

Reconstructing the Wilderness: Margaret Atwood's Reading of Susanna Moodie

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The literary relation between Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), and Susanna Strickland Moodie's 1852 sketches of immigrant life, *Roughing It in the Bush, or, Forest Life in*

Canada has been the subject of a number of critical analyses,¹ many of which adopt the heuristic metaphors of "violent duality" and "paranoid schizophrenia" that Atwood applies to Moodie in the "Afterword".² This Afterword has had an effect on Moodie and Atwood criticism very similar to that described by Anna Balakian as "false influence," in which a model text is distorted or transformed by a new text which illuminates the model text and inspires followers.³ So powerful is Atwood's reconstruction that not only most interpretations of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, but many independent discussions of *Roughing It in the Bush* as well,⁴ have succumbed to its lure. A new reading of this literary relation seems called for, one which considers Atwood's response to Moodie in terms of the creative relation Moodie achieved, by accepting and resisting inherited European aesthetics, with the wilderness landscape of colonial Canada. Such a reading is suggested by Atwood's poetic concern with the relationship of Canadians to their own landscape, and by the explicit stance of her criticism: "For the members of a country or culture, shared knowledge of their place, their *here*, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive."⁵

In *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Atwood interrogates Moodie's paradigms in a manner which raises the difficulty of knowing anything at all, when we can articulate that knowing only through language already opaque with the words of others. The reactive nature of *The Journals* suggests that the relation between

these texts is one of negative influence,⁶ an undisputed influence which is formulated as a reaction to a prior text. In Hermerén's formulation, this is an antithetical relation,⁷ but it may be more accurate to say here that positive and negative influence do not form a simple opposition, but a linear, sliding scale. Certain aspects of *The Journals* replicate *Roughing It* very closely — the teadrinker's dialogue in "The Charivari," "Brian the Still-hunter," Moodie's stance in relation to landscape, and those moments when Moodie's paradigms of landscape appreciation break down — and insofar as replication occurs, this is a case of positive influence. Atwood, however, does not merely replicate but interrogates and comments on Moodie's presentation, a reactive mode which points to negative influence.

It is in the area of negative influence that intertextuality has been most useful.⁸ Bakhtin's formulation of intertextuality understands the dialogic nature of language as a struggle between socio-linguistic points of view.⁹ The irreducible differences between these points of view mean that no unitary language is ever communicated,¹⁰ but as stylized objects of representation, these languages penetrate and interanimate each other.¹¹ While there is little or no direct authorial voice, the novel owns a "verbal-ideological centre" where all the different languages intersect. As Kristeva indicates, the transposition of signs involved in the intertextual citation is never innocent, but always transformed, distorted, or displaced by its inclusion in a new work, to suit the value system of the speaking subject.¹²

Using Bakhtin's dialogic paradigm, we can see that alien sociolects are, for Moodie, objects of representation which are destabilized and interrogated.¹³ Chief among these are eighteenth-century sociolects of landscape appreciation, which turn on the control of the phenomenal world by the gazing subject. The gaze involves a power relationship between the active, gazing subject and the passive object. Not only does the active function of the gaze objectify what is seen, but from the vantage point of the subject, the gazer actively imposes limits on her object. Gairdner points out that in the European Romantic tradition of which Moodie is a part, comprehending the phenomenal world implies the subjective relation of the thinker to the object, and Moodie's gaze, partaking of this paradigm, empties the object of any external, objective reality.¹⁴

The aesthetics of the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain required the objectification of landscape in the gaze of the human subject. In these paradigms, the phenomenal world in its unmalleable reality becomes, by the exercise of the gaze, an object, and its 'reality' is thus constructed by and in relation to the subject of the gaze. This structure is an economic one in that it is a structure of gain and loss, of "interested calculation,"¹⁵ it is also political, in that it implies and demands control of the object by the speaking subject whose gaze constructs the object. Attempting to exercise this aesthetic control over the Canadian landscape, the Moodie character is faced by a phenomenal world which eludes her control, thus subverting the inherited paradigm; this subversion is consciously related in *Roughing It in the Bush*. Moreover, it is at these moments when the phenomenal world eludes Moodie's control that Atwood enters, and, in the poems of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, transforms the landscape into a subject position.

As Christopher Hussey points out, the aesthetic appreciation of landscape requires the gradual relinquishing of notions of the features of landscape as signifiers in a moral and religious discourse,¹⁶ a discourse which prevents the disinterested appreciation which is necessary to an aesthetic paradigm. Such paradigms require a break from the appreciation of landscape in terms of use-value, and this break has as a necessary condition a fairly high level of material prosperity and security.¹⁷ This is not so much a break, but a removal; pragmatic considerations, although disguised, remain an important part of landscape aesthetics. Real physical danger inhibits aesthetic appreciation; importantly, the prosperity requirement also implies that aesthetic appreciation is the province of the educated, monied class. In the absence of a level of material prosperity which allows for both the security and the leisure to look about one, what is appreciated in the phenomenal world is the available and the useful; as Moodie suggests quite late in her character's development, the row of corn rather than the decorative water-colour.

Burke's description of the beautiful, associated with the tame, the non-threatening, and the submissive, and linked to the passion of society, which turns on gratification and pleasure¹⁸ seems directly related to this appreciation of the use-value of the phenomenal world. Although he argues that utility and fitness are not productive of beauty, the practical application of his conditions

of beauty to the discourse of landscape aesthetics, most importantly the notion of submission, suggests both the control of the beautiful object by the human subject and the use of that beautiful object for human gratification.

The privileging of the subject in the aesthetic of the sublime occurs quite differently. Kant points out that "we are inaccurate if we term an object of nature sublime; all we can say is that the object lends itself to a sublimity discoverable in the mind."¹⁹ It is here apparent that the importance of the object is in the emotions it arouses in the subject. Nor does the importance of powerful emotions to this aesthetic paradigm counter my assertion that the subject's control of the object is fundamental here. Kant, Burke, and Schiller all argue that a certain distance is necessary between the subject and the terrible object for the experience to be productive of the sublime.²⁰

Thomas Weiskel's model of the sublime moment may give some indication of how this control is exercised. The habitual system of reading landscape assumes a natural order of signs which is predicated on the authority of the Word, Logos; in traditional rhetorical doctrine, signs did have a natural order, and thus the habitual system of reading, landscape or text, can now be seen as naive and complacent. The sublime moment begins where this habitual system breaks down and the accustomed order is violated.²¹ In Weiskel's reading, an object arrests the mind and fills it with an understanding of infinity and of terror; a discontinuity occurs with this arrest of habitual perception which ends when the mind begins to comprehend its own power, through metaphorical identification with infinity.²² In economic terms, what is gained in the sublime moment is a comprehension of the value of the human sign at the price of transformation of the object, in its unmalleable reality, to a relation with the human sign. In political terms, the experience of transcendence asserts the control of the human sign over the phenomenal world.

