

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

CANADIAN WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY:  
THE EMBODIMENT OF A TRADITION

by

Helen M. Buss

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

Winnipeg, Manitoba

October, 1986



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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
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TITLE: Canadian Women's Autobiography: The Embodiment of a Tradition

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DEDICATION

for Richard Buss  
who first introduced me to  
Anna Jameson and Emily Carr  
whose autobiographies were the seeds  
from which this study grew.

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## INTRODUCTION

The great increase, in the last three decades, of critical attention to autobiographies indicates that such writing is finally being recognized as a distinct genre and thus is receiving the separate consideration which Northrop Frye called for in Anatomy of Criticism.<sup>1</sup> I would further argue that autobiography requires separate consideration not only as a genre or mode, or as part of the ever-changing formation and reformation of these modes, but also as "the Other of literature", as Marc Eli Blanchard puts it.<sup>2</sup> Autobiography is a touchstone in times of generic chaos, a catalytic agent for generic renewal and a continuing reminder of the human world that gives rise to the world of art.

Georg Misch is correct when he argues in his History of Autobiography in Antiquity that autobiographical works mark great changes in the consciousness of humans. He describes the change represented by The Confessions of Saint Augustine: "Man was trying to get into touch with the inner life-springs of the world, in order to free himself from the pressure of physical necessity, and to regain the harmony and inner tranquillity of his existence ... man's actual personal experience became their driving-power, and it led to an insight into those deep layers of human existence in which passion and suffering and the feeling for the infinite obtained the character of positive values."<sup>3</sup> For Misch, The Confessions are the culmination of that drive, the book being the landmark formal expression of the dawning of the Christian era.



Extending Misch's point, one could argue that The Story of Abelard's Adversities is a landmark literary moment for medieval man becoming renaissance man, that Rousseau's Confessions both defines the ego-centric, romantic temperament, and sets into operation a genre flow that culminates in the kunstlerromans of our own century, and that Ben Franklin's Autobiography gives us a portrait of the self-made man that influences American literature even to such present day works as Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman.

Women's autobiographies represent a similar "culmination" for our contemporary consciousness. In "The Tradition of Women's Autobiographies," and in her introduction to Women's Autobiography, Estelle Jelinek traces a separate history of women's autobiographical works and argues that these accounts manifest characteristics that make them the precursors of our contemporary sensibility: "however much the gradual collapse of traditional values has made women's values more acceptable to the present male culture, what may appear new is, in fact, for women the culmination of a long tradition."<sup>4</sup>

With Misch's and Jelinek's arguments in mind, I would suggest that autobiographical forms are a "natural" choice for women, who often find that the traditional genres, made and shaped for and by males primarily, often exclude female experience, whereas autobiography, which tends to take its shape as much from the individual life as from any external generic requirements, allows a fuller expression of a woman's experience. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar see creative women as suffering an enormous disadvantage when they try to express themselves

through traditional genres. A woman writing is inevitably involved in "a revisionary process ... not against her (male) precursor's reading of the world but against his reading of her."<sup>5</sup> Thus, women have trouble fitting their stories into male genres and Gilbert and Gubar argue that much of what the woman writer wishes to say is hidden behind generic requirements. They conclude that "what literary women have hidden or disguised is what each writer knows is in some sense her own story" (pp. 75-76).

Given that in the past men have been more comfortable in traditional genres than women, the exclusion of autobiography from the mainstream of our literary heritage has been a much greater disservice to women writers than to men. Through my examination of autobiographical theory and individual works of Canadian women's autobiography, I hope to make this significant portion of our heritage available for literary consideration as well as suggest the re-examination of some well-known texts as autobiographies.

My major source in locating texts has been True Daughters of the North, Canadian Women's History: An Annotated Bibliography, which lists a wide range of autobiographical documents.<sup>6</sup> I have limited myself to book-length texts, for it is in these that the developmental aspects of women's accounts are best exhibited. The texts considered in each chapter were chosen after a broad survey of similar texts and are those which best represent their group. In deciding which autobiographers are "Canadian," inclusiveness has been my guiding principle. Autobiographers who were not Canadian citizens, but who wrote about a

significant experience lived in Canada have been included, as well as women shaped by the Canadian environment, but who write about experiences in other lands.

In dealing with such a large body of work some chronological ordering is necessary, but since "first-comers" to the Canadian scene could have arrived anytime over a three-century span, the chapter divisions tend to be more topical than chronological. Chapter 1 outlines the theoretical position that underlies the consideration of all the texts from all periods. A necessary division among the "early" women is made between those considered in Chapter 2, who wrote autobiographical accounts in the form of diaries, journals or letters, and those in Chapter 3, who wrote retrospective memoirs. A group of "traveling women", whose accounts cover a time period from the early eighteen hundreds to the present day, are considered in Chapter 4. The accounts of women writing later in our history have been divided into those autobiographies which were undertaken after their authors reached some special public status as "achievers" (Chapter 5) and those that may be considered as the products of "literary" women (Chapter 6). Chapter 7 considers the work of four women whose accounts not only represent the variety of autobiographical efforts by Canadian women, but also provide the basis for some speculations on the future. The Conclusion connects Canadian women's autobiography with the larger Canadian literary tradition.

NOTES - INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, Four Essays (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 307.

<sup>2</sup>Marc Eli Blanchard, "The Critique of Autobiography." Comparative Literature, 34, 2 (Spring 1982) 100.

<sup>3</sup>Georg Misch, History of Autobiography in Antiquity, Vol. 11, translated by E. W. Dickes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 356.

<sup>4</sup>Estelle C. Jelinek, "The Tradition of Women's Autobiography," diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1977, and Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism, ed., Estelle C. Jelinek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 20.

<sup>5</sup>Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic, The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 49.

<sup>6</sup>Beth Light and Veronica Strong-Boag, True Daughters of the North, Canadian Women's History: An Annotated Bibliography (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1980).

## CHAPTER 1 - CRITICAL DIRECTIONS

Intensive examination of women's autobiography as a separate phenomenon from men's was spearheaded in 1969 when Paul Delany devoted a chapter of British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century to the life stories of women. He observes that "because of their subservient social position, that firm identification with profession or occupation which was typical of their male counterparts is not present." He notes that they often identify "with their husbands' careers and interest," but that because of their "relatively weak vocational interests ... [these women] strike the modern reader as having, generally, a more 'unified sensibility' than their male counterparts: their lives seem less compartmentalized, they have a wider range of emotional responses to everyday events and more awareness of concrete realities."<sup>1</sup> In this way, the three chief features of women's autobiography that have occupied theorists on this subject since 1970 are identified: a) women's excluded position and a resultant de-emphasis of the profession as the center of life, b) women's tendency to identify with a significant "other," and c) the "unified sensibility" of women autobiographers and its connection with contemporary notions of identity.

In her several examinations of women's autobiographies, Patricia Meyer Spacks explores the implications of turning the disadvantages of being a woman into autobiographical advantage. Spacks sees men as generally attempting to surmount societal limits whereas women attempt to operate within limitations. In order to do this women must

"transform difficult reality into glamorous myth."<sup>2</sup> Thus, in autobiography, women tend to mythologize their lives, each autobiographer "affirming her womanhood through imagination."<sup>3</sup> As well, Spacks sees women as having a preoccupation with being "good" rather than exceptional, which leads to a desire to examine every part of the life to see how it measures up to a self-imposed standard of goodness. This accounts for the "expressiveness" of women's accounts, a style in which the autobiographer needs to set down, seemingly spontaneously, the chaos of detail of the life in an effort to find her "goodness." Measuring the goodness of all areas of their lives rather than the perfection of a chosen portion, women offer what Spacks sees as a uniquely feminine definition of self.<sup>4</sup> Spacks believes that one aspect of that definition is becoming more and more popular in our century because of our preoccupation with the maturation changes of late adolescence, particularly the development of the imaginative faculty at that stage of life. Whereas the eighteenth century's glorification of full maturity, and the nineteenth century's preoccupation with childhood were less advantageous to women, Spacks suggests that women's tendency to complete their personalities through acts of fantasy and imagination is very much the twentieth-century mode.<sup>5</sup>

Spacks also notes the importance of the "other" in women's self-definition. In this regard, as well as in reference to the ability successfully to mythologize herself, Spacks ideal autobiographer is Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen). Out of Africa "reveals the self in its attention to the other. The author declares relationship in every act of her existence -- with her workers, her friends, her animals, her

chance acquaintances; and with the vast world of Africa, animate and inanimate. Through relationship she discovers and defines herself as mythical woman, affirming her womanhood through imagination while demonstrating in action her capacity to surmount all womanly limitations."<sup>6</sup> Of course, true to Spacks's definition, Dinesen "surmounts" not by perfectionist strivings but through learning to be "good" at various activities, to know a wide range of lifestyles through her various relationships.

In her essay "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers," Mary G. Mason formalizes this principle of the "other" and identifies its chief paradigms. Mason states that "nowhere in women's autobiographies do we find the patterns established by the two prototypical male autobiographers, Augustine and Rousseau; and conversely male writers never take up the archetypal models of Julian [of Norwich], Margery Kempe, Margaret Cavendish and Anne Bradstreet."<sup>7</sup>

Mason describes the Augustinian model as a "dramatic structure of conversion ... where the self is presented as the stage for a battle of opposing forces and where a climatic victory for one force -- spirit defeating flesh -- completes the drama of the self." The Rousseau model is seen as a secular version of the egoistic archetype which is "an unfolding self-discovery where characters and events are little more than aspects of the author's evolving consciousness." Women's models evidence the firm acknowledgement of "the real presence and recognition of another consciousness, and the disclosure of female self is linked to the identification of some 'other' ... This grounding of identity through relation to the chosen other ... enable[s] women to write openly

about themselves" (p. 210). According to Mason's theory, in women's autobiography other people do not play the limited roles that for example, Augustine's mother, Monica, does in the Confessions, that of a beloved person present at one significant moment to give impetus and blessing to a great change already in operation in the autobiographer. Rather, the "real presences" of women's autobiographies much more fully demonstrate in their recorded words and deeds, in the qualities they represent, the image of selfhood that the autobiographer is exploring. Thus Julian and Margery Kempe identify with a creator who is Father, and Lover (and for Kempe, son), Margaret Cavendish identifies a great deal of her own life with that of her husband, and Anne Bradstreet identifies her most complete self with the larger communal spirit of Puritan New England.

One important "other" not identified by Mason is the mother, the individual who gives the growing female her first standard of femininity and maternity. In "Heritages: Dimensions of Mother-Daughter Relationships in Women's Autobiographies," Lynn Z. Bloom theorizes that the mother plays a pervasive role in giving the daughter a sense of self and in transmitting the values of the cultural group. Bloom points out that in writing of her mother in her autobiography the daughter places herself in a shaping situation vis-a-vis this powerful relationship, one that she has not been able to occupy in life.<sup>8</sup> The observation has enormous significance for all "others" in women's autobiography, for the writer as woman may be defining herself through identification with the other, but as writer she is, at least to some degree, reshaping the other to suit her own identification needs. Thus she recreates another



that will create the new self of the autobiographer.

The implications for style that this phenomenon involves are vital. Jan Zlotnik Schmidt sees the expression of a fragmented nature by women autobiographers, a nature attempting to complete itself through the exploration of others, as requiring a less tight structure than traditional male autobiography. Her examples, Maxine Hong Kingston, Maya Angelou and Lillian Hellman create, through the shedding of false selves and the emergence of the true self, a kind of "hybrid song," that incorporates the other while moving beyond her/him.<sup>9</sup> Such an incorporation, rather than transcendence, requires a kind of expressiveness and the discontinuity of non-heroic forms. Perhaps the autobiographer that best illustrates Schmidt's point is Maxine Hong Kingston who, in The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts, grows up the painfully divided child of her American birth and the contradictory world of her mother's Chinese tradition in which a girl child is seen as a tragedy which a family must bear. Hong Kingston, rather than rejecting the destructive identity components her mother offers her, learns through mythologization the inner strength of her Chinese heritage. Rather than rejecting her mother as a role model, Hong Kingston explores her mother's past and her own relationship with her to find the strength and pride of this significant other. When the facts of her personal story are not enough to forge her entire identity, Hong Kingston uses her mother's tales of China as a basis for the invention of her own mythology in which she creates the ancestresses that she needs to define her feminine identity. By this process of imaginative incorporation, nothing of consequence is left behind in the

writer's creation of her "hybrid song," for the essence of all her contending traditions is incorporated into the new self. The style used by Hong Kingston is that of a series of interconnected short stories, each complete in itself but moving in series to a more complete self definition. The stories move from the realistic-historic to mythic narrative, as the writer shapes her identity through the writing of her "memoirs."

