspects of The Backwoods of Canada. Shirley Foster accounts for such "derivativeness or lack of individual vision" in representations of natural scenery by suggesting that in the nineteenth century, "[t]ravel writers found themselves almost inevitably caught up in . . . [the] traditions" of presenting landscapes in terms of the sublime and picturesque (56). Yet despite the conventionality of these passages, Traill's "capacity for detailed attention to 'still life'" remains – as Northrop Frye suggests – "exceptional, if not unique, in early Canadian writing" ("National Consciousness" 51).

Historically, a significant shift occurred in European travel narratives in the late eighteenth century as the highly factual, detailed accounts of scenery favoured by earlier writers were increasingly replaced by more emotive accounts characterized by "an increasing emphasis on the traveller's response to the poetic qualities of landscape, as defined in the elaborate aesthetic discourse of the sublime and picturesque" (Lawrence 89).[144] (In Pratt's terms, the latter would be classified as "sentimental" narratives, the former as "scientific.") Traill, who was exposed to travel narratives in her childhood (presumably including a range of texts from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries[145]), clearly embraces the trend of describing natural and human

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[144] Lawrence cites similar conclusions drawn by Charles Batten in Pleasurable Instruction: Form and Convention in Eighteenth-Century Travel Literature and William Spengemann in The Adventurous Muse: The Poetics of American Fiction, 1789-1900 (Lawrence 90).

[145] In the biographical sketch written by Traill's niece which forms the first selection in Pearls and Pebbles, Traill describes her childhood reading material: "We [she and her siblings] ransacked the library for books . . .We tried history, the drama, voyages and travels, of which latter there was a huge folder" (Fitzgibbon viii). Traill's parents also read "books of travel" aloud to the children (Forest and Other Gleanings 47).

landscapes in self-consciously artistic terms, especially in the opening sections of Backwoods. The first detailed landscape description included in the text – a description of the lower reaches of the St. Lawrence River in letter two – is both highly aestheticized and weighted with symbolic significance. In this passage Traill shares her first vision of the "New World":

> I am now able to trace distinctly the outline of the coast on the southern side of the river. Sometimes the high lands are suddenly enveloped in dense clouds of mist, which are in constant motion, rolling along in shadowy billows, now tinted with rosy light, now white and fleecy, or bright as silver, as they catch the sunbeams. So rapid are the changes that take place in this fog-bank, that perhaps the next time I raise my eyes I behold the scene changed as if by magic. The misty curtain is slowly drawn up, as if by invisible hands, and the wild, wooded mountains partially revealed, with their bold rocky shores and sweeping bays. At other times the vapoury volume dividing, moves along the valleys and deep ravines, like lofty pillars of smoke, or hangs in snowy draperies among the dark forest pines. (10-11)

This scene, described as if it were presented to Traill like a dramatic painting unveiled by "invisible hands," is imbued with a magical beauty, a symmetry of light and dark, and an over-powering sense of the sublime. The aesthetic qualities of the scene are emphasized by Traill's use of elevated diction, while the discourse of art – "trace," "outline" and "tinted" – reinforces the metaphorical allusions to performance (she "behold[s] the scene" as the "curtain is slowly drawn up") and to revelation. This is, of course, the "New World." Just two paragraphs earlier Traill "hailed" a "beautiful little bird" as a "good omen – a little messenger sent to bid us welcome" (10).

In the passage quoted above, our narrator implicitly positions herself as a passive observer, limited to raising her eyes, "powerless to act or interact with this landscape" (Pratt, "Scratches" 124),[146] or as William Gairdner suggests, passive in the face of an omnipresent God. Gairdner argues that in this scene Trail "has gone to great lengths . . . to awaken in us a sense that we gaze not merely upon nature as a brute, scientific fact, but also, and perhaps more importantly for her – upon a nature which is 'revealed' to us by God" (75). Both interpretations strike me as valid in this context: Traill's discourse here, as elsewhere, is multi-layered.

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[146] Pratt uses this phrase to refer in general to panoramic views in travel accounts, and specifically to the writings of John Barrow. I employ it here as a reminder of the conventional nature of much of Traill's landscape description, and to contrast this description with later passages in which she has, as John Moss suggests, "written herself into the Canadian landscape" ("Gender Notes: Wilderness Unfinished" 168).

In the opening lines, Traill emphasizes the picturesque qualities of the scene she describes, but it is the intense language of the sublime which dominates towards the end: the mountains are "wild," the rocky shores "bold," the bays "sweeping," the ravines "deep" and the pillars of smoke "lofty." These two aesthetic concepts – the sublime and the picturesque – are central to Traill's landscape descriptions in this passage and elsewhere (and, on a broader scale, to most nineteenth-century travel narratives of Upper Canada[147]). Patricia Jasen effectively summarizes the popular concept of the sublime current at the time of Backwoods' composition:

> The craze for sublime experience entailed a new appreciation of natural phenomena, which in earlier times had been generally regarded as unpleasantly frightening, unattractive, or even demonic. Among these were "scars" on the earth's surface such as mountains and ravines, and other gloomy or violent phenomena such as cascading waters, bleak moors, dark forests and thunderstorms. (8)

Sublime landscapes were assumed to evoke intense emotional reactions, while picturesque landscapes, which convey a sense of balance and order, would inspire reflection and aesthetic judgement. Picturesque landscapes invite the reader to, in Colin Coates' words,

> . . . think of paintings, in other words where nature imitates art. The framing of the perspective by vegetation or hills, contrasts between shadows and light, a variety of natural phenomena . . . all of these are possible elements of the picturesque. The observer may regard the scene, either natural or painted, in a leisurely fashion, the eye slowly taking in the entire view. It is a diverse but unified landscape. (321)

As Shirley Foster explains, the concept of the picturesque is derived from "eighteenth-century notions of the pleasingly pictorial quality in the natural environment [which] were still influential" when Backwoods was conceived; the sublime can be linked to "Burke's theory . . . taken up by Gothic and Romantic writers, [which] established a convention of 'nature writing' which emphasized the magnificent, the dramatic and the visually striking" (56).[148] Traill, and

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[147] See Patricia Jasen's Wild Things: Nature Culture and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914 (7-9) for a more extensive account of landscape descriptions in nineteenth-century travel narratives. In Land Sliding, William New explores the conventional nature of landscape descriptions in the work of early Canadian writers such as Susanna Moodie. He argues that "by the eighteenth century, the Canadian landscape had become a verbal territory as well as a physical one, and the ways in which language constructed this landscape affected what people thought they saw or thought was there to be seen" (62).

[148] Susan Glickman traces the historical development of the concepts of the sublime and the picturesque in the first chapter of The Picturesque and the Sublime (3-19).

other nineteenth-century travel writers, "found themselves almost inevitably caught up in these traditions" (Foster 56).

The concept of the picturesque also carries political implications, representing, in Ann Bermingham's words, "an ideological as well as aesthetic commitment" (66). I. S. MacLaren reminds us that "[t]he picturesque sustained the sojourning Briton's sense of identity when he traveled beyond European civilization. It was his aesthetic baggage, as it were, carried in the belief that it could organize the new world and sustain his hopes of controlling, governing it and its denizens" (100). Through their use of the picturesque, which made landscapes "accessible, artists, like politicians and generals, created new spaces for imperial expansion" (Coates 323). Given that one of Traill's overt purposes in Backwoods is to provide inspiration and advice for prospective immigrants (albeit in the form of a lively narrative aimed, in part, at an audience of armchair travellers), her text can be read as complicit with the discourse of nineteenth-century British imperialism.[149] The "enterprising English capitalist[s]" (2) and their wives and daughters whom Traill addresses in her introduction stand at the forefront of England's colonial expansion into Canada: they are, she informs us, the "pioneers of civilization of the wilderness" (3). Symbolically, the presentation of scenes "as a landscape, was a colonizing act in itself. This way of seeing the world reinforces subjective control over an objective environment" (Little, Introduction 5).[150] Even when Traill makes no specific mention of European enterprise, a colonial discourse underlies much of her landscape description. As Pratt reminds us, although in such works

> . . . European enterprise . . . [may be] seldom mentioned . . . the sight/site as textualized consistently presupposes a global transformation that whether the I/eye likes it or not, is already understood to be underway. In scanning prospects in the spatial sense – as landscape panoramas – this eye *knows itself* to be looking at prospects in the temporal sense – as possibilities for the future, resources to be

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[149] As Judith Johnston states, the writing of Traill (and the Australian immigrant writer Louisa Anna Meredith, with whom she compares Traill's work) "reveals how much indeed they were part of the colonial enterprise, recognized as fitted to record that enterprise not only by virtue of class and education, but also because they were already professional writers, a circumstance according their texts a particular status that differs greatly from the private and personal letters and diaries of early colonists that have been published in the twentieth century" (35).

[150] Jack Little refers to Lucy Peel's descriptions of the Eastern Townships in this quotation, but his generalizations are equally relevant to Traill's work.

> developed, landscapes to be peopled or re-peopled by Europeans. ("Scratches" 125)

As well as embracing this colonial vision, Traill indirectly employs the type of discovery rhetoric which Pratt identifies in the Victorian writings of Richard Burton.[151] Burton's landscape descriptions, like Traill's, exploit "three conventional means which create qualitative and quantitative value for the explorer's achievement": first, "the landscape is estheticized;" then "density of meaning is sought" as "[t]he landscape is represented as extremely rich in material and semantic substance" (often through the extensive use of adjectival modifiers); and finally, "mastery" over the scene is predicated, frequently through the metaphor of painting (Imperial Eyes 204-5).[152] Albeit in somewhat different forms, each of these rhetorical features surfaces in Traill's landscape descriptions. She consistently describes the scenery she encounters in aesthetic terms, she achieves "density of meaning" – initially through strings of adjectives, as she focuses on the sublime landscape of Lower Canada, and later through descriptions of the fertility of the land and its potential for economic exploitation – and she demonstrates her mastery over the landscape through her use of artistic metaphors and comparisons to the British countryside (most of which, though not all, are negative).

But let me return at this point to a consideration of the initial landscape descriptions in Backwoods. After Traill's opening accounts of rocky shores and mountainous coastlines in letter two (10-11), she turns with relief to scenes of human habitation. As she admits, even the sublime can become exhausting: "Though I cannot but dwell with feelings of wonder and admiration on the majesty and power of this mighty river, I begin to grow weary of its immensity, and long for a nearer view of the shore" (11). The settlements which now appear along the riverbank provide a sense of comfort and familiarity: "I watch the progress of cultivation among these rugged and

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[151] I refer to Burton's work, although it was published almost thirty years later than Backwoods, primarily because Pratt's analysis proves surprisingly relevant to Traill's text. By using a prominent male travel writer as a point of comparison here I also emphasize the importance of considering the generic conventions and constraints on Traill's writing, rather than reading her narrative in strictly biographical or gendered terms.

[152] As Pratt explains, "[t]he metaphor of the painting is suggestive. If the scene is a painting, then Burton is both the viewer there to judge and appreciate it, and the verbal painter who produces it for others. From the painting analogy it also follows that what Burton sees is all there is, and that the landscape was intended to be viewed from where he has emerged upon it. Thus the scene is deictically ordered with reference to his vantage point, and is static" (Imperial Eyes 204-5).

inhospitable regions with positive pleasure," she announces (11). As Foster suggests, Traill is "familiarizing the natural environment" by looking "for signs of man's benevolent and practical intervention . . . [and] focusing on cultivated nature, in harmony with humanity, not divorced or alien from it" (87).[153] Increasingly, her discourse is dominated by the overlapping rhetoric of the pastoral and the picturesque[154]: "white cottages" dot the shores and a "village church rears its simple spire" (12). As John Thurston explains, texts such as Backwoods tend to "hierarchize landscape, valuing most those picturesque scenes [such as the one just cited] that most recall old-country pastoral" ("Remember" 188). Continuing in this mode, Traill describes Crane Island as if it were the grounds of an idyllic English manor: "The island itself showed us smooth lawns and meadows of emerald verdure, with orchards and corn-fields sloping down to the water's edge" (15).[155] This style of description typically implies that the scenery exists for the pleasure of the viewer: "[t]he island showed itself." Thus, Traill's task becomes one of aesthetic appreciation and evaluation. Similarly, she informs us that "[t]he southern shores [of the St. Lawrence River] are more populous but less picturesque than those of the north, but there is enough on either side to delight the eye" (12). As David Jackel suggests, at this point in the narrative Traill uses landscape description "as a means of displaying her own good taste in the discovery of its 'picturesque' qualities" (17).

Yet Traill's vision is not one of unmitigated aesthetic pleasure: upon closer examination, our cultured traveller becomes offended by the whitewashed shingled roofs of cottages and homesteads which "have a glaring effect." Even more disturbing is the "gaudy hue" of a "rose-coloured house . . . garnished with grass-green shutters, doors and verandah." "No doubt the interior is furnished with corresponding taste," Traill sarcastically informs us (14). The "aesthetic failure" of such a scene is presented as a "moral failure" since the implication is that it "exists

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[153] Foster categorizes nineteenth-century travel writers into two groups: "those who essentially rejected or tried to familiarize the wilderness, and those who were drawn to its otherness" (85). Traill, and other members of the first group, "taking Europe as their standard, assessed it [the North American landscape] in terms relevant to their own culture or to their previous experiences of foreign landscape" (85). Traill follows this trend in comparing a beautiful Canadian sunset to those of Italy (based on her husband's experience, since she had never travelled outside Great Britain prior to her emigration) (Backwoods 22).

[154] Ann Bermingham's perceptive analysis of the picturesque in Landscape and Ideology includes an explanation of its links with "pastoral, preenclosed landscape[s]" (75).

[155] Colin Coates explores the concept of "the perspective that could be seen from the manor house" in "The Appropriation of Landscape in Lower Canada" (322).

only in its aesthetic dimension . . . and only in its capacity to reply to the writer's literary sensibility" (Giltrow, "North American Travel Writing" 208).

As Traill's narrative develops and descriptions of sublime landscapes become increasingly infrequent, comparisons between Canadian landscapes and those of her homeland – almost invariably favouring Britain – become increasingly common. "How lovely would such a spot be rendered in England or Scotland," she informs us (19); "[i]n Britain even the peasant has taste enough to plant a few roses or honeysuckles about his door" (23); and "the outline of the country reminded me of the hilly part of Gloucestershire; you want, however, the charm with which civilization has so eminently adorned that fine county" (46). Passages such as these have provoked a range of responses in recent critical analyses of Traill's work. Read biographically, as Foster does, such passages indicate the anxious desire felt by Traill, and her sister Moodie, "to find comforting comparisons with the homeland they might never see again" since the strangeness of the landscape "represented not the pleasures of the holiday exploration but potential permanence" (87). Taking this interpretation one step farther, Giltrow reads Traill's repeated references to British landscapes as expressions of the "poignant . . . disappointment and unresolvable alienation" permeating travel narratives such as Backwoods, which describe one-way journeys of permanent emigration rather than circular journeys ("'Painful Experience'" 132). W. J. Keith sees these comparisons as more neutral rhetorical devices, however, suggesting that they provide a common ground of comparison for Traill's English readers, satisfy the writer's need for the familiar, and – most significantly – should be read as a product of "visual conditioning" (Literary Images of Ontario 22).[156] Yet Traill's evaluations of Canadian scenery, especially human settlements, are sometimes harsher than these critics would suggest. In passages such as the description of the "rose-coloured house" quoted above, Traill indirectly asserts the superiority of her native country while emphasizing the distance between herself and the unsophisticated Canadians who demonstrate such poor taste. "There is generally one or more of these *smart* buildings in a Canadian village, standing forth with ostentatious splendour above its more modest brethren," she declares (14). Sarcastically posing the rhetorical question, "What would you say to a rose-coloured house . . .?", Traill invites her readers to share both her assumptions of superiority and the arrogance of her all-encompassing perspective.

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[156] Keith employs the example of Traill and other nineteenth-century writers who demonstrate a sharp disdain for "zig-zag fences of split timber," preferring the hedges and stone fences of their home country (Literary Images of Ontario 22).

Another feature of Traill's landscape descriptions which gains increasing prominence after the first letters is a focus on evidence of human industry in the countryside – in particular, agriculture. This is associated with a shift, from Traill's perspective, in the nature of the land itself. The sublime landscape along the lower stretches of the St. Lawrence River she now personifies as "churlish;" in contrast, the more pastoral landscape upriver appears "yielding":

> The scenery of the river near Montreal is of a very different character to that below Quebec; the latter possesses a wild and rugged aspect and its productions are evidently those of a colder and less happy climate. What the former loses in grandeur and picturesque effect, it gains in fertility of soil and warmth of temperature. In the lower division of the province you feel that the industry of the inhabitants is forcing a churlish soil for bread; while in the upper, the land seems willing to yield her increase to a moderate exertion. (24-5)

Traill's emotional response to the land is quite fascinating. Perhaps because she is moving from a tourist perspective, in which she "gloried in the sense of something alien, such as a wilderness that could be enjoyed physically and imaginatively and then left behind" (Jasen 25) to that of a settler, Traill now reads happiness, fertility, warmth and even willingness into the landscape.[157] She engages with what Annette Kolodny identifies as "the metaphor of the land as woman. The landscape experienced as feminine allowed, indeed invited, the newly arrived immigrant to feel himself reborn, transformed" (Lay of the Land 54).[158] Traill's embrace of this masculinist psycho-sexual myth of the land as a receptive woman waiting to be fertilized,[159] though far less

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[157] Jasen makes this tourist/settler distinction in Wild Things. Rather than suggesting that settler writings are totally distinct from tourist accounts, she interprets them as different rhetorical poses (25). In these terms, Traill has the luxury of writing as a tourist during the initial stages of her journey because there is no expectation that she will interact with the environment at this point in time.

[158] Kolodny considers this to be "the central metaphor of American pastoral experience" (Lay of the Land 54). Applying an American-based analysis to Canadian landscape descriptions is not unproblematic – Little, for example, suggests that "the British colonial gentry clearly expressed a deeper aesthetic appreciation for Nature (albeit in a an idealized guise) than did their American born neighbours" (7) – but the rhetorical practice of describing the land in feminine terms has certainly not been limited to American society or discourse. See Anne McClintock's Imperial Leather for a broader, more political analysis of this metaphor.

[159] Anne McClintock argues that "[t]he feminizing of the land represents a ritualistic moment in imperial discourse," and her examples, drawn largely from the works of male explorers whose discourse she categorizes as "porno-tropics," suggest the violence of rape (24). Admittedly, Traill refers to the inhabitants "forcing" the soil of the lower reaches of the St. Lawrence, but in general she seems to envisage the land as more potentially receptive. Of more

overt than in the works of male nineteenth-century explorers/writers describing the Orient and Africa, reminds us once again of the generic conventions which both dictate the parameters of Traill's text and provide her with a rhetorical framework.

In the passage quoted above, Traill's emotional response to the landscape is also closely linked to her preference for the scenery upriver over that of the "lower division of the province." In the letter which follows she broadens this comparison to cover Upper and Lower Canada: "With the exception of Quebec and Montreal, I must give the preference to the Upper Province. If not on so grand a scale, the scenery is more calculated to please, from the appearance of industry and fertility it displays" (35). Although she does not mention it, the landscape of the British settlements of Upper Canada obviously reminds Traill of her home, unlike the unfamiliar and highly distinctive settlement patterns (based on different systems of land tenure and inheritance) in the former French colony of Lower Canada.

While there are discernible patterns in the nature and development of landscape descriptions in Backwoods, Traill's rhetorical stance and emotional responses to the environment remain ambivalent. Almost immediately following the passage in praise of the warm and benevolent landscape quoted above, for example, Traill chastises the section of river below Montreal for not proving sufficiently awe-inspiring. Characterized by "waving lines and dimples," the rapids to which they have been "towed in good style" leave Traill "disappointed in . . . expectation of seeing something very grand;" feeling cheated, she remains "half angry at these pretty-behaved quiet rapids" (26). Not for the first time, the landscape has failed in its obligation to provide stimulation for our narrator who obviously believes that she deserves more.[160] However, when a series of rapids do meet Traill's approval in the next letter, she struggles to find a language equal to the task of conveying her excitement. After suggesting rather tamely that "[w]e were exceedingly gratified by the magnificent appearance of the rapids of the St. Laurence [*sic*]" she retreats, drawing attention to the inadequacy of her rhetoric and directing her reader's attention to a popular travel narrative published in 1821: "I should fail in my attempt to describe

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specific relevance to my study, Kolodny discusses the prevalent pre-twentieth century fantasy in which the landscape was conceived of as "a primal paradise where the maternal and the erotic were to be harmoniously intermingled" in The Land Before Her (4). I refer to Kolodny's work at some length later in this chapter.

[160] This scene recalls Giltrow's comments (cited earlier) about the assumed equation between aesthetic and moral failure prevalent in many travel narratives ("North American Travel Writing" 208).

this grand sheet of turbulent water to you. Howison has pictured them very minutely in his work on Upper Canada, which I know you are well acquainted with" (40-41).[161]

A clear shift in Traill's narrative occurs in letter four, when she and her husband finally alight from their ship, the *Laurel*, at Montreal after their extended journey. Not surprisingly, the descriptions of landscapes and scenes become increasingly focused and specific from this point onwards. Architectural details, information about soil types, descriptions of vines, flowers and bushes (sometimes with accompanying Latin and familiar names) and animated accounts of outdoor ovens and large spinning-wheels follow one another in a delightfully eclectic manner. Like many travellers, and travel writers, Traill now embraces what David Spurr identifies as the discursive strategy of surveillance, assuming "the privilege of inspecting, of examining, of looking at" (13). Her description of the interior of a log house in letter five provides a particularly striking example of such discourse. Admittedly, an account of the inside of a house is not what one would normally classify as a landscape description, but I wish to digress briefly to consider the implications of this scene for two reasons: first, because log-cabins were considered to be one of the conventionally exotic elements of the Canadian landscape and, as such, became common subjects in travel narratives (Thurston, "Remember" 184), and secondly because Traill struggles here to convey a response to the scene which is both objective and emotional – a task for which her discourse proves inadequate.

Traill opens this passage by assuming the right to intrude into the private dwelling of a stranger in order to satisfy her curiosity, although she does admit to using a subterfuge in order to do so: "As I felt a great curiosity to see the interior of a log-house, I entered the open doorway . . . under the pretext of buying a draught of milk" (54). The scene which greets Traill's eyes does not impress her: "The interior of this rude dwelling presented no very inviting aspect. The walls were of rough unhewn logs, filled between the chinks with moss and irregular wedges of wood to keep out the wind and rain" (54-5). In the ongoing description, she reiterates the roughness and irregularity of the dwelling, its components and its occupants: the roof is full of "crannies and apertures," the stools are "rough and unplaned," the table is "held together by its ill-shaped legs,"

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[161] Peterman quotes from Howison's description of these rapids in his explanatory notes to the CEECT edition of Backwoods (250-51, Note #40.35-36). Howison's description, which includes phrases such as "one perturbed expanse of foam, rushing over a rocky bed with terrific grandeur and vehemence," provides a fairly typical example of sublime rhetoric. Intertextual references such as Traill's allusion to Howison are common practice in travel narratives, suggesting a shared set of expectations and generic distinctions.

two ill men have "yellow bilious faces" and the hostess is "a harsh, covetous woman." Although the inhabitants are obviously of British descent, Traill distances herself from their suffering by emphasizing their foreignness, comparing them to characters in a survival narrative published in 1774: "This hut reminded me of the one described by the four Russian sailors that were left to winter on the island of Spitzbergen," she informs us (55).[162] She also claims that, "I felt much concerned for the poor emigrants, who told me they had not been many weeks in the country when they were seized with the fever and ague." Traill is obviously uncomfortable here; although she instinctively pities the inhabitants of the log-cabin, her comments remain quite harsh: "the husbands having fallen ill were unable to do anything," she tells us, and "[t]he most attractive objects . . . [in the cabin] were three snow-white pigeons, that were meekly picking up crumbs, and looking as if they were too pure and innocent to be inhabitants of such a place" (55-6).

After this statement, Traill abruptly shifts her focus to the steam-boat used for transport upriver to Peterborough. Apparently her curiosity was more than satisfied by what she discovered in the log-cabin; even more evidently, the failure of these emigrants, the futility of their dreams and the obvious discomfort of their residence (there is nothing cosy or homely in the entire scene except for some "gay patchwork-quilts" which merely emphasize the sallow complexions of the men who lie under them) strike uncomfortably close to home for a woman on her way to a backwoods settlement (remember, too, that she had not yet fully recovered from a bout of cholera which had reduced her – at its worst – to a state weaker than that of these men). The unevenness of the discourse in this passage reflects Traill's uneasiness. She shifts back and forth between what Pratt classifies as scientific and sentimental narrative perspectives, yet commits herself to neither. On other occasions such eclecticism proves to be an effective rhetorical tactic for Traill; here the result is disjointed and dissatisfying. She begins by listing all the colours of the unplastered roof – the green, yellow and grey moss and lichens, the "shingles, dyed to a fine mahogany red" (55) – and then provides details of every piece of furniture in the room. But when it comes to the human inhabitants, Traill quickly shifts into a generalized account of their predicament. Elsewhere in Backwoods she readily dramatizes scenes, allowing individuals to speak for themselves; here the emigrant's stories are obviously summarized and strictly filtered through the writer's perspective. The result is an inconclusive and ineffectual passage of description which Traill seems as happy to leave behind as she presumably was to escape from the confines of the not-so-idyllic log-cabin.

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[162] See Peterman's explanatory note #55.10-12 for an account of Traill's source (257-8).

As they proceed beyond Montreal, Traill's descriptive passages increasingly focus on what Elizabeth Thompson identifies as "small foreground details" ("Illustrations" 37). Thompson reads this shift as an indication of Traill's increasing inability "to create a verbal picturesque" as she confronts the harsh reality of the vast tracts of wilderness *en route* to her pioneer home (37). Similarly, Marian Fowler identifies a coping strategy on Traill's part, arguing that in an attempt to ignore the immensity of the forest, she describes only "the small pretty features of the Canadian landscape: birds, butterflies, flowers, those that fit within her English embroidery frame" (73). Yet there is a danger of oversimplification as we attempt to account for what are only minor shifts in narrative perspective. First, we must remember that Traill was an amateur botanist – hence, her fascination with the specifics of plant life seems perfectly natural. On a number of previous occasions, including her description in letter two of a gift of flowers from her husband, Traill seizes the opportunity to discourse on aspects of natural history which provided her with both intellectual stimulation and spiritual comfort.[163] Secondly, and equally significantly, the shift in Traill's rhetorical focus from broad panoramic views to foreground details, while present, is anything but absolute. Shifts between general and specific descriptions commonly occur in travel narratives and such variations can be read as a rhetorical strategy which highlights the sensitivity of the narrator, her control of her subject matter and the veracity of her narrative. The latter is especially important given that travel books have always faced challenges to their truth value; an ability to describe a scene in detail provides evidence that the writer was actually there.

At this point in Backwoods, as they move inland and leave behind the comforts of "civilized" life, Traill begins to confront the vastness of what Canadian critics (though rarely the author herself) identify as the "wilderness."[164] The concept of the wilderness and one's relation to it, either as an immigrant or as one of the country's Indigenous people, has played such a crucial

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[163] In letter two, Traill informs her readers: "It is fortunate for me that my love of natural history enables me to draw amusement from objects that are deemed by many unworthy of attention. To me they present an inexhaustible fund of interest. The simplest weed that grows in my path, or the fly that flutters about me, are subjects for reflection, admiration, and delight" (14). Later in the text, she discourses more specifically on the spiritual aspect of the natural world (see, for example, letter ten, p. 12: the "volume of . . . Nature is open, and eloquently marked by the finger of God"). I briefly discuss Traill's belief in a spiritual link between the natural world and God towards the end of this chapter, and revisit the topic in the context of Traill's scientific discourse in chapter eight.

[164] Except on a few occasions, Traill refers to the "bush" or "backwoods" or uses more precise terms such as "woods," "swamp," etc. None of these terms resounds with the symbolic significance of the term "wilderness," especially for a modern reader.

role in Canadian literature – and perhaps even more significantly, in the critical analysis of Canadian writing – in the last fifty years that I will digress briefly and consider some of the implications of this trope. As I mentioned in my introduction, with the publication of his Conclusion to the Literary History of Canada in 1965, Northrop Frye imposed a thematic framework on Canadian literature, identifying its predominant narrative stance as that of a beleaguered garrison struggling to survive in the face of a hostile wilderness (830). Yet, as Patricia Jasen rather bluntly reminds us, "our understanding of Euro-Canadian attitudes to the wilderness, particularly in Ontario, has been dominated and distorted in recent decades by the useful but too pervasive notion of the garrison mentality" (25). Challenging Frye's thematic framework, Edward Dahl suggests that Traill (along with Susanna Moodie, John Moodie and Samuel Strickland) demonstrate a "favourable attitude towards wilderness [which] derives from its beauty, from the association of God and wilderness, from the freedom wilderness offers, from the potential value of wilderness, and from the sense of mission that the writers have towards it" (44). Similarly, the feminist critic Helen Buss argues that women writers such as Traill identify with the wilderness rather than pit themselves against it in a futile struggle for dominance ("Women and the Garrison Mentality" 133).

A more nuanced analysis of women's textual responses to the wilderness can be found in Annette Kolodny's The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630–1860, and I will briefly consider the framework for reading wilderness accounts she outlines. Her analysis, though based on American texts and history, includes insights which apply quite poignantly to Traill's work.

Kolodny begins by tracing the European, and predominantly male, fantasy of the New World as a biblical paradise, a virginal Garden of Eden waiting to be conquered and exploited by a generation of new Adams (3-4). However, even as a metaphor this fantasy rapidly became problematic. No sooner was the landscape settled, than, as John Hammond of Maryland bemoaned in 1656, it "was deflowered by her own Inhabitants, stript, shorne and made deformed" (Kolodny 4). The garden was then displaced westward, but "[w]ith frightening regularity, the promise and its disappointment were succeeded by guilt and anger as, again and again, Americans found themselves bearing witness to the mutilation and despoliation of their several newfound Earthly Paradises" (5). One method of coping with the growing frustration of a failed and impossibly flawed fantasy was to project the myth of an "isolated woodland son" who – like Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett and other frontier heroes – is "adapted to life in the wilderness, but not in the settlements . . . [and] suggests at least the possibility of harmonious intimacy between

the human and the natural, free of the threat of violation" (5).

But where did this fantasy leave the pioneer women of the New World? Displaced and temporarily voiceless, Kolodny suggests: "Thus denied a place beside the abiding myth of an American Adam, American women were understandably reluctant to proclaim themselves the rightful New World Eve" (The Land Before Her 5). Instead, avoiding the rhetoric of conquest and fantasies of assimilation into the wild, pioneer women focused increasingly on "spaces that were truly and unequivocally theirs: the home and the small cultivated gardens of their own making" (6). Yet this focus, reflected in women's self-representational writings, should not be read as an idyll of domestic bliss or a celebration of the safety of the garrison. As Kolodny reminds us, "it must be recalled that during her earliest years on this continent, the Euro-American woman seems to have been the unwilling inhabitant of a metaphorical landscape she had had no part in creating – captive, as it were, in the garden of someone else's imagination" (6).