The aesthetic of the picturesque, while abandoning altogether any pretensions to transcendence, is nevertheless equally concerned with the transformation of nature's unmalleable reality to an object whose sole significance lies in its control by the human gaze. The term picturesque refers to a mode of aesthetic vision which emphasized visual qualities at the expense of either rational qualities or associated ideas.²³ It is an aesthetic concerned with surface appearances; the object of the picturesque gaze is almost

devoid of value, of transcendence, of any power to inspire the passions, but is instead formed, literally and figuratively, by the human subject's ability to comprehend it as art.

The application of picturesque conventions to gardening often required the physical alteration of the landscape, even to the extent of building false ruins or sham castles, and on one occasion staffing a newly built hermitage with a straw 'hermit.'²⁴ Such alterations both underscore the importance of the gaze and human control to this mode of vision, and link the picturesque to the earlier valuation of landscape in use-value terms. It is also clear that landscape aesthetics were largely the province of the educated and monied class; an analogy may then be drawn between the control of the phenomenal world, placed into the service of art, and the politico-economic control of the non-monied classes. It is intriguing, then, to note that the figures considered appropriate to a picturesque landscape were those of the peasantry, who as objects of the gaze are likewise valued in terms of the subject's ability to comprehend them as art.

In these paradigms of landscape appreciation, then, value does not inhere in the phenomenal world, but exists for and in relation to the human subject. When, however, nature eludes the control of the gaze, as I shall show to be so often represented in *Roughing It in the Bush*, it ceases to be beautiful, since what is beautiful is that which submits; it ceases to be picturesque, refusing the alterations which would transform it into art; it refuses the distance between subject and itself which is properly productive of the sublime moment; it ceases to be an object controlled by the human subject, and intrudes itself on that subjectivity. Schiller suggests that without human control, nature becomes a "force":

From being a slave of Nature, so long as he merely perceives her, Man becomes her lawgiver as soon as she becomes his thought. She who had formerly ruled him only as force, now stands as object before the judgement of his glance. What is object to him has no longer power over him; for in order to be object it must experience his own power. Insofar as he gives form to matter, and so long as he gives it, he is invulnerable to her influences; for nothing can injure a spirit except what deprives it of freedom, and Man proves his freedom by his very forming of the formless.²⁵

Textually, when the phenomenal world intrudes itself as force, it

exerts control over the subject and the aestheticism of the text breaks down.

The Grosse Isle scene in *Roughing It in the Bush*²⁶ is the first of these moments. From the vantage point of the ship, the Moodie character commands an excellent view of the "surpassing grandeur of the scene." A "mountain chain" forms "the stupendous background to this sublime view," the clouds "cast into denser shadow the vast forest belt" that girdles these "mighty giants" in their "rugged and awful beauty"; Moodie's response to this "sublime view" is "a thrill of wonder and delight" so that her "eyes were blinded with tears — blinded with the excess of beauty," an understandable response, since "never had [she] beheld so many striking objects all blended into one mighty whole!" The middle space — note that Moodie is utilizing the painter's terms of background and middle space here, in the picturesque tradition — is "occupied by tents and sheds for the cholera patients, and its wooded shores dotted over with motley groups"; this, with the rest of the "rocky isle" adds greatly "to the picturesque effect of the scene." It is, I think, an interesting footnote to our discussion of figures in a picturesque landscape and their objectification as art that Moodie's first consideration of the ravages of cholera is in its contribution to the picturesque effect of what is, under her gaze, a scene.

Once on the island, however, the Moodie character's perception is vastly different. The party lands on rocks, which "the rays of an intensely scorching sun had rendered so hot that [she] could scarcely place [her] foot on them," the motley groups which so added to the picturesque effect of the scene *qua* scene are now an "extraordinary spectacle," with "the confusion of Babel" amongst the "hard-featured, sun-burnt harpies," from whom Moodie shrinks "with feelings almost akin to fear." This is not the fear which is considered productive of the sublime, but rather, as Bentley points out, Moodie's response to the threat of social disintegration posed by the republican spirit of North America.²⁷ The figures of her landscape have eluded her power to objectify them as art, and this is unmistakably a relation of power: Moodie observes that "our passengers . . . who while on board ship had conducted themselves with the greatest propriety, and appeared the most quiet, *orderly* set of people in the world, no sooner set foot upon the island than they became infected by the same spirit of *insubordination* and *misrule*, and were just as *insolent* and noisy as the rest" [emphasis mine]. It appears that the new world enables the objects to escape the limits imposed on them by Moodie, and her resentment of this refusal of

subordination is palpable throughout the text.

Here, as elsewhere, the naiveté of the Moodie persona is abundantly apparent. MacDonald suggests that this scene is deliberately framed to imply irony in the conventional description of the landscape.²⁸ The Moodie character longs to see the island, which "looks a perfect paradise at this distance," up close. The captain disagrees, suggesting that "many things look well at a distance which are bad enough when near." At the verbal-ideological centre there is an awareness of the high contrast between two socio-linguistic points of view: the appreciation of the external world as art, and the difficulties posed by that external world in its unmalleable reality. The belief system of the Moodie character is an object of representation, undercut here and elsewhere by contrasts with other signifying systems. This use of contrast, according to McCarthy, is ironic, as the author-Moodie mocks the naiveté and romanticism of the Moodie character.²⁹ For Whitlock, the discrediting and interrogation of the narrator and the multiplicity of narrators is part of a "complex textual interchange between the retrospective narrator and her inexperienced younger self, which allows the inadequacies of colonial romanticism to become manifest and a number of different perspectives to compete."³⁰ The fall from idealism, according to Whitlock, is a leitmotif throughout this text, and it reflects Moodie's desire to see realistically, a determination which led her into "the complex issues of the relationship between art and artifice, literature and reality, the realisation that literature did not reflect reality in any simple way but raised complex issues of the interrelationship between the observer and the observed, the conventional and the 'real.'"³¹ While Whitlock's remarks are intriguing, I suggest that it is not so much in Moodie but in Atwood's reactive text that the complex issues Whitlock describes are investigated.

The distance-proximity plot of the Grosse Isle scene is used in a number of places in the text to suggest the difference between appearance and reality, and this means that the Moodie character is being re-educated to abandon an aesthetics of landscape which is patently inappropriate to her new environment. As the text progresses, the perspective of the Moodie character will draw closer to the verbal-ideological centre, until in the final sections of the text they are nearly indistinguishable. As I will show, however, the perceptual paradigms of the Moodie character are only superficially altered, and the more profound epistemological

investigation Whitlock posits is never realized.

Leaving Grosse Isle, with the island once again at a distance, Moodie finds that "the island and its sister group looked like a second Eden just emerged from the waters of chaos" (*RITB* 27) — an interesting observation, in light of her earlier description of the "confusion of Babel" amongst the immigrants on the island. It is the restoration of a Burkean "certain distance" that makes this re-evaluation possible.

What strikes the Moodie character most on the way to Quebec, however, is the "majestic river, its vast magnitude, and the depth and clearness of its waters, and its great importance to the colony" (*RITB* 27). Here, the use-value of the St. Lawrence River is linked in syntactical equivalence to aesthetic considerations, suggesting that it is the coincidence of these values which causes the mind to "expand with the sublimity of the spectacle."