\* \* \*

Although important critical directions emerge from an examination of women's autobiography as separate from men's, many critics whose work is not specifically in the field of women's accounts also offer valuable directions. Through their work we may see the ways in which women's autobiographies signal the larger movement in literature that Germaine Brée describes as the break-up of traditional genre systems. Brée's list of stylistic elements characteristic of the break-up includes most of the attributes often mentioned as characteristic of women's autobiographical writing. These features include "blanks, unfinished sentences, sentences that begin in medias res; discontinuities within a continued development; narrative prose, fragments of autobiography, anecdotes, aphorisms ... and, everywhere, the juxtaposition of widely different patterns of rhetoric and registers of vocabulary within a single frame."<sup>10</sup>

Critics concerned with how the impulse to write autobiography relates to identity formation also offer insights that can be applied to women's accounts. John Claude Curtin in "Autobiography and the

Dialectic of Consciousness," sees consciousness as in the process of unifying all its activities through "reflective recollection." Thus "autobiography is not simply one of the possible ways in which intentional consciousness can busy itself. It is, rather, a necessary form of the conscious function of reflective recollection." For Curtin, in autobiography "life is in process of elaboration of itself"<sup>11</sup> and it is the finding of a symbol with which to embody this elaboration that makes the autobiographical story possible. Given this kind of impulse toward an archetypal search, it is necessary to "re-vision" autobiographical works in the light of the insights of modern psychology in order to observe the search for the primitive self that is inevitably happening, to one degree or another, in autobiography. Thus, as Christine Downing points out, the work of the fathers of psychology, Freud and Jung, in showing how consciousness seeks identity, cannot be overlooked even in autobiographies that predate the insights of modern psychology.<sup>12</sup>

The consequences for style of "consciousness in search of a symbol of itself" are infinite. Jean Starobinski asserts that in autobiography "the very notion of style really obeys a system of organic metaphors, according to which expression proceeds from experience ... as the flower is pushed open by the flow of sap through the stem."<sup>13</sup> Philippe Lejeune makes the point that the autobiographer's search for persona may push the writer to adopt the first, second and third person in an effort to discover himself.<sup>14</sup>

\* \* \*

If such a process of self-discovery is going on in the very act of writing autobiography, then a similarly creative reading act is required to realize the full richness of autobiographical accounts. In insisting on such a reading for Rousseau's Confessions, Barrett J. Mandel makes it available for other works. Mandel calls Rousseau's autobiography a "masterpiece of the genre because it allows ... conflicting truths to manifest themselves, creating a complex unity."<sup>15</sup> By such a phenomenological reading of autobiographical documents the reader enters into the spirit of discovery that the writer entered into in writing. This more active reader is less dependent on familiar strategies of mechanical design and enters into a union with the autobiographer which Mandel describes in lyrical terms:

For me these profound moments body forth a sense of my sharing life--being--with the author, no matter how remote he or she may be from me in some ways. The autobiographer springs open a door and gives me a glance into his or her deepest reality, at the same time casting my mind into a state of reverie or speculation. The being of the author is felt to merge with my own. For a moment I plummet deep into my own veiled assumptions, feelings, and self-meaning. It is the experience of Zugehörigkeit ('belonging'), in which we recognize our subordination and obligation to shared truths (embodied by language) larger than ourselves (p. 69).

This act of phenomenological reading may be compared to the philosophical principle of "final" knowledge which is likened to romantic love by William Earle in The Autobiographical Consciousness. Earle states that this act of "love" leads to a more complete knowledge because, "knowledge is final when our cognition of an object is both adequate to the object itself and known to be adequate. Its truth

therefore is not a matter of chance, hypothesis or external comparisons. Cognition is adequate, absolute, and final when we grasp the object wholly, and know that we grasp it wholly."<sup>16</sup>

This is the kind of reading that I wish to undertake in examining individual Canadian women's autobiographies. The object, in this case the individual autobiography, must be considered on its own terms, not assessed according to the popular life-writing styles or literary clichés of its time, or ours, nor judged by the degree to which it conforms to the great male autobiographies of its age. The second part of the phenomenological reading does, however, imply externals in that I must "know that [I] grasp it wholly." How do I assess my knowledge of the object except by, in some manner, comparing the object to its environment? In other words, "knowing" a literary object is not only the merging of a close recreative reading, but also knowing it in relationship to the larger literary world. But it is necessary to accomplish this without allowing that world to become prescriptive and exclusive toward the text being examined.

\* \* \*

To facilitate this kind of reading of women's autobiographies, the work of genre theorists can be particularly helpful. In Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre, Elizabeth Bruss, without establishing exclusive definitions, offers guidance on how to decide which writing acts benefit from critical consideration as autobiography.

Bruss points out that "Living as we do at a time and in a literary

community which recognizes autobiography as a distinct and deliberate undertaking, it is difficult for us to realize that it has not always existed. We read older texts, or texts of another culture, and find in them autobiographical intentions, but it is often our own conventions which inform this reading and give the text this force .... What is autobiography for us may have originally been only the by-product of another act."<sup>17</sup> To overcome this problem and the tendency to judge a work by the standards of literary periodization, Bruss suggests that there are variables which should be taken into account in the textual examination of autobiography. They involve such elements as the textual features of a work that signal its fictional or non-fictional intent, consideration of what the major functions of the text were in the writer's time, and degree to which the community valued particular forms for their usefulness as paradigms for correct living. Such considerations can be helpful in identifying autobiographical content, often disguised by other intentions, and can become part of a method of examination.

As well, Bruss offers three "rules" for assessing the autobiographical nature of a work. We can establish the unity of author, narrator and main character as a criteria for autobiography. We can observe in what ways the author asserts that the information and events reported "to have been, [are] to be or have the potential for being the case," and we can assess the ways in which the writer "purports to believe in what [s]he asserts" (p. 10-11). These observations will help to establish the sincerity and authenticity of an account. In other words, Bruss sees the reader's stance as intrinsic to

the autobiographical act. The writer and reader have a kind of unstated agreement, what Philippe Lejeune calls *Le pacte autobiographique*.<sup>18</sup> By using Bruss's guidelines, many documents, such as those previously thought valuable only as social history, can be examined as autobiographical "acts."

Such a method can be enlivened by a knowledge of the strategies of that most conscious of stylists, Gertrude Stein. In her introduction to her study of Stein as autobiographer, S. C. Neuman describes The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas as a move toward meta-autobiography, whereby Stein announces and exemplifies a theory of genre at the same time. This theory involves going beyond the egocentric and developmental type of autobiography begun by Rousseau and made more popular as a result of the Romantic movement, in favor of a form that denies a consistent continuity of self, that transcends time instead of traversing it, and that insists that the relationships between people are more important than individuals in isolation. Neuman sees Stein as doing this through a narrative structure that Stein herself called the "continuous present," which like the cinema, presents movement as a series of still frames joined.<sup>19</sup> When Neuman comes to illustrate the continuous present as it appears in The Autobiography, we see that Stein's narrative strategies are similar to the feminine strategies that I have been summarizing. The description of the famous "party" scene at the beginning of Stein's book shows the use of such devices as the anecdote (Alice telling us about one of their gatherings of distinguished artists), as the vehicle of several strategies. The anecdotal digressions, within the framework of the larger anecdote of

the party, which on the surface would make the narrator seem disorganized, are really ways in which Alice is allowed to "begin again" over and over, at the start of the party but at a different perspective each time. By the time all the digressions are woven together, we are given a "party" that is a multitude of reflecting surfaces, each coming together around the nucleus of Gertrude Stein, although Stein has not at most times seemed the center of the narrator's attention. Thus, we see the expressionistic detail and the discontinuity associated with women's ] autobiography used by a sophisticated artist to create the continuous present.

In addition, other strategies of women autobiographers are used quite consciously by Stein. We learn about the "genius" artists present at the party through Alice's talk with their wives, an ironic twist of the "significant other" phenomenon. Of course, Alice herself is the most significant "other" of the autobiography. By telling her own story through the point of view of Alice Toklas, Stein takes identification by way of the "other" as far as that strategy can be taken. The humorous, almost self-mocking (or ego-mocking) effect thus created by Stein is a characteristic that is often seen in women's autobiographies and which down-plays emphasis on the ego-self. The Autobiography is on the surface full of understated humor, and deals with personalities, fashion and gossip almost in the style of the memoirs of a court lady. Yet this strategy has the very serious intention of creating a style that is anti-historical and anti-egocentric, and a world view that insists on the primacy of relationship and the relativism of knowledge. ]

Autobiographers such as Stein, Hong Kingston and Dinesen offer



highly conscious examples of strategies that are designed to reveal the nature of women's lives. These strategies occur, often more unconsciously, in the accounts of women struggling to record lives anchored in relatedness, women whose ground of being insists on abandoning the historical view of the world because they cannot leave the various versions of themselves in the past. The use of these strategies are often at war with a conscious commitment to more traditional forms of autobiography. The texts these women produce can often be highly "resistant" to traditional reading methods.

James Cox offers a way into such texts. In his analysis of Up From Slavery, he encourages critics to see the "bleak inertia of its prose ... its didacticism, its self-gratulation, its facts and its policies" as Booker T. Washington's way of giving his life weight.<sup>20</sup> Cox sees the nineteenth-century black man as going through the same self-building process as the equally didactic Ben Franklin, the white man's model. With this comparison in mind, Washington's strategies can be viewed more positively. The condition of being a member of a suppressed and misunderstood race is often used comparatively with the female condition for the purposes of argument. Certainly in their efforts to give their lives "weight," women autobiographers often resort to stylistic features that make their accounts "resistant." The "inertia" may be of a different type than that of Washington, but the spirit of Cox's positive method of reading remains equally applicable.

\* \* \*

In any full examination of women's autobiographies, it is necessary

to reconsider the traditional definition of the word autobiography and its applicability. Until recently, autobiography has been regarded as a genre which includes only those works of the Augustine/Rousseau type, works which come out of the confessional tradition and often include aspects of public apology as well. In this kind of life-writing, as Roy Pascal puts it, the author must "overlook the difference between the shape of life and the shape of an autobiography."<sup>21</sup> Such a definition involves a "review of a life from a particular moment in time" (p. 3). It emphasizes a spiritual/psychological self that is designed by the ego, or by an act of the ego inspired by divine intention, and which becomes consistent and unified in the shaping. In a "collusion" (p. 11) between past and present, the autobiographer uses the external life, the personal history, as so much raw material, for the final act of self-creation.

By Pascal's definition diaries are not autobiographies because they are full of "uncertainties, false starts, momentariness," and lack the "coherent shaping" that is necessary for autobiography. At the same time memoirs are rejected because they focus on others, whereas, for Pascal, an autobiography is consistently "focused on the self" (p. 5). Since women consistently focus on others while shaping the self, since they are often describing lives full of "momentariness," and since the act of autobiography is often a way in which women shape the self rather than sum up the accomplished act, the consistency that Pascal and other theorists demand would be a false standard for women to follow, an example of once more trying to fit male shaped genres to women's different needs. These standards are perhaps becoming false for men

also as shown by the work of critics such as Mandel and Curtin in moving away from traditional definitions. But whereas these definitions are ones that once suited men's needs, they have always been unsuitable for defining a "feminine" life.

In order to examine women's accounts fairly we must view the diary, not as a less artful sub-genre, but as a type of "serial autobiography."<sup>22</sup> Robert Fothergill in Private Chronicles asserts that a diarist is not an artless recorder, but "sets a standard for himself ... an external conception of the requirements of the genre. He is under an obligation to prosecute actively the task of bringing along a coherent story with significant interest. Instead of an ad hoc jotting down of impressions, the writing of the diary entails a continual negotiation between comprehensiveness and digested relevance" (pp. 153-4). Thus, for women, the diary offers the advantage of a form that can provide a method of embracing the "comprehensiveness" of their lives while offering an art form demanding that the momentariness, the fragmentation, the profusion of "others" that make up their days can be shaped into a "digested relevance."

Because the "real presence" of others is so much a part of women's life stories, and because the memoir offers a way to show the reciprocity between the personal life and the larger community, it is also suitable as a form of women's autobiography. Often considered as the less insightful younger sister of autobiography, the form has received a needed infusion of critical attention through the work of Marcus Billson, who in "Memoir: New Perspectives on a Forgotten Genre," attempts to confront the critical view of memoirs as "incomplete,

superficial autobiographies ... inaccurate, overly personal histories."<sup>23</sup> Since Billson agrees with the idea that "genres are essentially contracts between a writer and his audience," his strategy is to "clarify the 'contract' of expectations between the memoir-writer and his audience and thereby eliminate some of the hermeneutical confusion that has plagued the genre" (p. 260). This contract, Billson asserts, requires not only that the memoir be a writer's sincere account of what he believes to be his real past, but that it contain "a moral vision of the past." The memoir "presents the process of the memorialist's re confronting and reappraising his memories" for the purpose of "bearing witness to them, affirming their significance and meaning for the future" (p. 261). Billson asserts that "the ultimate question whether a memoir is literature rests not upon style ... but upon an evaluation of the structure and depth of the memoir's represented world, and the cogency of the memorialist's moral vision" (p. 262). By "moral vision" Billson does not imply a code of morality superimposed on the life but a vision of how life can be fully lived, a vision which the autobiographer gains through living and through the autobiographical act. Thus the contract between writer and reader demands that history be infused with the personal moral vision and that the personal autobiographical impulse be always aware of the "thisness ... the historicity, of past historical life" (p. 268). Billson sees the memoir writer performing three roles, that of "the eyewitness, the participant, and the historian" (p. 271). These are terms drawn from the vernacular of the historian, but they are equivalent to Bruss's triad in which the writer of autobiography presents a self that is

simultaneously the main character of the life-story, the narrator in the work and the writer outside the work.

In another article, "Lillian Hellman and the Strategy of the 'Other'," this time co-authored with Sidonie A. Smith, Billson writes that the "memorialist's vision of the outer world is as much a projection and refraction of the self as the autobiographer's"<sup>24</sup> and that women like Hellman find the memoir more satisfying than traditional autobiography because it allows them to live in a "world of 'others' who, as they come together in her memory, become significant in the articulation of her 'self'" (p. 163).

The arguments made for the inclusion of memoirs and diaries in a broader definition of autobiography by critics such as Fothergill, Billson and Smith allow for fairer and fuller readings of women's accounts, but it is important to note that in their efforts to recreate their lives women often resort to a melange of forms, so that introspective autobiography and externally centered memoir, as in Hong Kingston's Woman Warrior, combine to create a "hybrid" form which suits the "hybrid" life.

With this in mind it is necessary to consider two other writing modes as expressions of women's autobiographical impulse, the letter and the travel account. The letter, with its connotations of personal intimacy and privacy, has always been a form that has been a convenient and popular mode of female expression. An important feature of the epistolary form makes it especially advantageous to the autobiographical needs of women. Because of the fact that letters are often written for an intimate audience of family or close connections, the letter assumes

the presense of "The confidant who inspires, wins, or loses trust ... an essential figure ... called into existence by the need of every letter writer to have a 'friendly bosom' into which he can 'disburden his cares'." <sup>25</sup> In this way the letter provides in its very essentials, the figure of the reader who is both audience and significant "other."