According to Kolodny, the frustrations experienced by isolated women pioneers and their frequently unarticulated concerns about the very real dangers of the surrounding wilderness surface in the popular pre-twentieth century genre of "captivity stories." These accounts of Europeans held captive by First Nations people provide symbolic expression of "the otherwise dangerous or unacknowledged meaning of women's experience of the dark and enclosing forests around them."[165] But, for my purposes, the important components of Kolodny's analysis remain the traditionally male Edenic myth of the New World and its culturally sanctioned feminine equivalent: the rhetoric of gardening. Women pioneers, she argues, "set about making their own mark on the landscape," thereby escaping "the psychology of captivity" and – given the small scale of their alterations to the physical environment – avoiding "male anguish at lost Edens and male guilt in the face of the raping of the continent" (6-7). In order to apply Kolodny's admittedly American-based analysis to The Backwoods of Canada, I will now return to the opening sections of Traill's text, beginning with her first intimations of the land ahead as these establish, at least initially, a metaphorical framework for the landscape descriptions which follow.

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[165] The tradition of captivity narratives is a fascinating one, with a range of implications for post-colonial and feminist readings of literature. In Capturing Women, Sarah Carter explores the Canadian context of such narratives. Traill integrated a fictional captivity narrative into her 1852 novel, Canadian Crusoes, a work based on the disturbing experience of children becoming lost in the forest. For interesting analyses of Canadian Crusoes, see Gerson's "Nobler Savages" and Robert Fleming's "Supplementing Self." Traill also addressed the topic of a lost child in a sketch entitled "A Canadian Scene," included in Forest and Other Gleanings (72-77).

In letter two, as Traill describes the first heralds of the New World she evokes the Biblical account of Noah's ark: "a land breeze," she informs us, "came to us, as I thought, bearing health and gladness on its wings. . . . [Then] some winged insects came to us – a welcome sight" (9). Within a few paragraphs, the insects are replaced by the more conventional bird of the Biblical story: "We were visited this morning by a beautiful little bird . . . . I hailed it as a bird of good omen – a little visitor sent to bid us welcome to the New World" (10). Such allegorical Christian references – including further allusions to the Flood and references to the flight of the Chosen People from Egypt, both of which involve new beginnings – surface periodically throughout the first half of Backwoods,[166] but become less common as Traill writes increasingly of the metaphysical bond she perceives between God and the natural environment surrounding her new home. Although specific Biblical references disappear, an Edenic subtext continues to thread its way through the text. We can read Traill's naming of plants as an allusion to Adam's naming in the Garden of Eden: in letter seven she informs us that "I take the liberty of bestowing names upon them [plants] according to inclination or fancy" (88) and includes some of her own names for plants in letter fourteen (the "Douro-lily" on page 180, for example). Even more significantly, Traill expresses an ambiguous response to the advance of civilization, and specifically to the destruction of the traditional forests in this new Eden. As Peterman and Ballstadt suggest, Traill is an ecological conservative: "as a British pioneer and colonist she was of necessity committed to the project of colonial development; however, as a naturalist and a believer in an ordered but inscrutable universe, she wished above all to celebrate and preserve the fragile and precious elements of the natural world she encountered in Upper Canada" (Introduction to Forest and Other Gleanings 13).

In letter ten of Backwoods, Traill explains the prevailing attitude of Canadian colonists towards the wilderness. Characterizing her own feelings as "the lamentation of a poet," she informs us that,

> [t]he earth yields her increase to them [the "unlettered and industrious labourers and artisans" of Canada] as freely as if it had been enriched by the blood of heroes. They would not spare the ancient oak from feelings

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[166] William Gairdner explores the biblical references in Backwoods at some length in "Traill and Moodie: The Two Realities" (75-78). Although he exaggerates the differences between the two writers and refers to highly edited versions of Backwoods and Roughing It, he deals perceptively with the articulations of Traill's Christian perspective in her text. In "Breaking the 'Cake of Custom'" Bentley also explores the Christian motifs in Backwoods, though his analysis is limited to the opening sections of the work.

> of veneration, nor look upon it with regard for any thing but its use as timber. They have not time, even if they possessed the taste, to gaze abroad on the beauties of Nature, but their ignorance is bliss." (111)

As Keith suggests, in this passage Traill "is characteristically balanced and practical, but the tone of regret . . . is evident" (Literary Images 28), especially when we remember that she finds spiritual comfort in observing the life of the forest. And, although her focus is different, Traill – like the American pioneer women Kolodny writes about – finds herself outside of the dominant male perspective and mythic interpretation of the New World. She recognizes the practicality of the views held by the "industrious labourers" she cites above, and endorses the progress which accompanies the clearing of the land, but expresses an emotional alienation from their deeds. As Neil Forkey suggests in a thesis utilizing Traill's works as the starting point for an environmental history of the Trent Watershed, "Traill's ambivalence is evident. She recognizes the necessity of forest clearance, but her Arcadianism[167] prevents her from fully condoning the march of progress" (46).

Bearing in mind both Kolodny's interpretative framework and Traill's proto-environmental concerns, I propose to close this chapter with a critical re-reading of two significant passages in which Traill describes and comments on the uncleared forest and uncultivated lands of Upper Canada. I remain as interested in the inconsistencies in the text as in the larger patterns of her discourse.

Traill's early descriptions of the wilderness are almost exclusively limited to the portrayal of scenes perceived from the safety of a ship in the St. Lawrence River, but as her journey progresses inland her encounters with the Canadian forest become far more immediate. Yet not surprisingly, her perspective remains inconsistent and her accounts of the landscape sometimes ambiguous. For a reader steeped in late twentieth-century notions of untouched wilderness, one of the unusual features of Traill's descriptive passages as her journey takes her beyond established cities and towns is the absence of a clearly identified transition between cultivated and uncultivated areas. For example, as the Traills leave the tavern at Rice Lake and proceed inland, moving upriver into heavily wooded countryside, she makes only a cursory remark about land

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[167] In Forkey's terms, the "Arcadian ideal" embodies "a harmonious human coexistence with nature, rather than a domination of it" (34). He explains that "[f]or Catharine Parr Traill Arcadianism was a logical path, one accentuated by a reverence for the Creator and a world view which stressed the interrelatedness of species" (29). Essentially, the Arcadian ideal is a refinement of the Edenic myth.

which is "too swampy to be put under cultivation" and then shifts her focus to the beauty and – most surprisingly – the comfort provided by the surrounding forests:

> Towards noon the mists cleared off, and the sun came forth in all the brilliant beauty of a September day. So completely were we sheltered from the wind by the thick wall of pines on either side, that I no longer felt the least inconvenience from the cold that had chilled me on crossing the lake in the morning. (53)

For the first time, Traill begins to write "herself into the Canadian landscape" (Moss, "Gender Notes"169).[168] Instead of simply providing views for her to assess from an aesthetic distance, the benevolent forest now shelters and warms our narrator. Yet she reverts to the rhetoric of boredom (particularly prevalent in her account of the ocean journey) and a more conventional portrayal of "gloomy" woods in the following line, distancing herself as she conveys an increasingly ambiguous response to the forest:

> 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. And the thought that it must take years of hard labour ere a farm can be cut out of such a maze of timber – at first sight it seems impossible. Still there are objects to charm and delight the close observer of nature. His eye will be attracted by fantastic bowers, which are formed by the scarlet creeper (or Canadian ivy) the same climbing shrub as the Virginian Creeper, *Ampelopsis Virginiam*, and the wild grape vine, flinging their closely-entwined wreaths of richly tinted foliage from bough to bough of the forest trees, mingling their hues with the splendid rose-tipped branches of the soft maple, the autumnal tints of which are unrivalled in beauty by any of our forest trees at home. (53)

This passage includes a number of interesting rhetorical shifts. Traill opens with the rather disparaging phrase "[t]o the mere passing traveller," reminding us of her unique sensitivity: no "mere" traveller, she appreciates "the minute beauties of scenery." (Perhaps she also intends to position herself here as a settler, though this is less clear.) In the same sentence Traill's perspective shifts, however: suddenly she begins to identify with the traveller's response, suggesting that "there is certainly a monotony in the long and unbroken line of woods" and that

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[168] Writing of Mary Kingsley, Allison Blunt contrasts such "personalization, whereby . . . [the writer] becomes part of the landscape in her aesthetic response to it" to the traditional "monarch-of-all-I-survey" stance of much travel narrative (96). Traill utilizes some of the conventions of the latter in her early landscape descriptions which were written from the perspective of a ship in the St. Lawrence River.

she understands, if not shares, "the feeling of gloom almost touching on sadness." Hinting at her own future as a settler, Traill declares that the task of clearing such land and establishing a farm "at first sight . . . seems impossible." Then the passage shifts again, and the optimistic narrative voice we recognize from the introduction gains control: "Still there are objects to charm and delight the close observer of nature," she informs us, obviously referring to herself. In the final sentence of the passage, which – interestingly enough – Traill opens with a masculine pronoun (perhaps as a deliberate attempt to maintain the gender neutral stance of the observant traveller), she becomes expansive. Focusing in on specific plants and trees, she combines the scientific precision of Latin terminology (identifying the formal botanical name for the scarlet creeper) with romantic and picturesque descriptive phrases. Here the beauty of the Canadian forest, with its "richly tinted foliage," for the first time completely overshadows the remembered scenes of Traill's motherland: it is "unrivalled in beauty by any of our forest trees at home."

The highly emotive rhetoric with which Traill closes this passage ("fantastic bowers" "splendid rose-tipped branches" and "autumnal tints") carries into the subsequent paragraph as "[t]he purple clusters of the grape" now tempt her "longing eyes." This self-consciously poetic diction then gives way to the practical language of homemaking, and – for the first time in this passage – Traill uses the first person singular pronoun as she drops the pseudo-neutral pose of the traveller: "I am told the juice forms a delicious and highly-flavoured jelly, boiled with sufficient quantity of sugar; the seeds are too large to make any other preparation of them practicable" (53). Traill then engages with the trope of improving upon the natural bounty of nature: "I shall endeavour, at some time or other, to try the improvement that can be effected by cultivation. One is apt to imagine where Nature has so abundantly bestowed fruits, that is the most favourable climate for their attaining perfection with the assistance of culture and soil" (53-4). Traill is clearly beginning to identify with the landscape she encounters, describing it as a potential source of food and imagining positive ways in which she will interact with "Nature."

Traill personified nature on a number of earlier occasions, associating it with a variety of characteristics. Here nature is clearly a benevolent entity, providing sustenance in abundance, yet her "fruits" are unable to achieve "perfection" without the assistance of human endeavour – and specifically, without the assistance of a gardener, as Traill increasingly adopts the rhetoric of gardening as a means of, to use Kolodny's terms, making "her own mark on the landscape" (The Land Before Her 7). On other occasions, Traill focuses less on cultivated terrain and more on the perspective of nature as a romanticized, untouched wilderness. Echoing Wordsworth, she repeatedly suggests that the natural world provides "reflection, admiration and delight" (14) and

that its study "tends to refine and purify the mind" (184). Finally, in a more specifically Christian context, nature is presented as a source of spiritual comfort and guidance. (I deal with a key example of this shortly.)

I have analysed this descriptive passage from letter five in some detail because it encapsulates the diversity of Traill's narrative stance, highlighting some of the ambiguities in the ways her writing engages with the Canadian wilderness. In a general sense, the landscape has become a text to be read and reproduced.[169] More specifically, Traill has positioned herself in relation to a range of discourses. In accordance with the conventions of the sublime, she is emotionally moved by the scenery; as an ardent admirer of the picturesque, she describes the complementary hues and tints of the plants as if she were observing a painting; as an amateur botanist (blending the language of science with that of the more conventionally feminine discourses of collecting and flower arranging) she identifies the shrubs which form a "fantastic bower," citing two common and one Latin name for the specific plants; as a practical pioneer woman she emphasizes the potential usefulness of the grapes, given appropriate preparation; and, as a far-sighted gardener she considers the possibility of improving the quality of the fruit, presumably by reducing the size of the seeds through careful cultivation.[170] The first two of these narrative stances – a sensitive response to the environment and an appreciation of its aesthetic qualities – conform quite rigidly to the expectations and conventions of travel writing; adopting the latter three – that of the botanist, the pioneer and the gardener – Traill's text moves into the realm of the settler's handbook and adopts an interesting blend of feminine and scientific discourses.

Before I leave the topic of landscape descriptions, however, I would like to cite one final, and significantly transitional passage in Backwoods. At this point in Traill's account, our narrator and her husband have lost their way *en route* to the house of her brother, Samuel Strickland. Left alone as Thomas Traill attempts to find his way back to the "ill-defined" road they had been

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[169] As Jonathan Smith suggests, "[l]andscape becomes a text when the reader intends to respond" (79).

[170] As previously mentioned, the motif of gardening plays a central role in Kolodny's analysis of pioneer women's writing. In more gender neutral terms, Fiona Sparrow suggests – with reference to Traill and Moodie, and to the works of Atwood and Laurence in which these pioneer women resurface – that "[t]he British settlers in Canada saw themselves as gardeners in a wilderness, as untouched as God's newly created world. Their gardens often answered a pressing need and provided food, but they also satisfied a less physical appetite and brought flowering beauty to a barren spot" (24).

following when darkness began to fall, Traill explores her feelings in what is probably the most sentimental passage in the book:

> As I sat in the wood in silence and in gloom, my thoughts gradually wandered back across the Atlantic to my dear mother and to my old home; and I thought what would have been your [her mother's] feelings could you at that moment have beheld me as I sat on the cold mossy stone in the profound stillness of that vast leafy wilderness, thousands of miles from all those holy ties of kindred and early associations that make home in all countries a hallowed spot. It was a moment to press upon my mind the importance of the step I had taken, in voluntarily sharing the lot of the emigrant – in leaving the land of my birth, to which, in all probability, I might never again return. Great as was the sacrifice, even at that moment, strange as was my situation, I felt no painful regret or fearful misgiving depress my mind. A holy and tranquil peace came down upon me, soothing and softening my spirits into a calmness that seemed as unruffled as was the bosom of the star-lit water that lay stretched out before my feet. (86)

I have quoted this passage in its entirety because of the spiritual view of nature it articulates and because it marks a significant turning point in the text. The spiritual subtext is interesting: Traill transfers both the concept of "holy" from the context of her old home ("that hallowed spot") and the love of "her dear mother" to the Canadian wilderness where she now experiences a "holy and tranquil peace," as she commits herself, without any "painful regret or fearful misgiving," to a new life. This passage functions as a transitional point in Backwoods: hereafter, Traill's narrative increasingly conforms to the conventions of the settler's guide rather those of the traveller's tale. Although this does not mark the end of Traill's depictions of scenery and nature, broad, panoramic descriptions are, from this point onwards, less common than accounts of specific features of the natural environment, especially flowers, birds and small animals. These specific features will be analysed in some detail in a subsequent chapter on the scientific discourse in Backwoods.

But before I close my discussion of Traill's text as a travel narrative, I will focus on one final, highly significant feature of the work: representations of the Other – "Yankees," Scottish and Irish immigrants, and Aboriginal people.

CHAPTER 6

Catharine Parr Traill's Encounters with the Other: Ambiguous "Yankees," Romantic Scots, Ill-mannered Irish and Simple "Indians"[171]

I: Textual Encounters with the Other

As Traill's geographical and textual journey takes her beyond the enclosed world of the *Laurel* and the relatively easy travel afforded by the St. Lawrence River, and into the increasingly defamiliarizing environment of the Canadian backwoods, the concerns of her text shift accordingly. Her landscape descriptions undergo a general, though far from absolute, transition from large-scale panoramas to close-up descriptions of plants and animals, the generic features of the text increasingly conform to the conventions of the settler's handbook rather than travel narrative, and we discover a corresponding orientation towards the individuals and cultural groups who comprise the social community of Traill's new home. As she comes to terms with the multi-facetted contact zone in which she now finds herself, the genteel values with which she was raised increasingly vie with those of Yankees, other settlers from the British Isles and members of the local First Nations community.

Traill now confronts situations which would have been unthinkable in England. The

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[171] In keeping with Traill's usage, I employ both the terms "Yankee" and "Indian" throughout this chapter, as well as their more neutral, modern counterparts. While neither label is an acceptable modern usage, "Indian" remains the more problematic term because of its gross inaccuracy and inherent racism. As Robert Berkhofer emphatically states, "the *Indian* was a white invention," a concept which "denies or misrepresents the social linguistic, cultural, and other differences among the people so labeled" (3). I also use the more appropriate contemporary terms "First Nations," "Native," "Indigenous" or "Aboriginal" to refer to Canada's first inhabitants, especially when generalizing about Traill's interaction with these peoples rather than specifically analysing literary representations of European/Aboriginal encounters within the text. For interesting discussions of the complexities of labelling Canada's first peoples, see Strong-Boag and Gerson (8) and Taylor's essay "An Indian By Any Other Name" in Funny, You Don't Look Like One: Observations From a Blue-eyed Ojibway.

Yankee landlady of an inn ungraciously offers her "a mere closet, in which was a bed divested of curtains, one chair, and an apology for a wash-stand," and when she appears dismayed, "laconically observed there was that or none" – unless she chose to share a room with three men (41). "With a marvellous ill grace," a group of Irish boatmen decline to transport the Traills and a group of gentlemen upriver immediately, "positively refusing to row another stroke till they had satisfied their [own] hunger" (56). The Indigenous women Traill encounters expect to borrow household utensils for varying periods of time, pressure her to sell items such as "a gay chintz dressing-gown" belonging to her husband and "seldom make any article you want on purpose for you" (121). Even a young Scottish engineer, who might be expected to defer to the more aristocratic lineage of a fellow countryman, Thomas Traill, "went so far as to seat himself on the bench close beside" Catharine and "scrupulously avoided the least approach to courtesy or outward respect" (64). Yet these negative descriptions convey only one facet of Traill's textual responses to the Other. She also writes with admiration of the ingenuity and enterprise demonstrated by the Yankees she encounters, strives to empathize with the ill-tempered Irish boatmen, composes a romantic poem about the suffering of a homesick Scottish emigrant, and provides detailed, sympathetic descriptions of her Aboriginal neighbours.

The examples I deal with in this chapter are drawn primarily from the later sections of Backwoods, which, as I have suggested, can most appropriately be categorized as a settler's guide resonant with discourses of femininity, domesticity and science. However, Traill's descriptions of encounters with the Other remain somewhat of an anomaly in these sections, conforming more closely to the generic conventions of travel writing. Hence, I will continue to draw upon the theoretical framework outlined in chapter four.

In accounts of encounters with members of "exotic" social and ethnic groups such as Indians and Yankees, Traill observes the conventions of what Mary Louise Pratt has labelled "manners and customs" description, "a normalizing discourse, whose work is to codify difference, to fix the Other in a timeless present where all 'his' actions and reactions are repetitions of 'his' normal habits" ("Scratches" 120). Utilizing "this discourse, encounters with an Other can be textualized or processed as enumerations of . . . [personality] traits" (120). The intent and cumulative effect of manners and customs discourse is to codify difference, and within this interpretative framework Traill adopts a range of perspectives towards other cultural groups. Perhaps the most consistent feature of her textual encounters with the Other is a distancing achieved through generalized descriptions. Not surprisingly, she frequently reiterates popular stereotypes, though we should remember that – as Homi Bhabha emphasizes – stereotyping itself

is an "ambivalent text of projection and introjection, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, overdetermination, guilt, [and] aggressivity," rather than a monolithic discriminatory practice (169).

The two social groups who attract Traill's most concentrated attention in The Backwoods of Canada are the most exotic to her: Yankees and Indians. Although descriptions of the latter far outweigh those of the former, Traill's generalized accounts of Yankees indicate a greater degree of unease and tension in the contact zone. On a smaller scale, fellow immigrants from Scotland and Ireland pose a dilemma for Traill since they are both too familiar – in both senses of the word – and, at times, unaccountably foreign in this new environment. Like most settlers of her social class and upbringing, she arrives in Canada trailing (excuse the pun) English cultural assumptions about these groups on the periphery of British society. With the Irish and Scottish settlers, as with the Yankees, Traill shares a common language and many cultural practices, yet their behaviour in the rough new society of British North America transcends her expectations. As a result, some of Traill's confrontations in this particular contact zone prove distinctly *un*settling.

But before I proceed with my analysis of Traill's representations of the other inhabitants of Upper Canada I would like to briefly touch upon her use of national and cultural labels. Not surprisingly, "Yankee" and "Indian" are the most commonly occurring identifying terms, occasionally replaced by "American" (which is generally interchangeable with "Yankee," though Traill's harshest criticisms are always directed at "Yankees") and in specific situations, "squaw" or "papouse" (with no implicitly negative connotations). Fellow emigrants from the British Isles are less consistently labelled, especially as the text progresses. In her introduction, Traill refers specifically to "England" or "English" three times and "Great Britain" or "British" another four times, but these labels are employed with increasing infrequency as the narrative progresses. In later letters the terms "England" and "English" are limited almost exclusively to occasions when she wishes to differentiate herself or emphasize her superiority over the Irish or "lower class of [Scottish] highlanders" (6). Significantly, in place of national labels, Traill increasingly employs the neutral term "settler" as the narrative progresses.

Perhaps most interesting is the author's use of the label "Canadian." In general, in The Backwoods of Canada seasons, scenes, places, plants and animals are identified as "Canadian," but not people. The term is never applied to the country's Aboriginal people, nor is it employed by Traill in reference to herself. Her references to Canadians are limited to allusions to "our Canadian friend" and "our Canadian lasses" in letter four, vague generic comments about "the Canadians" in letters seven, nine and fourteen (87, 103, 173), and finally – in the closing pages of

Backwoods – a specific identification of her own, and her sister Susanna's children as "our young Canadians" (225). To become a Canadian, the text implies, one needs to be born in Canada – preferably of English parentage. Traill will condescend to refer to her "Canadian home," but England remains "a hallowed spot" to which she feels permanently linked by "early association, and all those holy ties of kindred" (192).

II: "Odious manners" and "ingenious ways": Ambiguous Yankees

The ambiguity of Traill's response to the Americans she encounters in her new homeland is quite striking. Although on a number of occasions she expresses a nationalistic distaste for these representatives of the former British colony which broke away from the motherland she holds dear, she still assumes that they will respond to her in a friendly, if not deferential, manner. When they fail to do so, Traill dismisses their behaviour as a "coldness approaching to apathy" (63) which "seems to place a barrier between you and them" (212). She apparently discounts, or deliberately ignores, the possibility that the Americans she encounters might perceive of her allegiance to British imperialism as a barrier to friendship, though her interpretation of their behaviour and motives is obviously highly politicized. At the same time, in spite of her criticisms, Traill expresses a fascination with Yankee linguistic "peculiarities" (62) and is impressed by their "industrious and ingenious" ways (211).

Traill makes a number of passing references to Americans in the opening letters of Backwoods, including a brief description of the host of an inn who demonstrates "that odious manner ascribed, though doubtless too generally, to the American," in letter four (41). This qualified endorsement of the popular stereotype of the ill-mannered Yankee is revisited in Traill's first detailed account of Yankee behaviour (in letter six, which describes the Traills' journey between Peterborough and Upper Douro). She opens this account with a relatively positive assessment of American social skills, reconsidering her initial assumptions and making no mention of the ill-mannered innkeeper previously described: "We had heard so much of the odious manners of the Yankees in this country that I was rather agreeably surprised by the few specimens of native Americans that I have seen. They are for the most part, polite, well-behaved people" (62). Here Traill diverges from the stereotypical portrayal of Americans common in nineteenth-century travel narratives produced by British immigrants and visitors to Canada. As John Thurston explains, in such works Americans are almost inevitably characterized by

"dishonesty, greed, cunning, impertinence, pride and boastfulness," faults attributable "to their disregard for deference and hierarchy" ("Toryism" 78).

Initially, Traill focuses on the manners of the Yankees she encounters; she is concerned about their ability, or inclination, to behave in accordance with British social norms and, by implication, their willingness to treat her with the level of respect supposedly merited by her social status. The contact zone in which Traill finds herself – between British immigrants and Yankees – was, in Thurston's words, unique, "determined by the uneasy contiguity of two linguistically homogenous but politically opposed cultures" ("Toryism" 77). Perhaps as a means of bypassing or downplaying the political tensions and unease between these groups, which existed in spite of their common ancestry, Traill shifts her focus in letter six from a discussion of Yankee manners to an analysis of a relatively safe and non-political distinction between Americans and British immigrants: divergences in pronunciation, diction and idiomatic usage. Yankee speech, Traill informs us, is characterized by "a certain nasal twang in speaking, and some few odd phrases" (62). She explores at some length the various uses of "[o]ne of their most remarkable terms . . . to '*Fix*'" (62),[172] and then draws some interesting conclusions about the general linguistic capabilities of Americans:

> With the exception of some few remarkable expressions, and an attempt at introducing fine words in their everyday conversations, the lower order of Yankees have a decided advantage over our English peasantry in the use of grammatical language: they speak better English than you will hear from persons of the same class in any part of England, Ireland, or Scotland; a fact that we should be unwilling, I suppose, to allow at home. (63)

Once again, Traill's class consciousness comes to the forefront, but with an unusual twist. In this seemingly balanced linguistic analysis, we are informed that, with a few exceptions, the spoken language of Americans compares favourably with that of the English peasantry. Superficially, Traill compliments American speech habits, yet her qualifying phrases draw attention to the superiority of the position she implicitly posits: she speaks of "the lower order of Yankees," and refers to English "peasantry" with the possessive pronoun "our." Maintaining this position in the final phrase of the passage, she indicates that "we" – members of the British ruling class with

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[172] Traill's discussion of the derivation and usage of the term "fix" is merely the first of many references in Backwoods to distinctive phrases employed by Yankees and members of other cultural groups. Obviously fascinated by terms she finds novel, she regularly shares these with her readers, as is common practice in travel narratives.

whom she aligns herself – would find it difficult to acknowledge the grammatically correct language usage of lower class Americans in a different setting (i.e. at home in England), while suggesting that in Upper Canada one applies a different, and more objective, standard of judgement. Traill's values may not have changed dramatically, but she now appears to recognize the validity of alternative perspectives and, perhaps more significantly, the limitations of some of the ingrained assumptions of her upbringing.

Traill's unease as she confronts behavioural norms which challenge those she previously accepted without question surfaces repeatedly in her descriptions of American customs and manners. One discursive strategy she employs to circumscribe transgressions to her personal social code is to distinguish between "genuine Yankees" and "imitators":

> Persons who come to this country are very apt to confound the old settlers from Britain with the native Americans; and when they meet with people of rude, offensive manners, using certain Yankee words in their conversation, and making a display of independence not exactly suitable to their own aristocratical notions, they immediately suppose they must be genuine Yankees, while they are, in fact, only imitators; and you well know the fact that a bad imitation is always worse than the original. (63-64)

As in the passage previously quoted, Traill assumes a shared system of values with her readers ("you well know . . ."). Yet more significant is her rejection of immigrants from Britain who "make a display of independence." Traill may tolerate such behaviour in Americans, since their political sovereignty is a given, but a similar show of independence from lower-class settlers is nothing more than a "bad imitation" which threatens Traill's social position and authority. Ironically, however, she writes glowingly in letter fifteen of how Canada is "a country where independence is inseparable from industry; and for this I prize it" (195). As is evident elsewhere in Backwoods, Traill's cultural values and deeply ingrained sense of class blind her to inconsistencies in her claims; on a textual level, these inconsistencies surface in ambiguous statements and somewhat abrupt shifts in discursive strategy.

To support her generalizations about imitation Yankees, Traill provides an example of psuedo-American behaviour. Her anecdote focuses on the behaviour of a Scottish engineer working on a steamer on which they travel. Deliberately seating himself "close beside" Traill, he boasts of the fact that in Canada he is "not obliged to take off his hat when he spoke to people (meaning persons of our [the Traills'] degree), or address them by any other title than their name" (64). Traill responds by asserting her authority, archly informing the presumptuous engineer that he "greatly overrate[s] the advantage of such privileges" since he "cannot oblige the lady or

gentlemen to entertain the same opinion" of him "or to remain seated beside . . . [him] unless it pleases them to do so" (64). From her perspective, his behaviour has nothing to do with principles or justice – it is a question of "rude familiarity" versus, in words she attributes to her husband, "[g]ood manners and good education." As Thomas Traill proclaims, a "rich man or a high-born man, if he is rude, ill-mannered, and ignorant is no more a gentleman than yourself [the Scottish engineer]" (65). The undercurrent of this anecdote is clearly political, and Traill's attitude towards the engineer and other Yankee "imitators" who "make a display of independence" (63) suggests a great deal about her uneasy response to republican ideals.

It is interesting to note that the Scottish heritage of this "rude" engineer in no way influences Traill's assessment of his behaviour. In general, in her written work she praises Scottish culture (an aspect of Backwoods I deal with specifically in the next section of this chapter), but in this situation the man's heritage is apparently overshadowed by his contamination by American notions of democracy and equality which threaten Traill's more conservative values. In a sense, he has been newly Othered: at home in England he may have been a romantic highlander, but now he is a misguided pseudo-Yankee. As John Thurston suggests, in nineteenth-century travel and immigration texts such as Backwoods "the 'democratic, or even liberal principles' portrayed as American and republican are everywhere decried, or discussed in terms so cautious as palpably to project a fear of contamination" ("Toryism" 76). Exposure to "a language of political equality and unalienable rights" threatened "Englishmen and women who had known only the discourse of deference, hierarchy and rule by an elite" (84-5).

Yet Traill's attitude towards American ideals is not as monolithic as Thurston would suggest. Her response to the practice of communal "bees," for example, is far more positive than that of her sister, Susanna Moodie.[173] Readily acknowledging the social virtues and political foundation of bees, Traill explains that,

> [i]n no situation, and under no other circumstance, does the equalizing system of America appear to such advantage as in meetings of this sort. All distinctions of rank, education and wealth are for the time voluntarily laid aside. You will see the son of the educated gentleman and that of the poor artisan, the officer and the private soldier, the independent settler and the labourer who works out for hire, cheerfully

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[173] In contrast, Susanna Moodie writes that, "[i]n the bush, where hands are few and labour commands an enormous rate of wages, these gatherings [bees] are considered indispensable, and much has been written in their praise; but to me, they present the most disgusting picture of a bush life. They are noisy, riotous, drunken meetings, often terminating in violent quarrels, sometimes even in bloodshed" (Roughing It in the Bush 333).