The sublime view causes the Moodie character's mind to soar upward "in gratitude and adoration to the Author of all being, to thank him for having made this lower world so wondrously fair" (*RITB* 27). This is clearly an instance of the sublime moment, and in the moment of apparent submission to the transcendent god-term, the Moodie character achieves a kind of self-transcendence which recalls Weiskel's model of the sublime.³² By both invoking the ultimate authority and identifying herself with that authority in the metaphorical moment of the sublime, the Moodie character is able to evade the consequences of disobeying authority; the burden of God's authority is lifted and there is an influx of power.³³ She has internalized the relationship of her imagination to the river which is her object, and in that moment of internalization achieved transcendence by affiliating herself, aloft, with God. The river, she has said, "would have been sufficient to have riveted the attention, and claimed the admiration of every thinking mind." She is such a mind, of course, and in the moment of religious submission she achieves, by her ability to appreciate the "spectacle" before her, her own aggrandizement. Aesthetic appreciation, it may be seen, redounds less to the credit of the pleasing object than it does to the educated aesthete who appreciates it.

Even more interesting is the purpose to which Moodie's first view of the sublime situation of Quebec City is turned. She exhorts Canadians to "Rejoice and be worthy of her [the city]," to exclaim, " 'She is ours! God gave her to us, in her beauty and strength!' " in a passage which curiously succeeds in eliding the

victory of Wolfe over Montcalm to attribute the conquest of Lower Canada to divine agency, a strategy which both exalts and justifies — can God err? — British imperialism:

Canadians! — as long as you remain true to yourselves and to her, what foreign invader could ever dare to plant a hostile flag upon that rock-defended height, or set his foot upon a fortress rendered impregnable by Nature? . . . What elements of future greatness and prosperity encircle you on every side! Never yield up these solid advantages to become an humble dependent on the great republic — wait patiently, loyally, lovingly upon the illustrious parent from which you sprang . . . (*RITB* 29)

The sublime spectacle of Quebec is enjoined to inspire Canadians to resist not only invasion but the dread spectre of republicanism, lurking south of the border. Furthermore, properly obedient Canadians will be rewarded with the achievement of material prosperity, and it is interesting that the aesthetic spectacle is linked here to the issues of capitalism and imperialism. Weiskel notes that individualism, asserted in the sublime moment, takes capitalism as its economic corollary,³⁴ and that in the background of the Romantic sublime is "the heady confidence of imperialism."³⁵ This link is reiterated in the class relations of *Roughing It*; the Moodie character says,

I was not a little amused at the extravagant expectations of some of our steerage passengers. The sight of the Canadian shores had changed them into persons of great consequence. The poorest and the worst-dressed, the least deserving and the most repulsive in mind and morals, exhibited most disgusting traits of self-importance. . . . Girls, who were scarcely able to wash a floor decently, talked of service with contempt, unless tempted to change their resolution by the offer of twelve dollars a month. To endeavour to undeceive them was a useless and ungracious task. (*RITB* 31)

Superficially, the steerage passengers are derided, but the Moodie character as well is the object of representation, and as later developments show, she is far more guilty of "extravagant expectations," than they. This is aptly illustrated in the sketch of Tom Wilson, whose ruin in the colony is brought about by his expectations; intriguingly, Wilson points out that, his expectations being less than J.W.D. Moodie's expectations, his chance of success

is better. Since he fails, we are left to assume that the same danger threatens the Moodies, and in fact their enterprises in the bush did fail spectacularly.

The Moodie character's tendency to turn the lower classes as well as the landscape into objects before her gaze is clearest in her description of the drowning she witnessed at Montreal. From the vantage point of the ship, she commands a view of the "fearful spectacle," saying "[t]here is something terribly exciting in beholding a fellow-creature in imminent peril . . . to feel in your own person all the dreadful alternations of hope and fear . . ." (*RITB* 44). The sailor may be a "fellow-creature," but is not fellow enough to stir the Moodie character from an essentially aesthetic appreciation of the scene before her; he remains an object. Despite her apparent concern for the sailor's fate, the Moodie character is again undercut: " 'Is it possible they will let a human being perish, and so near the shore, when an oar held out would save his life' . . . but not a hand stirred. Every one seemed to expect from his fellows an effort which he was incapable of attempting himself" (*RITB* 44-45). Moodie's judgement is an object of representation here, and encompasses herself as well as the crowd.

The Moodie character's enjoyment of the Canadian scenery is constantly reiterated, but she is always reminded — by cold, by the cholera, by the insolent local inhabitants — of the difference between Canada and her own land, where "Nature, arrayed in her green loveliness, had ever smiled upon [her] like an indulgent mother" (*RITB* 65). Indeed, it seems that, for the Moodie character, the ideal form of nature can only be seen in England, and more specifically on the grounds of the old Hall, her "beloved home": here, of course, nature is tamed and submissive, thoroughly under the control of the English gentlefolk. The poem "The Lament of the Canadian Emigrant" tellingly reveals this, contrasting "this far-distant shore," where "[t]he sigh of the wild winds — the rush of the floods — / Is the only sad music that wakens the woods" with England's "soft waving woodlands" and "green daisied vales." Nature and England form an identity here: "When my soul, dearest Nature! shall cease to adore thee, . . . Then the love I have cherish'd, my country, for thee / In the breast of thy daughter extinguish'd shall be" (*RITB* 77-78). This poem manifests the real content of the term "Nature" for the Moodie character at this stage of her development, associated as it is with the nurturing and maternal aspects³⁶ and with the non-threatening, entirely controlled "soft waving woodlands." Nature is only to be found in England; what greets Moodie in Canada is something else entirely, something

which confounds her inherited notions of the appropriate order of the phenomenal world.

Interestingly, although Moodie's descriptions are laden with key terms from the sociolects of landscape aesthetics, these terms are divorced from their paradigms, and appreciative landscape aesthetics are revealed as patently inappropriate to this environment. The landscape, "unimproved by art," (*RITB* 175) proves to be unmalleable. The sociolects of landscape aesthetics, finally, fail to assert the necessary control over the object of Moodie's gaze, which retains its own ineluctable reality beyond the language used for its description.

Outside of England, "the prospect is indeed dreary" (*RITB* 84) as the Moodies finally arrive at the first of their Canadian homes. "Prospect" can mean both a view of nature, a scene, and human material and economic prospects.³⁷ The polysemous quality of the word highlights that coincidence of aesthetic and economic considerations we have already seen in Moodie's use of landscape aesthetics, particularly in her elaboration of her family's dreary prospects: "Without, pouring rain; within, a fireless hearth. . . . we amused ourselves, while waiting for the coming of our party, by abusing the place, the country, and our own dear selves for our folly in coming to it" (*RITB* 84). That the Moodie character will later willingly praise Canada is unmistakably a change in prospect, in both meanings: "Let [home-sick emigrants] wait a few years; the sun of hope will rise and beautify the landscape, and they will proclaim the country one of the finest in the world" (*RITB* 175).