The travel account has been recognized by some literary historians as containing autobiographical elements. Longman's Companion to British Literature maintains that Romanticism encouraged the travel writer to use "the contact with strange physical environments and peoples.... [to] draw nearer to autobiography." <sup>26</sup> But the same entry also emphasizes that travel literature which contains autobiographical elements is best viewed as an intermediary stage between travel writing and a more "mature" writing form, the travel novel. I would suggest that, especially in Canada, where the immigrant's first knowledge of herself in the new land comes from traveling across it, a form of autobiography emerges from the middle stages between the impersonal travel account and the formalized novel of journey. Martin S. Day reminds us, in "Travel Literature and the Journey Theme," that autobiographers from Bunyan to Henry Adams "weld the spiritual quest to the journey archetype ... the journey as an individual passage." <sup>27</sup> With such a convenient and fortunate concurrence of travel, self-development, and the need to write home about the adventure, as was offered to early women settlers (especially if it were combined with some leisure for the writing act),

it was inevitable that travel accounts would become the vehicle of  
journeys of self-exploration.

\* \* \*

The image of a journey of exploration also provides a helpful transition from this theoretical overview to my specific exploration of Canadian women's autobiography. In 1968, Stephen A. Shapiro announced in "The Dark Continent of Literature: Autobiography," that he intended "to reveal the submerged mountain chains that link the continent of autobiography with the literary mainland and to help map this dark Africa of the genres."<sup>28</sup> His overview of the history of autobiography includes no women's accounts. Since then, many of the blank spaces on Shapiro's map have been filled in, and other critics have discovered many of the women's texts that are part of that map. But in terms of the world scene of autobiography, the Canadian map has hardly begun to be traced. Mapping the territory of Canadian women's autobiography will not only fill some important blank spaces in our own literary heritage but will be an addition to our knowledge of the phenomenon of autobiography in general.

## CHAPTER 1 - NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Paul Delany, British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 158.
- <sup>2</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Reflecting Women," Yale Review, 8, 63 (1973), 27.
- <sup>3</sup> Spacks, The Female Imagination (New York: Avon Books, 1972), pp. 388-89.
- <sup>4</sup> Spacks, "Women's Stories, Women's Selves," Hudson Review, 30, 1 (1977), 29-46.
- <sup>5</sup> Spacks, "Stages of Self: Notes on Autobiography and the Life Cycle," Boston University Journal, 25, 2 (1977), 7-17.
- <sup>6</sup> Spacks, The Female Imagination, pp. 388-89.
- <sup>7</sup> Mary G. Mason, "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers," in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, edited by James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 210.
- <sup>8</sup> Lynn Z. Bloom, "Heritages: Dimensions of Mother-Daughter Relationships in Women's Autobiographies," in The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature, edited by Cathy N. Davidson and E. M. Broner (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 291-303.
- <sup>9</sup> Jan Zlotnik Schmidt "The 'Other:': A Study of the Persona in Several Contemporary Women's Autobiographies," CEA Critic, 43, 1 (November 1980), 24-31.
- <sup>10</sup> Germaine Brée, "The Break-up of Traditional Genres: Bataille, Leiris, Michaux," Bucknell Review, 21, 2-3 (Fall 1973), 7-8.
- <sup>11</sup> John Claude Curtin, "Autobiography and the Dialectic of Consciousness," International Philosophical Quarterly, 14 (1974), 344.
- <sup>12</sup> Christine Downing, "Revisioning Autobiography: The Bequest of Freud and Jung," Soundings, 60, 3 (Fall 1977), 210-28.
- <sup>13</sup> Jean Starobinski, "The Style of Autobiography," in Autobiography: Essays, ed., Olney, p. 76.
- <sup>14</sup> Philippe LeJeune, "Autobiography in the Third Person", New Literary History, 9, 1 (Autumn 1977), 32.
- <sup>15</sup> Barrett J. Mandel, "Full of Life Now," in Autobiography: Essays, ed., Olney, p. 71.



- <sup>16</sup>William Earle, The Autobiographical Consciousness (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), pp. 99-100.
- <sup>17</sup>Elizabeth Bruss, Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 6.
- <sup>18</sup>Phillipe LeJeune, Le pacte autobiographique (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975).
- <sup>19</sup>S. C. Neuman, Gertrude Stein: Autobiography and the Problem of Narration (Victoria: University of Victoria ELS series, 1979), p. 23.
- <sup>20</sup>James M. Cox, "Autobiography and Washington," Sawanee Review, 85, 2 (Spring 1977), 246.
- <sup>21</sup>Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 2.
- <sup>22</sup>Robert Fothergill, Private Chronicles A Study of English Diaries (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 152.
- <sup>23</sup>Marcus Billson, "Memoirs: New Perspective on a Forgotten Genre," Genre, 10, 2 (Summer 1977), 259.
- <sup>24</sup>Marcus K. Billson and Sidonie A. Smith, "Lillian Hellman and the Strategy of the 'Other'," in Women's Autobiography, ed. Jelinek, p. 163.
- <sup>25</sup>Janet Gurkin Altman, Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1982), p. 50.
- <sup>26</sup>Christopher Gille, A Companion to British Literature (Detroit: Grand River Books, 1977), p. 837.
- <sup>27</sup>Martin S. Day, "Travel Literature and the Journey Theme," Forum, 12, 2 (1975), 43.
- <sup>28</sup>Stephen A. Shapiro, "The Dark Continent of Literature: Autobiography," Comparative Literature Studies, 5, 4 (December 1968), p. 425.

CHAPTER 2 - PIONEER WOMEN'S DIARIES AND JOURNALS:  
LETTERS HOME/LETTERS TO THE FUTURE

Autobiography often grows out of other writing intentions, as Elizabeth Bruss suggests when she calls some autobiography a "by-product" of another act. Canadian women's autobiography begins with early settler women's efforts to relate the adventure of their experience in the new land to those they left behind. Indeed, it is women's unwillingness to let go of the old life and old connections that is the chief reason we have these accounts. Women such as Frances Stewart, whose letters of half a century of settlement in the Peterborough area (1822-72) were published as Our Forest Home (1902), show Stewart still writing home to England, after forty-seven years, to her one remaining correspondent who knew her in the old life: "In a few days we shall have the memorable anniversary of our last parting and our departure from country and dearly beloved friends."<sup>1</sup> Anne Leveridge finds time out from the backbreaking labor of life in a one-room shanty in the early 1880s on a backwoods Ontario farm to write to her mother in one of the letters of Your Loving Anna (1972): "come and stay awhile in these backwoods. There you will see the wild beauties of nature to perfection."<sup>2</sup> The two attitudes, of wanting to hold onto the old connections and yet wanting at the same time to enter into the exciting prospects of the new land are always present in such accounts and the contrast lends them much of their interest.

John Faragher suggests, in Women and Men on the Overland Trail, that frontier women's accounts are often more interesting than men's

just because of the contradictions they feel about undertaking the adventure. He points out that leaving the old home for the pioneer adventure was for men largely an extension of male bonding activities, but for women it was more likely to be a breakdown of all that sustained their sense of community and context. Therefore, in a woman's account we find more attempts to "explain and elaborate her feelings in order to make herself understood. Women's empathy for others was the other side of women's concern that their true selves be truly communicated by taking time and care with language. Masculine characters, on the other hand, assumed that they were understood and saw no need to articulate things that seemed perfectly obvious to them."<sup>3</sup>

Thus we see evidenced in such accounts a real attempt at literariness, to express the complexity of the life in language. As well, these accounts are the products of people who find themselves caught in an autobiographical imperative, in much the same way as other autobiographers have found themselves on the cusp of a great historical change, which effects the identity of the individual. Just as an intellectual like Augustine was in the best position to experience the full impact of the change in personality implied by the doctrine of faith in Christianity, so women pioneers were the ones to feel the full impact of the change in identity implied by settling in a new land. The necessity to reformulate the "true self" leads almost inevitably to the autobiographical act.

Jean Starobinski, who sees no reason for autobiography except as a reaction to "radical change" in a life, describes this reformulation as a "conversion, entry into a new life, the operation of Grace" (p. 78).

But this definition implies too great a rejection of the past self to be entirely suitable to women's accounts. In the accounts I will be considering, we observe women creating a new pattern of identity while not abandoning completely the fabric of the old life for the new.

Elizabeth Simcoe's diary is a good example of a woman's account that reflects the enormous impact of the new world on the writer. Marian Fowler, in The Embroidered Tent, describes this impact as "the friction of embroidery with tent," and suggests that Simcoe, the wife of Upper Canada's first lieutenant-governor, is one of the prime examples of a woman who undergoes a radical change in her identity in Canada.<sup>4</sup> The pre-Canada Simcoe that Fowler describes is hardly the type we imagine as the hardy pioneer. As heiress to a large estate and fortune, her whole life was a training in the responsibilities and privileges of rank. As Fowler points out, "In the eighteenth century, heiresses in England had special status--they were courted and catered to at every turn, particularly by young men intent on marrying money" (p. 18). Simcoe's choice of John Graves Simcoe is revealing. He was twice her age (she was sixteen at the time of the marriage) and she met him while he convalesced from wounds received fighting the Americans (Fowler, p. 18). Throughout her diary Simcoe seems to show a great degree of independence from her husband, caused perhaps by the fact that she was superior to him in rank and that his intermittent bad health and his duties as governor did not allow him to participate as fully as his wife in the enjoyment of Canada.

Mrs. Simcoe's Diary (1965; 182 pp.), covers the years 1791 to 1796 and shows in its opening entries a woman with three defining

preoccupations. First, Simcoe is a socially conscious woman, always aware of her duties and rank as well as that of others; she takes her role, first as guest in Quebec City and later as chatelaine at Niagara very seriously. Second, from the early entries onward, we see the artist-observer at work; she writes on her departure from England: "The sea views are very fine. There is an uncommon aperature in the Land in one spot where we looked down as if into a vast well and saw the waves dashing below. We drove by the Light House. There are some buildings in ruins covered with Ivy which have a very picturesque appearance."<sup>5</sup> Simcoe's third preoccupation is with overcoming her fears and being ready for adventure; during the beginnings of a rough voyage she reveals that, "I got the better of my sickness yesterday but there blew so strong a gale of wind, that I was obliged to remain in my Cot .... It was by persevering to go on the Deck & by eating salt beef covered with Mustard, that I so soon became well and as my health amends my spirits rise & I am rather diverted at the difficulties we meet with at dinner .... I think I have great merit in beginning to write to you thus early" (p. 29).

We quickly become aware of the silent "other" for whom the diary was written. In fact, as the diary's editor informs us, there were several others, Simcoe's young daughters and their governess who were left in England while the Simcoes took the small children, Sophia and Frances with them (p. 3). The shape of the personality that the mother wants to show to the daughters affects the diary's entries, which are not hasty jottings, but, as the editorial comment notes, deliberate entries made from written observations made during each day's activities

(p. 21). Thus, her diary is the type of "digested relevance" that Fothergill describes in Private Chronicles and reveals a considerable literary self-consciousness as Simcoe shapes the "self" that she wishes to send home to her daughters.

The personality that Simcoe sends home in her diary is one that takes pleasure in the adventure: "I quite enjoy the thoughts of the long journey we have before us & the perpetual change of scene it will afford, but the people here think it as arduous & adventurous an undertaking as it was looked upon to be by my friends in England. It is surprising that those who are so much nearer to a Country should esteem it as impracticable as those who are so many thousand miles distant" (p. 55).

As well as revealing her liking for the unusual and difficult, Simcoe does not hide her fears. But she does tend to undercut them by announcing their cure at the same time: "Capt. Shaw also advises me not to believe the formidable accounts I have heard of Rattle Snakes .... He affirms they never bite but when trod upon or attacked, & the wound they make is cured by well-known herbs, as horehound & plantain Juice" (p. 55). Throughout her stay snakes are one of Simcoe's dominant fears, and it is remarkable that she undertook as many nature expeditions as she did considering her dread.

The trip up the St. Lawrence is filled with opportunities to examine and record the "picturesque" in nature. Mills on a tributary river make a "picturesque scene" (p. 60). Woods viewed through the smoke of a fire offer the right combination of "flare & smoke interspersed in different Masses of dark Woods" to create "a very picturesque

appearance a little like Tasso's enchanted wood" (p. 72). It is important to understand Simcoe's devotion to the "picturesque" school of art articulated by William Gilpin and advocated by Sir Joshua Reynolds and which reached its height of popularity in the 1780's and 90's. Fowler describes the devotee of the picturesque as trained to observe a scene as three main components: "roughness, sudden variation, and irregularity of form, colour and lighting" (p. 41). But as well as being trained to "see" more clearly, for the picturesque artist "feeling is fundamental to the intuitive perception impelled by the visual stimuli of picturesque travel and is complemented by another subjective operation of the viewer--the exercise of the imagination."<sup>6</sup> Thus, it is not only Simcoe's progress as a visual artist that we see in the diary, but also her progress as a feeling, imagining consciousness in a new land where she encounters experiences, both those engendered by the land and those familiar to the lives of women, that deepen and expand her identity.

Even by the time she has reached Niagara, her views of the picturesque are already changing. The falls are to be a continuing fascination for her as she finds it difficult to find just the right view of this "grandest sight" (p. 76), hoping that "after the eye becomes more familiar to the objects I think the pleasure will be greater in dwelling upon them" (p. 77). Thus, the new land becomes a place that does not reveal itself, but must be discovered by the imaginative effort of the artist. The Indians, who were a frightening mystery to her at Quebec, now "seem to have great energy & simplicity in their speech" (p. 81). Later still she will compare them to the ancient Greeks and

Romans in their oratory style.

As do many fictional heroines that will follow her in Canadian literature, Elizabeth Simcoe takes to the bush. She tires of the small military settlement at Niagara and is "determined in future to sleep on the Mountain" (p. 96). She has her tent set up on the heights near Queenston, has her meals sent up from camp, farms out her ailing son to a local matron and begins to know the advantages of the outdoor life: "A wet day ... is very dismal in a Tent but to see the light again & feel the air dry is such a pleasure that none can judge of but those who have felt the reverse" (p. 99). Fowler points out that it is at Queenston Heights that Simcoe's painting style shows "a new dash and verve": her oak trees "have almost as much sweep and spontaneity as Tom Thomson's pines .... wind tossed and majestic" they "dominate and dwarf the tiny tents" (p. 31).