> uniting in one common cause. Each individual is actuated by the benevolent desire of affording help to the helpless, and exerting himself to raise a home for the homeless. (89)

As the practical nature of communal bees and the unselfish sharing of work obviously appeal to Traill, and their advantage is so immediately obvious (without a bee, it would have been virtually impossible for the Traills to raise a house), her praise for the practice is unstinting. However, this unqualified espousal of (contained) egalitarian values is an exception in Backwoods. Traill may write with pride of living in a country where "it is considered by no means derogatory to the wife of an officer or gentleman to assist in the work of the house" or for the officer himself to turn "his sword into a ploughshare, and his lance into a sickle," yet she also declares, on the same page, that "[o]ur servants are as respectful, or nearly so, as those at home," adding – with no apparent irony – "nor are they admitted to our tables, or placed on an equality with us, excepting at 'bees,' and such kind of public meetings" (195).

As her text develops and she increasingly focuses on the details of pioneer life, Traill's descriptions of Americans become more positive. In letter sixteen, near the close of Backwoods, she even qualifies her use of the stereotypical label "Yankees": "of all people the Yankees, as they are termed, are the most industrious and ingenious" (211). Traill then outlines their virtues as pioneer settlers: "they are never at a loss for an expedient: if one thing fails them they adopt another, with a quickness of thought that surprises me, while to them it seems only a matter of course. They seem to possess a sort of innate presence of mind, and instead of wasting their energies in words, they *act*" (211-2). These admirable qualities, we are informed, are shared by "old settlers that have been long among them" (212). For the first time, albeit indirectly, Traill praises Canadians who have learned from their American neighbours, no longer distinguishing between "genuine" and "imitation" Yankees as she did in earlier letters.

These positive statements about American ingenuity follow a practical account of soap-making, based on advice Traill received from an American housewife, and lead into a brief anecdote about a travelling clock-maker from Ohio. The clock-maker expresses surprise that a gentleman such as Thomas Traill has chosen to homestead in the rural Canadian bush rather than in "the rich, highly cultivated, and fruitful state of Ohio," and in response is informed that, as British subjects, the Traills prefer to reside under a British government and "besides, they were averse to the manners of his countrymen" (212). While the businessman readily accepts the Traills' first reason, he responds to their second objection by arguing that "Americans at large ought not to be judged by the specimens to be found in the British colonies, as they were, for the

most part, persons of no reputation, many of whom had fled to the Canadas to escape from debt, or other disgraceful conduct." The latter comment particularly appeals to Traill, who places great value on reputation and social position, and she closes her anecdote by informing us that "there was nothing unfair or rude in the manners of this stranger, and his defence of his nation was mild and reasonable, and such as any unprejudiced person must have respected him for." Although Traill's attitudes have shifted over the course of her narrative, Americans still merit her greatest respect when they recognize her genteel upbringing and reinforce her assumptions about social class.

III: Romantic Scots and Ill-mannered Irish

As I mentioned earlier, fellow immigrants of Irish and Scottish descent pose a dilemma for Traill. Wife of a native Scotsman from the Orkney Islands and author of a sentimental children's story entitled "The Blind Highland Piper," Traill was obviously predisposed to admire Scottish culture – especially the romanticized version in vogue in early nineteenth-century England.[174] In the popular culture of the time, heavily influenced by the novels of Sir Walter Scott, Scotland was the land of fierce highlanders and bonny lasses, the inheritors of a noble historical tradition. And, for a number of reasons (developed at length by Katie Trumpener in Bardic Nationalism), Scott's romantic novels were especially influential in the British colonies.[175] As Trumpener explains, a major appeal of the Waverly novels was their presentation of Scottish culture as charmingly distinct, yet politically benign: "they reconstruct the historical formation of the Scottish nation, the simultaneous formation of the Britain that subsumes it, and a cultural nationalism that survives because it learns to separate cultural distinctiveness from the memory of political autonomy." The world view expounded in these novels could "therefore be accommodated within the new imperial framework" (246-7). In fact, not only could Scottish culture be "accommodated" in the colonies – it could safely flourish there. In Veronica Strong-Boag's words, "[a]llocated the status of exotic and impoverished but heavily romanticized kin, if

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[174] "Scotland was the dream of my youth," Traill declares in Pearls and Pebbles (161). As Katie Trumpener explains in Bardic Nationalism, "[b]y 1819 . . . British novel writing and reading were dominated by a long-standing vogue for Irish and Scottish subject matter" (17).

[175] Carole Gerson traces the influence of Scott's writings on early Canadian fiction in a chapter entitled "The Long Shadow of Sir Walter Scott" (A Purer Taste 67-79).

they [the Scots] wished for power, they had to pursue it in the far-flung legions of their conquerors" (30).

But where do Catharine Parr Traill's Scottish emigrants fit into this nineteenth-century cultural template? Since only two passages in The Backwoods of Canada deal specifically with individuals identified as Scottish, the scope of this analysis remains limited; however, these passages suggest two interesting extremes: an empathetic approval of humble Scots whose personal suffering is presented as poetic and picturesque, and a resolute dismissal of Scots who embrace American ideals of social equality.

The first account of a Scottish emigrant occurs in letter four and takes the form of a romantic poem composed in the style of Robert Burns (from whom Traill quotes in letter two). She opens the poem, which I referred to briefly in chapter four, by adopting the perspective of an immigrant woman who sings a "simple lay" as "[s]he turns her wheel wi' busy hand."[176] The woman's song, which laments the death of three "bonnie bairnies," is followed by a series of more reflective stanzas. In the second half of the poem, Traill drops the Scottish dialect and focuses on the graves of "hardy men, / Who left their native shore / To earn their bread in distant lands" and now "sleep in many a lonely spot, / Where the mighty forests grow." The closing stanza hints at Traill's anxieties about her own future, conveying a poignant sense of loss and isolation:

> The mossy stone, or simple cross,
> Its silent record keeps,
> When mouldering in the forest-shade,
> The lonely exile sleeps. (39)

However poignant the poem may be, Traill's use of a Scottish narrative perspective is highly conventional, and in the end discloses more about her unspoken fears, literary tastes and the popular, romanticized view of Scottish culture (and, in particular, individual Scottish men and women) prevalent in the nineteenth century than it does about the realities of emigrant life for impoverished Scottish immigrants to Upper Canada. Traill provides no details of encounters with men and women such as those she describes in the poem; instead she draws her inspiration from a picturesque scene of "open burying-grounds" consisting of "[p]retty green mounds, surrounded by groups of walnut and other handsome timber trees" (37).

Tensions arise when Traill actually finds herself dealing with a "lower-class" Scotsman in

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[176] This is reminiscent of Wordsworth's romantic "Highland lass" who sings a "humble lay" while working in the field ("The Solitary Reaper," 1805, Wordsworth's Verse 98).

a situation which would have been unthinkable at home in England. The man she encounters, a ship's engineer, proves to be far less romantic than the idealized woman at her spinning wheel. Rather than remaining a distantly poetic figure, he insists on sharing his egalitarian views with Traill and her husband. He takes the liberty of not only sitting next to her, but also boasting about his right to do so – and about his refusal to conform to British conventions of deferential behaviour. He evidently possesses none of the qualities of the romantic Scotsman, and Traill frames their textual encounter in a manner which clearly trivializes his arguments. As I mentioned earlier, the engineer is introduced as an example of a pseudo-Yankee, and Traill begins by emphasizing his lower-class status: "You would be surprised to see how soon the new comers fall into this disagreeable manner and affectation of equality, especially the inferior class of Irish and Scotch, the English less so" (64).

It is interesting to speculate, for a moment, about both Traill's reactions to the behaviour of this engineer, and his possible motives. One reading of the passage would be to argue that given the stereotypically romanticized attitude toward Scottish culture which surfaces repeatedly in her work, Traill feels particularly affronted by the "inappropriateness" of this man's behaviour, and hence reacts so strongly. Her defensiveness may also stem from insecurity. As an immigrant she has been abruptly thrust into a society in which it will be impossible to maintain the class distinctions with which she was raised; her personal reflections indicate that she recognizes that she and her husband will be expected to carry out tasks normally relegated to members of the lower classes and, of necessity, to deal with a wide range of Others on an equal footing. In this context, a man who publicly embraces values the Traills find threatening, and whose behaviour epitomizes the changes and accommodations they will need to make, cannot be anything but threatening. At the same time, Traill's account may exemplify – as she suggests it does – a significant historical trend among Scottish and Irish immigrants to Upper Canada. Given the limitations placed on their political autonomy at home, immigrants from these countries located on the geographical and social periphery of Britain would likely have been more inclined to embrace the ideals of equality which Traill disparages than would their more acquiescent English counterparts.

Traill guides her reader's response to the anecdote involving the Scottish engineer by informing us at the outset that she and her husband "were *rather entertained* by the behaviour of a young Scotchman" [italics mine]. As the "entertaining" anecdote draws to a close, Thomas Traill refers sarcastically to the engineer's "notions of Canadian independence" and then condescendingly requests that he "be so good as to explain the machinery of . . . [his] engine, with

which . . . [he] seem[s] very well acquainted" (65). Clearly out of his depth in matters of culture and social grace, the Scottish engineer should – according to Thomas Traill – concern himself, and his conversation, with his limited area of expertise: the ship's engine.

Traill's attitude towards this "inferior" Scotsman mimics her response to the Irish settlers she encounters. Perhaps because she feels no familial or emotional ties to the Irish, they are far less likely to be romanticized than the Scottish. As Strong-Boag suggests, in British colonial literature the Scottish are frequently rehabilitated, "[w]hile the Irish largely remained 'Celtic Calibans' or 'domestic degenerates'" (30).[177] Although until the late nineteenth century, "persons of Irish ethnicity composed the largest non-French ethnic group in Canada" (Akensen 125-6), as a cultural group they captivated little of Traill's attention. On the occasions in Backwoods when the Irish are not linked with "Highlanders of the humblest class" (111, *et al*), they are exemplified by drunken "mutineers" (56), a "ragged, but polite, Irish boy" (59), a "poor Irish woman" who complains that the bush roads "aren't like to our iligant roads in Ireland" (90), "some Irish choppers" (95) and "an Irish lad" (112). Traill makes some attempt to empathize with the "mutineer" boatmen (in spite of their drunken state), suggesting that her own hunger evoked "a fellow-feeling for them" (56), yet only the "ragged, but polite, Irish boy" merits a detailed description. His "frankness and good humour" win Traill's heart, and she revels in the pathos of his life story: "It was a sad thing, he said, to be left fatherless and motherless, in a strange land; and he swept away the tears that gathered in his eyes as he told the simple, but sad tale of his early bereavement" (59). Like the Scottish woman at her spinning wheel in Traill's poem, the boy's suffering is picturesque and he makes no claims – beyond an abstract sympathy – on Traill or her husband.

So the Scots and Irish remain problematic: newly Othered in Canada, they are still not different or unfamiliar enough to be safely exotic and non-threatening, and Traill's perception of their behaviour is everywhere permeated by the attitudes and values of her English upbringing.[178]

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[177] Strong-Boag draws the phrases "Celtic Calibans" and "domestic degenerates" from Anne McClintock's Imperial Leather (52-3).

[178] It appears that over time Traill's attitudes towards Scottish immigrants changed. The Scottish character she includes in her 1852 children's novel, Canadian Crusoes, is presented in a exclusively positive, though stereotypical light: he is "stern, steady, persevering, cautious, always giving ample reasons for his doing or his not doing" (5). Through his marriage to a lively Frenchwoman, he produces the heroine of the novel, Catharine, a true Canadian in whom the virtues of both cultures are combined (and who marries a young French Canadian man at the close of the novel, further cementing the bonds between the two cultural groups).

In contrast, she writes far more expansively, though not necessarily less stereotypically, of the Others she finds genuinely fascinating: Canada's First Nations people.

IV: "Simplicity of heart" and "quiet apathy": Indians

Traill's accounts of Americans – and to a lesser extent, Scottish and Irish emigrants – almost inevitably revert to generalized reflections about deportment and social manners and it is somewhat of a relief for a twenty-first century reader to turn to her ethnographic descriptions of more exotic Others: Indians. Far more attention is devoted to descriptions of members of First Nations tribes than to other cultural groups in Traill's work, and these accounts – while not unambiguous – are fraught with significantly less tension. Since she does not share linguistic or cultural ties with Canada's Indigenous people, she seems less threatened by their behaviour and finds it easier to learn from their example. Although Traill remains firm in her general conviction of the superiority of English cultural and social norms, she readily recognizes the value of specific practices of First Nations people, portraying her encounters with them as far more reciprocal than those between herself and Yankees, Irish or Scottish emigrants.

As Carole Gerson notes in "Nobler Savages," long before Catharine Parr Traill encountered genuine "Indians," she had absorbed popular, and often contradictory, stereotypes and assumptions regarding their behaviour. These included romantic stereotypes of noble savages (including a belief in their inherent ecological knowledge and almost supernatural survival skills[179]), the assumption that they are inherently childish and indolent (and accordingly in need of spiritual and moral guidance), fear-inducing beliefs about their inherent bestiality and uncontrolled sexuality, and predictions of their inevitable decline and disappearance.[180] These stereotypical assumptions were closely linked to the colonial policy of appropriating and exploiting Canada's Indigenous people. As Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis explain, this

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[179] These preconceptions figure prominently in Traill's children's novel, The Young Emigrants, published several years before her immigration to Canada, but significantly less so in Canadian Crusoes.

[180] The trope of the "disappearing Indian" was a commonplace in nineteenth-century Canada. The commonly held belief was "that North American Aboriginal peoples were a 'fated race,' to cite a recurring phrase, whose destined disappearance . . . was statistically demonstrable" (Gerson "Nobler Savages" 7).

colonial policy was justified by "the racist discourses of *terra nullius* (or barren lands, sparsely populated), the myth of the disappearing indigene, manifest destiny and the doctrine of fatal impact" (11). Traill's familiarity with these beliefs and discursive strategies, and with the characteristic modes of portraying North American Natives in eighteenth and nineteenth-century travel narratives becomes evident in the initial comments she makes about Indians in The Backwoods of Canada.

Traill's introductory statements about Aboriginal people – a series of stereotypical generalizations about their "progress," none of which appear to be based on first-hand experience – clearly demonstrate her embrace of what Mary Louis Pratt labels the trope of the "civilizing mission" (Imperial Eyes 153). Emphasizing the positive influence of Indian/European contact, Traill informs us in letter five that, "Many of them [Indians] can both read and write fluently, and are greatly improved in their moral and religious conduct. But," she qualifies, "they are still too much attached to their wandering habits to become good and industrious settlers" (50). The latter comment, besides being highly ironic – suggesting that the Indigenous people become "settlers" on their own land – is also particularly telling. Traill establishes a clear dichotomy between "good and industrious settlers" such as herself, and the – by implication – inadequate and idle nomadic peoples who had traditionally inhabited the Rice Lake area where she and her husband established their home in 1833.[181] In a sleight of hand gesture typical of colonial discourse, Traill suggests that she and her fellow Europeans, by virtue of their superior moral and religious qualities, merit a greater claim to the land and its resources than the Aboriginal people.[182]

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[181] In this statement, Traill clearly echoes Hector St. John de Crèvacoeur's Letters From an American Farmer (1782). As I explained in chapter three, Traill had more than a passing familiarity with Crèvacoeur's work, several pages of which were integrated into her children's book, Narrative of Nature, and History Book for Young Naturalists. In his text, Crèvacouer praises the life of farmers, who "are rendered simple and inoffensive by tilling the earth," while condemning the nomadic life of hunters who alternate "between the toil of the chase, the idleness of repose, [and] the indulgence of inebriation. Hunting is but a licentious idle life," he concludes (quoted in Gaile McGregor's "The Noble Savage in the New World Garden" 52). The attitudes expressed by Crèvacouer were widespread in nineteenth-century Canada: as Cecilia Morgan explains (in the context of Christian missionary work), many settlers "saw the transition from a nomadic life of hunting and gathering to a settled life of agricultural production as central to the redemption of Native people" (135).

[182] Land grants in Upper Canada, which were regularly assigned to veteran soldiers such as Thomas Traill, both mandated permanent residency on a piece of land and required a set amount of clearing per annum. Obviously, claims to land made by peoples who inhabited an area for only a few months at a time, who failed to construct permanent residences, and who relied on fishing and hunting rather than farming, would be seen as untenable.

Traill follows her disparagement of nomadic lifestyles with an explanation of the benefits of colonization for First Nations tribes, reiterating what David Spurr identifies as one of the "primary affirmations" of colonial discourse: a justification of colonial authority through demonstrations of moral superiority (110). Yet here the moral superiority of the European settlers is framed in a specifically Christian context. As Traill rather pedantically informs us, "[c]ertain it is that the introduction of the Christian religion is the first greatest step towards civilization and improvement; its very tendency being to break down the strong-hold of prejudice and ignorance, and unite mankind in one bond of social brotherhood" (51). However, before leaving the topic of Christian salvation for Indigenous people Traill adds a few less predicable comments. It seems, she suggests, that some of the improvements in Indian morality have only been temporary, and that – like children who require constant guidance – members of Native communities have begun to revert to uncivilized behaviour, allowing their "love of ardent spirits" to bring "discredit upon their faith" (51). The individuals to blame for this moral reversion are not the Indians themselves: she accuses imprudent Europeans "who call themselves Christians, and who are better educated, and enjoy the advantages of civilised society" of indulging "to excess in this degrading vice" (of drinking alcohol), and, by their poor example, leading vulnerable "half-reclaimed savages" astray. Admittedly, while Traill's harsh criticism of European settlers here is somewhat atypical, the discursive strategy of infantilizing Native people, repeated elsewhere in the text, is considerably more conventional, and less progressive.

In the contact zone between British settlers such as Traill and Canada's First Nations people, communication was limited by linguistic as well as cultural barriers. Although one might expect the settlers to feel infantilized as they are thrust into a situation where their ability to express ideas, make requests and assert control through language is reduced to the level of a small child, they tend to project this role onto the Others they encounter. As Stephen Greenblatt explains, "what is striking [in the context of North America] is that, though they are on foreign shores, the Europeans do not feel themselves infantilized; it is rather the natives whom they see as children in relation to European languages" (105). Presenting the Indians she encounters as childlike enables Traill to define her own role as both maternal and judgemental. On one occasion she describes with evident pleasure the response provoked by a very small gift to a First Nations woman: "I delighted her by a present of a few beads for working mocassins and knife-sheaths, with which she seemed very well pleased, carefully securing her treasure by tying them in a corner of her blanket with a bit of thread" (208). In this passage Traill writes as if she were an indulgent mother, emphasizing her child's pleasure – the Native woman was both "delighted"

and "very well pleased" – while highlighting the childlike gesture of wrapping up a "treasure." Yet the immature behaviour of two Indian males, which Traill proceeds to recount, seems considerably less charming. After describing how a Native hunter and his son responded to a series of coloured prints – they insisted on showing them to their dogs, as if the animals could "share the amusement" – Traill declares with some disappointment that "I could hardly have supposed the grave Indian capable of such childish behaviour" (209). On both of these occasions, Traill's interpretation of Indian behaviour and motives is obviously influenced by the very limited nature of the communication between herself and these people. Unlike the Scottish engineer or the Irish boatmen whose forceful expression of opinions and emotions Traill cannot ignore, the Aboriginal people in these anecdotes are presented as mute.[183] Since Traill cannot understand their language, and their knowledge of English is minimal, their communication is limited to signs, gestures and material exchanges. Sign language allows for the expression of basic ideas, but no more; rather than recognizing this limitation, Traill draws the conclusion that these people are inherently childlike, incapable of subtlety or complexity of thought.

As well as infantilizing First Nations people, Traill adopts the strategy – common in travel narratives and ethnographic studies – of using the present tense to position them as an unchangeable Other. As Johannes Fabian suggests, the "ethnographic present" is more than just a rhetorical convention: it "represents a choice of expression which is determined by an epistemological position and cannot be derived from, or explained by, linguistic rules alone." It "reveals a specific cognitive stance toward its object . . . [presupposing] the givenness of the object . . . as something to be observed" (86). Using the ethnographic present essentially "'freezes' a society at the time of observation" (81). Note the way Traill describes the fishing expertise of Native men, for example:

> The Indian, provided with his tomahawk, with which he makes an opening in the ice, a spear, his blanket, and a decoy-fish of wood, proceeds to the place he has fixed upon. Having cut a hole in the ice he places himself on hands and knees, and casts his blanket over him, so as to darken the water and conceal himself from observation; in this position he will remain for hours, patiently watching the approach of his prey, which he strikes with admirable precision as soon as it appears within the range of his spear. (116)

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[183] One could argue that Traill seems happiest when the Others she encounters remain mute. She is certainly more impressed by the sight of a Scottish girl at her spinning wheel than by the Scottish engineer who engages her in conversation.

In such passages, the behaviour of Native men – even "their admirable precision" – is presented as predictable and repetitive, clearly explicable through the actions of one individual. Obviously fishing involves a degree of habitual behaviour, as do most daily activities; however, the cumulative effect of such absolute statements is to fix the behaviour of the Other in a series of definitive actions.

Traill's description of this Aboriginal fisherman also emphasizes his inherent simplicity – all he needs is a tomahawk, spear, blanket and decoy-fish – while portraying his behaviour as that of a natural predator as he patiently sits "on hands and knees" awaiting "the approach of his prey." Aligning Indian behaviour with the natural/animalistic world is a useful rhetorical strategy, enabling a colonial writer such as Traill to express admiration for the traditional practices of Aboriginal people (much as she anthropomorphizes animals, writing glowingly of their instinctive behaviour, in many of her children's books) while maintaining a crucial distinction between natural (Indian) and civilized (English) behaviour. In this context, Canada's First Nations people are – in David Spurr's words – "conceived of as an extension of the landscape" (7). Such colonial discourse, "may be said to naturalize in . . . [two] senses: while it identifies a colonized or primitive people as part of the natural world, it also presents this identification as entirely 'natural,' as a simple state of what is, rather than as a theory based in interest" (157).

Somewhat less stereotypical, and certainly more evocative, accounts of Native people are found in descriptions of reciprocal visits with Indians encamped near Traill's home. After informing her readers that a "family of Indians have pitched their tents very near us," Traill, with her propensity for detailed accounts of household management, provides an itemized summary of their visits to her:

> The squaws have been several times to see me; sometimes from curiosity, sometimes with the view of bartering their baskets, mats, ducks, or venison, for pork, flour, potatoes, or articles of wearing-apparel. Sometimes their object is to borrow "kettle to cook," which they are very punctual in returning. (117)

In this passage Traill avoids either romanticizing or judging the Native women, instead depicting their needs in very concrete terms. Their behaviour, as she reads it, appears eminently sensible and, in Homi Bhabha's terms, "entirely knowable and visible" (156). Just as she responds most positively to Yankees whose pioneering expertise she recognizes, and from whom she acquires useful skills or advice, Traill writes most objectively and empathetically about Aboriginal people with whom she trades for essential goods, emphasizing the reciprocity of these encounters. Yet

Traill stops short of completely assimilating these First Nations women into her Western perspective: we are simultaneously reminded of their Other-ness through the quoted phrase "kettle to cook."[184] Traill's interest in expressions, both in English and Native languages, surfaces here, and on a number of later occasions,[185] recalling her fascination with Yankee colloquialisms. Even more significantly, she closes this passage by praising her visitors' conformity to English standards of behaviour through their prompt return of borrowed items.

The topic of borrowing leads into a more detailed anecdote of a visit from an individual First Nations woman.[186] Somewhat surprisingly, Traill introduces her description of this encounter by accepting responsibility for the difficulties in communication the two women experience, informing us that, "not understanding her language, I could not for some time discover the object of her solicitude" (117).[187] While Traill remains passive, the Aboriginal woman proceeds to energetically mime the action of washing clothes, laughs, and points to a washing tub, indicating by holding up two fingers the specific period of time for which she wishes to borrow the item. Communication is established; Traill willingly lends her washing tub; the Native woman departs, satisfied. Unlike many writers of her time, Traill "does not feel called upon to present her European reader with a catalogue of exotic differences" when describing First Nations people. In passages such as this, she positions herself not as a detached observer, but as a participant in the action (Gerson, "Nobler Savages" 14).

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[184] Bhabha articulates this dichotomy in the broader context of colonialism: "Colonial power produces the colonized as a fixed identity that is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (156).

[185] At one point, Traill explores the sounds of the "Indian tongue," writing with admiration of "a language that is peculiarly sweet and soft in its cadences, and seems to be composed of many vowels" (157).

[186] In "Nobler Savages" Carole Gerson argues for the particular aptness of anecdotes as a means of describing one-on-one encounters between Europeans and members of the First Nations community, and suggests that Traill and her sister Moodie developed "an experiential mode of discourse that communicates both their genuine engagement with the Other and their projection of their own otherwise unarticulable concerns as women and mothers" (5). I touch upon the indirect expression of Traill's "unarticulable concerns" as a mother in the next few pages.

[187] I use the phrase "somewhat surprisingly" here since it was common for Europeans to lay the blame for problems in communication on Native peoples, or – as I suggested earlier – to interpret Natives' limited facility with the settlers' language as an indication of childishness and limited intellectual capabilities. As Stephen Greenblatt elaborates, in the context of early contact writings, "Europeans found it extremely difficult to recognize just how difficult, distorted, and uneven were these first, tentative attempts at cross-cultural communication" (95).

In other anecdotes, Aboriginal women meet Traill's approval when they behave more submissively, conforming to norms of nineteenth-century European femininity and domesticity. In one particularly striking example, she writes:

> I was much pleased with the simple piety of our friend the hunter Peter's squaw, a stout, swarthy matron, of most amiable expression. We were taking our tea when she softly opened the door and looked in; an encouraging smile induced her to enter, and depositing a brown papouse (Indian for baby or little child) on the ground, she gazed round with curiosity and delight in her eyes. We offered her some tea and bread, motioning to her to take a vacant seat beside the table. She seemed pleased by the invitation, and drawing her little one to her knee, poured some tea into the saucer, and gave it to the child to drink. She ate very moderately, and when she had finished, rose, and, wrapping her face in the folds of her blanket, bent down her head on her breast in the attitude of prayer. This little act of devotion was performed without the slightest appearance of pharisaical display, but in singleness and simplicity of heart. She then thanked us with a face beaming with smiles and good humour; and, taking little Rachel by the hands, threw her over her shoulder with a peculiar sleight that I feared would dislocate the tender thing's arms, but the papouse seemed well satisfied with this mode of treatment. (119)

Although Traill opens this passage by describing her visitor as "a stout, swarthy matron," the ensuing description focuses on the gentle and diminutive nature of her actions and on her embodiment of Christian humility. The Native woman "softly" opens the door, "gazes around" in delight, eats "moderately," engages in a "little act of devotion" and thanks them profusely. The perfect, domesticated woman, she symbolizes progress, embodying both the success of the Western civilizing mission and reinforcing Traill's view of ideal feminine behaviour.[188]

Equally significant are Traill's descriptions of her own reactions in this passage: she is "much pleased" by the Aboriginal woman's "simple piety," readily interprets her guest's actions (telling us, for example, that the woman is "curious," "delighted" and "pleased" to be welcomed to their table) and closes by worrying about the safety of the "tender" baby. No indication is provided of the woman's age – beyond the term "matron" – yet Traill's discourse clearly attributes childlike qualities to her Native visitor. As Margaret Jolly suggests, the "symbolic

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[188] The trope of the civilizing mission can also be read in a more specifically Christian context. With reference to both the colonial missionary tradition and nineteenth-century views of femininity, Cecilia Morgan suggests that, "[b]y linking 'progress' to the symbol of the domesticated Native woman, religious discourse underscored the supposedly natural and inevitable position of white women within Christian society" (137). I explore feminine and domestic discourses in more detail in chapter seven.

constitution of the relationship between colonizing women and colonized women in the familial mode as that between mother and daughter was a poignant but strategic expression of the tension between subordination and identification, between detachment and agonized intimacy, between other and self" (115). Traill's textual presentation of her encounter with this First Nations woman and her adoption of a maternal role is a stance typically adopted by women travel writers, and – as such – challenges "neither the imperial assertion of superiority nor the type of knowledge that asserted that 'natives' were childlike" (Sara Mills, "Knowledge, Gender, and Empire" 41).[189]

In this travel narrative aimed at a mixed audience of men and women, Traill rarely writes about her own infant child; however, her discussions of Aboriginal child-raising practices, presented under the guise of anthropological commentary about the customs and manners of fascinating Others, provide discursive space for an articulation of maternal concerns. As Carole Gerson suggests, "[w]hen writing about Native women, [Susanna] Moodie and Traill were inevitably also writing about themselves" ("Nobler Savages" 16). Helen Buss, who has worked extensively with the published and archival writings of Canadian pioneer women, refers to such subtextual maternal concerns as "ground noise . . . the sound of . . . women's unwritable maternal bodies" ("Listening" 200).[190] In the passage following the description of the pious Native woman just discussed, Traill analyses the methods used by Aboriginal mothers to carry their children.[191] She begins by explaining how "the *young* infant is swathed to a sort of flat cradle, secured with flexible hoops, to prevent it from falling out" and then develops this into an orientalist analogy: as the cradle is propped against a "wall or chair, chest, or anything that will support it . . . the passive prisoner stands, looking not unlike a mummy in its case" (120). In a further metaphorical leap,

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[189] In a broader context, Margaret Strobel argues that, "[a]s participants in the historical process of British expansion, they [women] benefited from the economic and political subjugation of Indigenous people and shared many of the accompanying attitudes of racism, paternalism, ethnocentrism and national chauvinism" (xiii).

[190] The writing of Lucy Peel, a pioneer diarist contemporaneous with Traill (to whom I refer briefly in earlier chapters), challenges some of Buss' assumptions about "unwritable maternal bodies," however. Peel's description of the birth of her first child, and her husband's written account which accompanies it, provide a very emotional account of the pain and joy of childbirth (Little 13).

[191] In general, Traill seems impressed by Native parenting. She writes elsewhere in Backwoods that, "Indians seem most tender parents; it is pleasing to see the affectionate manner in which they treat their young children, fondly and gently caressing them with eyes overflowing and looks of love" (157).

Traill compares the swaddled Native child to a "picture of the Virgin and Child in some of the old illuminated missals" (120) – taking, in Elizabeth Thompson's words, "the papouse and its cradle from being an exotic curiosity to a religious icon" ("Illustrations" 47).