Landscape appreciation, the sociolect of the educated class, is predicated on a material prosperity which, interestingly enough, is often founded on property: the ownership and cultivation of land. This is borne out in the use of the multi-voiced "prospect," and again in Moodie's comparison of British and Canadian children:

The flowers, the green grass, the glorious sunshine, the birds of the air, and the young lambs gambolling down the verdant slopes, which fill the heart of a British child with a fond ecstasy, bathing the young spirit in Elysium, would float unnoticed before the vision of a Canadian child; while the sight of a dollar, or a new dress, or a gay bonnet, would swell its proud bosom with self-importance and delight. . . . Such perfect self-reliance in beings so new to the world is painful to a thinking mind. It betrays a great want of sensibility and mental culture,

and a melancholy knowledge of the arts of life. (*RITB*
148)

Notice that the ideal form of nature is the province of the educated British child, while the Canadian child, whose "perfect self-reliance" suggests that she does not belong to the leisure class (with which Moodie still associates herself), is incapable of the cultured appreciation. The Moodie character is aware, at this point in her development, that aesthetic appreciation — "sensibility and mental culture" — cannot co-exist with "knowledge of the arts of life." That this seems to be true redounds less to Moodie's credit than it does to the local inhabitants, who can at least bake bread.

This passage is immediately followed by a discussion of the Moodie character's misfortunes in the absence of her servant. Despite her own often-demonstrated sensibilities, the Moodie character is unskilled; she cannot even wash the baby clothes. In the dialogue between Mrs. Joe and the Moodie character which follows, the warring of sociolinguistic perspectives undercuts Moodie through ironic framing of her dialogue:

"Ah, I guess you don't look upon us as fellow-critters, you are so proud and grand. I s'pose you Britishers are not made of flesh and blood like us. You don't choose to sit down at meat with your helps. Now, I calculate, we think them a great deal better than you." "Of course," said [Moodie], "they are more suited to you than we are; they are uneducated, and so are you. This is no fault in either; but it might teach you to pay a little more respect to those who are possessed of superior advantages." (*RITB* 149)

It is difficult to perceive exactly what these superior advantages can be, here in the backwoods; the Moodie character's educated sensibilities might afford her considerable consolation, but without the material prosperity which accompanies such mental culture in England, they afford her little material comfort. In this sense, the Moodie character's paradigms have failed her: the educated sensibility which ought to have guaranteed her control of the external world does not, and her claims to superiority, valid in England, have no currency here: "the titles of 'sir' or 'madam' were very rarely applied by inferiors" (*RITB* 210). What the character fails to realize is that the distinction she claims is entirely irrelevant to her new environment. If she is unable to appreciate the Canadian landscape because it doesn't suit her aesthetic paradigms, she is equally unable to appreciate the skills which are locally valued. And yet we see in "The Charivari" that her perspective has begun to

change:

for a great deal of (British servants') seeming fidelity and long and laborious service in our families, . . . we owe less to any moral perception on their part of the superior kindness or excellence of their employers, than to the mere feeling of assurance, that as long as they do their work well, and are cheerful and obedient, they will be punctually paid their wages. (*RITB* 213)

Although the Moodie character, in retrospect, prefers the Canadian to the British servant, it is interesting that she takes the "superior kindness or excellence" of the employers for granted; her surprise is that this is not recognized by the servant. At the same time, however, she observes that, in Canada, "no domestic can be treated with cruelty or insolence by an unbenevolent or arrogant master" (*RITB* 214). The new environment has begun to exercise its influence.

The Moodie character's education is carried on as much by her despised neighbours as it is by her own experiences. The neighbour, Mrs. D., who berates Moodie for not sharing her dinner table with her servants, refuses to admit her own black servants to her table. Unlike earlier confrontations with Mrs. Joe and with others, the Moodie character here seems to recognize that her hidden assumptions have been revealed and questioned: "Alas, for our fallen nature! Which is more subversive of peace and Christian fellowship — ignorance of our own characters, or of the characters of others?" (*RITB* 228). Thurston notes that when Moodie can situate her characters through narrative, hold them at a distance, she is comfortable, but that her dis-ease emerges when she is compelled to engage with them in a dialogic discourse.³⁸ Here, however, both anxiety and distance have given way to an admission of other perspectives, and the Moodie character is able to respond to Mrs. D. as a subject whose language can penetrate her own.

Just as the Moodie character's treatment of her 'inferiors' has become less rigidly containing, her response to the landscape has been altered by the time the Moodies leave the Melsetter farm for the woods. While she still bemoans the "singularly savage scene" (*RITB* 286), she explicitly connects this reaction with her emigration: "The unpeopled wastes of Canada must present the same aspect *to the new settler* that the world did to our first parents after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden" (*RITB* 287, emphasis mine). It seems the Moodie character recognizes that her

response to the landscape is socially conditioned, as the centre of organization has recognized throughout. Her criticisms of the country are now always accompanied by an awareness that she has come to love this place. Most importantly, she has become able to associate nature with the new land, and to distinguish between the love of nature and the love of "home":

[W]e floated past scenes so wild and lovely — isles that assumed a mysterious look and character in that witching hour. In moments like these, I ceased to regret my separation from my native land, and, filled with the love of Nature, my heart forgot for the time the love of home. (*RITB* 361)

What is "wild" may also be "lovely," now; and the "lonely wilds" permit the soul to approach God as well as did the daisied vales of England. While the Moodie character will never abandon her inherited aesthetic paradigms, and these paradigms continue to operate in much the same way, her narrow vision of the ideal form of nature has unmistakably altered. When the time comes to leave the bush, she finds this change in herself complete.

Every object had become endeared to me during my long exile from civilised life. I loved the lonely lake, with its magnificent belt of dark pines sighing in the breeze; the cedar-swamp, the summer home of my beloved Indian friends . . . (*RITB* 507)

This is the same type of landscape she described earlier as a "dark prison" of "boundless woods," whose "swampy margin" and "belt of dark pines," all shed "a barren chillness on the heart" (*RITB* 175). The Moodie character's vision of "nature" has changed enough to admit the beauty of this view, but the meaning of her paradigms is unaltered: the change in prospect coincides with the return of material prosperity and the spread of cultivation.

In J.W.D. Moodie's closing chapter, "Canadian Sketches," the double meaning of "prospect" becomes explicit. J.W.D. Moodie asserts that "Canada is destined to be one of the most prosperous countries in the world" (*RITB* 518). Landscape and economic potential are irrevocably linked: "The interminable forests — that most gloomy and forbidding feature in its scenery to the European stranger, should have been regarded as the most certain proof of its fertility" (*RITB* 519). These prospects can only be realized if the colonist defeats the wild landscape:

Nature looks sternly on him, and in order to preserve his own existence, he must conquer Nature, as it were, by his perseverance and ingenuity. Each fresh conquest tends to increase his vigour and intelligence, until he becomes a new man, with faculties of mind which, but for his severe lessons in the school of adversity, might have lain for ever dormant. (*RITB* 521)

J.W.D. Moodie appears to share with Schiller, quoted above, a belief that man's superiority to nature lies in his ability to control it; both see the value of nature in the authority of the human ego. However, those moments when the aesthetic paradigms are ruptured allow us to interrogate the assumptions of these belief systems, whose invariable privileging of the human subject opacifies the external world. While *Roughing It* leaves the larger issue of ideological assumptions unaddressed, Margaret Atwood's revision posits the possibility of an order of meaning which does not take the human ego as its referent. Lorraine Weir elaborates this point by noting that the writing of place creates ownership, and imposes a humanist valorization on the world which sustains "the delusion of human supremacy."³⁹