Fowler's praise may be a shade hyperbolic, but other paintings (reproduced in both the diary publication and Fowler's book) show Simcoe's increasingly sophisticated knowledge of the shapes and forms of the Canadian landscape. A painting from a later journey features an enormous granite boulder rising from the water to the land at Bass Island in Lake Erie. The sketch shows that Simcoe has caught the special play of light and shade that the sheer rock faces of the Canadian shield create, and as well she has executed her sketch on birch bark, the symmetry of the lined bark offering an additional feature complementing the symmetry of light, rock and water. The treatment of the subject and choice of material illustrates Simcoe's growing attempt, not to impose herself on the landscape, but to experience its impact on



her through her feeling and imagination, as expressed in her painting.

The events of her stay at York fully realize this effort. The choice to stay in the wilderness surroundings of York, rather than at the military post of Niagara, is hers. The locals did not approve, but her husband went along (Fowler, p. 22). The diary entries become longer, more descriptive, and although she continues to do her duty as first lady, entertaining the locals and passing dignitaries, the country and the pleasure she takes in journeying through it, take precedence. She is quite literally getting closer to her subject when she allows "a green Caterpillar with tufts like fir on its back ... [to touch her] face ... & it felt as if stung by a nettle, & the sensation continued painful for some time (p. 106). She yearns "to conduct a Canoe myself when I see them [the Indians] manage it with such dexterity & grace. A European usually looks awkward & in a bustle compared with the Indian's quiet skill in a Canoe" (p. 107). Her continuing interest in the Indians and her admiration of their "grace" indicates her own desire to fit herself for her new environment.

There is one white man's wilderness skills she does admire; Lieutenant (later Colonel) Thomas Talbot, over whom Canada is to exert such a spell that he returns to spend his long retirement on a huge estate on Lake Erie. When Simcoe first knew him he was a young aide to her husband; thus his attentions to her, as recorded in the diary, are in no way improper. But the entries show that it is through his greater competence and adventurousness that she is able truly to experience the wilderness. The entries of the diary, particularly the York entries, are filled with his presence. He frees some pigeons and Simcoe's

pleasure cannot be entirely covered by the correct and proper words of the diary meant for her daughters' eyes: "Mr. Talbot gave a shilling to liberate some wood pigeons I must otherwise have seen & heard fluttering most disagreeably. I was much obliged to him for this polite attention" (p. 62). Together they go on jaunts, sight bald eagles (p. 78), and gather birch bark (p. 120). She admires his canoeing (p. 63) and his skating (p. 115). He stays as her aide while her husband journeys on business (p. 85-87) and takes her on visits to one of her favorite locations, the Peninsula (now Toronto's Center Island), where "My horse has spirit enough to wish to get before others. I rode a race with Mr. Talbot to keep myself warm" (p. 107).

There is no evidence in the diary (considering its audience this is not surprising) of a sexual liaison between the two, but Talbot is obviously much more attuned to Simcoe's adventurous, wilderness-loving self than is her correct military husband who seemed to see the new country as only so many potential forts (Fowler, p. 37). Many years later Talbot sent Simcoe a sketch of his home on Lake Erie, which she lovingly reproduced in a sketch of her own (reproduced in Fowler's book). Although Talbot opens up the York adventure to Simcoe, her own spirited curiosity is able to continue the exploration once he leaves to join his regiment in Europe. In the way that "others" are incorporated to make the "hybrid" self, once Talbot leaves, it is Simcoe herself who takes the lead in adventures.

The time of Talbot's departure is complicated by the death of Simcoe's infant daughter Katherine who had been born in Canada. The diary does not express directly the extent to which this experience

deepens her feeling for the new land in the way that Margaret Atwood describes Mrs. Moodie's feeling about a dead child: "I planted him in this country / like a flag,"<sup>7</sup> but Simcoe does not make entries in her diary for almost a month (an uncharacteristic gap for her). In a letter home to the family governess she explains how she coped with her grief: "the suddenness of the event you may be sure shocked me inexpressibly." All her fears become centered on her son Francis: "A few days afterward Francis was slightly indisposed but in the state of mind I was in, I fancied him dangerously ill, & sent express for our own Surgeon. This agitation turned my mind from the melancholy subject it before dwelt on, & I really think relieved my mind from the oppression I felt, more than any other thing could have done; tho the recollection of the loss of so promising a Child must long be a painful thing; to enhance the misery the Governor was at Detroit" (p. 125). The entries that follow this letter reveal that the child's death has had an effect on the way she experiences the new land, as her young son becomes more often mentioned as her companion, and as she tries to manifest a more permanent place of her own in Canada, a place that, like her daughter's grave, will remain after she is gone.

Young Francis takes a more prominent place in Simcoe's diary not only because she wants him closer to her after losing her baby daughter, but because in many ways he takes the place of the figure of Talbot. Francis, at five, accompanies Simcoe's party on an expedition to 40 Mile Creek (p. 130). He dresses as an Indian on his birthday and she is amused and proud when he imitates the Indians' songs and dances (p. 127). Most importantly, she and her husband claim land in Francis's

name and the boy accompanies her there often. In order to fulfill the settlement requirements of the claim they build a dwelling which in its setting and construction forms a symbol of Simcoe's encounter with Canada. The painting she made of it shows it rising like a monument, high on an isolated eerie above the ravine of the Don River. "Castle Frank" was a strange structure which "had a classical facade with pillars of peeled tree-trunks, but the interior was never finished" (caption of the reproduction in the diary illustrations). Simcoe's old-world self shows in the choice of the classical facade (in her painting it looks like a wilderness Parthenon), but the new country provides the unusual materials. Because it was left unfinished, a tent was set up inside when they stayed overnight, tents having become Simcoe's favorite dwelling by now. The "castle" is a comment on her Canadian experience, an ambitious, but often makeshift, eccentric and delightful one, in which she encompasses the new land into her own esthetic sense by her imaginative structure. Her feeling for her son as the now important "other" of her adventures is shown in the fact that the land was claimed for him and the castle named for him.

On the heights of Castle Frank not only is she free from mosquitos, but also free from disapproving bourgeois settlers' opinions and the strictures of her life as chief lady in Upper Canada. The degree to which the country charmed her is evidenced by the fact that after a winter of dutiful but less vivid entries concerning life in Quebec city, upon receiving a letter from her husband suggesting that she travel over the winter ice to Kingston to meet him, rather than waiting for break-up, she packs up her children and observes that "this scheme is

doubly delightful to me as being an unexpected pleasure, & I think I shall like travelling en Carriole very much" (p. 145). Her sangfroid has increased to the point that by the time she travels by lake boat to Toronto in May she can record: "my servant came several times to tell me we were going to the bottom. I told her to shut the door & leave me quiet, for the motion of the Vessel made me sick" (p. 157). Simcoe's perception of relative danger has become a more realistic and immediate one after years on the Canadian scene.

Fowler proposes that Simcoe's perception of Canada moved from the rational eighteenth-century concept of "Sense to sensuality ... all her senses newly awakened, in the rich texture of the land itself" (p. 28) and Fowler sees Talbot as a large ingredient in this conversion. Certainly there is a real sense in the diary that Simcoe has moved from recording the wilderness to experiencing it, but the change is not a conversion from one identity to another, nor is it effected through one man alone. Rather it is an integration of the old self with the new elements offered by the Canadian adventure. Her stay in Canada deepens her artistic sense in that she becomes more the feeling and imaginative picturesque artist than merely one with a good eye for the clichéd picturesque.

The degree to which Simcoe became "Canadian" is revealed when she is told they will be returning to England. She cannot take comfort even in her once beloved activity of going out to dine: "Took leave of Mrs. McGill & Miss Crookshank. I was so much out of Spirits I was unable to dine with her. She [Mrs. McGill] sent me some dinner but I could not eat, cried all the day" (p. 189). When she returns to England she

mourns: "The weather is damp raw & unpleasant. I could not but observe as we passed many good Houses that those Mansions appeared very comfortable in which people might live very happily, but it could not be supposed they could ever be induced to go out of them in such a damp Climate for the fields looked so cold, so damp, so cheerless, so uncomfortable from the want of our bright Canadian Sun that the effect was striking & the contrast very unfavourable to the English climate" (p. 207-8). But in the very next entry, the artist has cheered up enough to be able to note that she "passed a remarkable fine Cedar of Lebanon" (p. 208). Typically, Simcoe rebounds quickly.

Indeed, in her last entries Elizabeth Simcoe is in many ways the same woman as she was when she went to Canada, concerned at the end of her Canadian experience as at the beginning that she might make a mistake as chatelaine: "I was really so ill I could scarcely hear or see & possibly neglected the very persons I meant to be most civil to" (p. 151). As well, although Thomas Talbot is her "other" in the discovery of the wilderness, she continues to take a keen interest in all her husband's activities, describing them in detail to their daughters. She enjoys poring over maps with him and traveling on his expeditions. She becomes his precise map-maker in his plans to build forts throughout the lake region of Ontario. Thus, while she discovers new parts of herself, she does not discard the old self as in "conversion" autobiography.

Simcoe's diary has been the vehicle by which a sophisticated artistic temperament effects the "integration of the savage and the soft,"<sup>8</sup> that is the mark of the mature picturesque artist and the woman

autobiographer concerned with completion rather than perfection. ]

Simcoe's diary offers us a view of a woman who because of her rank and privileged education sees her own self development as important. Yet her sense of self also incorporates the personalities and achievements of others. But as Fothergill proposes, "the need to project an ego-image does not appear to be the leading motive in diaries written by women .... The position of women in society has tended to preclude the assertion of individual ego. ... A woman cannot easily cast herself as protagonist, when society and the controlling personal relationships of her life demand proficiency in exclusively supporting roles" (p. 87). Simcoe manages to tread a fine line between the "assertion" to which her rank entitles her and to which her artistic self inclines and the "supporting" role her woman's position demands of her. When both role and training argue against assertion, how then does a woman write a personal account of which she is inevitably the center without seeming to dominate? Consciously or unconsciously one of the favorite strategies of women is a self-deprecating humor, a kind of reporting of the self that is made to seem like comic relief from the more serious job of reporting the lives of others.

Such is the case in The Journals of Mary O'Brien 1828-1838 (1968; 280 pp.), an edited version of a large collection of journal entries, supplemented by letters that O'Brien (née Gapper) sent to her sister, brother-in-law and brother during the years in which she changed from a genteel English maiden aunt of thirty to a Canadian pioneer mother of several children.<sup>9</sup> The practical purpose of her journals is to inform the family back home of the nature of life in the new land and the

health and progress of family members in Canada. Since the primary readers of the journals are her sister Lucy Sharpe and Lucy's husband, whom O'Brien would like to encourage to emigrate, the entries tend to paint the pleasantest picture possible of the new land. As the years go by and Lucy's emigration is not as foremost in O'Brien's mind, the entries give a fuller picture of Canada, and of O'Brien's development.

O'Brien places family, rather than self, at the center of her concerns, first her mother and then her brothers and their families. The purpose of the visit to Ontario is to help her sister-in-law with a new baby, as well as to spend time with her beloved brothers. Her family loyalty is indicated by the fact that when she and her mother begin to want to stay in Canada, she writes a great deal about ways to arrange for her sister and family to emigrate, so that she will be able to fulfill her promise to tutor her niece without leaving Canada (pp. 65-72). This duty is so important to her that she actually delays accepting Edward O'Brien's marriage proposal until Lucy releases her from her promise. As well, Edward O'Brien must get his future mother-in-law's word that she too wishes to stay in Canada because no marriage can take place if the bride cannot carry out the duties of a youngest daughter to an aging mother. Thus, O'Brien's defining preoccupation is her sense of family. With new loves and duties emerging, the purpose of the diary becomes one of integrating the new with the old, of creating a version of the self that leaves nothing behind.

The old self that O'Brien brings to the new land is that of a well-educated, witty, but rather sheltered, English gentlewoman. She



views the activities of the raw colonial life with amused detachment. She mocks the desire for sophistication by the locals: "they are making such rapid strides in civilization as to have had two murderers tried and condemned at the same assizes" (p. 22). At the same time her humor serves as a way to feel out the idea of permanent settlement: "When I settle here I mean to have a maple sugar farm, both for the sake of encouraging a very valuable source of wealth, which the natives are prone to neglect from improvidence and prejudice, and because it will give me no trouble for eleven months of the year. Besides, it will ensure me plenty of wood" (p. 24).

The attitude of naive lightheartedness extends to almost all her own activities until she heads north to Lake Simcoe on a trip with her brother and her future husband. The place enchants her and she becomes suddenly more serious and less detached in her descriptions:

Now Mr. O'Brien has got into our canoe and paddled out to get a water lily which is spreading its beauty to be admired by the frogs. Now we get into the lake and make way. The Indians' canoes cast off and I, casting my eyes on the water, see the whole verdant carpeting of its bed--every leaf and insect distinct. Now I am attracted by the Indians on the bows who are singing in a rich soft voice a common psalm tune to Indian words.... Mr. O'Brien sits at the end with his paddle, Bill is in the bottom leaning over on one side with another. This allows me to lean over and dabble on the opposite side. Thus we glide along with a motion soothing though hardly perceptible" (p. 60).

O'Brien's use of the present tense, her ability to characterize herself in the scene while remaining the external narrator, and her new seriousness on this occasion indicates a self-conscious effort to use her literary ability to transmit the deep impression this new place has made on her psyche. The effect of the Lake Simcoe area on O'Brien's

consciousness can be measured by the fact that whereas most of her journal entries are less than a page, this one is almost three pages long, and filled with enthusiastic description of their adventures. The account of her journey indicates that, unlike the settled area of Thornhill, Ontario, where her brothers have bought already cleared land, this wilder place demands a new response from O'Brien.

From the beginning, her desire to settle here is shared by her future husband. He becomes the "other" that makes the adventure possible. His interests and activities will become an important part of the entries. The reader sees that the writer has already made her commitment to her husband and the new land in her language, but O'Brien herself agonizes over the whole next winter before she finds the ways to hold on to the old life while welcoming the new.