Traill's description of an Aboriginal mother and her baby as reminiscent of a Christian painting is interesting for a number of reasons. First, and most obviously, the overtly religious reference is highly significant. This Native woman is not merely a good Christian; she is, Traill implies, the quintessential Christian: the virgin mother of the Messiah in Native clothing. As such, she deserves veneration and emulation by Natives and non-Natives alike. Traill develops this idea in the paragraph which follows, suggesting that Canada's Aboriginal people are "natural" Christians:

> Certainly in no instance does the Christian religion appear more lovely than when, untainted by the doubts and infidelity of modern sceptics, it is displayed in the conduct of the reclaimed Indian breaking down the strong-holds of idolatry and natural evil, and bringing forth the fruits of holiness and morality. They may be said to receive the truths of the Gospel as little children, with simplicity of heart and unclouded faith. (120)

Traill's reference to painting when comparing the Native mother and baby to the Christian "Virgin and Child" is also significant, recalling her landscape descriptions in the early sections of Backwoods. Like those picturesque scenes, the Aboriginal mother and child are presented as frozen in time and space, of sufficient aesthetic value to be framed and admired. On a later occasion, Traill uses the language of painting even more overtly when describing a group of Native girls. Notice how she emphasizes the artistic pose of the girls as well as the complementary hues of the scene before her:

> I could not but notice the modest air of the girls; as if anxious to avoid observation . . . they turned away from the gaze of strangers, facing each other and bending their heads down . . . . The attitude, which is that of the Eastern nations, the dress, the dark hair and eyes, the olive complexion, heightened colour and meek expression of face, would have formed a study for a painter. I wish you could have witnessed this scene; I think you would not easily have forgotten it. (157)

Traill's romantic portrayal of these Aboriginal girls recalls her poem about the young Scottish woman singing as she works at her spinning wheel. As Veronica Strong-Boag notes, "both groups of the vanquished [First Nations people and the Scottish] faced romanticization by the victors" in nineteenth-century Canada (28).

But let me return to Traill's romanticized description of the Madonna-like Native mother

and child. As David Spurr suggests, the romanticization and idealization of First Nations people, "always takes place in relation to Western culture: far from being a gesture which turns its back on the west in order to accept some alternate mode of being, it conceives the idea of the Other that is readily incorporated into the fabric of Western values" (128). Accordingly, Traill's use of European norms to describe the Aboriginal mother and child can be read as a rhetorical gesture designed to familiarize and domesticate a potentially threatening Other by bringing Native people within a highly gendered and encultured European frame of reference. Yet it also functions as a more benign and conventional attempt to provide a suitable analogy for an English reading audience, a common practice in travel narratives.

This is not the only occasion when Traill defines Canada's First Nations people in terms of European norms. In the next first-hand encounter, describing a visit to a Native family's winter camp, she focuses at some length on the physical mannerisms and appearance of the people. An old hunter issues commands "with the gravity and phlegm of a Dutchman" (157) and she is "really struck with the beauty of Jane [a young Indian woman]; her features were positively fine, and though of gipsey [*sic*] darkness the tint of vermilion on her cheek and lip rendered it, if not beautiful, very attractive" (156). Traill's use of the adjective "gipsey" here is interesting. Gerson argues that Aboriginal women in nineteenth-century accounts often "occupy the position of the Other frequently assigned to the gypsy in European romanticism" ("Nobler Savages" 7). And, as Shirley Foster notes (reinforcing Spurr's comments about the link between the romanticization of Natives and European norms), the "closer the approximation to Western values, the more attractive the Indians could seem" to Traill (64). The gypsy-like woman, Traill informs us, wears her hair "neatly folded over her forehead, not hanging loose and disorderly in shaggy masses, as is generally the case with the squaws" (156). In the closing phrase of her description, Traill emphasizes that this young woman "may be considered an Indian belle, by the peculiar care she displayed in the arrangement of the black cloth mantle, bound with scarlet, that was gracefully wrapped over one shoulder, and fastened on her left side with a gilt brooch" (156). The Native woman evidently becomes more attractive and charming by virtue of her carefully draped western clothing, just as the modest girls referred to previously – whom Traill describes as possessing an "olive complexion," as if they were southern Europeans or gypsies – become more attractive by virtue of their reverential "attitude, which is that of the Eastern nations" (157).[192]

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[192] Although in this phrase Traill leaves the phrase "Eastern nations" ambiguous, I presume that she refers to Eastern European countries because of the specifically Christian context of the paragraph.

Aesthetic beauty plays an interesting role in Traill's text. While landscapes and flowers are presented as possessing intrinsic aesthetic qualities and values, beauty in humans is limited to First Nations people, especially women. This is not simply a matter of distance – admiring what can be viewed as artistic from a safe perspective – because Traill expresses a close, almost mystical affiliation with the natural world throughout her text. Perhaps the more significant link is the concept of "natural." If First Nations people are intimately linked to the natural world, as Traill's discourse implies, then perhaps beauty in a Native woman can be viewed as a natural by-product of such an association.[193] Yet Traill's descriptions do not fit this tidy categorization, either; while she may begin by praising attributes such as facial features, she almost inevitably introduces, at some point, the suggestion that European clothing or behaviour enhances the beauty of Aboriginal women. So once again we discover ambiguities and discontinuities in Traill's rhetorical stance – inconsistencies which reflect the multiple, sometimes contradictory voices in her text.

In general, Traill writes of First Nations men less frequently, more disparagingly and more stereotypically than she does of women. She refers quite conventionally to their "characteristic brevity" (118) and "quiet apathy" (207), though one anecdote stands out as more enigmatic. She opens by placing this story in the past, "[s]ome twenty years ago, while a feeling of dread still existed in the minds of the British settlers towards the Indians" (158). In highly sentimental terms, she outlines the plight of a poor widow, stranded on an isolated farm as darkness closes, who receives an unexpected and unwelcome visitor. The Native man, we are told, "entered so silently that it was not till he planted himself before the blazing fire that he was perceived by the frightened widow and her little ones, who retreated, trembling with ill-concealed terror to the furthest corner of the room" (159). Tension builds as the "swarthy" intruder proceeds to take off his outer clothing, "plainly intimating his design was to pass the night beneath their roof." Traill continues in a rather gothic style: while the little group trembles, the visitor deliberately tests the edge of his hunting-knife and carefully examines his tomahawk and rifle. Then, as "[t]he despair of the horror-stricken mother was now approaching a climax . . . she clasped the two youngest [children] to her breast . . . . With streaming eyes she was about to

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[193] Similarly, since in Traill's world-view one finds God in the natural world, people who are closer to nature – Aboriginal people – are predisposed to be better Christians . . . provided they have received the appropriate religious education. Like the children for whom Traill provides moral instruction in her stories and novels, Native people are capable of sinful behaviour if left to their own devices.

throw herself at his feet, as he advanced towards her with the dreaded weapons in his hands, and implore his mercy for herself and her babes" (159). Suddenly the tension dissipates, and Traill delights in the irony of the situation which results: "What then was her surprise and joy when he gently laid the rifle, knife and tomahawk beside her, signifying by this action that she had nothing to fear at his hands" (159). The threatening Aboriginal man becomes a welcome guest in the home, offered food and even the widow's bed to sleep in. Amazed by the luxury of the latter, he carries out "a mute examination of the bed-clothes for some minutes . . . [then] with a satisfied laugh, he sprang upon the bed, and curling himself up like a dog, in a few minutes was sound asleep" (160). The potential rapist safely transformed into a family pet, Traill proceeds to describe with admiration his "beautiful embroidered sheath" and "finely-worked mocassins and leggings" (although the entire incident was related to her second or third hand).

It is difficult to say whether Traill was aware of the seemingly obvious sexual subtext to this passage. In a general sense, as Sherry Ortner suggests, "feminist theorizing invites us to see encounters and transactions in the borderlands as always gendered and eroticized, both in practice and in the imagination" (182), so perhaps we should read this encounter as a fairly overt example of such discourse. It seems likely that Traill found the anecdote of the noble Indian warrior and the solitary pioneer woman reassuring, as well as titillating, as she was on occasion left alone in a rural farmhouse with only the company of a small child. In her retelling she seems to enjoy playing with the conventional rhetoric of gothic romance,[194] emphasizing the helplessness of the female heroine at the mercy of the swarthy Native warrior, and then deflating her readers' expectations as she transforms him into an object of housewifely concern and anthropological interest. It is interesting to note that while she admires the beauty of the man's garments, she carefully avoids describing his physique in similar terms. As Shirley Foster explains, masculine beauty was "a topic fraught with danger. Victorian women could not admit to – indeed were not supposed to have – any physical feelings towards the opposite sex." They were "thus constrained by their awareness of what it was 'proper' for them to note, as well as perhaps reluctant to venture into an area which might involve the arousal of disturbing emotions" (64).

Perhaps we should also read this account of a potentially transgressive relationship between a widowed European woman and a solitary Aboriginal man as representative of the struggle for control occurring in the contact zone between Natives and colonists in nineteenth-

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[194] Bentley describes this anecdote as "a gothic rendition of Canada's wilderness and past that may be indebted in this respect to John Richardson's Wacousta" ("Afterword" 295).

century Upper Canada. As Sarah Carter points out, the frequently touted "threat of real or imagined violence against white women" in colonial societies commonly served as "a rationale for securing white control, for clarifying boundaries between peoples" (15). Although the Native man in this anecdote poses an apparent threat to the unprotected woman, the danger is rapidly negated by – depending on one's interpretation – the benevolent presence of the civilized white woman and her children, the more generalized beneficial effects of contact with European settlers, or the inherent nobility of the Indian warrior. In any case, the interpersonal and cultural boundaries remain distinct: even if the Native man sleeps in the widow's bed, he sleeps alone, harmlessly curled up on top of the bedding. At this point in Canadian history the territorial distinctions between European and Native lands were also becoming increasingly concrete. After claiming lands on which nomadic peoples had traditionally hunted, fished and built seasonal accommodation, settlers such as the Traills constructed fences to mark the boundaries between their homes and the wilderness, the home of the Others. Yet Canada's First Nations people were allowed only limited claims to their supposed wilderness home. Traditionally they had roamed freely over large territories, never conceiving of land as a commodity to be claimed, bought or sold; now, through the imposition of a foreign system, they found themselves constrained and coerced into settling on woefully inadequate "Indian reservations."

The issue of territory raises two final aspects of Traill's representations of Native people: the manner in which she configures space in her textual accounts of encounters between herself, the representative English traveller/settler, and Canada's Indigenous people, and the economic aspects of her transactions with individual members of this cultural group. Two of Traill's most detailed accounts of Indian customs and behaviour occur in descriptions of visits to the camps of her Aboriginal neighbours. In these incidents – presented as a welcome break from routine and an exotic experience to be shared with family "back home" – Traill once again becomes a traveller, keen "to see these singular people in their winter encampment" or venturing forth "one beautiful afternoon in June" to visit their summer encampment (153, 206). She is especially fascinated by Aboriginal homes and delights in informing us, on both occasions, that she was invited to sit with the Native women, sharing a section of blanket. As with the poor family of emigrants living in extreme poverty in a log-house whom Traill visits in letter five (referred to in my analysis in the last chapter), she readily occupies the Indians' space, carefully observing the construction of their buildings and providing detailed accounts of furnishings. Amazed at the seeming shortage of room in their winter accommodation, Traill "soon discovered a plan that answered all the purposes of closets, bags, boxes, &c., the inner lining of birch-bark being drawn

between the poles so as to form hollow pouches all round" (158). During her visit to the summer camp she writes that she "amused" herself "with taking note of the interior of the wigwam and its inhabitants" (207).

On both occasions, members of the First Nations community perform for Traill and her companions, singing hymns that "filled the little hut with a melody that thrilled to our very hearts" (157). While the religious nature of the songs evidently pleases Traill, who considers the Natives ideal Christians,[195] the fact that they sing in "the Indian tongues, a language that is peculiarly sweet and soft in its cadences" adds a safely exotic quality to their performance. Traill's sightseeing visits, her naïve delight in "understanding" how the Aboriginal people live and her evaluations of their living quarters can certainly be read as symbolic of nineteenth-century colonial encroachment on the physical and cultural space of Canada's Indigenous people. As Robert Young emphasizes in Colonial Desire, "colonization involves the physical appropriation of colonial space in both physical and cultural terms" (172). One potential effect of "freezing the original indigenous culture by turning it into an object of academic analysis" (174), as Traill seems inclined to do, was to ease and enhance the imperialist appropriation of First Nations culture and land.

However, I believe that such an interpretation is unreasonably harsh on Traill and her text; in order to dismiss her as a puppet of the colonial enterprise or to classify The Backwoods of Canada as a tool of imperialism one would have to ignore the complexities, undercurrents and ambiguities in the work. An analysis of Traill's accounts of economic transactions between herself and First Nations people, for example, suggests a significant degree of reciprocity in the contact zone. Such transactions are invariably presented in the context of visits Traill receives from Native men and women, and her tone in these passages tends to be quite different from the romanticized rhetoric which marks her "tourist" visits to their camps. For example, after the successful transaction with the woman who came to borrow a washing tub, described earlier in this chapter, Traill outlines a more problematic business deal with an "old hunter" named Peter. She gave him some bread on the understanding that he would provide a pair of ducks, and when he failed to fulfil his half of the bargain, explaining that her brother Samuel had borrowed his canoe, Traill "coldly declined any further overtures to bartering with the Indians until my ducks made their appearance" (118). She soon receives a least one of her ducks, however (though she never accounts for the second one), and within a few pages, proceeds to write with grudging

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[195] Ideal and child-like Christians, that is, since the two go hand in hand for Traill.

admiration of how the Indians "are very shrewd and close in all their bargains, and exhibit a surprising degree of caution in their dealings" (121). She provides detailed descriptions of the baskets and trays of Native manufacture which "serve for many useful household purposes" (120-1), and has obviously learned that she cannot purchase such desirable items without offering "useful" goods in return. As Traill admits, her Aboriginal neighbours "appear to value the useful rather more highly than the merely ornamental articles that you may exhibit to them" (121). The latter statement recalls her advice in the introduction to Backwoods, where she informs her readers that potential settlers to Canada would be wise to "discard all irrational and artificial wants and mere useless pursuits" (3).

Traill's frustrations in trading with Native people surface when she explains how,

> . . . [t]hey will seldom make any article you want on purpose for you. If you express a desire to have baskets of a particular pattern that they do not happen to have ready made by them, they give you the usual vague reply of "by-and-by." If the goods you offer them in exchange for theirs do not answer their expectations, they give a sullen and dogged look or reply, "*Car-car*" (no, no), or "*Carwinni*," which is a still more forcible negative. (121-2)

Yet such frustrating economic transactions in the contact zone prove to be learning experiences for Traill. Unlike her visits to Ojibwa camps where, at least by her account, she is welcomed and entertained, here Traill is forced to deal with the original inhabitants of the land on their terms. These Aboriginal men and women evidently do not feel that they need to provide her with items simply at her behest, and when they feel that a trade she proposes is disadvantageous they reply not in her language, but in their own. And although Traill's rhetoric displays a degree of irritation, her matter-of-fact tone and her use of economic terms such as "manufacture," "bargain," "value" and "exchange" place her transactions with Aboriginal people on a fairly reciprocal basis.

What then can we conclude about Traill's representations of Canada's First Nations people in this popular travel narrative/settlers' handbook, and what broader implications might this have for our understanding of the uneasy contact zone between mid-nineteenth century colonists in rural Upper Canada and the Aboriginal people they encountered? Certainly, Traill's discourse is saturated with conventional tropes, stereotypical assumptions, and essentialist notions about the inherent qualities of Native behaviour and the intrinsic differences between *them* and *us* (the *us* being she and her English readers). Her perceptions are influenced by an absolute faith in nineteenth-century Evangelical Christian teachings, a ready conformity to many nineteenth-century notions of femininity, and an intimate (albeit small scale) involvement in the colonial

enterprise. As in any such account of contact-zone encounters, or "borderlands perspective[,] the terrain of cultural encounters . . . is never neutral and never level" (Ortner 182). However, like many "sentimental" travel texts, Backwoods is "characteristically dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense . . . represent[ing] the Others' voices in dialogue with the voices of the self and often tender[ing] the Other some credibility and equality" ("Scratches" 132). Reading Traill's descriptions of First Nations men and women, one is struck by her respect for these people, not simply as a type, but as individuals, by her willingness to re-evaluate commonly-held assumptions in the face of personal experience, and by her desire to establish reciprocal relationships. While she may not achieve an ideal dialogic relationship, which would involve – to use Bridget Orr's terms – "a recognition and acceptance of the irreducible alterity of each to the other" (156), at times she moves towards such a subject position. Soon after her arrival in Canada, she became a student of the Ojibwa, learning their language and acquiring from them a knowledge of local plants and their medicinal qualities, some of which surfaces in the more scientific and botanical sections of Backwoods. Recognizing the importance of Aboriginal people as trading partners, Traill emphasizes the reciprocity of their exchanges: the pork, flour, potatoes and clothing she can provide is bartered for baskets, fish, ducks and venison. With the First Nations women who lived near her she shared an emotional bond of motherhood and a love of children, and the children's novel she published in 1852, Canadian Crusoes, reflects her increasing appreciation of their culture and language[196].

As Bentley suggests, Aboriginal people occupy "a curious position in Traill's text . . . [b]oth primal and marginal" ("Afterword" 294). What we encounter in The Backwoods of Canada is a highly ambiguous discourse, perhaps representative of the troubled relationship between European settlers in Upper Canada and First Nations people in the years before Confederation. Pioneers such as Traill benefited from their relationships with Natives, trading for fish, game, furs and useful household items such as woven baskets. Yet they accepted with relative equanimity what they perceived as the approaching "disappearance" of these peoples' culture, distinct way of life, and even their existence. As Traill confidently asserts, "[t]he 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 that they once

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[196] In this account of wilderness survival, the protagonists are assisted by a young Aboriginal woman, Indiana. In Traill's symbolic conclusion to the novel Indiana becomes the wife of Hector, the Canadian-born son of a Scottish immigrant father and a French Canadian mother.

existed" (160).[197] Not too many years after she wrote these words, Traill's generation of colonists, deciding that the original inhabitants of the lands they now claimed had outlived their usefulness, introduced a deliberate policy of cultural genocide, forcing Native children to attend residential schools and outlawing key cultural practices such as potlatches and sun dances.[198] In the context of what was to follow, Traill's empathetic descriptions of Indians in The Backwoods of Canada seem almost progressive.

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[197] Perhaps, as Gillian Whitlock suggests, the impending "disappearance" of Canada's Native people contributed to their relatively positive portrayal, in comparison to that of other immigrant groups: "Whereas the indigenous people can be presented as a finite presence, the Yankees, the Irish and the other lower-class immigrants are not grateful, not orderly, and not about to disappear" (67). Although Whitlock refers to Moodie's Roughing It here, the applicability of her comments to Traill's work is obvious.

[198] Strong-Boag and Gerson, 27.

CHAPTER 7

"We begin to get reconciled to our Robinson Crusoe sort of life": The Backwoods of Canada as Settler's Guide

Practical information and advice for prospective, and, to a lesser degree, current immigrants to Upper Canada in the 1830's forms a significant component of The Backwoods of Canada, yet this aspect of Traill's text has been largely ignored by reviewers and critics during the last hundred and forty years.[199] More than a century and a half after the book's publication, we are faced with the question of how to read and interpret material such as instructions for making maple sugar, advice on choosing a homestead plot, descriptions of seasonal changes and homilies on the value of physical labour. Perhaps, given the potentially problematic nature of these sections for twenty-first century readers, we should simply consign the settler's guide components of Backwoods to the realm of the historian. From a feminist perspective, Traill's embrace of gender stereotypes and class prejudices in these sections may seem ideologically suspect; similarly, critics in the field of postcolonial studies may feel uneasy engaging with material which implicitly endorses imperialist values. As Gillian Whitlock suggests, settlers are "unpalatable subjects. Their writings bring to the fore the 'less defined cadences' of postcolonialism: politically flawed texts which rest on the cusp of coloniality; writings which work with rather than against European models, and feature difficult and sometimes ambiguous engagements with a history of invasion and dispossession" (41). Yet to ignore the settler's guide components of Backwoods is to ignore an illuminating aspect of Traill's text, crucial for an appreciation of its initial impact, its underlying generic framework, the social and cultural milieu in which it was written and read, and the potential barriers it poses to today's readers.

In this context, let me begin with an analysis of the genre of the settler's handbook and its nineteenth-century conventions, followed by a reading of selected passages from Backwoods, a consideration of the types of advice for settlers which Traill offers, an exploration of the dominant

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[199] i.e. since about thirty years after the original publication of the text, at which point the advice Traill offered lost its contemporary relevance.

discourses of social class, colonialism, femininity and domesticity, and – in closing – a consideration of letter fifteen, one of the most problematic and generically unstable of the settler's guide sections. While one could argue that Backwoods should be read as an example of an intrinsically blended genre of travel and settlement narrative – "a genre not in ontological but in relational and functional terms" (Thurston, "Remember" 183) – my position remains that such a blended generic classification proves less applicable to specific sections of Traill's text than to the work as a whole. Interpreting Backwoods in terms of a blended generic template also has the potential disadvantage of minimizing its non-narrative features. In his critical analysis of this hybrid genre in "Remember, My Dear Friend," Thurston focuses more extensively on the distinctively travel narrative features of the works he studies than on those characteristic of the settler's handbook. In order to avoid such an analytical disparity, I will deal as exclusively as possible with the settler's guide components of Traill's text in this chapter.

But before proceeding, I would like to briefly consider the quotation included in the title of this chapter: "We begin to get used to our Robinson Crusoe sort of life." This phrase occurs at a crucial point in Backwoods: the beginning of letter eight, approximately forty percent of the way through the eighteen letters in the text. At this point, the Traills are temporarily residing with Samuel Strickland, Catharine's brother, while their log-cabin is under construction. Except for descriptions of First Nations people, most of the overtly travel narrative sections of Backwoods are past; the dominant concerns of the remaining letters relate to settler life and scientific observations.

Two critics have explored the link between Backwoods and Robinson Crusoe in some depth. T. D. MacLulich, focusing on the thematic and narrative links between these texts, suggests that Traill's "book resembles the story of the exploitive Crusoe, who constructs a home out of the raw materials his island supplies and the odds and ends he rescues from a wrecked ship. There is a fascination in watching her build a home in the wilderness which is like the fascination of observing Crusoe at work" (118). MacLulich also identifies significant differences between the stories: unlike Crusoe, Traill "is no solitary; it is a new community she sees growing around her, not a self-contained personal kingdom," and "the self-punitive aspect of Crusoe's shipwreck, the guilt and repentance he feels before he receives his deliverance" is missing from Backwoods (119). Rather than seeking deliverance, Traill transforms her "place of exile . . . through her own physical and mental exertions, into a true 'home'" (117).

More recently, Marian Fowler has argued that Defoe's work provides Traill with "both form and function" (65). She notes a number of structural and discursive similarities between the

two books: the claim to factual honesty made by both authors (although Robinson Crusoe is a novel, in his role as "Editor" Defoe describes it as "a just history of fact"); the common scientific "legacy of empiricism bequeathed by Bacon and Locke"; the presence of "a strong didacticism and a conventional piety" in Defoe and Traill's work; and a similarly determined, optimistic view of life, which Fowler deems "Robinson Crusoe's Power of Positive Thinking" (64-65). More problematically, Fowler suggests that Traill's "choice of a masculine hero suggests that initially in Canada she is voluntarily moving towards an androgynous ideal" (65). However, I would argue – in accordance with Misao Dean's approach, which I explore later in this chapter – that rather than embracing androgyny, Traill reconstitutes femininity in her new environment.

Fowler's assumption that Robinson Crusoe simply represents a traditional masculine hero "triumph[ing] over an alien environment" ignores a crucial aspect of the Robinsonade tradition. Although in its archetypal form Robinson Crusoe may appear to be an exclusively male fable, Jeanine Blackwell identifies a quite extensive "corpus of female Robinsonades" in German, French, Dutch, British and American literature of the eighteenth century (5). (Traill's 1852 novel, Canadian Crusoes, is of course a Robinsonade.) In these female versions of the castaway story, the heroines are more likely to "occupy and dominate social and emotional territory, where the male Robinsons learn to master their geographical surroundings" (Blackwell 14). Even in his original male incarnation the Crusoe figure lives, in Karen Lawrence's words, "like a middle-class 'domestic' woman" as "he progressively cultivates his exilic garden and, through the resources of his intelligence and labor, turns the uninhabited inland into a home" (52-3).[200] And although some nineteenth-century educational theorists worried about the potentially dangerous effect of Defoe's novel on impressionable young males, they recommended Robinson Crusoe for girls,

> . . . because they thought women were likely to learn to desire what Crusoe accomplished, a totally self-enclosed and functional domain where money did not really matter. It was no doubt because Crusoe was more female, according to the nineteenth century understanding of gender, than either Roxana or Moll that educators found his story more suitable reading for girls than for boys of an impressionable age." (Armstrong 16)

Given the domestic focus of the Crusoe story, its widespread popularity and its reputation

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[200] Lawrence cites Virginia Woolf's essay on Robinson Crusoe (included in The Second Common Reader), in which she reaches a similar conclusion about Crusoe's inherently middle-class domestic values (Woolf 54; Lawrence 52).

"as an exemplary text for women" (Lawrence 51), Traill's statement that, "[w]e begin to get used to our Robinson Crusoe kind of life" seems anything but surprising. But what I find interesting in Traill's analogy is the implication that the pioneer life she describes might be a temporary, rather than permanent state of affairs. Although on an explicit level Robinson Crusoe deals with details of the protagonist's survival – constructing a house, building a garden, and so on – hope and the expectation of rescue remain implicit throughout the story. Yet for Traill (and her sister, Susanna Moodie), emigration to Canada was permanent and irreversible. Her reference to Robinson Crusoe, although it leads into a section consisting of advice for settlers, harkens back to the genre of travel narrative and the convention of the round-trip, rather than one-way voyage, reminding us of the sometimes uneasy congruence between the conventions and perspectives of the generic templates underlying The Backwoods of Canada.

But let me now turn to the generic conventions of the settler's guide. Between 1820 and 1850, as emigration to Canada became an increasingly popular option for members of the British lower and middle-classes, a large number of settler's guides targeting this audience appeared on the market.[201] Such works, aimed at prospective or newly arrived residents of Upper Canada, combined advice and factual information (often in the form of maps, charts or tables) with varying amounts of narrative and description. Although the settler's guide was traditionally a male domain, Traill used this to her advantage: instead of simply conforming to the socially and rhetorically constructed masculine conventions of the genre, she set out to provide a companion text, a feminine "Backwoodswoman" to complement such works as William Dunlop's Statistical Sketches Of Upper Canada, For The Use of Emigrants: By A Backswoodsman.[202] As Traill makes explicit in her introduction to the first edition of Backwoods, she intends to provide something found in "few, if any" of "the numerous works on Canada that have been published within the last ten years . . . a faithful guide to the person on whose responsibility the whole comfort of a family depends – the mistress" (1). Accordingly, much – though certainly not all – of the advice and information included in Traill's text concerns housekeeping, domestic management and the attitudes that female emigrants need to adopt to succeed as pioneers. When

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[201] As I indicated in chapter three, Carl Ballstadt states that "[o]ver one hundred non-fiction accounts of emigration were published in Britain during the 1820s and 1830s" ("Catharine Parr Traill" 1:185).

[202] Dunlop's text, published in 1832, is referred to in Traill's introduction as "spirited and witty," though, as she qualifies, "it does not enter into the routine of feminine duties and employment, in a state of emigration" (1).

she includes material traditionally found in male-authored guides, such as descriptions of land clearing or house-raising, Traill positions herself as an onlooker rather than a participant.

Since Traill is so forthright about engendering Backwoods by positioning it as a "woman's" text – both in the sense that it is authored by a woman, and directed towards women – it is important to contextualize this work within women's writing about their experiences as settlers in Canada in the first half of the nineteenth century. As Carole Gerson suggests in her bibliographical study of 152 works written by women between 1728 and 1859, "the myth that women enjoyed a strong literary presence in early Canada" is quickly dispelled when one notes that of the 17,000 items contained in the Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproduction (CIHM), "the total number of texts authored by women is at most 300; eliminating items in French, translations, announcements . . . reduces the list by half" (Canada's Early Women Writers 4). When we narrow this list down to what Gerson classifies as "pioneer writing" – "instructive accounts relating to settlement in the New World, oriented towards fellow immigrants" – we are left with, in chronological order, six works: Traill's Backwoods (1836), Emily Beavan's Sketches and Tales Illustrative of Life in the Backwoods of New Brunswick (1845), Mary Ann Shadd's A Plea for Emigration; or, Notes of Canada West . . . for the information of coloured emigrants (1852), Susanna Moodie's Roughing It in the Bush (1852), Susanna Moodie's Life in the Clearings (1853) and Traill's The Female Emigrant's Guide, and Hints on Canadian Housekeeping (1855).[203] As is obvious from this list, Traill's assessment of the novelty of her text – at least in terms of its perspective – was quite justified. The Backwoods of Canada clearly established an, admittedly limited, niche market for settler's accounts written by women and arguably influenced each of the texts listed above.[204]

One difficulty in writing about the genre of the settler's handbook is the paucity of

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[203] Of only peripheral significance to this chapter, but relevant to the broader context of nineteenth-century women's writings contemporaneous to Traill's work, only two travel accounts about Canada were published by women prior to Backwoods; the most prominent work, Anna Jameson's Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada did not appear until 1838 (Gerson, Canada's Early Women Writers 10, 40).

[204] Comparisons between Moodie's settler's accounts and Traill's have been quite common; a comparison between Emily Beavan's Sketches and Tales Illustrative of Life in the Backwoods of New Brunswick and Backwoods might prove quite insightful. Like Traill, Beavan writes about Indian summer, the aurora borealis, and First Nations people, as well as describing the inside of residences and comparing "Yankee" and British manners.

theoretically grounded critical material available.[205] In "The Fractious Politics of a Settler Society: Canada," Daiva Stasiulis and Radha Jhappan provide a thoughtful overview of Canada as a settler colony and suggest a context for understanding race and class relations in nineteenth-century Upper Canada (concerns which are implicit in settler's handbooks), but they do not analyse specific texts or textual conventions. The most comprehensive, though somewhat generalized, exploration of nineteenth-century settler's guides is found in Daniel Keon's PhD thesis, "The 'New World' Idea in British North America: An Analysis of Some British Promotional, Travel and Settler Writings, 1784 to 1860." Writing from the perspective of intellectual history, Keon identifies a surprising uniformity in the more than four hundred and fifty works he examines, "a harmony in the British authors' purposes" (81). He identifies the central characteristic of these texts as a "utilitarian point of view" – not in the philosophical sense of Utilitarianism, but in the more general sense of an underlying concern, if not obsession, with usefulness (95-6).[206] Closely linked to this utilitarian perspective are two thematic concerns: an emphasis on productivity and what Keon terms the "New World mentality," a belief that "[h]ere in the New World the emigrant would realize a fundamental goal of his life – to achieve and enjoy greater material prosperity" (99). Another common feature of the settler's guides Keon studied is an assumption that readers would prefer to live under British rule and, linked to this, an implicit belief in the superiority of Canada to the United States.[207] A frequently reiterated desire is to counter "the pernicious influence of . . . misconceptions" about life in British North America (126).[208] Keon also identifies a number of significant rhetorical features of the settler's guides he analyses. Often "the authors wrote their books as if they were engaged in conversation with the

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[205] As Whitlock explains, "[l]ittle has been done to theorize the settler subject" (41).

[206] Edward Dahl interprets this utilitarian outlook as a prevailing attitude towards the wilderness in the works of Traill, Strickland and the Moodies (18).