The issues raised by these interrogative moments in *Roughing It in the Bush* are ultimately epistemological. If, in the moment of rupture, it is possible to see that the presence of the human subject renders meaning opaque, the question then becomes, as I shall show it to be for Margaret Atwood, one which addresses the possibility of sure knowledge. Is there, Atwood asks, any way to eliminate the presence of the subject in the signifying chain and comprehend the external world in its unmalleable reality?⁴⁰

I have intimated that it is the ruptures in the inherited European aesthetic paradigms, when nature eludes the control of the objectifying gaze and begins to act as a force, which Atwood seizes upon as the originating point of her epistemological investigation. The epigraph provides the most explicit statement in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* of the rupturing of the aesthetic paradigm: "Where my eyes were / every- / thing appears" (*JSM* 8). The "eyes" are eyes trained to see in inherited modes, but what exists when the gaze is not directed onto the object is "every- / thing"; in eluding the gaze of the human subject, the phenomenal world eludes the limits and boundaries imposed on it by the human desire to have its signification predicated on the authority of the ego. In "Disembarking at Quebec," we see the landscape endowed with volition in that it has the power of refusal which I would argue can

only inhere in an autonomous subject: "The moving water will not show me / my reflection," cries Moodie, "I am a word / in a foreign language" (*JSM* 11). In refusing to reflect, re-assert, the importance of the human ego, the phenomenal world has reduced the Moodie character to the role of signifier, a "word," not even comprehensible; this reduction involves an interesting inversion of traditional landscape aesthetics, in which the ultimate referent for the signifying landscape is, as we have seen, the human ego. In the inversion, the ego becomes a signifier, but one whose referents are inaccessible, "foreign." The new world landscape and the Moodie-signifier can thus be seen as different discourses, lacking the metaphor which will bridge the gap between them.

While Atwood's poetry assumes the existence of the phenomenal world, she is concerned that the contingency of language, inescapably oriented toward the subject, renders the phenomenal world opaque. We have seen that the inadequacy of inherited landscape aesthetics in *Roughing It in the Bush* demonstrates the inescapable presence of the human subject in these sociolects; the Moodie character responds by opening up her aesthetic paradigms so as to reassert the subject as a transcendent signified. Atwood, on the other hand, rejects this solution as yet another means of obscuring meaning. Bakhtin suggests that any possibility of alluding to other linguistic points of view is alien to poetic style, and thus any sense of historical and social boundedness is also alien.⁴¹ For Atwood, however, the notion of a priest-like poetic language is a wished-for, unattainable ideal; she seeks such a unitary, indisputable discourse, but her poetry responds instead to Bakhtin's idea of novelistic discourse, in which every element of the phenomenal world is already "overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist."⁴² This characteristic of the utterance is perceived by Atwood to threaten the very possibility of meaning. The inversion of "Disembarking at Quebec" outlined above is, I think, symptomatic of Atwood's desire to abridge the subject-object duality in an effort to know the external world in its ineluctable and unmalleable reality.

The desire for sure knowledge is Atwoodean, rather than part of Atwood's response to Moodie. In Atwood's work this desire is manifested by a rigorous examination of the relation between the external world and the human subjectivity which must always interpret it, and is visible in Atwood's concern with disguises in poems prior to *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. Atwood is positing an objective reality, sure knowledge of which is obliterated

by the perspective of the subject. Any formulation of that objective reality is only a version of a language-bound reality,⁴³ so that what we know is always and only known through language. The desire for sure knowledge is thus inevitably a desire for a sure language which would make such knowing possible; as Cheryl Walker indicates, it is a metaphysical desire for a bridge between signifier and signified which can join the two terms to achieve a translucence of meaning without value-charged reference to the inevitable third term of the subject. Walker argues that in the later Atwood, the possibility of a text which is ideologically innocent and transparently referential becomes the object of nostalgia rather than the object of epistemological investigation it appears to be in the early works.

Moodie struggles with the disruption of meaning when her languages fail, but there is no evidence that she addresses the inevitability of the orientation of language toward the subject which is the heart of this problem, or even that she wishes to. Her concern with the disruption of meaning is linked to the privileging of a human subject; the failure of her languages disturbs because the human subject is not valorized. In Atwood, on the other hand, the desire for sure knowledge is a desire to evade that subject orientation whose lack so disturbs Moodie. Desire for sure knowledge in Atwood is inevitably an ontological concern, as well as an epistemological one: it is a concern with meaning, at the root of which is a concern with the essential being-in-itself of things, in the Heideggerean sense, and thus with immanence. This is most clearly seen in Atwood's concern with the loss of meaning, and I suggest that what many critics see as a stance against modernity in Atwood is better understood as a stance against encroaching insignificance. After all, as Rosenberg points out, the total valorization of nature, which is often cited as evidence of Atwood's anti-modernity stance, is frequently revealed in her poetry as an emotional or intellectual dead end.⁴⁴ Rosenberg makes it clear that "it is not so much our building cities . . . to which Atwood objects; rather, it is our forgetting what we are building them against."⁴⁵ In Atwood's work, we may frequently observe that when the meaning of our rituals is forgotten or half-obscured, those rituals are drained of meaning and become insignificant: they fail to signify. Similarly, many of Moodie's linguistic rituals, translated from their home soil, have been drained of meaning: the titles of "sir" and "madam," for instance, have been completely transvalued by the local inhabitants, so that they fail to signify any longer in Moodie's system of signs, forcing her to examine the

content of those titles so that a different meaning may ultimately be restored. As Tinkler points out, Moodie's sensitivity to language is acute, reflecting a strong sense of the inherited norms of language, which she believes should remain unambiguous for social intercourse.⁴⁶ Her response to the custom of borrowing (Ch. 5) is violent, says Tinkler, because of the radical change in its meaning;⁴⁷ as McCarthy notes in his discussion of the same anecdote, when words cease to mean, the order they describe ceases to exist.⁴⁸

Above all, it is the problem of perception, "overlain with qualifications, open to dispute," that is under epistemological and ontological investigation in these poems. And the contrast of perceptions — of Moodie, of other immigrants, of Atwood herself — is the vehicle of this investigation, as in "The Planters":

They deny the ground they stand on,

pretend this dirt is the future.
And they are right. If they let go
of that illusion solid to them as a shovel,

open their eyes even for a moment
to these trees, to this particular sun
they would be surrounded, stormed, broken

in upon by branches, roots, tendrils, the dark
side of light
as I am. (*JSM* 16-17)

The illusion that "this dirt is the future" is a necessary one in this context, since its promise of controlling the environment enables the planters to keep the Schillerean force of nature at bay. If they let go, if they forget against what forces they plant, they too will be "surrounded, stormed, broken / in upon."