O'Brien is an example of the "goodness" preoccupation that Spacks describes as typical to women autobiographers. She cannot, despite her own desires, become a good wife until she is sure she can remain a good daughter and sister. Once this is assured her concern is for her ability to measure up as "good" at the domestic life, while holding on to some of the intellectual content of her single existence. Her concerns are typically disguised under a layer of self-mocking humor. Describing her domestic efforts she remarks: "I ... stirred a bowl of cream into butter, in which I succeeded much to my heart's content, sitting under the verandah and reading Milton all the time. Only I found to my sorrow when my work was finished that I had ground off one of my nails" (p. 118). Yet she allows her true opinion of the importance of her place as wife to show through indirectly when she

advises an old friend about to come over to Canada that "an active wife will be worth more to him than anything else except his own industry and honesty" (p. 138). These strategies of humor and indirection are used often enough to suggest that they are consciously used literary devices on O'Brien's part.

O'Brien is beginning to experience the phenomenon that many English gentlewomen experienced on taking up life in pioneer Canada. In her journal A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada, Anne Langton explains: "As long as the lady is necessarily the most active member of her household she keeps her ground from her utility; but when the state of semi-civilization arrives ... then she must fall, and must be contented to be looked upon as belonging merely to the decorative department of the establishment and valued accordingly."<sup>10</sup> For many women, once they had a taste of the power that "utility" brings, there is no returning to their "decorative" selves. But for O'Brien the idea of herself as "supporting" others, rather than "asserting" self, demands that she disguise her new accomplishments. She claims that all her efforts are being undertaken for another: "Domestic arrangements, I must confess, are not much to my fancy, either in theory or practice. However if Edward thinks that I do it well and praises me a little sometimes, I suppose I shall like it well enough" (p. 105).

This claim of living a new life to please her husband is also a way of protecting the old self while entering into the new experience. Later, as her competence grows and she accepts her new role, she is able to describe her foibles and successes with her characteristic good humor: "I had just finished the first stage of my cooking and was about

to shift my character from cook to gentlewoman when accidents began to happen" (p. 141). As always, as well as being concerned with presenting a version of herself that incorporates both the old and the new, she presents herself in a comic attitude to lessen the highlighting of the ego self that such a self-portrait may involve.

The degree to which her confidence grows after she and her husband settle on their land on Lake Simcoe is indicated by her report of the delivery of her second child. Formerly, she has reported her sister-in-law's deliveries with much circumspection. All we know of her first pregnancy is that she once "was obliged to lie down and go into hysterics" (p. 125) and in a letter home she expresses fear for her own life (p. 145). The editor indicates that the record of O'Brien's own first birthing is lost (p. 156). Now, with her second child's birth she presents her situation as if it were part of the everyday work of a pioneer farm making the exceptional seem routine: "After dinner I went into Mama's room to get out of their way and from thence I did not immediately return, for a few minutes made me the mother of another son. The nurse had not arrived, but Mama was so completely taken by surprise that she had no time to be alarmed. With Edward's assistance and Flora's ministrations she did all that was requisite for me and the baby." The next day she adds, once more disguising the boasting with humor: "I was glad to find that my nurse had patients requiring assistance more imperiously than myself, so, having got rid of all useless hands, we had nothing to do but enjoy ourselves, look at the baby which is pretty tolerable ugly, write my journal and await the return of the boat. Such is the way we manage things in the bush"

(p. 197). The understatement of the last sentence covers years of struggle and hard work in learning how to "manage" in the pioneer life. But as well, it is a strategy by which O'Brien mythologizes herself, or as Spacks puts it "changes difficult reality into glamorous myth." Her reference to writing in her journal indicates that the writing is the self-conscious vehicle of mythologizing.

In her new role, superintending a large household of children, hired hands, an aging mother, with a husband increasingly involved in politics in Toronto, O'Brien nevertheless finds ways to integrate her old self with her new duties. She keeps several young neighborhood girls whom she tutors in her house. They pay their board by doing household duties, leaving O'Brien time for other activities, including her journals. These broaden and mature in their interests as the years go by, and include commentary on the development of the district and the political situation in the province. Through her close identification with her husband's political involvement she becomes an informed commentator on the explosive politics of Upper Canada in the 1830's and through her broad domestic involvement she is able to give a fine portrait of farm and community life. In this way, through the writing of her journals she keeps all parts of her personality lively.

A description of an incident in which she helps a Mrs. Monck gives us insight into the darker side of pioneer experience. When acting as midwife to Mrs. Monck, O'Brien discovers the lady to be in a state of nervous and physical exhaustion. O'Brien takes her to her home, nurses her, delivers her baby, cares for her. Later she visits her in her own home and, when the unfortunate woman suffers a "mental derangement"

(p. 243) and runs away into the woods, it is O'Brien the rescuers bring to her for her comfort. Mrs. Monck refuses to see her husband but instead confesses to O'Brien "a good deal of the supposed causes of her miseries and her wanderings in the woods. These [last] appear to have left a comparatively comfortable impression on her mind. She promised to come to me as soon as she could be moved" (p. 244).

The woman and her children spend some time with the O'Brien family and O'Brien later visits her where she is being cared for in Toronto. This incident, told in O'Brien's straightforward way, with no overt attempt to enhance her own role, demonstrates a typical strategy of women autobiographers. The effect of the non-heroic telling is ironically to make the teller seem quite "heroic," not just in her competent charity to another, but in the contrast she herself offers to the victim. The implication of any such retold incident is to make our narrator's ability to cope in the wilderness seem that much more of an accomplishment when we become aware that other women have collapsed under the pressures of pioneer life. The story of Mrs. Monck is thus a variation of showing the self through the life of the "other." As well, there is an indirect criticism of husbands in the telling of the passage that is all the more significant in O'Brien's case since she often records, without complaining, her husband's frequent illnesses and his absences from home to pursue a political career. Thus, by implying criticism of another woman's husband, she criticizes all husbands while not putting herself in a bad light by being observed to be a complainer. In such ways do the strategies of indirection and disguise work for the enhancement of the self that the autobiographer wishes to present.

Mary O'Brien's journals end abruptly after the birth of her fourth child and an account of the 1837 rebellion. The editor speculates that the sister to whom much of the journal is addressed, Lucy, may have come to Canada at that time (p. 280). Certainly the journals have been motivated by O'Brien's need to hold on to old connections. But as well, I would speculate that the journals may have, by 1838, accomplished their other, unspoken motivation: the shaping of a coherent and positive version of self that includes what is valued in the old, younger self and those qualities that are needed to become a pioneer in a new land. To the end of the diary, her feeling about her life on a wilderness farm remains a key ingredient in Mary O'Brien's shaping of herself. In a late entry she enthuses: "This has been a great day. The mud wall is finished and the bear which has for some time been prowling about is shot, after having terrified the pigs. . . . A magnificent animal the bear is or, rather, was. Even when dead there was a spirit about him" (p. 256-7).

In many ways Mary O'Brien represents the spirit of the ideal pioneer woman. But through her journals we are able to glimpse the other side of the pioneer woman as well. The story of Mrs. Monck gives us a glimpse of a figure that is as familiar in fiction as is the good-humored, accomplished pioneer woman of which O'Brien is the real life precursor.

O'Brien was thirty when she came to Canada. She was a healthy young woman who married a man of limited but real means. Through his political connections he was able to obtain a generous land grant for a

modest sum. Elizabeth Simcoe was only twenty-five and although she had birthed six babies, her wealth largely insulated her from their day-to-day care. She experienced Canada in a way that perhaps no one has since. With servants and luxuries in tow she was able to enjoy the virgin land without very much suffering its dangers, except to taste them as part of the adventure. In contrast, Sarah Ellen Roberts, the author of Alberta Homestead: The Chronicle of a Pioneer Family (1968; 264 pages) lacked these advantages. She came to Canada in 1906 with her husband and sons, to settle near Talbot, Alberta on some of the last of the free homestead land available in the old west. As her son, the editor of the book explains, she had spent her life as the college-educated daughter of an academic family and the wife of a medical doctor in Illinois.<sup>11</sup> At fifty-four (her husband was fifty-eight), plagued with migraines, timidity and what amounted at times to a phobia of open spaces and a near obsession with cleanliness, she made an unlikely pioneer. She came, as many did, out of desperation, because her husband had lost his practice during a long illness and they had no means to send their three grown sons to college. The homestead and the hard work of the five of them was to provide that lack, and for six years they slaved at it, in the end having to leave no wealthier than they came and with Roberts' always fragile health broken. But the boys did get to college and she was able to sum up her experience in these positive words: "As we look back over the years we spent on the homestead, we remember hardships, of course. But even more vividly, we remember the love we bore each other, we remember the sweet companionship of working together at daily tasks, and of sharing with each other hardship and



heartbreak and trial and triumph and sorrow and joy" (p. 264).

Like Mary O'Brien, the mythologization of "difficult reality" is firmly attached to the significant others of the family. Her account was written at least partially because Roberts had been urged by her family to complete her record, begun on the homestead in the first winter, and she agrees because, "I believe that in the years to come such an intimate record of pioneer life on a homestead will be interesting to my children and grandchildren" (p. 3). After the first year the hard work of the farm caused her to abandon her almost "daily record". In 1915, three years after the family left Alberta she "took the story up and completed it" (p. ix). Thus the first 100 pages of the account are a diary, the rest of the book a memoir supplemented by accounts and letters of her sons and other relatives. The diary and her later memoir have a surprising consistency, the later writing having the same detail and immediacy that the on-the-spot record has. She has the ability to recall her experiences in vivid and dramatic detail.

Perhaps one of the reasons for this amazing recall is that these years represent a time that must have often seemed like a vivid waking nightmare, rather than a "chronicle of a pioneer family," as Roberts faced crop failures, personal disabilities, work that would try a much younger woman, and a loneliness that was often devastating. However, she is concerned at all times with telling not only her own story but also the story of her heroic sons and husband, who all seem to thrive on the hardships and challenges. They find the experience of homesteading to be like the one that Faragher describes as typical of men, an extension of male bonding activities. The intertwining of these two

realities, her own, and her men's, creates a unique account.

We do not see the obvious change in personal identity that we note in the younger women discussed in this chapter. Instead we see an identity long ago formed in safe non-rural environments confronted with a reality that threatens the individual with disintegration: "How shall I describe the feeling that then settled down upon me? I had never had it before.... It wasn't exactly homesickness or fear or loneliness or awe, although I think that all of these may have entered into it .... I felt as though I were absolutely alone in the world, and my sense of littleness and helplessness overwhelmed me" (pp. 21-22). Roberts does not portray herself as creating a new self equipped to handle the new experience; she remains as ill equipped at the end of the stay in Alberta as she was at the beginning. Late in the account she confesses that she "had the same dreadful headaches that I had had all my life, but I think they were even more severe than they had previously been and lasted longer, for they usually kept me in bed for two days and unfitted me for any work for at least one more" (p. 253). As well, Roberts is ruthless in not directly mythologizing her own frontier spirit; that privilege is reserved for the experience of her husband and sons, her heroic "others" who by her own accounts and theirs undertook Bunyan-like tasks to keep the family solvent and surviving.

Roberts' accomplishment is the written record itself, for in it she creates her own and others reality with the same care that Faragher notes in other pioneer women: "[who] frequently employed a range of stylistic elaborations. They took care to identify names of people and places and specify dates and times.... used extended description:

colorful adjectives, qualifying phrases, long passages of explanation and summary.... In general men and women were concerned with different orders of meaning. There was an almost inverse relationship in the way most men wrote about objects and things, most women about people" (p. 130).

Roberts is so often incapable of meeting the demands of the pioneer experience on a day-to-day basis, she is so often in awe of the stamina and energy and competence of her husband and sons, that she is driven to encompass in language what she cannot encompass in life. Hers then is a pioneering in language to find meaning in what is awesome, confusing and demanding in life. She constantly doubts her ability to shape the reality with words, using expressions such as "impossible to describe," or "no words can express," or "how can I say," continually. Yet by the very act of struggling for expression she achieves it, as she does when describing the northern lights:

How I wish that I could describe them or give some faint idea of their beauty. There has been hardly a night this winter that the northern horizon has not been aglow. Much of the time it is a steady, soft light, resembling somewhat the light thrown on the sky by a large city when viewed from a distance at night. Frequently the light mounts to the zenith and descends to the southern horizon in swiftly moving streamers of ever-changing color. These streamers play back and forth, fade away, and then grow again in intensity in a way that defies any description (p. 83).

Expressions like "defies any description" are part of the strategy that allows her to share experience with the reader. The reader is drawn into the same sense of awe as the writer, feeling the need to reach beyond the known world/word to find the emotional as well as the visual

effect of the lights in the imagination.

Because Roberts is ruthlessly honest and straightforward about her own insufficiencies, we are drawn into the difficult emotions of her experience. But she is also able to endear herself to the reader while describing such emotions, by gently mocking her own fear: "I think that during the first few weeks of our stay here I never went to the door of the tent without scanning the horizon, as they say in novels, to see if I could discover anywhere upon the seemingly boundless prairie any living, moving thing; for there were times when the loneliness was so oppressive that to see even a herd of cattle moving toward a little meadow where the grass looked greener gave me a distinct sense of relief and companionship" (p. 34). Whether she is quivering away the night under a wind-bent tent, or waking to find her pigtailed sticking straight out from her head with frost, she is unmerciful, but often humorous, in presenting her unheroic self. Such a strategy appeals to the readers' sympathy. As well, her comment "as they say in novels" is our invitation to see her, at least occasionally, as a romantic, solitary figure "scanning the horizon." Such devices, used repeatedly and effectively, indicate considerable literary self-consciousness.

But, on a practical surface level, this account is for her posterity, and she is careful to make her men the heroes of the story. Yet, ironically, by merely detailing her own mundane reality of "primitive" housekeeping she allows us to see her courage and endurance. She works day in and day out in complete isolation. Much of the men's work is done in the company of each other; her work is rarely shared. She allows herself a kind of indirect praise however in detailing the

stories of two women who make her own survivorship seem hard won. She tells of a "Belgian woman" who was so odd that Roberts fears her attempts at friendship, and a "Dutch woman" who badgers her in an eccentric manner. The Belgian is later found wandering the prairie in a mad state, because her husband insists on sending her out to find stock in bad weather. Roberts loses touch with the Dutch woman after meeting her "villainous-looking" (p. 171) husband. As in Mary O'Brien's account the self is praised only in an indirect way by contrast with the "other". Although criticism of her own men is unthinkable for Roberts, like O'Brien she implies that husbands are responsible for the safety and survival of pioneer wives. We are led to conclude, even more than in Mary O'Brien's account, that husbands, if not the root of a woman's sanity can be the root of her insanity.