[207] In Traill's text this attitude is less strident than in many of the works Keon studied. As I suggested in chapter six, when Traill compares Upper Canada and the United States, she concerns herself mostly with the inferiority of American behaviour and social customs.

[208] One misconception frequently dispelled was the harshness of Canadian winters (Keon 127), a topic Traill addresses at the beginning of letter thirteen. In response to an unidentified correspondent, Traill writes "You say you fear the rigours of the Canadian winter will kill me. I never enjoyed better health, nor so good, as since it commenced. There is a degree of spirit and vigour infused into one's blood by the purity of the air that is quite exhilarating. The very snow seems whiter and more beautiful than it does in our damp vapoury climate" (149).

prospective emigrants" and "even discussed how they viewed their relationship to their readers" (79, 80). A question and answer format, such as Traill utilizes in letter eleven, also characterizes many of these works.[209]

Like Keon, John Thurston analyses both thematic and rhetorical features of settler's handbooks. In "'Remember, My Dear Friend': Ideology and Genre in Upper Canadian Travel and Settlement Narratives," he describes the optimistic ethos of "romantic individualism" which permeates such texts, a perspective similar to Keon's "New World mentality." Thurston also stresses the relationship between the writers of these works and their intended audience, arguing that settler's handbooks "produce a colony for an interested public" (183). The writer/reader relationship is emphasized through the "naked subjectivity of the recording 'I' . . . [which] serves as both apology and challenge, excuse for partiality and limitation, and guarantee of truth and authenticity" (184).

Thurston and Keon's analyses of settler's handbooks provide a useful generic context for Backwoods, especially since – as with travel narratives – there is always a danger of assuming that features of a particular text are distinctive or unique, rather than generically conventional, or of assigning an inappropriate significance to a specific passage or rhetorical stance. As I suggested in chapter two, a question which engages my attention is what factors enabled Traill's text to flourish in a nineteenth-century market saturated with travel accounts and settler's handbooks, to maintain a degree of prominence as a work of autobiographical and historical significance over the next hundred years, and then to move into the established Canadian literary canon in the latter half of the twentieth century. This question is especially poignant with regard to the settler's handbook components of the text, since this material seems to have the least literary potential and the least immediate relevance to a twenty-first century audience.[210]

The answer to my question lies, in part, in the persona Traill adopts in Backwoods. The fascination she conveys with all she encounters and her refusal to complain, blended with a certain amount of honest self-appraisal, draw her reader into the text. Instead of simply sharing

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[209] An extreme example, James Strachan's A Visit to the Province of Upper Canada in 1819, was written entirely in the form of responses to questions rather than chapters (Keon 84).

[210] This attitude is exemplified by Marian Fowler's negative response to the advice for settlers offered in Backwoods. In The Embroidered Tent, she characterizes Traill as "Mrs Happy Homemaker" and suggests that "[t]he basic assumption of The Backwoods of Canada is that piling up around one a substantial heap of worldly goods, acquired by hard work and habits of thrift, will make one happy, and successful in the eyes of the world" (78).

her expertise in these sections, as often as not she leads us through the learning process. Notice how, in the following description of house-raising, Traill writes from the perspective of an outsider, emphasizing her passivity and adopting a self-conscious naïveté:

> The following day I went to survey the newly-raised edifice, but was sorely puzzled, as it presented very little appearance of a house. It was merely an oblong square of logs raised one above the other, with open spaces between every row of logs. The spaces for the doors and windows were not then chopped out, and the rafters were not up. In short it looked a very queer sort of place, and I returned home a little disappointed, and wondering that my husband should be so well pleased with the progress that had been made. (98)

As we might expect, Traill is soon reassured that the dwelling will become a standard house: a "day or two after this . . . it had not quite so much the look of a bird-cage as before," she informs us (98).

The persona Traill adopts in such passages is interesting because it is very atypical for a settler's handbook. Instead of speaking with the experienced voice of a backwoods pioneer, she maintains the freshness and emotionalism of the traveller's perspective, referring lightly to the "bird-cage" aspect of her new home and emphasizing her personal responses: the house looks "very queer" and she feels "a little disappointed," "wondering" at her husband's pleasure with the supposed progress in its construction. Even when Traill slips in information about the cost of wages and the problematic use of unseasoned lumber in the construction of a floor, as she does in the next few lines, she balances this with narrative details and a conversational tone: "We console ourselves with the prospect that by next summer the boards will all be seasoned, and then the house is to be turned topsy-turvy, by having the floors all relaid, jointed, and smoothed" (99). In this and similar passages, Traill maintains a careful balance between entertaining anecdote and useful information, constantly shifting between the personal and the general, the experiential and the informative.

More conventionally, Traill adopts a question and answer format in letter eleven. As Keon explains, this discursive format is quite common in nineteenth-century settlement guides, though the carefully constructed, balanced sentences which characterize Traill's text lend a charm to her material, and the strength of her opinions and distinctive voice give it vitality found in few such works. In the following section, Traill answers the questions, "Who are the persons best adapted for bush-settlers?" and "Who are the next best suited for emigration?":

> But there is another class of persons most unsuited to the woods: these are the wives and families of those who have once been opulent tradesmen, accustomed to the daily enjoyment of every luxury that

> money could procure or fashion invent; whose ideas of happiness are connected with a round of amusements, company, and all the novelties of dress and pleasure that the gay world can offer. Young ladies who have been brought up at fashionable boarding-schools, with a contempt of every thing useful or economical, make very indifferent settlers' wives. Nothing can be more unfortunate than the situations in the woods of Canada of persons so educated: disgusted with the unpleasant change in their mode of life, wearied and discontented with all the objects around them, they find every exertion a trouble, and every occupation a degradation. (127)

As is frequently the case, in this passage Traill specifically addresses female emigrants and while her disapproval of fashionable and idle young women may seem harsh, it is certainly not hypocritical. The daughter of a businessman who fell on hard times, raised at home in an environment of loving, yet puritanical strictness, Traill – by all indications – never enjoyed a life of fashionable ease. Nor does she appear inclined to have done so: on several occasions in Backwoods she reiterates her delight at being liberated from the artificial world of fashionable England.

When Traill targets the behaviour of male settlers, she focuses less on attitude and temperament and more on the ability to perform manual labour and acquire rudimentary skills in carpentry, construction and agriculture. Speaking with absolute certitude, she informs us that, "[t]he poor gentleman of delicate and refined habits, who cannot afford to employ all the labour requisite to carry on the business of clearing on a tolerable large scale, and is unwilling or incapable of working himself, is not fitted for Canada," (126-7).[211] On certain issues, such as queries about finances, Traill simply defers to male authorities. In response to the question, "What will be the most profitable way of employing money, if a settler brought out capital more than was required for his own expenditure?" she writes, "On this head, I am not of course competent to give advice. My husband and friends, conversant with the affairs of the colonies,

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[211] For a reader familiar with Traill's biography, this comment seems particularly poignant. Thomas Traill, an Oxford-educated man from an aristocratic Scottish family, suffered from debilitating bouts of depression and proved to be singularly unsuited to pioneer life. In a letter written to her sister Susanna in 1852, Traill writes that her husband "is utterly cast down unable to form a plan or think for his own benefit and becomes a prey to every one" (Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman 70-71). In a private journal entry written after Thomas' death, she felt compelled to "bear testimony to . . . [her] husband's worth," since it was apparently disparaged by others. She describes him as "a scholar and a true gentleman" (Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman 29), attributes which Traill suggests – in the settler's handbook sections of Backwoods – are of limited value on a backwoods farm.

say, lend it on mortgage, on good landed securities, and at a high rate of interest" (128). On other occasions, when describing obviously male concerns, Traill adopts the persona of a naïve onlooker (as in the description of house-raising referred to earlier).

The advice most frequently offered in Backwoods deals with the attitudes and attributes pioneers should cultivate. Traill frequently reiterates the need for determination, hard work and patience, and the development of her statements on this theme is interesting. In letter four, which provides an ongoing account of her journey to the backwoods, Traill optimistically announces that she and her husband "are prepared to meet with many obstacles, and endure considerable privations" (32). However, a few pages later she qualifies her optimism: "I perhaps overlooked at that time the labour, the difficulties, the privations to which these settlers [she had been listening to an enthusiastic account of established settler life] had been exposed when they first came to this country" (37). In the letter which follows, Traill cites the advice of an experienced settler – advice which again forces her to confront the unreality of some of her expectations:

> "Never mind books," said my companion, "use your own reason. Look on those interminable forests, through which the eye can only penetrate a few yards, and tell me how those vast timbers are to be removed, utterly extirpated, I may say, from the face of the earth, the ground cleared and burnt, a crop sown and fenced, and a house to shelter you raised, without difficulty, without expense, and without great labour." (48)

In letter seven, as their journey slows down and they approach the backwoods settlement which will become their new home, Traill dwells at length on the necessity of hard work and patience, speaking alternately through her own voice and that of an "intelligent friend." She writes of "long years of unremitting and patient labour" (72) and of labouring men who "suffer much privation before they reap the benefit of their independence" (73). Traill returns to these themes on a number of further occasions, speaking with the increasing confidence and pride of an established settler, extolling the virtues of manual labour and hard work: "the officer turns his sword into a ploughshare, and his lance into a sickle . . . . Surely this is as it should be in a country where independence is inseparable from industry" (195).

The most specific, and specifically "feminine," advice offered by Traill deals with the acquisition and preparation of food on a pioneer farm. However, her treatment of such concerns tends to be random rather than systematic.[212] An interesting example can be found in letter ten

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[212] This is in sharp contrast to her 1854 work, The Female Emigrant's Guide And Hints on Canadian Housekeeping, where she devotes sections to gardening, baking, managing a dairy,

when Traill devotes several pages to the topic of producing maple sugar. She describes the process of tapping and thickening in some detail, yet the information is framed in terms of a personal narrative, rather than presented as a recipe or series of guidelines. She begins by addressing the reader – or supposed recipient of this letter, since the closing reads "Farewell, dearest of friends" – announcing, "But I must now tell you of our sugar-making" (112). Before moving on to practical details, she alludes to the procedure as an "experiment . . . on a limited scale . . . sufficient to initiate us in the art and mystery of boiling the sap into molasses." At several points in her description she stops to reflect on the aesthetic qualities of the process: "[i]t was a pretty and picturesque sight to see the sugar-boilers," she informs us, and the thickened sugar "looks more beautiful when the grain is coarse and sparkling" (113). Traill closes this section by returning to the personal thread of her narrative: "Besides the sugar, I made about three gallons of molasses, which proved a great comfort to us, forming a nice ingredient in cakes and an excellent sauce" (113).

Interestingly, this is one of the passages to which material was added after Traill's initial submission of the manuscript. The additional section, which was not part of the work as initially envisioned, lacks the liveliness of the core text. She opens by announcing that "[t]his spring I have made maple-sugar of a much finer colour and grain than any I have yet seen" (124) and then provides a step-by-step description of the process she followed. The somewhat ironic persona of the earlier section who writes that the tree-tapping was "managed according to rule, you may be sure" and occasionally detaches herself from the process to write as a naïve observer, is replaced by the more neutral, and far less entertaining voice of an experienced pioneer matron who concludes that, "I observed that in general maple-sugar, as it is commonly made, is hard and compact, showing little grain, and weighing very heavy in proportion to its bulk. Exactly the opposite is the case with that I made, it being extremely light for its bulk, all the heavy molasses having been separated, instead of dried into the sugar" (125). The contrasting tone and diction of these two passages – the material quoted in the previous paragraph from letter ten of the first edition, based on Traill's initial manuscript, and the quotations from the accompanying material (which was printed as an appendix to the first edition, but integrated into the text in the form of chapter endnotes in the CEECT edition) – is a typical stylistic discrepancy, evident throughout the work. Although both sections fall within the domain of the settler's handbook, those in the core

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and so on, all listed in alphabetical order at the outset. (This text is often referred to as The Canadian Settler's Guide, the title given to the 1855 edition and used thereafter.)

text tend to be anecdotal and somewhat entertaining, while the additional material, which focuses on practical details and instructions, tends to be more mundane.

As I suggested earlier, the specific nature of the practical, rather than behavioural, advice Traill offers to settlers in this work seems quite random. She touches on the difficulties of ordering groceries, on the production of maple sugar, vinegar, pickles, soap and candles, and provides some advice about rearing calves and cultivating Indian corn. Yet she includes few guidelines for preparing and tending a backwoods garden (less than a paragraph), a key responsibility for most women in a pioneer household, and makes no mention of curing meat and fish, nor of baking (except for a few comments about hop-rising), or dealing with illnesses and injuries. One need only look at Traill's later work, The Female Emigrant's Guide And Hints on Canadian Housekeeping (1854), a systematically organized handbook for pioneer women, to notice the limitations and arbitrariness of the advice offered in Backwoods.

Since much – though not all – of the practical advice and guidance included in the text is directed at women, Carl Ballstadt has suggested that Backwoods can be read as a "New World Equivalent of such English guidebooks [to appropriate feminine behaviour] as Mrs. John Sandford's Woman in her Social and Domestic Character (1831)" ("Literary History" 197). This argument has been further developed by Marian Fowler, Misao Dean and Gillian Whitlock, who analyse conduct guide features of Traill's work in their critical studies.[213] Marian Fowler has, as I suggested earlier, the least patience with such nineteenth-century domestic handbooks, dismissing them as preaching "the gospel of domesticity," and suggesting that "[i]n Canada, Catharine could comfortably put on her apron knowing that she was conforming to the newest female role-model" (79-80). The Backwoods of Canada, Fowler argues, "is one long boast of her newly acquired domestic skills" (80). Misao Dean, adopting a more historical and less condemnatory stance, explores the context and impact of such domestic guides, discovering in these works assumptions about gender and femininity which, while essentialist, were not necessarily disempowering. As I explain in chapter three, Dean argues that femininity "created a sphere of discourse in which women were granted authority, and generated a concept of the inner self which valued women for their personal qualities rather than their sexual attributes or their fortunes" (19-20). Gillian Whitlock considers the links between femininity and domesticity in conduct guides, explaining

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[213] Marian Fowler, The Embroidered Tent, 1982 (79-83); Misao Dean Practising Femininity, 1998 (20-28); Gillian Whitlock The Intimate Empire, 2000 (52-56). Fowler and Whitlock deal almost exclusively with Backwoods, while Dean's major focus is on The Female Emigrant's Guide And Hints on Canadian Housekeeping.

that "[m]anuals such as this had proliferated throughout the preceding century, presenting a female subjectivity in terms of a grammar that invariably links virtue in a woman to good household management" (53).

However, there is a danger in reading Backwoods too narrowly through the focus of the conduct guide. While the settler's handbook sections of Traill's text convey an implicit message regarding the acceptability of certain modes of behaviour for the "mistress of the house," they are less monolithic than Fowler, Dean and Whitlock suggest. Still, the interplay of social class, gender and domesticity in Traill's text is significant, and using the work of these critics as a starting point – especially Dean and Whitlock's studies, since their analysis is the most balanced and theoretically grounded – I will consider the role of these discursive threads in the settler's handbook sections of Backwoods.

As implied in the introductory paragraphs of this chapter and in my brief discussion of the Crusoe motif, issues of social class are inherent in Traill's presentation of advice for the domestic management of a backwoods home, and in the more general guidelines she offers for the conduct and attitudes appropriate for a settler's wife. At the outset of Backwoods, Traill identifies herself and her husband as members of "the higher class" of immigrant (1) characterized by "delicate nurture and honourable intent" (3). At home in England their social class was marked by their education (Thomas attended Oxford University; Catharine, although educated at home, was strictly supervised in her learning and was conversant with history, geography, literature and several European languages), the land-owning status of their families (Thomas was heir apparent to a large estate in Scotland, while the Stricklands owned a spacious manor house), their associations (Thomas had known Lockhart, Sir Walter Scott's biographer, at Oxford and Catharine was on the social periphery of the London liberal circle of Thomas Pringle and his anti-slavery campaign) and their occupations (Thomas had been an officer in a Scottish regiment while Catharine wrote children's books, but never worked outside the home). Yet there was a subtle class distinction between the two families, and based on the private correspondence of one of Thomas Traill's sisters, it appears that his family were initially unhappy about his marriage to Catharine, believing that he had married beneath himself (Fowler 61). Although the Stricklands had aristocratic ambitions, claiming a distant, but apparently unwarranted kinship with the British royal family, and moving in genteel social circles, their wealth came from the father's business pursuits, which suffered a sharp decline before his death. Catharine and her siblings were raised with values of financial prudence and the expectation of hard work, and she began to contribute to the family income after the failure of the family business in 1818. These middle-class values

made Catharine a far more suitable candidate for emigration than her husband. Comments in both Backwoods and her private correspondence make it clear that Thomas Traill was far less prepared, psychologically and physically, to perform the manual work necessary to establish a successful backwoods farm with a minimal of capital.

Like many women, Traill had increased her social standing through marriage and her claim to be an upper-class emigrant would not have been controversial. However, in colonial Canada social class was less clearly demarcated than in England, and this appears to have been a cause of some unease for Traill. On one hand, she praises the egalitarian nature of communal working parties, or "bees," a "laudible practice . . . grown out of necessity" (89). On such occasions, she informs us, "[a]ll distinctions of rank, education, and wealth are for the time voluntarily laid aside . . . [and] [e]ach individual is actuated by the benevolent desire of affording help to the helpless, and exerting himself to raise a home for the homeless" (89). Traill's qualifying phrase – "for the time" – is an important one, however. As she clarifies in letter fifteen, members of the lower classes are not treated in such an egalitarian manner on a regular basis. Traill assures her readers that, "[o]ur servants are as respectful, or nearly so, as those at home; nor are they admitted to our tables, or placed on an equality with us, excepting at 'bees,' and such kinds of public meetings; when they usually conduct themselves with a propriety that would afford an example to some that call themselves gentlemen" (195).

Class distinctions in the pioneer settlements of Upper Canada were based on association, upbringing, manners and education, but unlike at home in Great Britain, could not take into account the nature of the daily tasks an individual performed – or, as was more often the case, the nature of the tasks he or she would not deign to perform. Of necessity, pioneers such as the Traills worked alongside their hired help, becoming at least moderately adept at all kinds of manual labour. At times Traill expresses a pride in the independence she and her husband have gained, writing glowingly of "the officer who turns his sword into a ploughshare, and his lance into a sickle" (195). Yet she returns repeatedly to the theme that such occupations do not imply a lowering of standards: "We pride ourselves on conforming to circumstances; and as a British officer must needs be a gentleman and his wife a lady, perhaps we repose quietly on that incontestable proof of our gentility, and can afford to be useful without injuring it" (195). The phrase "must needs be" and the qualifying "perhaps" in this claim suggest interesting undertones. As an officer is by definition a gentleman, and his wife a lady, they would seemingly be incapable of behaving in a manner unbecoming of their social position and the "incontestable proof" of their status should be obvious to everyone. However, Traill also suggests, in the statement quoted in

the previous paragraph, that on occasion members of the lower classes behave in a more genteel manner than "some that call themselves gentlemen." This idea is also raised earlier in the text, in letter six, when Thomas is quoted as informing the upstart engineer that a "rich man or a high-born man, if he is rude, ill-mannered, and ignorant, is no more a gentleman than yourself" (65). The implication seems to be that members of what Traill refers to as the "higher class" of emigrant have an obligation to behave according to the genteel behavioural codes of their homeland and risk lowering themselves if they fail to do so; however, members of the lower classes may behave admirably, and even set an example for the gentry, without meriting a place at their tables.

As Whitlock indicates, Traill's insistence that class is based on education and manners, rather than on the type of work one performs, is crucial to the maintenance of her self-esteem. In Backwoods she "envisages[s] a class structure where the work doesn't contravene the norms of gentility" (53). Traill calls for a revised definition of class in the context of Upper Canada, since according to the British class system she and her husband have demeaned themselves, both in terms of the tasks they perform and the humbleness of their home. "[D]ownward mobility" or "aristocratic dissolution" was, as Whitlock explains, a social concern in colonial Canada, posing "threats to the maintenance of settler authority and the boundaries between colonizer and colonized" (61).

In Upper Canada, as in other British colonies, social class was closely aligned with the colonial enterprise and in this environment texts such as Backwoods were constitutive as well as representative of social order, functioning as "one component in the social technology of colonialism meant to regulate specific segments of the populace both at home and abroad" (Thurston, "Toryism" 85). Through both her narrative and sections of practical advice, Traill presents her personal experiences as a series of tidy events with clearly delineated results and implications, and the pioneer home she and her husband establish as an extension of British social order. The rhetorical device of a series of "letters home" enables Traill to maintain an emotional and filial bond with her motherland. One of the implicit messages of Backwoods is that the emigrant's goal is to recreate in the New World, with a few unavoidable modifications, the refined and regulated world left behind; the text itself provides explicit advice on how to face and overcome the inevitable hardships encountered *en route* to this goal. In this context, knowing how to produce maple sugar or use hops to leaven bread, or more generally, adopting the attitudes essential for success in a pioneer environment, become social virtues rather than incidental pieces of knowledge. As Traill emphasizes in her introduction to Backwoods, an emigrant officer such

as her husband plays a vital role in the imperial enterprise by "leading the advanced guard of civilization, and . . . serving his country as much by founding peaceful villages and pleasant homesteads in the trackless wilds, as ever he did by personal courage, or military stratagem, in times of war" (3), and his wife's task is to facilitate his role by serving as "an active and a cheerful partner" (4).

Traill does not distance herself from the colonial enterprise in any way. As Simon Gikandi explains, while we may be tempted to read colonial women as

> . . . the absolute other in the colonial relation so that we can unpack the universalism of the imperial narrative and its masculine ideologies . . . the result (positing white women as figures of colonial alterity, for example) can be achieved only through the repression of their cultural agency and the important role they play in the institutionalization of the dominant discourse of empire and the authority of colonial culture. (122)

In the world of Traill's text, the successful development of Upper Canada rests, to a significant degree, on the personal attributes and domestic virtues of the wives and daughters who accompany male emigrants.

As I emphasize in my analysis of Traill's introduction in chapter three, discourses of domesticity, femininity and colonialism are closely linked in The Backwoods of Canada. But the ideological concepts of femininity and domestic virtue could not simply be transferred from genteel England to a pioneer homestead in Upper Canada without alteration. What the settler's handbook portions of Traill's text provide are a series of guidelines for women on how to adapt to pioneer life without compromising their femininity. In this context, femininity is not construed as passive; as Misao Dean explains, "femininity was (and is) its own kind of power, however limited, and women . . . grasped that power in order to construct themselves and be constructed as authoritative" (10). Yet in Upper Canada, as in other colonial societies, femininity remained a "particularly contested discursive formation," its roots conservative, while its implications for social mobility were potentially revolutionary. It drew

> . . . on a conservative belief in universal and continuous values which is contradicted by the liberal rhetoric of freedom characteristic of the New World. The supposed passivity and physical limitations of the nineteenth-century woman were contradicted by the necessity for active and physical labour on the Canadian bush farm. Femininity was reconstituted as consisting of the virtues which were instrumental to class mobility: primarily, a woman's ability to create domestic comfort and well-being wholly by her own labour and without expending any of the family income. (Dean 12)

Traill briefly addresses the issue of appropriate feminine behaviour on a number of occasions, including the introduction, but it is only in letter eleven (which is organized around a series of questions and responses) that she discourses at some length on the topic. In response to the question "What are the necessary qualifications of a settler's wife; and the usual occupations of the female part of a settler's family?" she provides a list of attributes: "a settler's wife should be active, industrious, ingenious, cheerful, not above putting her hand to whatever is necessary to be done in her household, nor too proud to profit by the advice and experience of older portions of the community" (130). Traill then turns to religious authority to reinforce her claims, citing an example from Proverbs and alluding to the necessity of doing one's "duty in the state of life unto which it may have pleased God to call one" (130). As Whitlock explains, Traill espouses "a major tenet of evangelical prescriptions of femininity in marriage: the [belief that the] well-being and prosperity of the husband is dependent on the ability of the wife to manage the emotional resources of the household" (53).[214] From Traill's perspective, an unquestioning acceptance of divine authority and a "cheerful conformity to circumstances" matched with as much "practical knowledge" as possible is the recipe for successful pioneer life as a woman (Backwoods 130).

As Traill's admonitions imply, the standards of appropriate feminine behaviour outlined in The Backwoods of Canada differ from those prevailing in her home country. Femininity in early to mid-nineteenth century England, although certainly neither a monolithic entity nor an uncontested discourse, was associated, at least for members of the upper class and aspiring middle class, with genteel pursuits and leisure activities. Given the vastly altered circumstances of their daily lives, one might expect pioneer women to reject the dominant discourses of femininity as incompatible with reality; yet, as Misao Dean explains, the response of individuals such as Traill was to reconstitute their femininity "by using the concept of the gendered inner self" (13). In Backwoods femininity is defined in terms of internal values, centred on the ability to create and maintain an economically viable domestic environment. Conceptually, women are still represented as domestic by nature; the difference is that in Traill's discourse, women are expected to create the domestic environment in which their families reside. There is no pretence in The Backwoods of Canada that domestic comfort can be achieved by anything other than unremitting labour and intensive economic management. Such active management might be construed in a

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[214] In chapter three, I provide a brief overview of the nineteenth-century evangelical beliefs and discourse which linked domesticity, femininity and religious piety, and rooted these socially constructed modes of behaviour within the domestic environment of the home.

gendered context as masculine, but by focusing on the "essentially feminine inner self" – the unchanging qualities of "modesty, frugality, devotion to duty and self-control" – Traill is able to maintain a continuity with the values of her homeland while authorizing new forms of "feminine" behaviour for herself and her Canadian readers (Dean 13).

Traill suggests that the value of appropriate feminine behaviour extends far beyond the individual, influencing family life and potentially determining the success of the colonial enterprise. As she warns her readers, housewives who fail to be suitably cheerful and ingenious, and "give way to melancholy regrets," have the potential to "destroy the harmony of their fire-side, and deaden the energies of their husbands and brothers by constant and useless repining" (130-1). Yet those women who provide the "example and assistance of an active and cheerful partner" enable their husbands to "struggle up the hill of Independence" as they strive to establish themselves in a new country (4).

In letter eleven, Traill exemplifies her warnings by providing a sketch of a foolish pioneer woman she encounters. As Traill informs us, she could "hardly forbear smiling" when the woman complained about her inability to step out to the shops for a chat on Saturday evening. Traill archly concludes that

> . . . for the sake of a dish of gossip, while lolling her elbows on the counter of a village-shop, this foolish woman would have forgone the advantages, real solid advantages, of having land and cattle, and poultry and food, and firing and clothing, and all for a few years' hard work, which, her husband wisely observed, must have been exerted at home, with no other end in view than an old age of poverty or a refuge from starvation in a parish workhouse. (131)

In passages such as this, Traill presents herself as superior to what she perceives as trivial feminine pursuits such as gossiping and shopping; elsewhere she expresses relief at being free from pointless social constraints: "we *bush-settlers* are more independent: we do what we like; we dress as we find most suitable and most convenient; we are totally without the fear of any Mr. or Mrs. Grundy; and having shaken off the trammels of Grundyism, we laugh at the absurdity of those who voluntarily forge afresh and hug their chains" (194).

Just as femininity is presented as empowering in the context of pioneer life, domesticity takes on a broader role in the world of Traill's text. Domestic abilities become economic virtues in The Backwoods of Canada: only through thrift, regulation and attention to detail can a pioneer housewife maintain a prosperous and harmonious home. As Elizabeth Thompson explains, these virtues, hand in hand with specific domestic skills such as the ability to bake bread or produce soap, are presented as superior to "the decorative, idle skills of an English lady" (The Pioneer

Woman 4). Traill subtly "impress[es] upon her reader that, while the life of a pioneer woman may be difficult, it is not degrading" (Thompson 4).

In one of the later letters in the text, Traill expounds upon the problems involved in writing a settler's guide: "It is . . . far more difficult to write on the subject of emigration than most persons think," she informs us in letter fifteen, adding that, the topic "embraces so wide a field that what would be perfectly correct as regards some part of the province would by no means prove so as regarded another" (204). With a conscious eye to potential critics, she carefully qualifies her advice, specifying that "[m]uch depends on the tempers, habits, and dispositions of the emigrants themselves" (205). She encourages her reader "to use his best judgment" in weighing the pros and cons of emigration, yet admits to the limitations of her arguments: "It would take volumes to discuss every argument for and against, and to point out exactly who are and who are not fit subjects for emigration" (205). The shifting gender of Traill's reader in this final section from letter fifteen, in which she addresses the issue of deciding whether or not to emigrate, is interesting. In one paragraph the reader addressed is clearly male: he must "use his best judgment . . . in a matter of such importance [i.e. emigration] not only as regards himself, but the happiness and welfare of those over whose destinies Nature has made him the guardian" (204). On the next page, the intended reader is female, and Traill is at her most didactic. She returns to the idea of a "Backwoodswoman" modelled on Dunlop's text, which she raised in the opening sentences of her introduction, suggesting that it

> . . . might be written in the same spirit, setting forth a few pages, in the history of bush-ladies, as examples for our sex. Indeed, we need some wholesome admonitions on our duties and the folly of repining at following and sharing the fortunes of our spouses, whom we have vowed in happier hours to love "in riches and in poverty, in sickness and in health." Too many pronounce these words without heeding their importance, and without calculating the chances that may put their faithfulness to the severe test of quitting home, kindred, and country, to share the hard lot of a settler's life; for this sacrifice renders it hard to be borne; but the truly attached wife will do this, and more also, if required by the husband of her choice. (205)

I have quoted this passage at length because it fits uneasily with the letter which follows – recounting a visit to the summer camp of Traill's Aboriginal neighbours – and with much of the material in Backwoods, and because it brings to the forefront tensions within the settler's guide sections of the text. For the first time, Traill rhetorically identifies herself with unsatisfied pioneer wives, suggesting that "*we* need some wholesome admonitions on *our* duties" and on the importance of cheerfully "sharing the fortunes of *our* spouses" (italics mine, here and throughout

this paragraph). Yet it is just such advice that Traill opened her text with, outlining the responsibilities settler women must cheerfully assume, and in the more than two hundred pages preceding this statement she has provided numerous examples of exemplary behaviour – sometimes explicitly, sometimes through her own actions and attitudes. Similarly, Traill's suggestion that "a Backwoodswoman *might* be written," seems highly incongruous at this point in the work. After these statements, Traill reverts to the more superior stance of the settler persona, and now distances herself from the foolish women who "pronounce these words [marriage vows] without heeding their importance, and without calculating the chances that may put *their* faithfulness to the severe test." In the final phrase of her paragraph, the obvious implication is that she is "the truly attached wife [who] will do this, and more, if required by the husband of her choice" (205).