Atwood's Moodie is, of course, aware of the power that inheres in her gaze. Her fear of "The Wereman" is unmistakably a fear of what will happen when her object eludes her gaze, that in entering the forest, he will be "blotted out" (*JSM* 19). McCarthy's discussion of the prophylactic function of landscape conventions⁴⁹ in *Roughing It in the Bush* allows us to suggest that the disruption of these conventions, in "The Wereman," threatens to obliterate the

object entirely. Atwood's Moodie asks herself, "Unheld by my sight / what does he change into / what other shape . . ." and we can see that Atwood's Moodie is unmistakably losing her grip on the object of her gaze. Since her gaze can be said to construct a reality, she is also losing control of that reality. Without that control, the phenomenal world assumes a meaning she cannot fathom. This Moodie is aware that her perceptions do not encompass an external reality which is proving itself unmalleable: ". . . it may be / only my idea of him / I will find returning / with him hiding behind it." With the power of her gaze called into question, Atwood's Moodie shows herself in "The Wereman" to be aware of her new position as object of another's gaze, the first time this possibility has been recognized:

He may change me also
with the fox eye, the owl
eye, the eightfold
eye of the spider. (*JSM* 19)

In my reading, the subjects of this gaze are multiple now, including both the denizens of the landscape and Moodie's beloved partner. Once the objects of this Moodie's gaze, they have escaped, and the terms of the gaze are terrifyingly inverted here and in the next poem, "Paths and Thingscape," in which Atwood's Moodie is "watched like an invader / who knows hostility but / not where" (*JSM* 21). The deliberate inversion of inherited European aesthetic paradigms is suggested by the word "thingscape" in the title. The possibility of a landscape, in the European sense, has been abandoned in the "thin refusal" made by "these vistas of desolation"; the vagueness of "thingscape" to me implies both the phenomenal world's refusal of Moodiean terms and her own inability to negotiate "the drizzle of strange meaning."

What renders the signifier incomprehensible in the new context is the complete lack of a referent; Atwood's Moodie has come to a country where her "damaged / knowing of the language means / prediction is forever impossible." When referentiality disappears from ritual and from language, the possibility of referentiality and ontological meaning is abandoned and language becomes a prison-house. It is this prison-house in which Atwood's Moodie is trapped, the prison-house of inherited paradigms of landscape appreciation which generalize, as all second-order languages must, and, by generalizing, empty the phenomenal world of its history and particularity; that is, of its own meaning as itself. [50](#)

Atwood's Moodie quickly realizes that the inherited paradigms are useless, and the complete inversion of "Two Fires" marks a desire in her for new and particular knowledge. The fires, says Atwood's Moodie, "in- / formed me," both forming and informing her; she has been irrevocably changed, and the "charred marks" around which she will now "try to grow" may be read as the ruins of her old paradigms, "what was left of their scorched dream." Bilan reads the "scorched dream" as the dream of imposing the old order on the new world.⁵¹ What remains, as we see in "Looking in a Mirror," (JSM 24-25) is the parenthetical suspicion that there is no translucent meaning undistorted by subjectivity, a suspicion that always accompanies mirrors in Atwood's work. "Mirrors," she tells us, "are crafty";⁵² because in the act of reflecting, suspending, preserving the gazing subject mirrors disguise their own depth. There is a phenomenal reality, Atwood suggests, which is obscured by the ineluctable presence of the subject in the mirror. Atwood's Moodie, looking in the mirror, finds only "the shape you already are / but what / if you have forgotten that." In my reading, Atwood's Moodie is unavoidably present in the mirror, but at the same time the loss of her interpretive paradigms suggests that without the ultimate referent of her own subjectivity, now almost unrecognizable, the possibility of a new knowledge, new paradigms, emerges. It may be that Atwood's Moodie's commitment to her new country enables an undamaged knowing of the language, and this possibility is the focus of Journal II.

In "The Death of a Young Son by Drowning" the child Atwood's Moodie plants "in this country / like a flag" (JSM 31) is the sign of a new covenant⁵³ which binds her to the land. The Moodie of *Roughing It in the Bush*, as well, is bound to her new country in this way: "I will and do love thee," she says, "land of my adoption, and of my children's birth; and, oh, dearer still to a mother's heart — land of their graves!" (RITB 65-66). Until the death of her son brings her into contact with the land, Atwood's Moodie has remained an immigrant, one who migrates, always journeying toward "the land [she] floated on / but could not touch to claim." In this respect she is much like the Moodie character of *Roughing It in the Bush*, whom Giltrow describes as "operating on an abstract plane of diffuse enthusiasm."⁵⁴ For Giltrow, Moodie's neglect of concrete details in landscape representation is that of the tourist, whose pleasure in the landscape does not anticipate incorporation into the scene, but is instead a "quick, unimplicating view of foreign sites."⁵⁵ Similarly, Atwood's Moodie cannot see the

particularity of her new country, so that the landscape remains generalized, mutable as waves. The death which marks her covenant with the land enables the environment to leap to "solidity." One of the effects of this covenant suggested by the poem is an attempt at a first-order language which emphasizes the particularity of things: "the new grass / leapt to solidity; / my hands glistened with details" (JSM 31). And yet we are not privy to these details; the return to first-order language is promised, but not actualized.

When the death of her son enables Atwood's Moodie to end her migration, she begins to disassociate herself from "The Immigrants," who "think they will make an order like the old one" (JSM 32). Atwood argues in *Survival* that, for the Canadian settler, the new country is a place of exile in which the old country must be recreated, a desire which reflects a vision of the universe in which order is inherent.⁵⁶ She also notes, and I think these points are linked, that Canadian writing appears to distrust nature, frequently expressing the sentiment that nature has betrayed expectation, that "it was supposed to be different."⁵⁷ I suggest that what is betrayed, in fact, is the belief that there is a natural order inherent in the universe. David Stoucks makes this connection as well, in his discussion of *Roughing It in the Bush*:

Seeking a haven in which to preserve customs threatened at home is imaginatively at the opposite pole from rejecting the old order and emigrating in order to begin life anew. The backward-looking nature of the Canadian experience is reflected in Mrs. Moodie's nostalgia for the daisy-covered fields of her England home.⁵⁸

Nature betrays expectation because it is not the daisy-covered fields of England; it does not reflect the natural order and human supremacy presupposed by British landscape paradigms. While these observations fairly represent the stance of the Moodie character, Atwood's Moodie both recognizes this position and disassociates herself from it in the poem "The Immigrants." Their modes of perception now fail to signify for her: "the old countries recede, become / perfect, thumbnail castles preserved / like gallstones" (JSM 32). The distance between signifier and signified in the immigrant's paradigms is so enormous here that the signifiers not only fail to signify, but have become entirely banal. Atwood's Moodie has only become able to see the banality of such modes of perception once she has made the break from them herself; it is one

of the things she has discovered, as she says in "The 1837 War in Retrospect" by "being there / and after" (*JSM* 35). In this poem, images reminiscent of television, a transparent figure for banality, are used to suggest the fate of signifiers completely divorced from their referents:

that this war will soon be among
those tiny ancestral figures
flickering dull white through the back of your skull,
confined, anxious, not sure any more
what they are doing there.