However, it should be noted that the way in which Roberts views the pioneering venture as a male activity is not typical of other Canadian women autobiographers. Besides Roberts personal situation, two factors may help explain her attitude. Roberts is an American, and as Carol Fairbanks has shown in Prairie Women: Images in Canadian and American Fiction, the mythos of the male as leader and active agent in the pioneering venture was stronger in American minds than Canadian.<sup>12</sup> As well, Roberts is a product of late-nineteenth-century Victorian times, and thus inherits the ideal of woman as "angel" of the home, whereas O'Brien and Simcoe predate the Victorian traditions.

One of the positive results of this doubting of female ability, as Faragher has noted, is women's desire to cover a broader territory in their accounts because of their need to relate the important activities

of men as well as the detail of their own adjustments. That this offers a more densely textured account is obvious in many passages in Roberts book, not the least of which is her account of the coming of spring on the prairie:

The first winter was by far the most severe of any we experienced in Alberta, and we were more poorly prepared for it than we were for the later ones. Of course, the spring did come, as springs always do. The snow disappeared, the crocuses challenged the frost with their purple blossoms all over the prairie, and the ice melted in the ponds, which were once more alive with water fowl. It was like greeting old friends to hear the "honk, honk" of the geese as they flew northward, or to hear the musical note of the meadow lark. The men say that the best of all days is that day when the frost has left the ground and the work in the fields has begun. And I am sure that only one who has plowed early in the spring, when it seems so good to be out of doors, can know how it feels to walk out over a great breezy field, down the long, black, straight furrows. Lathrop says that when he first plows in the spring he rests under a sort of illusion, for it seems that it is he and not the team ahead that is forcing the plowshares through the stubborn soil. The grasp of the plow seems to give him a sense of power.

I used to go out to where the men were plowing. It fascinated me to watch the moist earth roll up on the moldboard and turn over, black and cool and sweetsmelling. There is nothing quite like that odor. It has in it all the essence of the spring, all the promise of the summer. It is as though the very clods had language and spoke to us of the wealth that lay latent in them (p. 102-03).

This passage illustrates Roberts ability to make herself part of the scene without establishing a dominant ego self which would obliterate her attempt to portray both the miracle of the spring and her men's feeling as the "active" participants in that miracle. Beginning with the general statement about winter, she inserts her "we," which here means her personal family, thus localizing and personalizing her

account. Her image of the crocuses that "challenged" the frost indicates not only her literary mindedness but her desire to recreate the active rather than passive nature of spring. Her reference to her "old friends" the water fowl includes them in the gestalt of "others" she is creating. Her unsophisticated inclusion of "honk, honk," creates a humorous, domestic, but dramatic aspect to the description. Her efforts at inclusion extend to the men's, especially her son Lathrop's feelings about spring--indeed the men are as usual, the active "characters" of her recreation--and emphasize the intensity of the experience of the new season.

But ironically, for the reader, Roberts is not the minor character that she presents herself to be. She is the perceiving consciousness of the writing, open through all her senses and language-making capacities to all the components of the moment that is spring. Thus, for the reader she becomes more than a central character, more than an ego-presence as narrator, most powerfully in the quoted passage when she finally uses the word "I." The "I" position is one of connection with all the elements of the scene, the day, the birds, the plowing, the men, the fields, and her own emotions as she speaks specifically of the feeling of being "fascinated," with the moment and of the intimacy of touching the "moist" earth. By building through the description of the natural scene, through her "others'" perceptions of it, to her own feelings, she places her own in the culminating position. The reader's attention is called to her language-making ability by the final simile of the earth's language. For as the earth speaks to her of "wealth that lay latent," so she speaks to us, indirectly, of the complexity of the

perceiving consciousness that is giving us this moment through her own language. This is quite different from the use of an omniscient narrator device. Here we have the special immediacy that is achieved in autobiographical accounts, where we "merge" our reality with that of the autobiographer who is writer, narrator and character in the story.

Thus, in many ways, Roberts is a prime example of women who use their imaginative language-making ability to complete the self. Language is especially important to her because so much of the "active" part of the pioneer experience is denied her due to her health and/or her perception of herself as unequal to the task. For her, the autobiographical enterprise is the active energy of what Curtin has called "life [ ] in process of elaboration of itself."

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Fowler theorizes that what early women sought in Canada was the "androgynous ideal," the integration of male and female qualities in a broader definition of self (p. 10). In some cases this may be true, as pioneer women take on tasks traditionally allocated to men. But I would argue that what these women seek in Canada is a more broadly "feminine" self, a more primitive self, one that naturally seeks an identification with the land because of its feminine-maternal qualities of the ever-changing, ever-renewing life source that excludes no part of itself, that makes use of all substances. For Elizabeth Simcoe this expresses itself in her heightened esthetic sense. Mary O'Brien creates a self that is an abundant, multi-faceted earth-mother image. Sarah Roberts uses her language-making ability to join herself imaginatively



with the "language" of her physical environment.

For such a "feminine" definition of self, a feminine mode of expression is needed. The most apt description of the form these women are in the process of creating is Virginia Woolf's definition of the diary, as it imitates the shape of women's lives:

Something loose knit and yet not slovenly, so elastic that it will embrace any thing, solemn, slight or beautiful that comes into my mind. I should like it to resemble some deep old desk, or capacious hold-all, in which one flings a mass of odds and ends without looking them through. I should like to come back, after a year or two, and find that the collection had sorted itself and refined itself and coalesced, as such deposits so mysteriously do, into a mould, transparent enough to reflect the light of our life, and yet steady, tranquil compounds with the aloofness of a work of art."<sup>13</sup>

The implication of Woolf's metaphor is that the diary creates its own meaning over time, and that it is the reading consciousness as much as the writing consciousness that creates the "light" and the "art" of the work. What is required of the writer is that she deposit everything "that comes to mind." Though none of the women I have dealt with have such a consciously "elastic" view of the form of their work, each has so faithfully recorded the full texture of her life, each has had a significant enough command of literary devices, that the effect is the same. Since the accounts were destined for the eyes of beloved "others" they are especially filled with the loving attention to detail that Woolf demands of "a work of art." And since the work was done with such love, the reader is free to perform her own creative act, and to experience that sense of Zugehörigkeit (belonging) that results from the autobiographical act.

## NOTES - CHAPTER 2

- <sup>1</sup> Frances Stewart, Our Forest Home: Being Extracts from the Correspondence of the Late Frances Stewart, compiled and edited by her daughter E. S. Dunlop (Montreal: Gazette Printing and Publishing Co., 1902), p. 294.
- <sup>2</sup> Anne Leveridge, Your Loving Anna: Letters From the Ontario Frontier, edited by Louis Tivy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), p. 86.
- <sup>3</sup> John Mack Faragher, Women and Men on the Overland Trail (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 133.
- <sup>4</sup> Marian Fowler, The Embroidered Tent: Five Gentlewomen in Early Canada (Toronto: Anansi, 1982), p. 10.
- <sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Simcoe, Mrs. Simcoe's Diary, edited by Mary Quayle Innis (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1965), p. 26.
- <sup>6</sup> Charles Kostelnick, "From Picturesque View to Picturesque Vision: William Gilpin and Ann Radcliffe," Mosaic, Vol. XVIII, No. 3 (Summer 1985), 36.
- <sup>7</sup> Margaret Atwood, "Death of a Young Son by Drowning," in The Journals of Susanna Moodie (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 31.
- <sup>8</sup> Kostelnick, "Picturesque View," p. 33.
- <sup>9</sup> Mary O'Brien, The Journals of Mary O'Brien, 1828-1838, edited by Audrey Saunders Miller (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1968).
- <sup>10</sup> Anne Langton, A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada: The Journals of Anne Langton (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co. Ltd., 1950, 1964), pp. 127-8.
- <sup>11</sup> Sarah Ellen Roberts, Alberta Homestead: The Chronicle of a Pioneer Family, edited by Lathrop E. Roberts (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968, 1971), pp. ix - x.
- <sup>12</sup> Carol Fairbanks, Prairie Women: Images in American and Canadian Fiction (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 34.
- <sup>13</sup> Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), pp. 13-14. Some implications of Woolf's statement for American women autobiographers are discussed by Suzanne Juhasz in "'Some Deep Old Desk or Capacious Hold All': Form and Women's Autobiography," College English, 39, No. 6 (February 1978), 663-8.

CHAPTER 3 - PIONEER WOMEN'S MEMOIRS: PRESERVING THE  
PAST/RESCUING THE SELF

When we look closely at the individual memoirs written by early Canadian settler women we observe each memorialist embarking on a rescue mission. What is to be rescued varies. For one woman it may be a younger old-world version of the self lost in the necessary adjustment to the new country. For another it is an ideal of family life that could have existed only in the special conditions of the pioneer venture. For a third it is the rescue of a special coincidence of time and place and person that allowed a self to exist that could thrive only in that one concurrence. But those memoirs that are successful have two things in common: their rescue of the past carries with it an ability to recreate the past in the kind of "structure and depth" and to enliven it with that personal "moral vision", the vision learned through a lifetime of experience, which Marcus Billson proposes are the distinguishing marks of great memoirs.

In this way, memoir-writing becomes an autobiographical act. The ~~X~~ act of rescuing the past for the purpose of what Billson calls "reconfronting and reappraising" is a means of creating a version of the self that the writer can accept as her own. That this is done through the "mirror" of history and the lives of others makes the memoir an entirely suitable format for certain Canadian women. For these women are like the "housewife" that Spacks refers to in "Selves in Hiding", who "seldom offers her life to public view",<sup>1</sup> but through memoirs is able to achieve exactly the "disguise" in which she may find a means of

"declaring personal power and effectiveness" (p. 114). The personal power that these women declare comes to us by way of the cogency of their vision of the past and the importance of its values which they share with us through their memoirs.

The thirty-six page editor's introduction to Elizabeth Johnston's Recollections of A Georgia Loyalist (1901; 127 pp.), would seem to indicate that the book was written to provide historical information on the background of her distinguished United Empire Loyalist family, which had fled Georgia during the upheavals of the American revolution.<sup>2</sup> If what we learn about that great historical event from her writing were the test of the success of her memoirs, they would be a failure. The real purpose of Johnston's memoirs quickly becomes obvious. Only three of the eleven chapters are concerned with the years 1764-1784, Johnston's first twenty years (and the years covering the major events of the revolution), and even these chapters feature the revolution not as a foregrounded event but as an offstage menace that affects the life of the family. Johnston is primarily concerned with the events of her own family life following the revolution when she and her husband, their children and her father, seek a place to call home, first in Scotland, then in Jamaica and finally in Nova Scotia.

This refusal to highlight the great historical event and the emphasis placed on the post-revolutionary personal events is typical of women. Gerda Lerner points out, in The Female Experience: An American Documentary, that women's "history has been a special kind." When removed from "the lens of man's records and observations," we find that women have not necessarily seen the time periods considered significant

by men as significant to their own development.<sup>3</sup> For men of Johnston's time, participation in the revolution (on either side) might be considered the shaping event of their lives. For women, the shaping was often the period that followed, when all their resources were called upon to rebuild the damage to family and stability that the great male adventure had caused.

Johnston organizes her memoirs around three periods in her life and each section has its special approach and tone. The first section, chapters one and two (pp. 37-63) tells the story of her life up to the time of her marriage in 1779, at age fifteen, to a loyalist soldier, Captain William Martin Johnston. The second section, chapters three through ten (pp. 64-121) covers most of her adult life up until age forty-six (1810), at which time, mostly through her efforts, the family settles permanently in Nova Scotia. The third section, takes the reader into Johnston's old age, to the time of writing in 1838, when she is seventy-four. The style of the first section is fast-paced narrative, with a tone of nostalgia for an almost fairy-tale past, as Johnston recreates her secure childhood as the obedient only child of doting, well-to-do parents, a childhood security shattered by her mother's death when Johnston was ten, and further destroyed two years later by the events of the revolution in which her father barely escaped the fate of other loyalists--being tarred and feathered. The second section, although still concerned with giving a chronological account, is much less narrative-oriented in its strategy. It tends to pinpoint certain moments of emergency in the family's life together--their various moves, the sending of children away for education, a family member's

illness--and the discursive quality of the writing focuses attention on the ethical problems involved for Johnston as mother of the family. The third section is largely a recording of deaths, as Johnston more and more becomes the one who marks the passing of family members, telling in brief memorial passages each one's character, accomplishments and the nature of their passing. The tone of the third section is reflective, resigned, a tone of self-forgiveness and acceptance of the past.

Interestingly, this structure corresponds with what William Spengemann identifies as the three basic types of autobiography. In The Forms of Autobiography, Spengemann sees the great autobiographers (all of them male) as writing one of three kinds of works: the historical, the philosophical or the poetic.<sup>4</sup> In this Canadian woman's memoirs we see a writer bridging all three forms; her early life is told as a series of historically linked cause and effect factors, her middle life is essentially a philosophical problem in ethical behavior, her old age is a more poetic phase when she achieves a reflective distance on her life. For some critics concerned with purity of form and accustomed to traditional male autobiographies that tend to take up one form or another exclusively, Johnston's telling of her life would seem an unfortunate mixture of styles. But Spengemann's analysis of men's autobiographies points to the first great autobiographer, Augustine, as having been unusual in his use of all three forms.

Although Augustine is concerned with the dramatization of the act of conversion and the concomitant new relationship with the divinity, and Johnston's concern is a more domestic one, correct behavior as mother of a family, both autobiographers wrote to present a moral vision

of life. Thus, they choose similar three-fold strategies. Augustine's moral vision rests on the importance of the gift of faith, as opposed to reason, in creating the Christian life. Johnston's moral vision rests on the performance of the deeds that duty dictates, no matter what the personal desire may be. In a sense this has as much to do with faith as does Augustine's conversion, except that his three-fold account emphasizes the coming to faith, the gift of faith, and the special relationship with God that follows; Johnston's divisions emphasize the experience of a life which leads the individual to seek moral conduct and an eventual achievement of self-acceptance through self-examination.