The tensions in this passage may result from an inconsistent editing on Traill's part. The original source of this section is apparently a letter to a friend, rather than to Traill's mother or sister, the addressee of the previous letters. She opens this letter with the statement that "I promised when I parted from you before I left England to write as soon as I could give you any satisfactory account of our settlement in this country," recalling the assurance she makes to her mother at the beginning of letter one that she will fulfill her request to "provide a minute detail of our voyage." Traill avoids repeating earlier accounts of her journey by suggesting that her friend "will have heard" of her travel experiences through her letters to her "dear mother," and proceeds to provide an overview of her current situation. Nevertheless, the comment at the close of the letter, cited previously, suggests that Traill is vaguely considering writing a settler's guide for women (a "Backwoodswoman"). While such a suggestion may fit within the context of a letter specifically dated "September the 20th, 1834" (most, though not all, of the letters in Backwoods are dated), it seems out of place within the broader context of what had become a published work of the kind our narrator suggests "might be written" (205).

Letter fifteen is an interesting chapter in discursive and generic terms. Although informative, this section of Backwoods includes neither the specific advice about establishing a pioneer home, nor the developed scientific descriptions which characterize most of the letters in the latter half of Traill's work. Instead, our writer seems anxious to persuade her unnamed addressee, and perhaps herself, that she has made the right choice in emigrating, and taking this further, generalizes in enthusiastic terms about the wonders of Canada. In what sounds increasingly like a tract promoting emigration, Traill declares that her "situation is very agreeable, and each day increases its value," that "Canada is the land of hope; here every thing is new; every

thing going forward" and that "[t]here is a constant excitement on the minds of emigrants" (186-7). On a personal level, she assures us that although she misses Britain, "there are new and delightful ties that bind" her to Canada and, for the first time in her text, expounds at some length on the joys of motherhood. "Have I not here first tasted the rapturous delight arising from maternal feelings?" she inquires, followed by the declaration that "[w]hen my eye rests on my smiling darling, or I feel his warm breath upon my cheek, I would not exchange the joy that fills my breast for any pleasure the world could offer me" (192-3). Traill follows this statement by imagining a possible response from the friend to whom the letter is addressed, and perhaps, from her readers: "'But this feeling is not confined to the solitude of your Canadian forests, my dear friend,' you will say" (193). She continues with the dialogic format, addressing her audience as "you" throughout the next few paragraphs as she argues, perhaps a little too forcefully to be convincing, that she loves the liberty and independence of Canadian society. Traill then becomes somewhat defensive, insisting that she and the members of her social circle ("mostly military or naval"), although they "meet on equal grounds . . . are, of course, well acquainted with the rules of good breeding and polite life; too much so to allow any deviations from those laws that good taste, good sense, and good feeling have established" (194-5).

Passages such as this prompt Marian Fowler to argue that Traill's tone becomes "slightly hysterical" as Backwoods develops and our narrator tries desperately to convince herself of the desirability of her situation, clinging to English class advantages which have become almost meaningless in the Canadian wilderness (75, 86). Certainly, Traill's tone is inconsistent here, flitting from the deliberately light-hearted in the letter's opening, as she quotes from Shakespeare's Puck,

> Prepare your patience, then, my dear friend, for a long and rambling epistle, in which I may possibly prove somewhat of a Will-o'-the-wisp, and having made you follow me in my desultory wanderings, –
>
> Over hill, over dale,
> Through bush, through briar,
> Over park over pale,
> Through flood, through fire, –
>
> Possibly leave you in the midst of a big cedar swamp, or among the pathless mazes of our wild woods, without a clue to guide you, or even a *blaze* to light you on your way. (185)

to the smugness of, "[a]mong many advantages we in this township possess, it is certainly no inconsiderable one that the lower or working class of settlers are well disposed, and quite free

from the annoying Yankee manners that distinguish many of the earlier-settled townships" (195), and closing with the self-deprecating comment that, "my dull letter, grown to a formidable packet, will tire you, and make you wish it at the bottom of the Atlantic" (205).

Instead of becoming irritated by Traill's persona in this letter, a more fruitful approach is to consider what makes this section of Backwoods problematic. The general generic template is the settler's guide, yet Traill strives, not very successfully, to integrate personal and anecdotal elements into a presentation of the advantages of emigration. She opens the letter by suggesting that what follows will be a "slight sketch of our proceedings" (185). As Carole Gerson and Kathy Mezei explain, the sketch was a loose generic form popular in nineteenth-century Canadian letters, "an apparently personal anecdote or memoir which focuses on one particular place, person or experience. . . . Colloquial in tone and informal in structure, it is related to the letter" (2). However, a sketch requires a consistency of tone or purpose which Traill fails to achieve in letter fifteen. The discourses of maternity, femininity (with a strong undertone of evangelical Christianity), and colonialism vie uneasily for dominance in this letter, creating an uneasy hybrid. Traill's self-conscious portrayal of the backwoods society in which she and her husband circulate is interesting from a historical and sociological perspective and can readily be linked to the biographical details of her life, though it is stylistically inconsistent and may be unsatisfying to a twenty-first century reader who is unlikely to share either her class biases or her essentialist view of femininity.

I have deliberately chosen to close this discussion of the settler's guide components of Backwoods with a consideration of a generically unstable section of the work, cognizant of the danger that a generic approach to Traill's text may result in too tidy a classification or itemization. Although it is important to recognize the generic templates underlying the text, since these influenced its creation, publication and reception, we must not neglect the sites of contestation in the work. As I suggested in chapter one, The Backwoods of Canada is "a noisy, hybrid text – a sometimes melodic, sometimes cacophonic blend of voices" (5).

In general, what we encounter in the settler's handbook sections of The Backwoods of Canada is a highly implicated discourse, dominated by the rhetoric of domesticity, femininity and colonialism. These sections can be read, in Misao Dean's words, as "an ideological 'mending basket' which remade the connections between the economic behaviour demanded of emigrant women in Canada and the feminine inner self created by the ideology of the domestic woman" (13). Generically, these portions of the text observe some of the conventions of conduct books,

and many of the conventions of the more focused settler's handbooks – such as The Female Emigrant's Guide – yet Traill continues to integrate features of travel narratives. In so doing, she maintains – with varying degrees of success – a narrative impetus, conveys a sense of temporal progress and continues to develop the optimistic and forthright persona established in the opening letters. She also increasingly employs the rhetoric of science and rationality, the final discursive threads of The Backwoods of Canada, which I explore in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8

"Subjects for reflection, admiration and delight": Scientific Discourse in The Backwoods of Canada

As I explained in chapter seven, discourses prescribing an essential femininity intrinsically linked to domesticity and closely aligned to the British colonial enterprise permeate the settler's handbook sections of The Backwoods of Canada. Yet, as Ann Shteir suggests in her fascinating study of women and botany between 1760 and 1860, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century femininity was also linked to a less predictable pursuit than homemaking: the study and practice of science. In the social discourses of the period, science was presented as both a morally uplifting pastime for bourgeois women (far superior to the practice of reading novels, for example) and a natural extension of their maternal role, since as loving, nurturing beings, women would be naturally inclined to cherish the beauty of nature and tend their gardens with devotion. Natural history and botany, in particular, were presented as a means of "moral and spiritual improvement . . . [,] an antidote to frivolity and an alternative to the dangers of the card table" (Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science 2).

The association of women and scientific endeavours during the years of Traill's childhood and early adulthood can be attributed to three main factors. First, an emphasis on classification in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century science meant that a significant role was played by amateur scientists who collected, identified and classified specimens of plants, animals and fossils. Such painstaking and time-consuming tasks could be completed on a flexible schedule, making "science accessible and egalitarian; discoveries could be readily understood and contributions of permanent value could be made by part-time amateurs" (Berger 15). Mary Anning, who worked in a small fish shop, spent hours in the cliffs near Lyme Regis searching for dinosaur fossils, unearthing the first almost complete Plesiosaurus skeleton in 1821, yet returned home at night to care for her widowed mother (Allen 71). Almira Phelps, an American scientist, lectured in botany and physics, published highly reputed textbooks (one of which, Familiar Lectures on Botany, was reprinted for more than forty years after its initial appearance in 1829) and became the first woman member of the Maryland Academy of Science – in addition to marrying twice, raising two of her own children and a number of step-children (Slack 86-90).

During a similar period of time, Catharine Parr Traill published articles and books on Canadian plants, prepared collections of pressed wildflowers, ferns and mosses for sale, and continued to develop her scientific expertise into her eighties – while raising seven children in the backwoods of Canada, assisting in the upbringing of nieces and grandchildren, coping with an ageing husband prone to depression and dealing with widowhood in her fifties. Although neither Anning, Phelps, nor Traill led typical lives for women of their time, they were not rebels or revolutionaries. These women developed scientific interests and expertise without compromising the nurturing role their society had groomed them to fulfill, a feat which would become increasingly difficult as science became more professional towards the end of the nineteenth century.[215]

When discussing nineteenth-century science, and more specifically, when approaching the scientific sections of Backwoods, it is important to understand the role played by amateur scientists, especially in fields such as botany. However, as twenty-first century readers we also need to be cautious in our use of the term "amateur." By identifying Traill as an "an amateur with a passion for flowers" who had "no desire to be a methodological scientist," Michael Peterman offers praise, while clearly delineating the limitations of her ability ("Splendid Anachronism" 179). Marianne Ainley, taking exception to this polite dismissal of a woman who worked outside of the scientific establishment, identifies Traill as "an active botanist and science writer" whose work can be compared to such American women of science as Almira Phelps, Graceanna Lewis and Florence Merriam Bailey ("Science" 92-3). Yet the difference between Peterman and Ainley's assessments of Traill's work becomes less significant if we read the term "amateur" in terms of its original sense – "'amator' meaning 'lover of'" ("Science" 94) – and its early nineteenth-century context. The men and women who scoured the British countryside and larger empire with their magnifying glasses and collection bags in search of undiscovered species of ferns, insects, shells or whatever else might catch their fancy were amateur scientists, not in the sense of being unprofessional, but in the sense that they lacked formal qualifications, usually worked independently of academic institutions and rarely made a living from their pursuits. Such

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[215] As Ann Schteir explains, "[d]uring the early nineteenth century in England, it was in some ways easier for women to combine family and botany than it became later on, for science was part of family routines, and the interest of girls and women in scientific work was not disjunctive with family life" ("Botany in the Breakfast Room" 43). Elizabeth Keeney provides an interesting discussion of the increasing professionalization of science in The Botanizers: Amateur Scientists in Nineteenth-Century America.

amateurs, including Catharine Parr Traill, took themselves seriously, read scholarly works, used scientific discourse and methodology, and felt comfortable corresponding with university professors or experts in the field.

A second factor which accounts for the association of woman and science during the years of Traill's upbringing and early adulthood was the home-based nature of much scientific work at the time. A demand for expensive laboratories and an emphasis on formal academic qualifications lay far in the future; although Traill expresses a desire for more reference material to assist in the identification and classification of plants, she writes confidently about her observations, hypothesizing about scientific cause and effect on several occasions. She advises emigrant women to pursue natural history studies, not from textbooks, but through personal investigation and careful observation of the environment. The type of science Traill practised required an observant eye, patience, a systematic – though not necessarily linear – approach, determination, and most importantly, an abiding curiosity. Specimens could be collected on walks with one's children, collections laid out on kitchen tables, notes written up in the evening hours by candlelight. While such scientific endeavours rarely resulted in the creation of abstract theories, they lent themselves to the study of plant growth and development, and of the interplay between plants, insects and animals.

A third factor which helps to explain the association of women and scientific endeavour in the first half of the nineteenth century was the increasing social dialogue which took place regarding the importance of education and the growing emphasis placed on early childhood education, generally considered a feminine domain. Middle and upper-class women were encouraged to acquire a basic scientific knowledge which they could pass on to their children. This in turn created a market for introductory and juvenile scientific texts, and as a developing "maternal ideology . . . lent authority to women in scientific education and popular science writing," women became increasingly prominent as writers of such works (Shteir, Cultivating Women 4). At the same time, the increasing focus on adult education and schooling for the middle and lower classes – in which organizations such as the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge played a dominant role – provided further opportunities for women writers of basic scientific works and created a social context in which the author of a travel narrative/settler's handbook such as Backwoods might readily introduce scientific descriptions into her text.[216]

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[216] Scientific references had been a common component of travel narratives since the second half of the eighteenth century, however. As Mary Louise Pratt explains, "[s]pecimen gathering, the building up of collections, the naming of new species, the recognition of known

Before I consider the specifically scientific aspects of The Backwoods of Canada, I will explore a scientific and social discourse of significant relevance to Traill's text: natural history. For Traill and her nineteenth-century readers, the discourse of natural history provided a way of interpreting their natural environment and of establishing a link between themselves, the natural (as opposed to man-made) world and God. As Lynn Merrill explains in her 1989 overview of natural history, the field was loose and interdisciplinary, covering everything from meteorology to botany, zoology, immunology, and occasionally even ethnology, and resisted fragmentation into "carefully delineated specialities" (The Romance of Victorian Natural History 78). "By virtue of its all-inclusiveness, natural history embraced entire landscapes in addition to objects – the total of impression, the long view – of landforms, weather, vegetation, color, and light" (15). In spite of its breadth, the field produced a resolutely orderly vision of the world, covering, in Michel Foucault's words, "a series of complex operations that introduce the possibility of a constant order into a totality of representations" (The Order of Things 158). Its "systematizing" view of nature "supported an essentially conservative world view, defined by an emphasis on stability and harmony, and framed in hierarchical terms" (O'Brien 24). As Mary Louise Pratt explains, in its colonial applications natural history constituted "a European discourse about non-European worlds . . . [,] an urban discourse about non-urban worlds, and a lettered, bourgeois discourse about non-lettered peasant worlds" (Imperial Eyes 34-5). It certainly "sparked no revolutions. It did not change the world, as Darwin arguably did. But it molded vision and put its stamp on language" (Merrill viii).

In a comprehensive study of Victorian science in Canada, Carl Berger suggests that "[t]he primary mission of natural history was to collect, describe, and classify the flora and fauna, and identify and trace the geological formations of new, unknown territories" (xi). But it was also "a personal, evocative, aesthetic science, a science that transmuted natural objects into texts" (Merrill 255). Both of these aspects – the inventorial and classificatory, and the more subjective aestheticization – figure prominently in Traill's descriptions of plants and animals in Backwoods.[217] In a broad, discursive sense natural history provided "a way of seeing, a

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ones, became standard themes in travel narratives" (Imperial Eyes 27). Prior to the eighteenth century, although descriptions of flora and fauna frequently appeared in travel narratives "they were typically structured as appendices or formal digressions from the narratives." In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "[t]ravel narratives of all kinds began to develop leisurely pauses filled with gentlemanly 'naturalizing'" (27).

[217] Aestheticization also plays a prominent role in Traill's landscape descriptions, as I

sensibility, and a medium for communicating something essential about nature and man's place in it" (Berger 31). As "a way of seeing," the discourse of natural history is integrated quite seamlessly into the perspective of the traveller which dominates the opening sections of Backwoods; it also shares with the settler's handbook components of Traill's text both an implicit conformity with the colonial enterprise and an emphasis on adaptability and utilitarianism.

In "Knowledge, Gender and Empire," Sara Mills explores the link between colonization and natural history, suggesting that the detailed descriptions and accounts produced of foreign plants and animals conveyed "the colonized country as a storehouse of random flora and fauna waiting for the civilizing ordering of the narrator with her Western science" (41). Applying these concepts to the specifics of nineteenth-century Canada, Suzanne Zeller argues that "inventory science [the term she uses to describe the dominant mode of natural history at the time] . . . both reflected and reinforced the criterion of practical value or usefulness" (5). The discourse of utilitarianism and adaptability formed an explicit component of Canadian natural history and travel accounts as writers "took special delight in noting how each species was ideally adapted to its surroundings, where it coexisted in harmony with other species: everything had its place in a universal unchanging order" (O'Brien 25). Adaptability in the natural world could also provide a model of successful immigration. Writing about nineteenth-century immigrants to the United States, Margaret Welsh notes that "[n]atural history discourse held significant psychic force in the adaptation of immigrants to their new home" and, in reference to a Baltimore merchant, suggests that "[h]is search for and careful listing of the individual plants evidently gave him great emotional satisfaction and accustomed him to his new surroundings" (167). In the context of Upper Canada, Bentley argues that Traill, "in the process of naming and describing . . . flowers and birds . . . did for the country's wildlife what the settlers were simultaneously doing for its bush: she made it known and accessible, not with axes and concession roads, but with a penetrating eye and the grid of taxonomy" ("Afterword" 298). And in a broader sense, science was seen as the handmaid of progress, "proffering solutions to settlers' most basic problems . . . [holding] out the promise of a means to locate good soils for agriculture and valuable mineral deposits for mining and industry, to cope with climate, and to make commercial use of plants and other natural products" (Zeller 3).

The natural history texts which most obviously influenced Traill's writing were Isaak Walton's The Compleat Angler and Gilbert White's The Natural History of Selborne (Peterman,

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explained in chapter five.

"Splendid Anachronism" 177). Walton's book, a rambling, pastoral text which Traill recalls reading as a child with her father by the side of the Waveney River, takes the form of a series of dialogues providing a defence of the art of angling, some practical advice, extensive accounts of fish and fishing anecdotes (sometimes in the form of poems) and a healthy dose of moral instruction. This seventeenth-century text, a favourite among the Victorians who responded positively to both its rural nostalgia and its explicit morality, is aptly summarized by Jonquil Bevan as "an anthology of nearly forty poems and songs, made particularly interesting by the insight we are given through his comments into the opinions and tastes of the compiler" (Introduction 9).

While Walton undoubtedly influenced Traill's attitude towards the natural environment, it is Gilbert White's work which provided a more direct influence on her scientific writing. In the preface to one of her later books, Studies of Plant Life in Canada, Traill writes optimistically of her work becoming "a household book, as Gilbert White's Natural History of Selborne is to this day among English readers" (xvii). The Natural History of Selborne, described by the author as a "parochial history" of his home district (7), is written in the form of a series of letters to Thomas Pennant, a traveller and natural history writer, and to Daines Barrington, a lawyer and naturalist. The goals of this 1789 work were to induce "readers to pay a more ready attention to the wonders of the Creation, too frequently overlooked as common occurrences," to lend a "helping hand towards the enlargement of the boundaries of historical and topographical knowledge" and to shed "some small light upon ancient customs and manners" (7-8). Initially slow to gain popularity, this text became, in David Allen's words, "an irresistible classic: somehow, it enshrines a portion of our necessary collective mythology" (50). Selborne is "the testament of Static Man: at peace with the world and with himself, content with deepening his knowledge of his one small corner of the earth, a being suspended in a perfect mental balance" (Allen 50-51). Traill's indebtedness to Gilbert White's work is particularly evident in passages where she blends scientific and religious discourse. She strives to achieve a similarly informative, yet readable and personal style, though tensions sometimes become apparent in her attempts to write pastoral descriptions of the Canadian wilderness. As Elizabeth Thompson suggests, "[w]hile White's schemes [for ordering the natural world] work well in his sheltered, apparently unchanging, pastoral world of Selborne, they seem inadequate to contain a rapidly changing Canadian frontier landscape" (Introductory Essay 141)

As I indicate in the opening sections of this chapter, Traill's profound interest in plant life would not have struck her contemporaries as surprising. Women of her social class in England

not only read books on botany, they also "attended public lectures about plants, corresponded with naturalists, collected native ferns, mosses, and marine plants, drew plants, developed herbaria for further study, and used microscopes" (Shteir, Cultivating Women 3-4). On the basis of their studies, they "wrote about botany and their books, essays, and poems are a rich cultural resource for chronicling the experiences of young girls, women, and mothers in the science culture of their day" (Shteir 4). Botany was considered particularly suitable as a pursuit for women because of its delicate connotations, its fashionable associations and its link to representative art. Yet the social and discursive functions of this field of study were more broad-ranging: through its reliance on the Linnaean system of classification, which categorized the reproductive parts of plants as male and female, the botanical discourse of Traill's day "put the topic of sexuality before those who studied plants" and was closely linked to gendered perceptions of masculinity and femininity (Shteir 4). Botanical discourse thus participated in both the formulation and dissemination of essentialist conceptualizations of femininity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

When one regards Traill as a scientist – albeit a part-time one whose primary interests lay in identification and the practical applications of scientific knowledge, rather than theorizing or experimenting – and compares her life with that of other women scientists of her generation, some interesting tendencies become apparent. In the introduction to their historical study of women scientists, Pnina G. Abir-Am and Dorinda Outram identify a number of commonalities among women scientists, two of which are particularly relevant. Like most of the scientists they studied, Traill "had a father who displayed strong interest in his daughter's education and achievements" and "a middle-class social background that became unstable through a variety of political economic, social, or natural events" (15, 16). These factors, matched with an intense curiosity about the natural world and the process of science (Ainley, "Last in the Field" 28), a determination not only to succeed as a settler but also to learn to love her new home, and a profound religious belief which was reinforced by both the observation and representation of order in the natural world, contributed to Traill's development as a frequently overlooked "player" in "the world of nineteenth-century Canadian science" (the latter phrase is Michael Peterman's, though he qualifies it by describing Traill as a "distant and small player" in this world – "Splendid Anachronism" 173).

As Peterman explains, assessing Traill's scientific work has proven problematic for literary scholars and students who tend to either ignore the scientific aspects of texts such as Backwoods, over-generalize about Traill's achievements, or interpret her work within the context

of their own contemporary perspective, neglecting "the complexities and tensions of the world of nineteenth-century Canadian science" ("Splendid Anachronism" 173). Peterman emphasizes that Traill possessed neither the training, equipment, reference material, nor financial means to carry out serious scientific work in the backwoods of Canada (176) – though I would argue that a number of those conditions would have applied equally to England's amateur scientists of the time. And in spite of these limitations, Traill pursued her passion for natural history, producing accounts of plants and animals which Peterman characterizes as an "original" and "gentle" blend of science and literature (176, 183). He focuses on the personal dimension of Traill's scientific writings, arguing that for her "the study of flowers was a nurturing process, engendering not only peace of mind through all the stages of life but also a first sense of identity and place, of rooted continuity" and that natural history was "a kind of autobiography" (178, 179). Peterman concludes that Traill had "no desire to be more than descriptive, informative, evangelical, and useful in her cataloguing" and "no desire to be a methodological scientist" (176-77, 179).

Not surprisingly, the most developed and insightful analysis of Traill's scientific approach is provided by Marianne Ainley, a scholar with a background in science and an interest in women's roles in the field. In two articles, a general essay entitled "Last in the Field? Canadian Women Natural Scientists, 1815-1965" (1990) and a more focused piece, "Science in Canada's Backwoods: Catharine Parr Traill" (1997), she challenges Peterman's reading of Traill as an "anachronism"[218] and a talented "amateur," arguing that he downplays her strengths as a scientist. Ainley sees Traill as "a pioneering naturalist and popularizer of science" and praises her for the fact that "[u]nlike most science writers in the colonies . . . [she] integrated rather than marginalized non-Western scientific information and practices" ("Science" 80, 91). As well as integrating knowledge of indigenous plants and animals which she acquired through contact with Canada's First Nations people, Traill "quite consciously . . . both distanced herself from the European centers of botany and defined herself as a *woman* botanist" (86). From a scientific perspective, "the accuracy of most of her observations is remarkable" and in her later work she developed an increasing understanding of "plant succession as well as the interrelation of soil, light, climate, plants, and animals . . . [and] may be considered as an early ecologist" (84, 88). Ainley concludes that "Catharine Parr Traill most certainly was not a 'splendid anachronism,' nor was her work that of a struggling 'amateur'"; instead "[h]er writing provides a postcolonial

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[218] In referring to Traill as a "splendid anachronism," Peterman quotes from Carl Berger's more perfunctory consideration of her work in Science, God and Nature in Victorian Canada 35.

alternative to earlier western scientific texts" (93).

Unlike Marianne Ainley, I have neither the background nor the expertise to assess the validity of Traill's scientific descriptions; instead, I propose to analyse how she addresses scientific concerns in The Backwoods of Canada and how she positions herself as a scientist. The discursive and rhetorical strategies which Traill employs in these sections of her work harken back to the conventions of natural history discourse, yet also reflect her sense of audience and contribute to the development of the authorial persona who enlivens the text.

In the scientific sections of Backwoods, Traill focuses on two main areas of interest and three minor ones (listed in order of priority): 1) botany (Traill provides detailed, descriptive sketches of a range of plants, especially flowers); 2) zoology (several letters include specific accounts of birds, insects, squirrels and frogs, focusing on their appearance and habits); 3) disease (Traill's speculations on the cause of diseases, although limited, provide clues to the nature of her scientific education and her theoretical approach to the natural environment); 4) meteorology (Traill attempts to explain the seasonal phenomenon of Indian summer in scientific terms and speculates about the cause of static electricity); 5) geology (the text includes two accounts of rock formations and erosion. This appears to be Traill's area of least confidence as she refers to "the mysteries of geology" and defers to "the geologist to exercise his skill in accounting for" the appearance of "curious limestone formations"; however, as I suggest later, Traill was far from ignorant of current geological theories – 69, 111).

Lynn Merrill, although writing in general about the discourse of natural history, highlights a number of the key features of the scientific sections of Traill's work:

> The discourse of natural history mirrored its subject: visual, dialectical, emotional. It reveled in multiplicity and singularity, in panorama and particularity, and exhibited clear, focused vision, a love of concrete objects, a mania for the minute, and an aesthetic appreciation of intricate forms. It was science endowed with literary qualities, style, personal vision. Victorian natural history writing, unlike scientific prose, was not goal oriented but rather discursive – a gathering up, a collection of disparate observations acquired on rambles or jaunts (259-60).[219]

The most obvious of these characteristics in Backwoods is Traill's aestheticization of the natural

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[219] Traill entitled one of her later natural history essays "Something Gathers up the Fragments" (published initially in Pearls and Pebbles and recently reprinted in Canadian Poetry with an introductory essay by Elizabeth Thompson). I allude to this essay in the title of this thesis.

world. Adjectives such as "beautiful," "lovely," "handsome,"and "pretty" are sprinkled throughout her descriptions, not only in reference to flowers, but also to less likely subjects such as beetles, wasp-flies, berries, squirrels and fields of rice. Often these terms apply to rich colours or complementary blends of colour, though she is also attracted to delicacy and formal balance. Seeking beauty, order and purpose in her natural environment, Traill records her observations in a discourse which embodies these qualities. As Merill suggests, "[n]atural history was aesthetic science, science pursued out of a personal sense of awe and beauty" (79).

Closely linked to Traill's aestheticization of nature is her use of personalized and emotive language. Terms such as "delightful," "elegant," "refreshing," "splendid" and "magnificent" provide an emotional counterpart to aesthetic descriptions, reinforcing the romantic concept of an innocent pleasure gained through interaction with the environment. Our narrator's eyes "are gratified" by a diversified parkland (66), hemlocks are a "refreshing tint of green" (81), she "admire[s] the high-bush cranberries" (104) and she can "hardly refrain from laughing" at a chorus of bullfrogs" (123). Nature in general is personified as a generous benefactor: "Nature has so abundantly bestowed fruits" she exclaims (53), and seeds are "flung carelessly from Nature's lavish hand" (167). It is also a force which delights in its creations: "Nature revels in her wilderness of forest trees," we are informed (48).[220] Species or individual subjects are also personified: trees "reel and bow" at the fall of a neighbour (145), "saucy" birds "mount guard as sentinel" (163), titmice are "little architects" (164) and "a wicked little thief of a mouse" is accused of tearing to pieces a wasp-nest which Traill was saving (215).

Not surprisingly, on several occasions Traill employs a gendered discourse embodying many of the stereotypical assumptions about essential masculinity and femininity found in literary and scientific works from the early years of the nineteenth century. In one particularly extreme example, she personifies a water-lily as a magnificent "queen of the lakes." Its buds, she informs us, "are very lovely, and may be seen below the surface of the water, in different stages of forwardness from the closely-folded bud, wrapped in its olive-green calyx, to the half-blown flower, ready to emerge from its watery prison, and in all its virgin beauty expand its snowy bosom to the sun and genial air" (170). This queen is matched by a "handsome" yellow species of water-lily who is less "delicate" and "silken" than his partner. Traill names him the "water-

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[220] As Michael Peterman explains, Traill's "sustained . . . focus on nature's salutary qualities . . . is what distinguishes her writing from the works of her sisters and most of her contemporaries" ("Splendid Anachronism" 179)

king" (170). As Londa Schiebinger explains, this style of anthropomorphized description emphasizing gender differences and "ascribing to plants human form, function, and even emotion" stems from the popular Linnaean system of taxonomy (170). The Linnaean system, which Elizabeth Thompson suggests that Traill uses "throughout her natural history writing" (Introductory Essay 140)[221] is based on the categorization of plants according to sexual features – specifically, the number of stamens (male parts) and pistils (female parts).[222] The "implicit notions of gender [which] structured Linnaean taxonomy . . . imported into botany traditional notions about sexual hierarchy" (Schiebinger 170). Although Traill does not expound upon the sexual features of the water-lilies she describes in botanical terms, the attributes she associates with her "queen" and "king" plants reinforce conventional cultural notions of a reclusive and beautiful femininity, and a hardier, bolder masculinity.

While emotive and aesthetic language may appear to dominate Traill's descriptions of plants and animals, it is balanced with a more scientific discourse of methodology focusing on observation, identification and classification. Traill repeatedly draws her reader's attention to the concrete and verifiable nature of her observations. She informs us that she "noticed," "observed," "found," "collected" and "gathered" specimens, and when she uses second-hand information about the behaviour of swallows and hawks, declares that "it is well authenticated" (165). In letter six she announces, "I shall very soon begin to collect a hortus siccus for Eliza, with a description of the plants, their growth, and qualities. Any striking particulars respecting them I shall make notes of; and tell her she may depend on my sending my specimens, with seeds of

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[221] However, Traill adopted a different system of classification in her 1868 work, Canadian Wild Flowers. In her description of Yellow Lady's Slippers, she refers to the Linnaean system, but then explains the classification of these flowers according to "the Natural Order of Jussieu, which we have followed" (45).

[222] Carl von Linné (1707-1778), commonly referred to as Linnaeus, "devised his [taxonomic] system in such a way that the number of a plant's stamens (or male parts) determined the *class* to which it was assigned, while the number of its pistils (the female parts) determined its *order*. . . . In the taxonomic tree, class stands above order. In other words, Linnaeus gave male parts priority in determining the status of the organism in the plant kingdom. There is no empirical justification for this outcome; rather Linnaeus brought traditional notions of gender hierarchy whole-cloth into science. He read nature through the lens of social relations in such a way that the new language of botany incorporated fundamental aspects of the social world where women were legally subordinate to fathers and husbands" (Schiebinger 171). Mary Louis Pratt explores the "deep and lasting impact" of the Linnaean system, "not just on travel and travel writing, but on the overall ways European citizenries made, and made sense of, their place on the planet" in Imperial Eyes (24).

such as I can collect" (68). In the next letter we are informed that Traill has begun "collecting" and "discovered" an unfamiliar trailing plant (87). In letter fourteen she laments her inability to "make faithful representations of the flowers," having declined her sister's offers to teach her flower painting when she was younger,[223] and decries her lack of scientific expertise. Yet in spite of these apologies, she proceeds to inform us that she has made "a list of the plants most worthy of attention" in her neighbourhood and will provide a sketch "not with my pencil but my pen" (168). She also mentions having "promised to collect some of the most singular of our native flowers for one of the Professors of Botany in the Edinburgh University" (173).[224]

When classifying plants, Traill provides both Latin and common names whenever possible, and on occasion includes terms commonly used by the First Nations people she befriended, or distinctly Canadian (rather than British) ones. She evidently possessed a reasonable general knowledge of plant and animal nomenclature; the principal external source she cites is Pursh's North American Flora, which she refers to several times. On a few occasions, when Traill is unable to discover the name of a plant, she provides her own, adopting the role of "a floral godmother" (104).[225] She also adds Latin names in the chapter endnotes which are based on material provided after the original manuscript of Backwoods was in the process of being printed.