It seems to me that the focus of *Journal II* is the falling away into insignificance of inherited paradigms, a falling away which approaches the banal. This, Atwood appears to suggest, occurs when the ineluctable orientation of language-bound reality toward its subject becomes a solipsistic perspective incapable of contemplating the possibility of meaning which is not centred around the subject. The 1837 war, divorced of any significance except that which refers back to the human subject, is meaningless; what it was fought against, like what the planters worked against in the earlier poem, has been forgotten. Atwood suggests through her Moodie that the presence of the human subject inhibits any possibility of seeing those events and their meaning clearly.

Part of what is obscured by the privileging of the subject is the explicitly political dimension of acts and events. The exhortation of "The Charivari" — "Resist those cracked / drumbeats. Stop this. Become human" (*JSM* 37) — is unmistakably Atwood, not the voice of the Moodie character, and it is interesting that the voice of the poet has become explicit in order to make the political dimension of the anecdote explicit. The presence of Atwood's Moodie, it seems, would obscure this dimension of its significance; in the absence of Moodie-as-subject, Atwood can pretend to an objective recognition of reality and its significance that has hitherto been implicit.

The second journal closes with the assertion that Atwood's Moodie has acquired that "other knowledge" which has been the wished-for focus of all the poems in this section:

that men sweat
always and drink often
that pigs are pigs
but must be eaten
anyway. (*JSM* 42)

She has moved far from the "rituals of seasons and rivers" whose European meanings are forgotten, half-obscured, and in achieving that "other knowledge" has reduced the gap between signifier and signified. "Pigs are pigs"; these are the details which "glistened" in her hands.

"There is," says this Moodie in the first poem of *Journal III*, "no use for art" (*JSM* 47). Those "verses about love and sleighbells," whose exchange-value is no longer necessary for material comfort, contain none of the "other knowledge" with its potentially radicalizing power, and are seen as entirely banal. The difficulty here is finding a language which will express the history and particularity of its signifieds; again, we see that Atwood is seeking a translucent sign, while hinting that such an immediate meaning may finally be unobtainable in language. In order to achieve translucent meaning, Atwood's Moodie must cast off the mediating subjectivity which in its most extreme form is the complete self-referentiality of "Solipsism While Dying" (*JSM* 52-53). Once this is accomplished, Atwood's Moodie will be able to break out of the prison-house of language and hear the "stone voices of the land" say

god is not
the voice in the whirlwind

god is the whirlwind

at the last
judgement we will all be trees. (*JSM* 58-59)

The representation of the landscape through *Roughing It's* cacophony of voices makes it apparent that the Moodie character's treatment of the landscape is a conventional one, dependent on eighteenth-century paradigms. These paradigms involve a privileging of the human subject that reflects a belief in a natural order inherent in the universe, which order affirms human supremacy and in particular the supremacy of the English. Although the Moodie character becomes aware of the inability of her paradigms to adequately reflect the land before her, she can never interrogate the assumptions on which those paradigms are based.

Atwood, however, reacts to Moodie's presentation by supplying the interrogation of assumptions Moodie can never achieve. Nostalgic for a unitary, indisputable poetic discourse which is ideologically innocent and transparently referential, she queries the

privileging of the human subject which overlays meaning with qualifications and disputes. Only through a sure and translucent language, Atwood suggests, can sure knowledge of the phenomenal world, in its history and particularity, its ineluctable and unmalleable reality, be achieved, and such a language can only be posited through the abandonment of the idea of an inherent natural order, the Logos. Once the possibility of transcendence is abandoned, something does survive, in the noumenal realm of the whirlwind. This can only be described through language, but Atwood posits the possibility here, which she will shortly abandon, of eventual sure knowledge, achieved through an apocalyptic immanence, of the apprehension of things, "not as they are but as they are."

Notes

1. See Sherrill E. Grace, "Moodie and Atwood: Notes on a Literary Reincarnation," in John Moss, ed., *Beginnings: A Critical Anthology*, Vol. 2 of *The Canadian Novel* (Toronto: E.C.W., 1980); Laura Groening, "The Journals of Susanna Moodie: A Twentieth Century Look at a Nineteenth Century Life," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 8 (1983) 166-180; Ann Boutelle, "Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, and Their Nineteenth Century Forerunners," in Alice Kessler Harris and William McBrien, eds., *Faith of a (Woman) Writer* (Westport, CN: Greenwood, 1988); Eva-Marie Kroller, "Resurrections: Susanna Moodie, Catherine Parr Traill, and Emily Carr in Contemporary Canadian Literature," *Journal of Popular Culture* 15 (1981) 39-46; and Al Purdy, "Atwood's Moodie," *Canadian Literature* 47 (1971) 80-84. [\[back\]](#)
2. Margaret Atwood, "Afterword," *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1970) 62. Further references to appear in parentheses in the text, prefaced by the abbrev. *JSM*. [\[back\]](#)
3. Anna Balakian, "Influence and Literary Fortune: The Equivocal Conjunction of Two Methods," *Yearbook of Contemporary and Canadian Literature* 11 (1962) 27-28. Balakian uses the example of inaccurate translations, which may either transfigure a work or produce an outright contradiction of meaning which is nevertheless highly influential. [\[back\]](#)

4. Bina Freiwald, "'The tongue of woman': The Language of the Self in Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*," in Lorraine McMullen, ed., *Re(Dis)Covering Our Foremothers: Nineteenth-Century Canadian Women Writers*, Reappraisals: Canadian Writers Ser. (Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1990) 161-162; Groening 169. Groening also suggests that the poems in *JSM* adopt the critical position outlined in the "Afterword," a reading which reduces these poems to the single aspect of psychologizing the immigrant experience and which fails to take into account the epistemological interrogation Atwood undertakes in this collection. [\[back\]](#)
5. Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972) 19. [\[back\]](#)
6. See, in particular, Göran Hermerén, *Influence in Art and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975) 42-49, and Balakian 29. Thais E. Morgan, "Is There an Intertext in this Text? Literary and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Intertextuality," *American Journal of Semiotics* 3 (1985) 3, highlights the identity between negative influence and the less rigorously articulated heuristic metaphor of inspiration. [\[back\]](#)
7. Hermerén 42. [\[back\]](#)
8. See Morgan for an excellent overview of the major proponents of intertextuality. [\[back\]](#)
9. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Michael Holquist, ed., Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981), especially "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" 41-83, and "Discourse in the Novel" 259-422. [\[back\]](#)
10. Bakhtin 276. [\[back\]](#)
11. Bakhtin 47. [\[back\]](#)
12. This summary of Kristeva's contribution to intertextuality is Morgan's, p. 22. [\[back\]](#)
13. John Thurston has noted the value of Bakhtin's theory in understanding the characters of *Roughing It*, but neglects the importance of the sociolects of landscape aesthetics. Thurston, "Re-writing *Roughing It*," in John Moss, ed.,

Future Indicative: Literary Theory and Canadian Literature, Reappraisals: Canadian Writers Ser. (Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1987) 200-203. [\[back\]](#)