It is important to note that there are other important differences in the two uses of the three-fold form. Augustine's is a retrospective account which condemns and rejects his former life in order to emphasize the act of conversion and transcendence of sinful ways. Johnston's is a retrospective account, but one by which she attempts to accommodate her past self in the light of the discoveries of later life.

In each section of her memoirs Johnston finds ways of emphasizing the strength of her moral vision in all of her life. Early in the first section she intrudes to show the importance of family duty in her life. She explains that a suit to reclaim her childhood lands was undertaken by friends "sorely against my will" (p. 46). Although she believes the suit was won, and that she could have claimed the lands in adulthood, she never does, because her loyalties by then are firmly fixed with her husband and father, both people unwelcome in the United States. At the end of the first chapter she even risks a negative assessment of her beloved mother in order to point out the importance of strict discipline

in raising a child that as an adult will face difficult duties: "We may see in almost every event that befalls us the hand of our merciful Heavenly Father directing the various events of our lives for our good. Perhaps had my beloved and tender mother lived she might not have kept as strict a hand over me as my volatile nature required. My aunt was kind, but was at the same time decided in her conduct toward me, and I was made industrious at my needle" (pp. 50-51).

Johnston wrote her memoirs at the urgings of children and grandchildren in Nova Scotia. It is for them and people like them, the descendants of the loyalists who were to have such a large place in the shaping of the Canadian character, that she presents her life. She wishes to portray a generation shaped by kind but strict adults, prepared to face hardship stoically, equipped with the courage and skills to adapt to new circumstances, but imbued with absolute loyalty to tradition and the past.

In this regard, she describes her reaction when confronted with William Johnston's confession of love for her at the time that both of them are caught up in the events of the revolution: "By silence only I told him what I felt, then I got upstairs into my own room in the dark, and wept most abundantly, not at the thought of parting from him, but to think I should have listened to such a thing without my father's knowledge" (p. 54). We may question her sureness concerning her motivation for weeping, considering this is a woman in her seventies writing about a traumatic moment almost sixty years before, but we must look to the sincerity and the purpose of the assertion to judge the autobiographer's accomplishment. Nothing in the events of the rest of



Johnston's life-story contradicts the idea that her father is always one of her chief concerns. As her only living blood relative in exile, her respect for him and her care for him throughout the rest of his life is never in doubt. It is this vision of ethical conduct she wishes to impart to her children.

When she moves into the central, middle period of her life, the acts of a dutiful daughter, wife and mother become more ethically complex. This is particularly highlighted in her consideration of the deaths of two of her older children. As a result of her husband's taking up a medical practice in Jamaica after training in Scotland, it is deemed necessary that the older children must go to Scotland to receive a proper education. In this situation it is her obvious duty to stay with her husband and younger children, but she does not part very willingly with her son and daughter.

Of her son Andrew's tragic life she says: "That want of firmness had been a marked feature of the child's character from very early infancy, and it proved ruinous to him in his subsequent life. In his early education many traits of character and little faults were kept by his too fond widowed aunt and her maiden sisters from his worthy Grandfather Johnston's knowledge which had he known he might have nipped in the bud" (p. 92). As the confessional sixth chapter of the memoirs reveals, Johnston is not at all as certain as this statement would indicate about where the blame lies for her son's later misspent youth and early death from fever. At times she sees his own too-easy nature to blame, at other times the indulgent aunts, then her husband's insistence on the son's taking up the medical profession. She concludes

with this warning: "Let this sad history ... be a warning to all my grandchildren to avoid idleness and dissolute companions, and to study in youth, that seed-time of knowledge, that they may reap the fruits of honest industry in after life and be an honor and credit to their parents" (p. 99). But this warning is moderated with her concluding judgment on the case: "even while at college his weak aunts rather took part against me, judging me too severe in wishing him to devote more of his time to study. I have had severe trials in this life, yet I am conscious that I deserved many, and none, I believe, have been more than was good for me. This is a long, sad history of my lamented first-born; let it be a warning to youth, and to parents to allow their sons to choose that profession their hearts most incline them to" (p. 100).

At the very moment that she sums up the blame that she places on others, Johnston begins to admit some possibility of error on her own part by recording that the aunts blamed her severity. The outright admittance of error on the part of this woman who is so concerned with correct ethical behavior comes when she deals with the madness and death of her daughter Catherine. Johnston's strategy in telling this story is revealing. She precedes the account with a digression concerning her youngest child Laleah, who at thirteen is so devoted that she writes a poem in praise of her mother while they are on a dangerous sea voyage. Thus Johnston is able to lead into the story of Catherine with these words: "my heart feels too grateful to my affectionate child, even after so many years have rolled on, not to put them [the verses] also in these recollections of by-gone days, the retrospect of many of which alas, is too, too sad" (p. 103). The unstated purpose of the Laleah

story is to show that a child who remains under Johnston's protection does not develop Catherine's unfortunate tendencies. This time it is Grandfather Johnston who had "taken her [Catherine] from me, thinking to benefit her by the advantages she would gain in Edinburgh" (p. 105). But as well as indirectly condemning the helplessness of women in the face of patriarchal authority figures, Johnston is ready to make a fuller confession of her own part in Catherine's tragedy: "Perhaps I was too anxious to counteract the faults that had been fostered so long, and may have tried to check them too suddenly" (p. 106). Although Johnston does not turn away from a full account of Catherine's descent into madness, almost as if this detailing is part of the painful but necessary confession, she does mute the story of her death, as if it were too painful to dwell upon. Catherine is eventually consigned to a hospital for the insane in the States and dies there after the family has moved to Nova Scotia, and just before her mother is due to visit her.

In his article "A Question of Tone," Richard Hoggart contrasts the "splendid assurance," of the tone of nineteenth-century autobiography to the twentieth century's uneasiness with self-justification and special pleading.<sup>5</sup> Hoggart's examples are male autobiographers. When we look at a nineteenth-century female autobiographer such as Johnston we find that the early part of her memoirs has that same tone of "assurance." However, in telling the stories of her children's tragedies, particularly Catherine's, that assurance gives way to something else, a tone of mourning and expiation of the past rather than one of justifying the ego-self. In this way the autobiographer holds on to what is worthy

in her past self, that is, her insistence on the centrality of the parent-child relationship, but also admits to the too inflexible self that contributed to her children's problems. The effect of the two confessional chapters is seen in Johnston's conclusion to chapter 7: "At this moment, though more than seventeen years have passed since she was consigned to an early grave, I feel all the tenderness of grief as though it were very recent" (p. 114).

In this confession we see the past being recollected for the purpose of "reconfronting and reappraising" in a very real sense, as through the act of reliving the griefs of her past Johnston memorializes her dead children, expiates her guilt, and through the "tenderness" caused by the autobiographical act begins the construction of a moral vision that makes a more complete acknowledgement of the complexity of her own life. This is the real difference between Augustine and Johnston. Despite their use of similar forms, or rather the bridging of three forms, they do so for ultimately different purposes. Augustine is concerned with the continuing perfection of the self as accomplished through the love of Christ and which allows the transcendence of the old self. We see the woman autobiographer concerned with a continuing self-completion rather than perfection. This can be seen more clearly if we compare Johnston's "conversion" to Augustine's. After his dramatic moment in the garden, when Augustine is brought to his new self by the grace of God, he deals little with the world of the flesh, of history, but goes on to praise the beauty of a life lived in Christ. In Johnston's account the conversion is not a "moment" or even properly a "conversion." It is a gradually moderated position, one that

incorporates aspects of the old self in the new, reached through a painful and emotional review of the past. Johnston is concerned with the "historicity" of life, with staying inside the events of her life. She may be as concerned as Augustine with achieving peace and acceptance of self in her life, but not with transcendence of her past life, its duties and relationships. Thus the memoir mode is more suitable to her aim than confession or traditional spiritual autobiography.

In their article "Lillian Hellman and the Strategy of the 'Other'," Billson and Smith note that the memorialist portrays her significant others in great detail and conclude that "each portrait ... becomes a kind of self-portrait" (p. 174). So it is with Johnston, who in the third section of her memoirs records the various deaths within her family. In each case she is memorializing some specific quality of character. Taken together these qualities make up a composite of her own best self. At her father's death, she comments on his concern with doing his duty toward her as his child and her own wish that she has done her's to him (p. 127). Of her daughter's Eliza's death in childbed fever she lays emphasis on how the young mother's last words were an expression of concern for her children. Of Eliza she says: "If I were called upon to bear testimony whose individual character I had ever known most free from selfishness, I could with truth and boldness say it was my beloved Eliza's" (p. 132). Of course, true to the moral vision she is building of mutual love and duty between parent and child, she takes on the raising of her daughter's children. Her most revealing "self-portrait," however, is of her daughter-in-law Laura who died in a tragic self-caused housefire from which she should have been able to

save herself. Johnston observes: "Hers was a strong mind in matters that concerned her spiritual welfare, but in temporal things her diffidence led her to lean on others" (p. 152). In the end Johnston envisions a self that is not only loving and dutiful but one that has been prepared by parental training and practical life to carry out in daily action the dictates of her ethical position. Johnston's own life was certainly such a training ground.

Thus, through the process of mourning and commemoration, Johnston recreates in vivid detail the lives and deaths of her beloved kin, thereby not just creating the memoirs of the family past but creating as a by-product an autobiographical image of herself, using these people as mirrors to show her own preoccupations. She creates her identity, first as dutiful daughter, then as loyal wife, then as loving and firm mother, finally as maternal head of her family and sustaining center of the family in the vicissitudes of history. Thus, even though this book does not deal very much with the Loyalist cause, it deals in great depth with the psychology of a woman to whom the epitaph "loyalist" certainly applies. Johnston has developed her position as matriarchal head of the family while remaining completely loyal (except perhaps for the occasional criticism of her husband's actions and a less than memorable recreation of his death) to her patriarchal world.

In creating her self she has also prepared herself for death and immortality. John Barrett Mandel, in writing about death in autobiography, proposes that this preparation is one of the chief motivation of autobiography. Elizabeth Johnston has created "the effigy [the written work that] will have its own kind of life," through the

recreation of the actual deaths of her family members.<sup>6</sup> That she has prepared herself for death is shown in the final words of her memoirs: "At my time of life it is needful to cause the mind to dwell deeply upon the awful and momentous change which must soon take place in my frail body, and on the great transition of the soul. If prepared, what a delightful change from earth to heaven! If the prize is so great, what manner of persons ought we to be; how little ought we care for the perishing body so soon to be food for worms, and how exclusively ought we to take thought for the soul that never dies" (p. 164). Although Johnston has reached her position of faith by a much more earthly route than Augustine, we cannot doubt that it offers the same "security infused into my heart," that the saint felt as a result of his faith in his maker.<sup>7</sup>

Mary G. Mason's analysis of the autobiographical writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe shows that neither of these prototypical women autobiographers take up the Augustinian model of the "climatic structure of a conversion story" (p. 214). In fact, in the same way as Johnston, these early autobiographers represent change as occurring in a serial manner and through relationships with important "others." Thus, the variations that Johnston makes in the three-fold pattern is a typically feminine change dictated by her female life story.

One can argue that her direction is also typically Canadian. The very act of settling in Canada, when with a little arrangement the Johnston family could have found a home in Scotland, indicates the desire to hold on to old forms, customs, and loyalties, while participating in building a new nation. The essential act of the

loyalist was to be a new world person, while insisting on the existence of his old world self. This Canadian desire for a double self, or what in more negative terms Margaret Atwood has called our national disease of "paranoid schizophrenia",<sup>8</sup> gives additional impetus to the "rescue" operation undertaken by the Canadian autobiographer, since for some writers the old self becomes buried so deeply under the demands of the new world self that it becomes unrecognizable to those who have never known the old identity.

Such is the case with Susan Sibbald, who in writing The Memoirs of Susan Sibbald (1783-1812) (1926; 313 pp.), recreates in exhaustive detail her life before she came to Canada. As her great-grandson and editor Francis Paget Hett explains in the introduction, Susan Sibbald was a widow past middle age with grown children when she emigrated to Canada in the 1830's in order to establish herself as a farmer in the Lake Simcoe area of Southern Ontario. Her aim was to build up, with the help of her sons, an inheritance of land which would secure a comfortable future for the family. Such an adventure on the part of a determined woman should, by our present day standards, make for a rich memoir. But Sibbald does not choose to write about any years past her youth and early marriage. Hett speculates that "possibly she desired that an account of her happy youth and early married life only should survive, and the story of the subsequent years, with their sorrows and vicissitudes, should be forgotten."<sup>9</sup> As the memoirs are written at the request of her son Hugh, it is possible that she left out the later more active years because he shared them with her.

But these reasons alone do not explain why a woman would write such



a closely detailed account of her life as the daughter of an English country gentleman, her life as a Regency era debutante in London and Bath, ending with a shorter account of the first years of her marriage to an army officer, and ignore entirely her adventures as a Canadian pioneer. There is little in the text, filled with endless detail of country visits, social gatherings, balls, descriptions of dress styles, the minute detailing of manners and customs (to the point where the reader wonders if Sibbald has total recall), that would connect the Sibbald of the English life with the picture of the determined pioneer Canadian mother that appears opposite page 314 in the text.

I include Sibbald here because in her desire to evoke her past youthful self and her failure to connect that self with her adult self she illustrates the problems facing women autobiographers who must connect very different versions of the self as identity changes throughout the female life cycle. When these natural changes such as marriage and childbirth are accompanied by radical relocation, such as settlement in Canada and a new, more challenging life style, the problem intensifies. Sibbald is an example of the necessary "inertia" of some autobiographers who attempt by their attention to detail to give their lives what James Cox calls "weight." Driven by the female need to leave no part of the self behind, and knowing as she must, that no one who knew her as a Canadian could possibly connect her with the frail delicacy of the girl who appears in the picture opposite the title page, Sibbald evokes with tender nostalgia, her youthful self.