While Traill focuses on classification and description in her botanical accounts, her discussion of other scientific topics tends to be more general, as she concentrates on explaining the natural processes she observes around her. She employs the rhetoric of cause and effect quite overtly in sections dealing with disease, geological features and weather patterns. Her references to disease and illness, although brief, are particularly fascinating from a twenty-first century perspective. As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, Traill includes minimal description of her own bout of cholera though she mentions that "[t]he remedies applied were bleeding, a portion of

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[223] Traill probably refers to her sister Eliza here (Peterman, Explanatory Notes 167.17, 277).

[224] Peterman suggests that this may have been Robert Graham, a Professor of Botany at Edinburgh University from 1820 to 1845 (Explanatory Notes 173.3-4, 277).

[225] Traill's delight in becoming a "floral godmother" as she names unfamiliar species of flowers reflects the prevailing "mania . . . for naming new species" which developed among the middle and upper classes in England in the first half of the nineteenth century (Lynn Merill 86). I briefly discuss the implications of her naming of plants in terms of her relationship with the formal scientific community later in this chapter.

opium, blue pill, and some sort of salts – not the common Epsom" (33). Apparently, "[t]he remedies proved effectual" (33). She also implies, especially before she becomes sick, that some emigrants are at least partially to blame for their ailments:

> To no class, I am told, has the disease [cholera] proved so fatal as to the poorer sort of emigrants. Many of these, debilitated by the privations and fatigue of a long voyage, on reaching Quebec or Montreal indulged in every sort of excess, especially the dangerous one of intoxication; and, as if purposely paving the way to certain destruction, they fell immediate victims to the complaint." (28)

As Gillian Whitlock notes, Traill's assessment of the cholera epidemic (and her sister, Susanna Moodie's more detailed account in Roughing It in the Bush) are strikingly similar to contemporaneous "descriptions of poverty and disorder by middle-class observers writing about diseased British cities such as Manchester. Contagion is linked to intemperance, sensuality and degeneration, to spaces where appropriate boundaries are not in place" (49). Reflecting the prevailing attitudes of middle-class England – both Traill's place of origin and that of her intended readers – her discourse effectively distances and delineates the disease of cholera, so that although she assigns blame to others, she is personally absolved of any responsibility, even when she falls ill herself.

More developed, and more significant from a scientific perspective, are Traill's considerations of the cause of malaria. In letter five, which describes her journey from Cobourg to Peterborough, Traill mentions a number of "fine settlements on the Rice Lake" which caught her eye (51). However, "the shores are not considered healthy," she informs us, because of "the inhabitants being subject to lake fevers and ague, especially where the ground is low and swampy" (51). Traill suggests an environmental cause of these illnesses:

> These fevers and agues are supposed by some people to originate in the extensive rice-beds which cause a stagnation in the water; the constant evaporation from the surface acting on a mass of decaying vegetation must tend to have a bad effect on the constitution of those that are immediately exposed to its pernicious influence. (52)

Traill's diction in this passage is a fascinating blend of vague generalization, scientific causality and emotive hyperbole. Both the source of her information – "some people" – and the effect of the process she describes – "a bad effect on the constitution" – remain vague. Yet the process itself is delineated in relatively precise scientific terminology: "the extensive rice-beds . . . cause a stagnation in the water, the constant evaporation from the surface acting on a mass of decaying vegetation." She closes with an evaluation, attributing an almost immoral effect to this same

process, as apparently innocent inhabitants are "exposed to its pernicious influence."

In letter seventeen, Traill returns to the topic of malaria and its possible causes. She informs us that the disease which she, her husband, and her baby contracted arose

> . . . from a cellar below the kitchen. When the snow melted, this cellar became half full of water, either from the moisture draining through the spongy earth, or from the rising of a spring beneath the house; be it as it may, the heat of the cooking and Franklin stoves in the kitchen and parlour, caused a fermentation to take place in the stagnant fluid before it could be emptied; the effluvia arising from this mass of putrifying water affected us all. (217)

As in the previous passage, stagnant water is described as causing the disease, though here the process is presumed to involve fermentation, rather than just evaporation. Traill returns to a consideration of the environmental causes of malaria and fevers one final time, a few pages later, suggesting that "to the vile custom of keeping green vegetables in the shallow, moist cellars below the kitchens, much of the sickness that attacks settlers under the various forms of agues, intermittent, remittent, and lake-fevers, may be traced" (219). And, as with cholera, the "lower classes" are described as being at least partially responsible for their illnesses: "[m]any, of the lower class especially, are not sufficiently careful in clearing these cellars from the decaying portions of vegetable matter, which are often suffered to accumulate from year to year to infect the air of the dwelling" (219-20).

This theory of disease, known as the "miasma" theory, was part of the classical medical tradition. As Perry Williams explains in "The Laws of Health: Women, Medicine and Sanitary Reform," the principal cause of mass disease was believed to be "changes in the air . . . fevers endemic and epidemic amongst the working classes [were interpreted] as the result of the poisoning of the air by 'effluvia' or 'miasms' rising from decomposing organic refuse and stagnant water" (69). This was not the opposite of a contagion theory: "before the advent of the germ theory of disease, there was general agreement than many if not all diseases could *both* be communicated by direct contact *and* contracted from atmospheric influence" (69-70).[226]

Traill also attributes weather patterns to decomposition. In letter eight, after describing a

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[226] Traill was also inclined to believe that colds could be linked to environmental factors, especially changes in temperature, though she had to admit that the cause and effect relationship was less evident in Canada: "in any other climate one would scarcely have undergone such sudden extremes of temperature without catching a severe cold" she informs us in letter thirteen after describing how she and her husband shifted from the "oppressive" heat of a wigwam to the harsh winter cold after a visit to her Ojibwa neighbours (158).

"hurricane of wind" which was preceded by a "stagnation of air," she ventures into a consideration of the possible causes of the phenomenon of "Indian summer." She dismisses "the notion entertained by some travellers, that the Indian summer is caused by the annual conflagration of forests by those Indians inhabiting the unexplored regions beyond the larger lakes" as "absurd" (94). Her confident justification of this dismissal makes for interesting reading: "Imagine for an instant what immense tracts of woods must be yearly consumed to affect nearly the whole of the continent of North America: besides, it takes place at that season of the year when the fire is least likely to run freely, owing to the humidity of the ground from the autumnal rains" (94). The logic of Traill's argument is quite convincing; she then proceeds to provide an alternate hypothesis to explain the atmospheric effects of Indian summer, attributing these to a similar cause as malaria and lake fevers. She concludes that "the peculiar warmth and hazy appearance" of the season is caused by "the fermentation going on of so great a mass of vegetable matter that is undergoing a state of decomposition during the latter part of October and beginning of November" (94). Traill develops this argument, suggesting that "a great alteration will be effected in this season, as the process of clearing the land continues to decrease the quantity of decaying vegetation" (94). She claims to have "heard the difference is already observable by those long acquainted with the American continent" (94). Traill's assertion that the climate of North America was undergoing a significant change as a result of colonization reflects a prevalent theory in the early nineteenth century. According to popular belief, "the climate of Canada would be moderated by clearing and cultivating the virgin forest" (Zeller 122). As Zeller explains, optimistic beliefs such as this played a significant role in the development of a Canadian identity as they "directly influenced what Canadians thought their country could become" (115).

A number of briefer references to meteorological phenomena, also emphasizing causality, are included in Backwoods. In letter four, Traill expresses surprise that although "[t]he weather is sultry hot, accompanied by frequent thunder-showers . . . [these showers] have not the effect one would expect, that of cooling the heated atmosphere" (29). She also muses about the "phenomenon" of static electricity induced by "very cold weather"(109), provides a lively and detailed description of the "violent and destructive" effect of a hurricane (146), attempts to account for the "minute frozen particles, which are quite dry, and slightly prick your face like needle-points" on a "bright winter's day" (149), waxes enthusiastic about the effect of frost on simple objects – "every frozen particle sent forth rays of bright light" (150) – and in the final paragraphs of her text refers excitedly to "a splendid meteoric phenomenon that surpassed every

thing I had ever seen or heard of before" (227).[227] She confesses to having been tempted to believe that the "chaste pure light" she observed might be "the robe of some bright visitor from another and a better world," but then catches herself and reverts to the more prosaic discourse of science: "imagination apart, could it be a phosophoric exhalation from some of our swamps or inland lakes, or was it at all connected with the aurora that is so frequently seen in our skies?" (228).

Traill also interprets the geological formations she observes in terms of causality, while employing an additional rhetorical strategy. Blocks of granite and limestone encountered at the summit of a ridge are described as "mostly smooth and rounded, as if by the action of water" (69). After expressing wonder at these loose blocks of stone, describing their isolated location as "one of the mysteries of geology," she declares that, "[t]he learned in such matters account for these isolated rocks easily"[228] (69). Traill's rhetorical strategy – denying expertise before and/or after providing a description or explanation – is even more evident in the second geological passage included in Backwoods. In letter eight, after describing a shoreline "full of fossil remains, evidently of very recent formation" and identifying "shells of river-insects that are scattered loose over the surface of the limestone, left by the recession of the waters, [which] are similar to the shells and insects incrusted in the body of the limestone," she states, "I regret I know nothing of geology or conchology" (106). This statement is immediately followed by a description of a geological feature and a hypothetical explanation of its origin:

> Just below the waterfall I was mentioning there is a curious natural arch in the limestone rock, which at this place rises to a height of ten or fifteen feet like a wall; it is composed of strata of grey limestone, lying one upon the other; the arch seems like a rent in the wall, but worn away, and hollowed, possibly by the action of water rushing through it at some high flood. (106)

The confident tone of this passage, obviously calling into question the preceding apologia,

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[227] Carl Ballstadt suggests that this description bears symbolic weight as Traill focuses on "emblems of the promise she anticipates" in her new home ("Catharine Parr Traill" 1:168).

[228] Traill's apparent allusion here is to William Dunlop, author of Statistical Sketches Of Upper Canada, For The Use of Emigrants: By A Backwoodsman, to whom she refers in her introduction to Backwoods. Dunlop conducted a large-scale survey for the Canada Company in 1827-28, concluding that the "whole of the [Huron] tract [in which the Traills settled] is what in geology would be considered a recent formation, and would be supposed to have taken its origin from the subsiding of an enormous mass of waters which at no very distant period must have covered this part of the continent" (Zeller 20).

reminds us of Traill's introduction to Backwoods, and suggests that she is adopting a safe rhetorical stance, disarming possible criticism. Traill was evidently not completely ignorant of geology: she was familiar with Dunlop's work (both through his Backwoodsman and, we can assume, through her brother Samuel, who was an associate of Dunlop's), and – given her reference to a professor at the University of Edinburgh in letter fourteen – had quite possibly heard of the major geological work being carried out there in the early nineteenth century. If so, she was not an atypical settler. As Suzanne Zeller explains,

> [a] surprising number of immigrants to Canada in the early nineteenth century had had firsthand contact with exciting theoretical controversies in British geology, particularly in Scotland. Scottish geology formed part of a broader natural history and contrasted with the independent local observations emphasized in English geology. It was included in the popular education of surgeon-naturalists and explorers who served on British government expeditions in British North America. Moreover, settlers too arrived preconditioned to interpret the rocky Canadian landscape in ways determined by current issues in geology.[229] (14-15)

What is impressive about Traill's geological and meteorological descriptions is the manner in which she attempts to account for the unfamiliar environmental phenomena she observes, integrating popular scientific beliefs and providing rational explanations for scientific processes. As Marianne Ainley suggests, "Traill's unrecognized forte was her interest in the *process* of science" ("Last in the field?" 28).[230] And while her curiosity was most intensely focused on plants, her descriptions and hypotheses about the physical conditions she observes in her natural environment are some of the most overtly scientific sections of Backwoods.

Two final features of Traill's scientific writing become obvious upon a close analysis: the emphasis she places upon both the particularity of her observations and the actual plants and

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[229] Zeller refers to the conflict between the Wernerian school (or "Neptunists") who "dominated the Scottish geology taught at the University of Edinburgh . . . [and] theororized that all the rocks of the earth's crust were precipitated out of water into distinct layers" and James Hutton and his followers ("vulcanists") who argued for "igneous origins of the earth's geological structures" (15). Traill's descriptions of geological functions suggest that she may have subscribed to the Wernerian theory, though her explanations are too brief to prove this definitively.

[230] Ainley builds on the work of Marian Fowler here. In her 1982 study, The Embroidered Tent, Fowler refers briefly to Traill's scientific abilities. She quotes descriptions and speculations about geographical features from Backwoods, and concludes that Traill"has a scientist's interest in process" (67).

animals she describes, and an implicit – as well as explicit – focus on usefulness.[231] Her concern with particularity is especially evident in the following description from letter fourteen:

> Last autumn I observed in the pine-wood near us a very curious plant; it came up with naked brown stems, branching off like some miniature tree; the stalks of this plant were brown, slightly freckled and beset with little knobs. I watched the progress of maturity in this strange plant with some degree of interest, towards the latter end of October; the little knobs, which consisted of two angular hard cases, not unlike, when fully opened, to a boat in shape, burst asunder and displayed a pale straw-coloured chaffy substance, that resembled fine saw-dust: these must have been the anthers, but they bore more resemblance to seeds; this singular flower would have borne examination with a microscope. One peculiarity that I observed, was, that on pulling up a plant with its roots, I found the blossoms open under ground, springing up from the lowest part of the flower-stems, and just as far advanced to maturity as those that grew on the upper stalks, excepting that they were somewhat blanched, from being covered up from the air. I can find no description of this plant, nor any person but myself seems to have taken notice of it. (172)

As Lynn Merrill explains, "[o]ne pleasure of natural history was the perception that nature was inexhaustible, bountiful, endlessly variable; on the other hand, there was a great deal of pleasure to be found in the perception that much in nature was singular and unique" (15). Traill's delight in recognizing a feature of this plant that no one but she "seems to have taken notice of" is particularly obvious, as is her careful attention to detail. Like other writers of natural history, Traill implies that "by looking at natural objects closely, the common gazer in effect becomes an uncommon gazer" (Merrill 71). Another interesting feature of this passage is the emphasis on observation over a period of time to trace the development of the plant. This foreshadows an aspect of Traill's later botanical writings, a focus on "long-term life-history studies" which Marianne Ainley suggests "fit well the emerging North American trend . . . by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, [such life-history studies] were to complement and to some extent supersede the collection-based study of taxonomy" ("Science" 93).[232]

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[231] Ann Boutelle's concise assessment of Traill's scientific passages in Backwoods is particularly apt: "[h]er description is sharply accurate, occasionally lyrical, and never forgetful of its practical aspects" ("Sisters and Survivors" 15).

[232] Foucault suggests that a focus on "history" is a key component of natural history, providing an insight into the world-view conveyed by this field of study and its discourse: "to write the history of a plant or an animal was as much a matter of describing its elements or organs as of describing the resemblances that could be found in it, the virtues that it was thought to possess, the legends and stories with which it had been involved, its place in heraldry, the

In Traill's scientific writings, the term "usefulness" can be interpreted in a number of contexts. On a general level, the practice of scientific observation and identification is presented as morally uplifting, both for adults, as "a never-failing source of amusement and instruction, at once enlightening and elevating the mind" (3),[233] and for children, as "a study that tends to refine and purify the mind, and can be made, by simple steps, a ladder to heaven, as it were, by teaching a child to look with love and admiration to that bountiful God who created and made flowers so fair to adorn and fructify this earth" (184). More specifically, scientific information is identified as of practical use for emigrants: for example, Traill informs her readers of the culinary and medicinal uses of a number of the plants she describes. In a broader context, the detailed descriptions of plants and animals included in Backwoods helped to facilitate a large-scale scientific venture closely linked to colonization: identifying and understanding the natural environment of Canada in order to exert control over it. As Zeller explains, "[s]cience provided nineteenth-century colonists, both English Canadians and some French Canadians, with not only the practical means to dominate their physical surrounding but also an ideological framework within which to comprehend the experience of doing so" (7). Finally – and most significant discursively – Traill emphasizes the useful role played by each living being within an overall natural plan. Even the humble "sawyer," an insect larvae which burrows into the logs of newly built cabins, commonly considered a pest, is presented as a valuable link in an environmental chain: "You would be surprised at the heap of fine saw-dust that is to be seen below the hole they have been working in all night. These sawyers form a fine feast for the woodpeckers, and jointly they assist in promoting the rapid decomposition of the gigantic forest-trees, that would otherwise encumber the earth from age to age" (222).

More space in Backwoods is devoted to descriptions of plants than to any other scientific phenomena; hence, I will close this discussion of the natural history sections with an examination of a typical botanical description. As Elizabeth MacCallum explains in a 1975 article dedicated to Traill's work, "the seriousness of her botanical pursuits went beyond a genteel taste for floral beauty. She was interested in every aspect of the plant: its appearance, its medicinal and

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medicaments that were concocted from its substance, the foods it provided, what the ancients recorded of it, and what travellers might have said of it" (The Order of Things 129).

[233] As Carl Berger explains, "[t]he Victorians took for granted that a familiarity with natural science and a sensitivity to scenery formed part of the intellectual equipment of every educated person" (9).

nutritional value, its life cycle and its relation to other flora and fauna" (45). In this section, located in the midst of seventeen pages of botanical description, Traill describes a plant found near her home:

> The blood-root, sanguinaria, or puccoon, as it is termed by some of the native tribes is worthy of attention from the root to the flower. As soon as the sun of April has warmed the earth and loosened it from its frozen bonds, you may distinguish a number of purely white buds, elevated on a naked footstalk, and partially enfolded in a handsome vine-shaped leaf, of a pale bluish green, curiously veined on the under side with pale orange. The leaf springs singly from a thick juicy fibrous root, which, on being broken, emits a quantity of liquor from its pores of a bright orange scarlet colour: this juice is used by the Indians as a dye, and also in the cure of rheumatic, and cutaneous complaints. The flowers of the sanguinaria resemble the white crocus very closely: when it first comes up the bud is supported by the leaf, and is folded together with it; the flower, however, soon elevates itself above its protector, while the leaf having performed its duty of guardian to the tender bud, expands to its full size. A rich black vegetable mould at the edges of the clearings seems the favourite soil for this plant. (175-6)

This passage includes almost all features common to Traill's plant descriptions, in a characteristically random order. She opens by citing several different names for the plant, including that used by the Indigenous people (when she can, Traill also indicates biological class and order, but when this information is unavailable to her – as in the above example – she does not draw attention to its absence). After indicating that the plant merits study, she describes its structure, shape and colour, and identifies where and when it can be found. Her references to the plant's size are typically vague: we are informed only that the leaf eventually "expands to its full size" and that the budding flower "resemble[s] the white crocus very closely," so presumably, it is similarly small. Traill includes specific references to size in only three of her numerous plant descriptions; on other occasions, she compares plants or their components to the size of a cherry fruit (54), "a moderately large dahlia" (170), "a small heart's ease" (177), a sixpence (177) and "an olive or large damson" (179). The scarcity of mathematical measurements may seem surprising from a twenty-first century perspective, accustomed as we are to the association of mathematical precision and scientific validity. Yet Traill is more interested in the qualities of the plants she describes, and more inclined to assume a common reference point with her British readers based on the characteristics of familiar plants.

Along with such comparisons, Traill's descriptions typically focus on a specimen's development and growth, and frequently include emotive metaphors (here the blood-root is "loosened . . . from its frozen bonds" by the warmth of the spring sunshine). Relying on the

expertise of her First Nations associates, Traill also identifies potential uses of this plant, both as a dye and as a medicine. Finally, she employs a maternal metaphor to describe the interaction between the leaf and the flowers: the bud is initially "supported by the leaf" but as it grows it soon "elevates itself above its protector." The leaf "having performed its duty of guardian to the tender bud, [then] expands to its full size." Ainley suggests that Traill's use of maternal metaphors, a characteristic feature throughout her scientific writing, enables her to establish an "easy and informative" style as she writes for a "mixed audience: other naturalists as well as the general public" ("Science" 86, 89). The only recurring features absent from this particular botanical description are a reference to the plant's perfume or odour, and, as previously mentioned, an identification of its scientific class and order.

Scientific nomenclature was evidently an area of some concern for Traill; it also provides an indication of her interactions with, and attitudes toward the established scientific community. Traill positions herself as both an insider and an outsider to this community. Just as she claims to be ignorant of geology and conchology, she conveys a sense of inadequacy about her lack of botanical expertise:

> With some few [plants and their "botanical arrangements"] I have made myself acquainted, but have hardly confidence in my scanty stock of knowledge to venture on scientific descriptions, when I feel conscious that a blunder would be easily detected, and expose me to ridicule and contempt, for an assumption of knowledge that I did not possess. (168)

Possessing only a copy of "Pursh's North American Flora," she also "must confess it is tiresome blundering out Latin descriptions to one who knows nothing of Latin beyond what she derives through a knowledge of Italian" (168). This self-conscious apologia is, not surprisingly, followed by a confident statement of intent:

> I have made out a list of the plants most worthy of attention near us; there are many others in the township I am a stranger to; some there are with whose names I am unacquainted. I subjoin a slight sketch, not with my pencil but my pen, of those whose flowers that pleased me particularly, or that possessed any remarkable qualities. (168)

Fifteen pages of detailed description of a range of plants – including succulents, aquatic plants, trees, ferns and grasses – follow. Interspersed between these descriptions we find confident statements such as "I have promised to collect some of the most singular of our native flowers for one of the Professors of Botany in the Edinburgh University" and "I am not afraid of wearying you with my flower sketches" (173, 177).

Traill is clearly sensitive about her limitations as a botanist, yet she is confident in her

observations and recordings: "though it is very probable some of my descriptions may not be exactly in the technical language of the correct botanist, I have at least described them as they appear" (183-4). If we focus on the self-deprecating comments which surface periodically, we may well conclude that Traill is no more than a bumbling amateur with very limited expertise. However, if we treat such statements as a rhetorical strategy designed to defuse criticism and reinforce her self-presentation as the supportive partner of a British officer, focusing instead on her descriptions of plants, animals and scientific phenomena, we encounter a persona who displays a scientific interest in cause and effect, a desire to explain the processes she observes in the natural world, a fascination with minute particulars, a confidence in inductive generalizations, and an ability to express herself comfortably and interchangeably in scientific terminology and familiar language. As she informs us, although "scientific botanists in Britain" might consider her "very impertinent in bestowing names on . . . [unfamiliar] flowers and plants," she considers herself "free to become their floral godmother, and give them names" (104). Ainley argues that in statements such as this Traill subtly challenges the formal discipline of botany, as "quite consciously, she both distanced herself from the European centers of botany and defined herself as a *woman* botanist" ("Science" 86).

Reading Traill as an outsider to institutionalized western science, as Ainley does, a number of critics in recent years applaud the holistic and ecological approach underlying the scientific accounts in Backwoods and her later botanical studies. Elizabeth MacCallum suggests that Traill "established a mystic communion with nature in the wilds, based on a complex appreciation of its aesthetic, ecological and moral values" (39). According to Elizabeth Thompson, she had "thought deeply about her environmental responsibilities . . . [and] saw that by pioneering, she and her fellow immigrants had forever destroyed a working ecosystem" (Introductory Essay 148). Neil Forkey, in his 1996 thesis on the socio-environmental history of the Trent watershed, the area where the Traills settled, rather idealistically argues that "her legacy to Canadian environmental history" was her hopeful attempt "to point humankind toward a more meaningful relationship with the natural environment" (81). In Living in Harmony: Nature Writing by Women in Canada, a recent anthology of prose and poetry selections which highlight "individuals' encounters with and concern for nature . . . [and] champion environmental preservation and protection" (6), Andrea Lebowitz includes a passage of scientific description from Backwoods. From the perspective of these critics, Traill aptly merits Ainley's claim that she "can be considered one of the first Canadian ecologists" ("Last in the Field" 28).

Yet equally significant, and more often ignored by contemporary critics, is the deeply

religious sentiment embodied in her descriptions of nature. She confidently declares that while Canada's "volume of history is yet a blank, that of Nature is eloquently marked by the finger of God" (112). For Traill, the study of the natural world goes hand in hand with the appreciation and worship of God. The scientific study of flowers, for example, "tends to refine and purify the mind" and is particularly appropriate for children as it "can be made, by simple steps a ladder to heaven . . . by teaching a child to look with love and admiration to that bountiful God who created and made flowers so fair to adorn and fructify this earth" (184). As Elizabeth Keeney explains in her account of amateur scientists in nineteenth-century America, the "mingling of utility and beauty [in flowers] struck nineteenth-century botanical writers as one of God's greatest gifts, revealing plainly a 'tender goodness' and divine love" (106).

The concept of an absolute order discernable in the natural world through observation and reflection underlies Traill's descriptions of plants and animals. Carl Berger suggests that this belief was rooted in the seventeenth-century tradition of natural theology, a branch of natural history whose chief claim was "that there existed an overall design in nature, a rank and order in the chain of life, and a regularity in the operation of laws, all of which were evidence of a transcendent guiding intelligence" (32). This belief system coincided with Traill's colonial perspective: since "man was enjoined to use and subdue the earth and its creatures, convert it to a fit abode, and enjoy dominion from sea to sea," taming the Canadian wilderness could be interpreted as fulfilling God's plans (Berger 45).

The God of Traill's text is both creator and absolute ruler, though his influence on the natural world is presented as more indirect than on human affairs. For example, insect larvae are described as "seemingly insignificant agents . . . servants of the Most High, working his will, and fulfilling his behests" (222). In accordance with the attitudes of natural theology, Traill presents nature "as distinct from God; it was the handiwork of God, filled with clues and hints as to his intentions" (Berger 45). Hence the natural world, such as the bucolic surroundings of a "lowly log-built church in the wilderness . . . situated at the foot of a gentle slope on the plains, surrounded by groups of oak and feathery pines . . . retired from the noise and bustle of the town, [provides] a fitting place to worship God in spirit and in truth" (Backwoods 69). Yet God also interacts personally with Traill: he "chastised and afflicted" her when she was ill, and brought her and her husband "through the perils of the great deep and the horrors of the pestilence" (33, 68-9). Although not stated directly, it is obvious that the "holy and tranquil peace [which] came down upon" her when she "sat in the wood in silence and in gloom," feeling homesick and unhappy after she and her husband had become lost *en route* to her brother's house, is a gift of God in our

narrator's eyes (84-5). As Carl Berger suggests, "Traill was a master at reminding her readers that nature never did betray the heart that loved her" (47).

As I explained in chapter five, Traill integrates a number of biblical allusions into her text, some of these linked symbolically to the natural environment. In letter two, she alludes to the story of Noah and the flood as "a beautiful little bird" is hailed as a "good omen – a little messenger sent to bid us welcome to the New World" (10). Such allegorical Christian references – including further allusions to the Flood and references to the flight of the Chosen People from Egypt, both of which involve new beginnings – surface periodically in Backwoods; an Edenic subtext – evident in Traill's joyful naming of unfamiliar plants and flowers – also threads its way through the text.

Although the discourse of religion permeates Traill's text, embodied in the cheerful persona she creates who has such confidence in divine order and providence, and in her descriptions of the orderly world of nature, direct references to God surface only intermittently in Backwoods. Except in a few references to Indian Christians, and to lapsed English Christians who set a bad example for the former, Traill makes no mention of specific religious doctrines or precepts. Unlike her sister Susanna, who underwent a serious religious crisis in her twenties, briefly leaving the established English church and joining a dissenting congregation,[234] Traill remained constant in her religious faith. This certainty is reflected throughout her descriptions of natural phenomena and scientific processes.

Natural historian, independent scientist, romantic lover of nature, early ecologist, genteel collector of flowers and plants, devout Christian who discerns the hand of God in the natural world – each of these labels conveys an aspect of Catharine Parr Traill's scientific persona and suggests a slightly different way of reading the scientific sections of Backwoods. As with the textual interpretations explored earlier – travel narrative, settler's guide and their permutations – these readings teach us as much, or more, about the cultural and textual conventions of the time and place in which Traill constructed her narrative as they do about her life or subject matter. They also make us consider the baggage we, as individual readers and products of our time and place, bring to the text. We may, for example, choose to regard Traill as a proto-feminist or an early ecologist, yet these terms and their twenty-first century connotations would have been

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[234] John Thurston explores the nature of Susanna's temporary religious conversion, and its influence on her writing, in chapter three of The Work of Worlds.

completely alien, and potentially alienating, to the author herself.

So how can we synthesize these multiple readings of The Backwoods of Canada? Is it possible to link an early twenty-first century perspective with that of a nineteenth-century reader, bearing in mind Traill's values and concerns while benefiting from the theoretical perspectives of modern literary and rhetorical theory? Although I believe that a single, holistic reading of the text would inevitably become over-simplified and over-generalized, I will attempt to "gather up" as many threads as possible in my final chapter, contextualizing and suggesting links between the multiple readings I have discussed, as well as exploring the interplay between discourse and genre.

CHAPTER 9

Gathering up the Threads: Generic and Discursive Patterns in The Backwoods of Canada

As I have demonstrated, The Backwoods of Canada observes the conventions of a number of genres and discourses, some more extensively than others, and lends itself to a range of historical and contemporary readings. But neither these conventions nor these readings function discretely, just as Traill's text cannot be read in a cultural or historical vacuum. So how can we bring together the diverse threads of this work to suggest a more holistic reading without compromising its fluidity and multiplicity?

The parameters I have established – providing an interpretation which is holistic, yet fluid and multifaceted – doom any attempt at synthesis to failure in a definitive sense. I could sidestep the task, arguing that Traill's work is generically and discursively unstable, as John Thurston does with Susanna Moodie's Roughing It in the Bush in his 1996 study, The Work of Words. Backwoods is certainly not tightly structured and the letters which constitute the text vary quite significantly in format, style and tone. However, Traill's text is not hybrid in the way that Moodie's is: it is clearly the work of a single author (though perhaps edited rather arbitrarily), and maintains a generally consistent authorial persona and perspective. Not to attempt a more holistic reading of Backwoods would be to deny significant inter-relationships between elements of the work, and between ourselves and its readers over the last century and a half. Hence, I will attempt, with some trepidation, to link the predominant generic and discursive threads of Catharine Parr Traill's text.