14. William Gairdner, "Traill and Moodie: The Two Realities," *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 1 (1972) 39. [\[back\]](#)
15. The phrase is Bourdieu's. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Richard Nice, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 172. [\[back\]](#)
16. Christopher Hussey, *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1967) 5-6. [\[back\]](#)
17. Hussey 7. [\[back\]](#)
18. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), James T. Boulton, ed. (London: Routledge and Paul, 1958) 40-42. [\[back\]](#)
19. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* (1790), Werner S. Pluhar, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987) 300. [\[back\]](#)
20. See esp. Burke 39-40. [\[back\]](#)
21. Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976) 19. [\[back\]](#)
22. Weiskel 23. [\[back\]](#)
23. The picturesque can be roughly divided into two schools of thought, one headed by Uvedale Price, the other by Payne Knight. Price held that picturesque beauty involved certain qualities inherent in the object, qualities which one could learn to recognize through exposure to art, in particular, to the Italian landscape painters who first established the picturesque. Knight, on the other hand, asserted that the picturesque consisted only of a manner of viewing things with an eye and mind educated in the principles of painting. In either case, it is abundantly apparent that the object of the gaze is valued only as it can be related to the human sign of art. See Christopher Hussey for an extended discussion of Price and Knight, as well as other practitioners of the picturesque. [\[back\]](#)

24. Carole Fabricant, "The Aesthetics and Politics of Landscape in the Eighteenth Century," in Ralph Cohen, ed., *Studies in Eighteenth Century British Art and Aesthetics* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1985) 50-51. [\[back\]](#)
25. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters* (1793), Reginald Snell, trans. (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1965) 120-121. [\[back\]](#)
26. Susanna Strickland Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush, or, Forest Life in Canada* (1852), Carl Ballstadt, ed. Centre for Editing Early Canadian Texts Ser. 5 (Ottawa: Carleton UP, 1988) 17-22. All further references will appear in parentheses in the text, accompanied by the abbrev. *RITB*. [\[back\]](#)
27. D.M.R. Bentley, "Breaking the 'Cake of Custom': The Atlantic Crossing as a Rubicon for Female Emigrants to Canada?," in McMullen, ed., 116-118. [\[back\]](#)
28. R.D. MacDonald, "Design and Purpose," *Canadian Literature* 51 (1972) 21-22. [\[back\]](#)
29. Dermot McCarthy, "Ego in a Green Prison: Confession and Repression in *Roughing It in the Bush*," *Wascana Review* 14 (1979) 8. While much of McCarthy's article is seriously undermined by his dependence on Atwood's "Afterword" for his understanding of Moodie, it nevertheless contains several interesting remarks. [\[back\]](#)
30. Gillian Whitlock, "The Bush, the Barrack-Yard, and the Clearing: 'Colonial Realism' in the Sketches and Stories of Susanna Moodie, C.L.R. James, and Henry Lawson," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 20 (1985) 39. [\[back\]](#)
31. Whitlock 40. [\[back\]](#)
32. Weiskel 10. [\[back\]](#)
33. See Weiskel 11. [\[back\]](#)
34. Weiskel 9. [\[back\]](#)
35. Weiskel 6. [\[back\]](#)
36. Freiwald considers this aspect of nature in Moodie to be an

- indication of her preoccupation with maternal feelings, but ignores the broader cultural implications of Moodie's landscape aesthetic. Freiwald 168-169. [\[back\]](#)
37. For an interesting discussion of the similar function of "prospect" in "The Rising Village," see Kenneth J. Hughes, "Oliver Goldsmith's 'The Rising Village,'" *Canadian Poetry* 1 (1977) 39-40. Hughe's useful observations link the ambiguous usage of "prospect" to opening up, commercial expansion, and the spread of civilization. [\[back\]](#)
 38. Thurston 201. [\[back\]](#)
 39. Lorraine Weir, "Atwood in a Landscape," in Sherrill Grace and Lorraine Weir, eds., *Margaret Atwood: Language, Text, and System* (Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1983) 144. [\[back\]](#)
 40. Others have noticed the importance of this issue to *JSM*. See Jean Mallinson, "Margaret Atwood," in Jack David, Robert Lecker, and Ellen Quigley, eds., *Canadian Writers and Their Works*, Poetry Series 9 (Toronto: E.C.W., 1985) 41; Jerome H. Rosenberg, *Margaret Atwood*, Twayne's World Author Ser. 740 (Boston: Twayne, 1984) 41; Lorraine Weir, "Meridians of Perception: A Reading of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*," in Arnold E. Davidson and Cathy Davidson, eds., *The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism* (Toronto: Anansi, 1981) 69-79; and in particular Cheryl Walker, whose fine essay "Turning to Margaret Atwood: From Anguish to Language," in Beatrice Mendez-Egle, ed., *Margaret Atwood: Reflection and Reality* (Edinburg, TX: Pan American UP, 1987) 154-171, links this enterprise in Atwood to that of the Modernists, particularly Hart Crane. I am indebted to Walker for my understanding of epistemological investigation in Atwood. [\[back\]](#)
 41. Bakhtin 285. [\[back\]](#)
 42. Bakhtin 276. [\[back\]](#)
 43. Walker 166. [\[back\]](#)
 44. Rosenberg 38. [\[back\]](#)
 45. Rosenberg 22. [\[back\]](#)

46. John F. Tinkler, "Canadian Cultural Norms and Australian Social Rules: Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* and Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life*," *Canadian Literature* 94 (1982) 12. [\[back\]](#)
47. Tinkler 12. [\[back\]](#)
48. McCarthy 15. [\[back\]](#)
49. McCarthy 6. [\[back\]](#)
50. See Frank Davey's discussion of first and second order languages in Atwood. Frank Davey, *Margaret Atwood: A Feminist Poetics*, New Canadian Criticism Ser. (Vancouver: Talon, 1984) 52-55. [\[back\]](#)
51. R.P. Bilan, "Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*," *Canadian Poetry* 2 (1978) 5. [\[back\]](#)
52. Margaret Atwood, "Tricks with Mirrors," *You are Happy* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper and Row, 1974). [\[back\]](#)
53. Dennis Duffy's book, *Gardens, Covenants, Exiles: Loyalism in the Literature of Upper Canada / Ontario* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1982), proposes a paradigm of Upper Canadian literature based on the "Loyalist myth" of exile in the wilderness followed by a garden regained. He suggests the notion of a covenant, a social pact, which made the creation of a precarious garden in the wilderness possible, and argues that the War of 1812, and other hardships, confirmed the strength of the covenant in blood. The symbolic pattern Duffy describes as laid upon the facts of defeat, exile, endurance, and ultimate mastery of the new land does seem to illuminate Moodie's response to the death of her children. [\[back\]](#)
54. Janet Giltrow, " 'Painful Experience in a Distant Land': Mrs. Moodie in Canada and Mrs. Trollope in America," *Mosaic* 14 (1981) 133. [\[back\]](#)
55. Giltrow 133. [\[back\]](#)
56. *Survival* 121. [\[back\]](#)
57. *Survival* 49. [\[back\]](#)

58. David Stoucks, " 'Secrets of the Prison-House': Mrs. Moodie and the Canadian Imagination," *Dalhousie Review* [\[back\]](#)