Throughout this study, I have aimed to keep the generic and discursive conventions through which Backwoods was created, and its readers – the individuals who continue to validate this work through their interpretations – at the forefront. The generic templates of the travel narrative and the settler's guide, I argue, provide a general framework for the text, while discourses of femininity, maternity, domesticity, class, colonialism, religion, and science dominate in different sections. However, the significance accorded to each of these elements, either consciously or subconsciously, has varied considerably over time. When initially

published, Backwoods was read primarily as a settler's handbook, though some reviewers focused on its anthropological accounts of First Nations people. As the nineteenth century progressed, the text was increasingly read as an historical artefact describing a pioneer way of life only recently left behind and touted as an embodiment of the author's indomitable spirit. In the first half of the twentieth century the historical and biographical emphasis continued, while as a literary work Backwoods was relegated to the position of a minor piece, frequently compared to Susanna Moodie's more popular text and sometimes denigrated for its lack of polish. From the 1960's onward, more attention has been paid to Backwoods, though only in the past twenty years has its critical reputation risen significantly; it is now regarded as a significant text in its own right, taken seriously as an historical, scientific and early ecological study, as well as a work of creative non-fiction.

Generic and discursive conventions and structures function in different ways on the production and reception of Backwoods. In its production, the uniquely blended genre of the travel narrative/settler's guide provided Traill with a format for a marketable text and a means of organizing and articulating her experiences as an emigrant. She chose this popular generic template, which then became a determining component in the persona she created, the way she structured her narrative, and the diction and rhetorical strategies she employed. On a general level, the generic features of the travel narrative constituted a means of seeing: the discursive "eye/I" who, in Alison Blunt's words, "constructs spatial and textual difference" (21).

Genre also provided, and continues to provide, Traill's readers with a way to interpret the text. For her initial audience, familiar with the conventions of the blended travel narrative/settler's guide popular in the first half of the nineteenth century, Traill's work included few surprises (this was one of the early criticisms directed at Backwoods: that it had little new to add to the plethora of such books). Her perspective as a woman was slightly different and her narrative persona more engaging than that found in many texts, but the material she included – an account of the sea journey, landscape descriptions, manners and customs descriptions of First Nations people, accounts of plants and animals, advice for future settlers – was predictable, at least in its general coverage.

However, by the late nineteenth century, the generic template underlying Backwoods had become less familiar to readers, and from this point on, critical responses to the text embody different reading strategies and generic conventions. Critics began to interpret Backwoods as an historical memoir, focusing increasingly on the specifics of time and place, and on Traill's autobiographical persona. As the twentieth century progressed, less attention was paid to

historical content while autobiographical elements were increasingly subjected to psychological interpretation and comparison with Susanna Moodie's work. Thematic studies interpreting Traill's text in the context of Frye's "garrison mentality" were followed by feminist and post-colonial critiques. Recently, the generic conventions through which the scientific sections of Backwoods are interpreted have shifted considerably. For an 1830's reader, Traill's descriptions of plants and animals and her general comments on nature were reminiscent of popular natural history accounts such as Gilbert White's Natural History of Selborne. Yet late twentieth and early twenty-first century readers approach these passages from a different perspective, discovering anecdotal, scientifically-based descriptions of plants and animals (appealing to some, irrelevant to others), or an ecological account of Canada before it was polluted and spoiled (though the term ecology was not current when Traill wrote).

In comparison to genre, discourses in Backwoods function, in terms of both production and reception, on a deeper, less conscious level. As one would expect, the discourses embedded in Traill's writing – the most prominent being colonialism, class, femininity, domesticity, maternity and religion – were prevalent in her society and can be linked to the details of her personal upbringing and experiences. The relative significance of each of these discourses on the production of Backwoods is difficult to ascertain, however, and it could be argued that any attempt to delineate and evaluate their influence would suggest more about the critic than about the social milieu in which the text was created. Still, it is reasonable to propose that Traill's text most explicitly participates in the highly gendered, deterministic discourses of nineteenth-century femininity and domesticity, as Misao Dean and Gillian Whitlock, respectively, argue. Less overt, though perhaps no less significant, is the religious discourse underlying Backwoods. Interwoven with discourses of femininity and domesticity, Christian discourse surfaces in Traill's descriptions of First Nations people, in scientific passages and in the metaphors employed in the travel narrative sections of the text. The discourses of science, colonialism, class, and maternity, although less extensively employed in Backwoods, helped to determine the perspective Traill adopted towards her subject and the manner in which she presented her material.

I will now attempt a pictorial representation of the generic and discursive factors which influence(d), and perhaps even dictate(d), the production and reception of Traill's text. My intention is not to provide a definitive analysis of how the work was created, or how it has or should be read; in this model I seek to identify key discursive and generic influences on the text, its author and its readers, and to suggest inter-relationships between these theoretical constructs.

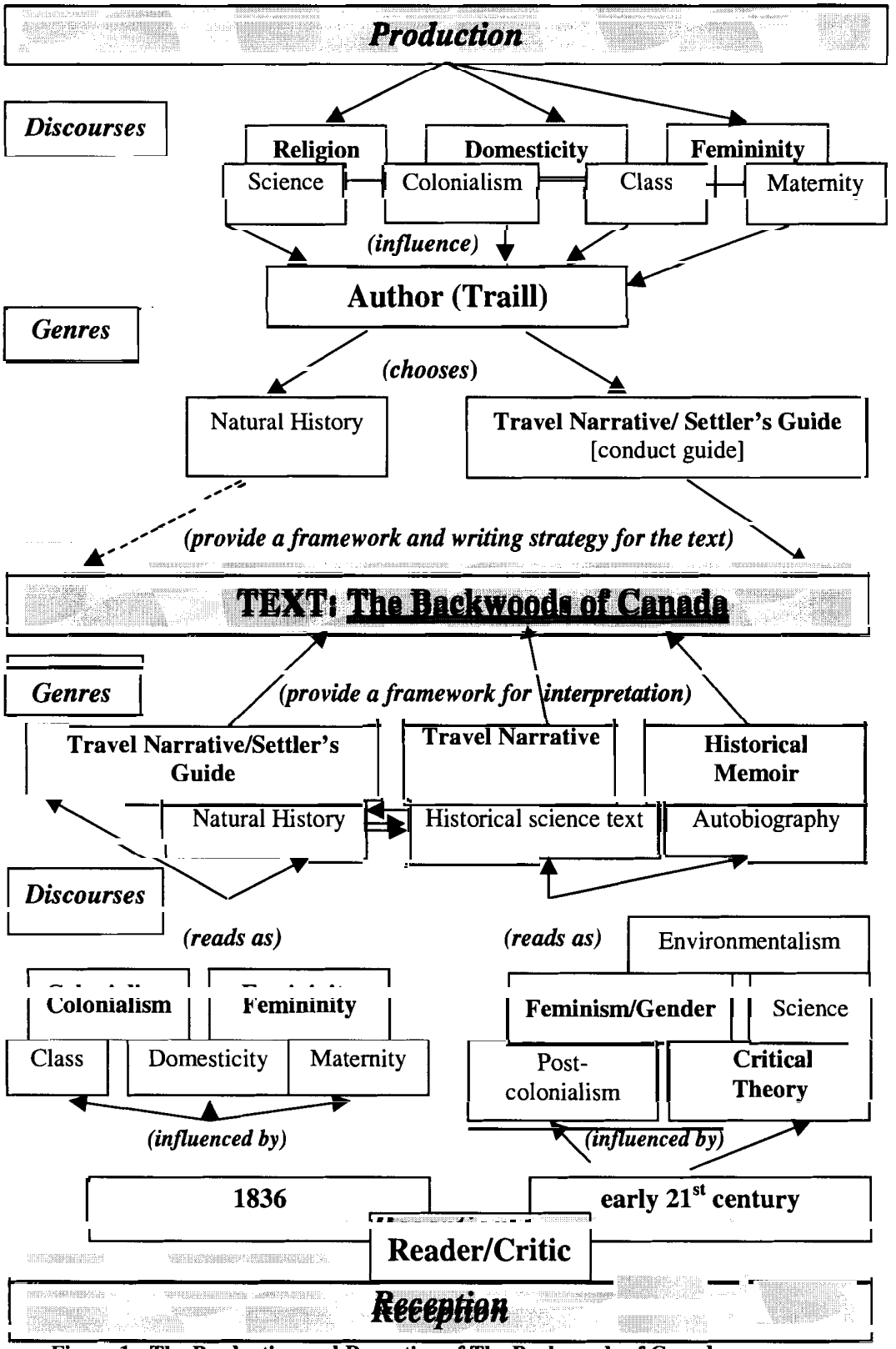

Figure 1: The Production and Reception of The Backwoods of Canada.

The text holds a position at the centre of this model which can be interpreted as static, representing the definitive finished product as published, reproduced and passed down to us (amended somewhat by editors), and fluid, open to reinterpretation and re-inscription within a cultural and literary canon of significant works. I considered using the terms "encoding" and "decoding" to suggest the active and symbolic nature of the processes of production and reception of the text, in accordance with Stuart Hall's usage in his cultural studies based analysis of popular discourse.[235] However, I am uncomfortable with the corresponding assumption that an absolute *a priori* reality exists, waiting to be encoded in a text, and once embedded in a text, waiting to be decoded. Instead, I interpret the experiences Traill recounts as, at least in part, a product of the genre(s) she chooses and the discourses influencing her. In each context, I highlight the discourses and genres I consider most influential.

I deliberately place discourses at different positions in relation to the author and reader: prior to, hence influencing, the author, yet following the reader, directing interpretation. Although they affected the creative process, I interpret the discourses relevant to the production of Backwoods primarily in the context of Traill's social and cultural environment. Discourses of religion, science, colonialism, class, femininity, maternity and domesticity – functioning both socially and linguistically – acted indirectly, dictating her perspective and providing a means of articulating and interpreting experience. Genre, Traill's conscious choice, provided a textual framework and writing strategy. Although travel narrative/settler's guide is clearly the dominant genre, Traill also utilizes generic features of natural history texts (indicated by a fragmentary arrow) and conduct guides (placed in parenthesis after "travel narrative/settler's guide," as this is the least influential genre).

In the production section of the chart, I employ the verbs "influence," "chooses" and "provide" to indicate the interplay between social discourses, the author and generic conventions. Although Traill makes significant choices as she composes her text, these occur within the framework of what John Frow terms "systemic constraints" (70). Similarly, the reading strategies and choices of Traill's audience are directed, if not dictated, by contemporary social and – in the case of twenty-first century readers – academic discourses. Rather than absorbing meaning from a text, readers are "actively engaging with and constructing textual meaning" (Frow 69). In this

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[235] See Hall's essay, "Encoding/Decoding." He employs a flow chart to represent both the process of producing, or constructing, a message as "meaningful discourse" and the means by which the message is received and circulated. In Hall's model, both encoding and decoding are "meaning structures" (130).

context, "[t]exts become a locus of struggle in which the business of belief is negotiated by readers choosing textual sense" (69-70). Frow's phrase "locus of struggle" reminds us of the significant, shifting links between power and discourse. As I indicate in chapter one, Foucault emphasizes that discourse both "transmits and produces power" (The History of Sexuality 1:101).

In the reception section of the chart, I use the reader/critic[236] as the starting point. Although I realize that this could be interpreted as a naïve assumption that readers are less influenced by social discourses than writers, this is not my intention: I have chosen to emphasize the way readers approach a text through discourses and genres determined by their social and historical milieu. To avoid creating an overly elaborate chart, I indicate only two categories of reader/critic – one contemporaneous to the text (1836) and one contemporary to myself (early twenty-first century) – though the two are not absolutely distinct. If I were to elaborate on the "reader" section, I would add a reader spanning the late nineteenth-century through to the 1980's who interprets the text primarily as a pioneer memoir, influenced by discourses of femininity, history and twentieth-century thematically-based literary criticism. Ideally, I would also indicate that although twenty-first century readers/critics may interpret the text through a broader range of genres and discourses than their nineteenth-century counterparts, the potential reading audience for the text has become narrower, and increasingly academic.[237] A more comprehensive and complex model of the reception history of Backwoods would also be dynamic, representing reader response as a continuum rather than a fixed entity.

In the reception portion, discourses lead to genres, and both influence how a reader interprets the text. Here discourses and genres provide reading strategies, frequently involving conscious choices on the critic's part. For example, Marianne Ainley chooses to read Backwoods as an early scientific work, Misao Dean adopts a feminist-historical approach, Gillian Whitlock focuses on the discourse of domesticity in the text, while John Thurston attempts to read the work

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[236] I have chosen to use the singular "reader/critic" to correspond with the singular author in the top half of the chart. However, one could readily replace this with the phrase "interpretative community" which I utilize in chapter two.

[237] As I suggest in chapter two, John Frow would distinguish between the initial "first-order" reading practice of "everyday culture" engaged in by Traill's early readers, and the more recent analytical practice of "second-order" reading by individuals and institutions "with significant cultural capital" (87). However, because I wish to focus on discourses and genres in this chart, I employ only the general descriptor, "Reader/Critic," and allow the increasingly analytical reading practice of Traill's twenty-first century audience to remain implicit in the categories "post-colonialism," "critical theory" and "feminism/gender."

as its initial readers might by reconstructing the blended genre of the travel narrative/settler's guide. Each of the latter three critics adopts a late twentieth-century critical approach, interpreting Backwoods through the discourses of the 1830's and using the text to uncover social discourses which influenced the author. These critics strive to read an 1836 reader in – and into – the text of Backwoods, and not surprisingly, interpret the work as more multi-layered and multi-facetted than Traill's initial readers.

Reading for the diversity of the text is the strategy I apply throughout this study. In order to appreciate Traill's work, we need to combine an awareness of the socio-historical context in which it was produced with an appreciation of how a range of critical and theoretical approaches shed light on facets of the text. As readers, we should allow the work to lead us, modifying our reading practices as appropriate and recognizing sites of conformity, transgression and tension. A sensitivity to genre and discourse enables us to place the text, and to recognize points where the generic conventions Traill observes and the discursive strategies she adopts, fail her.

A number of interesting parallels become obvious when one compares the conventions and interpretative strategies associated with Backwoods and those of Traill's later works. Canadian Crusoes: A Tale of the Rice Lake Plains, perhaps the most significant of these, has – like Backwoods – retained a degree of popularity and an, admittedly somewhat tenuous, critical reputation into the twenty-first century. Canadian Crusoes also poses challenges to today's readers since the generic conventions to which it conforms – those of the didactic, nineteenth-century children's story – are potentially unfamiliar and unappealing, and because Traill's detailed descriptions of flora and fauna seem out of place in a work of fiction. To an even greater extent than Backwoods, this text now attracts a different readership than initially targeted. Described at the time of publication as a book intended to "interest children, or rather young people approaching the age of adolescence, in the natural history of this country, simply by showing them how it is possible for children to make the best of it when thrown into a state of destitution" (Agnes Strickland, Preface 322), Canadian Crusoes is, in the twenty-first century, "less likely to appeal to the Judy Blume generation of juvenile readers than to adults interested in Canadian cultural history" (Gerson, "Wilderness Survival" 73). As Jauss suggests, a text such as this both evokes new critical responses at a later stage and precipitates readings which uncover meaning in a text "that one previously could not have sought in it" (35).

First published in 1852, Canadian Crusoes tells the story of three children who become lost in the wilderness – ironically, less than ten miles from home – and successfully survive for

two years, applying common sense and a practical knowledge of the Canadian woods (some of which they acquire from their "Friday," a Mohawk girl rescued by one of the boys). Traill was fascinated by the idea of lost children, and reworked the theme in a number of short pieces before developing it in this novel.[238] As Ruth Bradley-St-Cyr suggests, the strength of the text "lies neither in plot nor in character, but rather in its capacity for education" (21). Canadian Crusoes, which – like Backwoods – was intended to educate as well as entertain, proved immediately popular, remaining in print for more than seventy years,[239] and appearing in numerous English and American editions.[240]

In keeping with the Crusoe myth, which I explored briefly in chapter seven, Canadian Crusoes is saturated with the discourse of domesticity. The protagonists – especially Catharine, who shares the author's name and its slightly unusual spelling – expend a great deal of energy creating a home in the bush. In this "pioneer fable,"[241] the children successfully domesticate their environment, building a series of increasingly sturdy shelters, hunting, fishing and growing corn. Not surprisingly, many of the roles they adopt are conventionally gender specific: Hector and Louis build houses, gather firewood and take charge of most of the hunting and fishing, while Catharine stays near to home, gathering fruit and preparing meals. (Interestingly, the Mohawk girl, whom they name Indiana, plays a more androgynous role, hunting with the young men, yet cooking and sewing with Catharine). Even when Catharine is taken prisoner by a hostile Indian man and removed to a distant camp, she adopts a domestic role, attaching herself to a widow and her family, moving into their home and helping with childcare, cooking and household chores.

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[238] In his introduction to the CEECT edition of Canadian Crusoes, Rupert Schieder traces the germination of the story of the lost children, beginning in 1837. Traill initially utilized the material in journal entries and short stories (Schieder, Editor's Introduction xvii-xx).

[239] This long print run was followed by a gap of about sixty years, until the novel was reprinted in a definitive CEECT edition in 1986. As with Backwoods, this meticulously prepared edition has granted Canadian Crusoes a scholarly legitimacy, though it does not appear to be sparking much critical inquiry.

[240] Canadian Crusoes appeared under the title Lost in the Backwoods in the American editions, a name change which Traill described as *"very stupid* and as I think illegal" (Schieder, Editor's Introduction xxxviii).

[241] In her review of the CEECT edition of Canadian Crusoes, Gerson describes the text as a re-enactment of "the pioneer fable that had brought their parents (and their author) to the New World: reason and knowledge, properly applied to the natural abundance of North America, will inevitably produce relative prosperity" ("Wilderness Survival" 74).

Interwoven with the discourse of domesticity are those of religion (or more specifically, evangelical Christianity), natural history, femininity, race and colonialism. For Traill and her initial reading audience, religion and natural history were the most overt and significant of these discourses, yet these have been frequently overlooked by late twentieth/early twenty-first century critics. Instead, recent criticism focuses on colonial discourse, interpreting Canadian Crusoes as significant in historical and sociological terms, applying methodology associated with postcolonialism and the critical analysis of travel narrative. Using a model suggested by Homi K. Bhabha, Robert Fleming reads Traill's novel as a performative narrative about Canadian identity in which the heroine becomes empowered by adopting Indigenous ways ("Supplementing Self"), while Carole Gerson applies Pratt's concept of contact zones, and a feminist critique, to Traill's representations of Native women in Canadian Crusoes, Backwoods and a short sketch entitled "A Visit to the Camp of the Chippewa Indians" ("Nobler Savages").

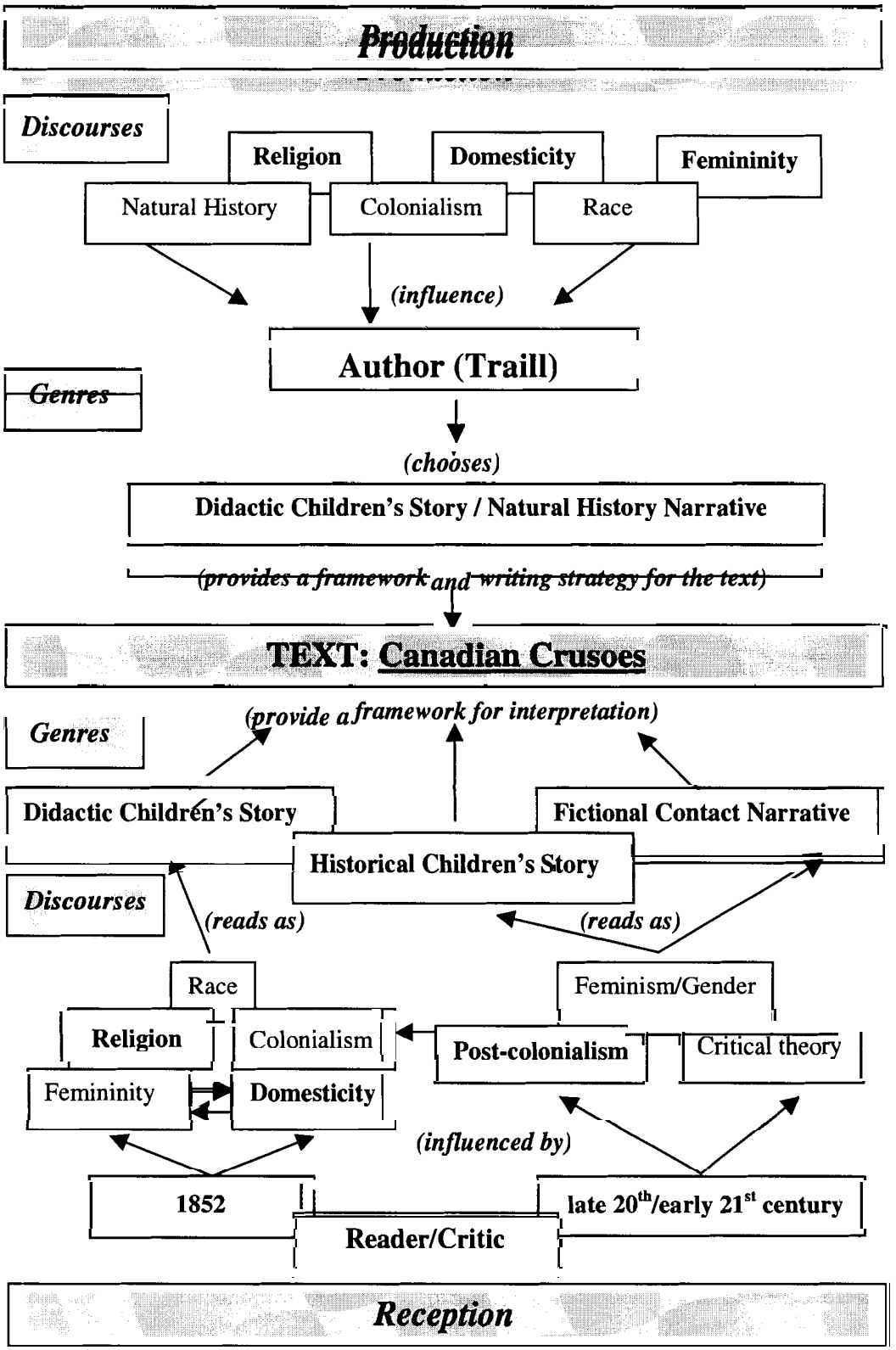

Figure 2: The Production and Reception of Canadian Crusoes.

Significantly, while Canadian Crusoes exploits many of the same discourses as Backwoods, in terms of its production and reception, it has inspired a more limited range of critical responses. On a basic level, this provides evidence of the obvious – that this novel is a less complex, less textually rich work than Backwoods – yet it also highlights interesting gaps in critical responses to both works. While devising the second chart, I had difficulty identifying generic conventions through which late twentieth/early twenty-first century critics approach Canadian Crusoes. Except for brief comments in reviews and the limited discussion of Canadian Crusoes included in Bradley-St-Cyr's essay, "A walking tour through the children's books of Catharine Parr Traill," recent critics – including Rupert Schieder in his Editor's Introduction to the CEECT edition – have tacitly ignored its generic features. As I modified the Backwoods chart, I also noted the comparatively insignificant role played by the discourses of feminism and gender analysis in critical responses to Traill's novel[242] – in spite of the fact that an exploration of the interplay of femininity and domesticity in Canadian Crusoes would potentially contribute to our understanding of nineteenth-century textual and social constructions of femininity, complementing Misao Dean's study, Practising Femininity.

A comparison of the charts for Canadian Crusoes and Backwoods suggests that race – and more specifically, racial classification – plays an overt role in the former, but is insignificant in the latter. As I indicate in chapter six, this is not the case, though my consideration of Traill's presentation of race in Backwoods has been mostly implicit, subsumed within discussions of the genre of travel narrative and the discourse of colonialism (most specifically in analyses of textual presentations of encounters with the Other). While it might be interesting to read Backwoods in terms of racial discourse, and to consider why such discourse surfaces less overtly in this travel narrative/settler's handbook than in Traill's novel, I would also suggest that the limited critical attention currently paid to Canadian Crusoes can be linked, in part, to the presence of such racist rhetoric. Throughout this study, I have assumed that approaching Backwoods with an awareness of a range of discourses and generic conventions, especially those which influenced its production, enriches reading and critical responses. Yet with Canadian Crusoes, more so than with Backwoods, the discourses and generic conventions underlying the text need to be deconstructed, interrogated, and recognized as potential hindrances to today's readers. An interesting question to ask ourselves is whether we would recommend this novel to readers

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[242] Gerson is the only critic who applies a feminist-based critique to Canadian Crusoes ("Nobler Savages").

outside of a historical study of children's literature, or a similar scholarly context. I suspect that the answer would be a resounding 'no,' and not just because modern adolescents are accustomed to more fast-paced literature. While Backwoods benefits from contextualization and qualification in a twenty-first century context, Canadian Crusoes, I would suggest, requires it.

Traill's other major works which follow Backwoods are also narrower in scope. The Female Emigrant's Guide, published in 1854, targets an audience of, in Ann Boutelle's words, "less capable, less organized emigrants – the unprepared who left in desperation, without means to get themselves started, and without any knowledge of what to expect" ("Sisters and Survivors" 15). Traill prepared this "very Victorian book" (Ballstadt, Introduction ix) as a companion piece to Backwoods, which she had written twenty years previously and now admitted was "necessarily deficient in many points of knowledge . . . essential for the instruction of the emigrant's wife" (Preface xviii). Organized alphabetically in a textbook, rather than narrative format, this work provides a methodical account of such diverse topics as dyeing wool, curing fish, making carpets and the characteristics of each month of the Canadian year. As Misao Dean explains in the only extensive critical analysis of this text, "The Female Emigrant's Guide inherits its generic conventions from British conduct books which combined the generic attributes of devotional literature, courtesy books, and domestic economies" (22). Although it includes sections of poetic natural history descriptions, these are limited; The Female Emigrant's Guide remains most significant in terms of its domestic discourse and gender conventions "destabilized by emigration" (Dean 22), and is primarily of interest as a detailed addendum to Backwoods.[243]

Traill's most important scientific work – Studies of Plant Life in Canada – published in 1885, provides a wealth of material about Canadian wildflowers, flowering shrubs, and grasses, and marks the culmination of more than fifty years of botanical observation, collection and classification. Traill had published numerous articles on Canadian plants and animals, and an illustrated text, Canadian Wild Flowers, in 1868, but Plant Life in Canada is far more ambitious and comprehensive than anything she attempted before. As well as descriptive passages and illustrations, this work includes information about the geographic distribution, ecological

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[243] I do not mean to suggest that this work should be read as merely a continuum of Backwoods, however. As Carl Ballstadt suggests, this very popular book – which went through at least eleven editions – "shows a marked advance in the degree of Mrs. Traill's Canadianization" (Introduction xi). It would be interesting to compare Traill's developing attitudes towards her adopted homeland and the concept of "Canadian" in Backwoods (which I touched upon in chapter six), Canadian Crusoes and The Female Emigrant's Guide.

relationships and potential uses of plants, and is certainly "no dry, scientific catalogue" (Ainley, "Science" 90). Although the generic antecedent of Plant Life in Canada is the natural history text, Traill's organization is more categorical and scientific than that employed in Gilbert White's The Natural History of Selborne.[244] In characteristic fashion, Traill includes both implicit and explicit Christian references, utilizes maternal metaphors and integrates information acquired from First Nations people. Since this work was intended for the general public, and more specifically for "Canadian mothers," Traill employs "less scientific terminology than either in her previous botanical articles or in Canadian Wild Flowers" (Ainley, "Science" 91). In many ways, the descriptions in Plant Life in Canada are reminiscent of Backwoods, and like The Female Emigrant's Guide, this text can be approached as complementary to the core work of my study, providing an expansion and development of the botanical descriptions of Backwoods.

Pearls and Pebbles, a collection of Traill's sketches originally published in 1894, and recently reissued and edited by Elizabeth Thompson, is more diverse and potentially appealing to a modern audience than either The Female Emigrant's Guide or Plant Life in Canada. The text consists of a preface, twenty-four prose pieces (a number previously published) and a "Biographical Sketch" produced by Traill's great-niece, Mary Agnes Fitzgibbon. As Thompson explains, in this collection "miscellany rules as Traill mingles meditation, anecdote, reminiscence, and detached scientific observation" (Editor's Introduction xiii). The conventions of natural history writing dominate in most of these sketches, though four pieces – "Sunset and Sunrise on Lake Ontario," "The First Death in the Clearing," "Alone in the Forest," and "The Children of the Forest" – are closely linked in terms of narrative, style and theme to Backwoods, and follow conventions of travel narrative and contact literature.

The major distinction between Backwoods and these later works is that while the discourses underlying Traill's most famous book often struggle for "the authority to control semiosis" (Armstrong 23), in general her other texts are less diverse and less dialogic. Canadian Crusoes is dominated by discourses of colonialism and domesticity, The Female Emigrant's Guide highlights feminine and domestic discourses, natural history and religious discourse intertwine in Plant Life in Canada, and Pearls and Pebbles includes sketches which individually cover a range of discourses, but are only loosely organized as a collection. Each of these later publications is rooted in The Backwoods of Canada, and – in a somewhat generalized manner –

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[244] I discussed Gilbert White's rambling, pastoral text and considered its influence on Traill's work in chapter eight.

can be read as an extension of its discursive and generic threads.

In one sense, Traill's late nineteenth-century critics were right: the significance of Backwoods is primarily historical. It provides an example of a particular style of text produced in a particular place and time. It speaks to us of the exigencies of writing and publishing in pre-Confederation Canada, and of the values and expectations of the society in which it was created and circulated. It was both profoundly conservative in its espousal of middle-class social and colonial values, and subtly transgressive in its, admittedly occasional, representations of Native people as independent agents with whom one can – and should – form reciprocal relationships, and in its scientific passages which blend maternal and scientific discourse and acknowledge the role of Native expertise.

Yet Backwoods is also significant to cultural and literary studies. Its generic diversity – in terms of both the genres through which it was constructed and those through which it has been interpreted – and the range of readings it has inspired over the last hundred and seventy years make for a fascinating study, raising issues of categorization, evaluation and canonicity. On a more theoretical level, an analysis of the relationship between discourse and genre, which are closely intertwined in this text, raises questions regarding the function of these constructs in society and in the processes of writing and reading. Given that The Backwoods of Canada is the work of "a more complex writer than has heretofore been assumed," (Peterman and Ballstadt, Introduction to Forest and Other Gleanings 2) and its readings over time more varied and nuanced than one might expect, an effective twenty-first century interpretation demands a sensitivity to the multi-facetted nature of the work, to the layered readings it has inspired and to those which it might inspire in the future.

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