Perhaps it was part of her original intention to connect that girl with her older, stronger self, because she begins her story by referring

to the fact that "in my native town of Fowey, there had been many courageous females," including one who led the other females during an effort to protect Charles II in 1644, when they "shouldered their broomsticks, and mounting the hill above the entrance to the harbour, so terrified the Rebels who were approaching in ships, that they tacked about and put out to sea again" (p. 3). But Sibbald gets caught up in the detail of her early life and it is left to her editor to detail the motivation for the move to Canada, which he attributes to economic problems caused by Sibbald's husband's death and perhaps attributable to his prior mismanagement of family estates (p. xvi). The editor speculates that the immediate motivation of her emigration was the news that two of her sons, already sent to Canada, were living in taverns! (p. xvii). In fact, the Sibbald that appears in Hett's biographical introduction appears much more vital than the image of herself that Sibbald paints. Her failure shows particularly in the fact that no "moral vision" of life emerges in her writing. Because a joining of the many fragments of the female life are not made, no encompassing vision emerges.

Sibbald fails as an autobiographer because, given women's need to explore the detail of their actual lives, not just the life of the mind, the spirit or the career, but what Billson calls the "thisness" (p. 268), of their daily lives to find their images of themselves, they cannot afford to ignore any significant part of the personal history. Although there is more than enough detail on Sibbald's early life, she ignores the vital changes that created the writer of the book; therefore narrator, main character and writer cannot be joined by the

reader.

Sibbald can be compared with the American writer Edith Wharton, who in A Backward Glance, examines her social and cultural past in detail but refuses to deal with her unhappy marriage. Thus, she leaves out essential information that even if dealt with indirectly, as some women do when the material is "delicate," would explain her metamorphosis from New York socialite to a creative writer. In the same way, Sibbald never comes to a consideration of the later years of her marriage or her Canadian life, and thus her memoirs remain ineffective as anything more than a tract on early nineteenth-century social customs. In memoirs that are autobiographical acts, the vision of the self, as Billson and Smith assert, should be as much a "vision of the outer world ... as ... a projection and refraction of the self as the autobiographer's" (p. 163).

In the traditional autobiography of spiritual development alone, whole realms of the life history, a marriage, a childhood, the middle years, can be omitted as long as the work concentrates on vital illustrations of a great change in the personality. Memoir-based lives, as women's stories often are, cannot ignore part of the life, especially a part that contains shaping relationships with others, and at the same time succeed in presenting the whole person.

What the memoir-based story can do, however, is choose a significant but short period of time that acts as a kind of crucible of the whole life, and explore that time in great detail. As Billson points out, autobiography must cover a span of a good many years (however lightly it jumps over events), in order "to portray the

phenomenology of change, the developing teleology" (p. 266), of the one subject of a traditional autobiography, "the author's soul" (p. 267).

In the memoir, however, "covering a limited amount of time, two years or less, there is the possibility, contrary to past critical assumptions, for a great deal of introspection, which can detail many inner psychic changes." Billson's example is Norman Mailer's Armies of the Night which "covers only four days but portrays a definite process of psychic development" (p. 266). My example in Canadian women's autobiography is Mary Hiemstra's Gully Farm (1955; 311 pp.), the record of one year in a pioneer family's settlement on a farm in Saskatchewan.

The primary purpose of Hiemstra's memoir is to draw a detailed portrait of her admired pioneer parents who came to Canada from an English farming background to settle near Battleford, Saskatchewan with the ill-prepared Barr colony immigrants in 1903.<sup>10</sup> Since her father is buoyantly optimistic about the opportunities of the new land and her mother is at all times ready to see the drawbacks, the writer is able to offer us both sides of the pioneering experience with honesty and humor, while maintaining an implicit respect for the parents who brought her safely through such an experience.

As real presences in the text the parents represent two strikingly different types, the father full of adventurousness, the mother a model of loving care. But as well as representing the qualities that Hiemstra most admires, their unity as parents points to the moral vision of the united family that the autobiographer wishes to present as the overriding theme of her memoir. Their unity is all the more exceptional because as individuals they disagreed about everything, particularly the

adventure in Canada. The father's enthusiasm has something of the naive in it, whereas the mother rarely loses an opportunity to point out how much better off they could have been in England.

How distressful this potential for division between the two people that make up her world is for Hiemstra shows in her account of her father's attempt to rescue a lost settler during a blizzard. She chooses to give a larger amount of space to the description of her mother waiting with the lamp at the window: "Mother didn't seem to notice that the fire was almost out, and that the cold was coming in. She didn't even notice the shadows. She stood by the window and looked at the flying snow, and tears ran down her young cheeks, but she did not notice the tears, either. I spoke in a low voice, but she did not answer, she simply stood there holding the light, and after a little while I became afraid. I seemed to be alone in the storm" (p. 224). During times that her parents are in disagreement or are separated, the child feels intensely alone. Since their unity is essential to her sense of self, it is natural that she chooses this first year on the farm in Canada to act as the crucible of her story, for it was this year that the external environment would have destroyed the family if the parents had not been capable of overcoming their differences. This crucible year gives Hiemstra the many examples of unselfish joint actions and compromises on the part of her parents that are needed to build her view of them, and thus of herself.

Hiemstra's account gains a great deal of its power from her ability to put herself completely in the place of another, particularly her mother and father, but also others as well, such as the lost settler

whose plight she summons up in her imagination: "The wind pushed from first one side then the other, and the snow hissed as it whirled like a shroud around him. He stumbled on, but he had no idea where he was going. He was lost, and the cold dark arms of the blizzard were closing around him. He fell and got up and fell again. His feet were numb and his hands like ice, and even his body in his too-thin coat felt stiff and half frozen. Soon he knew he would fall and not get up again. It was then that he began to shout" (p. 227). It is the combined efforts of Hiemstra's parents that save the man, and the event is a symbol of the entire winter during which the young children are like the man lost in a storm; they are brought through a winter that killed others by the united efforts of mother and father.

From the position of this first traumatic winter Hiemstra reaches forward and backward in time to show herself and her beloved parents as they were before and after the adventure. One realizes that her humorous attitude toward their very real disagreements is one she has gained as a result of seeing their underlying unity. She does not hide the fact that early in the adventure there are times when her mother seriously intends to take the children and return to England, and as late as the spring of the first year spent in Canada, she is still arguing for a return to England. Hiemstra points humorously to two reasons for her mother's decision to stay, in detailing her parents final argument on the subject. Her mother announces to her father: "They're your children, and you're going to look after them" (p. 296). She decides that the only way her children will get a father's care is if she stays in Canada. But as well, she decides there is no point in

leaving such a man for other women to claim: "'I'm not going,' she said primly. 'If you think you're going to bring that Dukhobor into my house you're mistaken'" (p. 297). Hiemstra takes great pleasure in recreating these scenes in detail, especially when they show the jealous love her mother bears her father, which comes out only in these arguments. At the end of her memoir she shows them as a prosperous couple on a well-developed prairie farm, but still bickering about the wisdom of coming to Canada. Their devotion is proved for Hiemstra by the fact that although her mother always claimed she could exist happily without her husband, she died only five weeks after him.

The autobiographical accounts of the daughters of pioneer parents frequently feature portrayals of the parents that emphasize the relationship between the parents as the backbone of the venture. In Jessie Browne Raber's Pioneering in Alberta, family solidarity through the efforts of the hardworking and loving parents is often their only strength.<sup>11</sup> For Edith Van Kleek, in Our Trail North it is the energy and devotion of her older brother who is her father surrogate and her widowed mother that give Van Kleek her own start as a strong adult.<sup>12</sup> But Hiemstra's is the most striking of these accounts. Not the least of the reasons for her success is the compression of the time period covered into that dramatic first year of settlement, and her insistence on offering the full account of the ways in which her parents disagreed, so that we may see the unity they achieved as all the more outstanding.

One aspect of the moral vision of the united parents making the pioneer venture successful that is not directly commented upon by Hiemstra and others is the underlying fact that it is often necessary

for one partner in the marriage to surrender his or her views before such unity can be achieved. This is more often than not the woman. Even when husband and wife are equally enthusiastic about the new life, women see themselves as making key compromises at important moments that preserve this necessary unity. This is demonstrated more clearly when we examine a pioneer memoir told by a woman who was the mother rather than the child of such a family.

Susan Allison, whose life as a pioneer in the British Columbia interior caused her to be dubbed "The Mother of the Similkameen," and whose memoirs have been the inspiration of an opera, wrote A Pioneer Gentlewoman in British Columbia (1976; 72 pp.), in the form of thirteen contributions to the 1931 editions of the Vancouver Sunday Province.<sup>13</sup> Allison was eighty-five at the time and as the editor of her memoir points out, although she may have had occasional lapses of memory for dates and names, her account of her adventures as a pioneer from the 1860s to the 1880s remains vivid and readable. This is partially due to the fact that Allison was a published author of essays on the Indians of the Similkameen, and in her long life had also written poetry and stories, which she could draw on as source material for her memoir.

Another reason for the strength of her memoir is her ability to perform, with equal vigor, the three tasks that Billson sees as part of the memorialist's stance. Susan Allison is eyewitness, participant and historian of her own story. In the early pages of the memoir, Allison very quickly presents the kind of active, demanding life that prepared her to be more than a passive observer of events. These sometimes difficult experiences give her the ability to assess and judge the actions of



others so that she can act as historian and give us the essential nature and vision of her pioneer times.

In her efficient compressed writing style, a style she must have developed in the days when she was both writer and mother of fourteen children, she describes in six short pages the nature of her early life. In this brief space she is able to, a) show us the compelling picture of sea travel in the mid-nineteenth century as she describes her family's journey from England to the West Coast of Canada, b) indicate the place of herself and her family as middle-class people in the broad social range represented in the colony's scant but varied population, c) present their personal situation (ie. a spendthrift stepfather, a timid mother, a risky venture), d) present a cameo portrait of early Victoria B.C., e) outline the situation, purpose and daily lives of the inhabitants of Hope, B.C. where the stepfather intended to settle as a gentleman farmer, and f) show us a portrait of her demure and genteel self at fifteen, by which we can measure the changes about to occur in her. This breathless, compressed writing style is to be her strategy throughout the memoir; she is expert at presenting only salient details, which sum up the "times" and yet show her personal life as part of those times, not only as observer but as participant.

After quickly realizing that she and her mother and sister must learn such working-class skills as baking and washing clothes if they are to survive a servantless existence, the women find themselves in further desperation when the stepfather deserts the family. Allison tells these events in a straightforward, non-heroic manner, as is shown in her recounting of how she and her mother managed to earn their

living: "My mother and I started quite a nice little school. Mr. Yates sent his little boy, Mr. Hunter sent his girls, and Bill Bristol, who was then the Similkameen mail carrier, sent his daughter, and some children were sent from Yale. I did not like teaching but it helped out my small income" (pp. 20-21). Below the understatement of "quite a nice little school" and the seemingly random list of those attending, Allison is informing the reader that she and her mother ran a top-rated school, since the people who mattered trusted and respected it. She also lets us know that staying financially independent was most important to her.

Part of the impact of Allison's account is that her statements about her personal feelings are rare, and usually come at the end of one of these compressed recollections. Their comparative rarity and their culminating positions allow them to make an impression on the reader in inverse proportion to the amount of text they occupy. In recounting the events leading up to her marriage to John Fall Allison, twenty years her senior, she offers no insight into her intimate feelings but concludes the account with a separate paragraph that states: "Then began my camping days and the wild, free life I ever loved till age and infirmity put an end to it" (p. 21). Her husband is figured as the means of her introduction to this life, but the life is not seen as always dependent on his presence.

In telling the story of her settlement on the isolated ranch that John Allison's skill has carved out of the wilderness, her personal observations always emphasize her desire to be a competent, hardworking but independent part of all ventures. She describes her arrival and first meeting with her husband's business partner and concludes by

observing: "Mr. Hayes had a good supper ready for us the day I first saw Princeton, though he did not approve my dressing for dinner, a habit I was drilled in as a child and has always stuck with me to some extent. As I did not object to his coming to table in shirt sleeves I did not see why he objected to my habits, but I think he half forgave me when he found I could milk cows and was not afraid to go into a corral full of cattle" (p. 23). Years of gaining the respect of those around her and proving her competency for the new life are presented in this emblematic incident.

Allison's husband soon puts her in charge of his trading operation with the Indians in order to pursue his cattle business, which takes him from home many months at a time. In this way Allison comes to know the people who are to be her most significant "others" in her effort to build her adult version of herself. She is fascinated by the Indians, as is evidenced by a lifetime of recording their legends and history. Her essay, "Account of the Similkameen Indians of British Columbia," was published by the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1891 and is included with her memoirs (pp. 73-79). As a historian, she is a fair and realistic judge of the Indians and their predicament at the end of the pioneering period in Canada. In a more personal sense they offer in abundance the qualities she is cultivating in herself, self-reliance, adaptability, a philosophy of live and let live, a love of nature, and a sense of the spiritual embodied in all life. They are in many ways her mirror self. Her most succinct observation on herself and the Indians is contained in her comment on the help received from an Indian woman during the premature birth of her first child away from the supports of

mother and midwife that she had planned: "Suzanne was very good to me in her way--though I thought her rather unfeeling at the time. She thought that I ought to be as strong as an Indian woman but I was not" (p. 28). It would seem that a great deal of Allison's life afterwards is spent trying to be as "strong as an Indian woman," as she undertakes various adventures including a more remote settlement for her young family on the shores of the Okanagan.

It is her life in the Okanagan that occasions the recounting of a serious disagreement with her husband, whose presence in the memoir increasingly changes from one of admired, competent mate, to the rather muted presence that is referred to as "Mr. Allison" or "my husband." He decides to move back to the Similkameen from the Okanagan, where she has been very happy, in order to help his cattle business. Allison will once again be called upon to run the store, except that by now she is the mother of many children: "I begged him to keep our little home and argued the long, long winters at the Similkameen and the scarcity of winter feed, but his mind was made up and that was that" (p. 55). Later, when she argues for a return to the Okanagan, she finishes up the subject in one short paragraph: "I longed more than ever to go back to Okanagan in the fall of '81 when the cattle started back. I hated store-keeping. The poor little children, I felt, were neglected but it had to be" (p. 60).

There is no outright censure of her husband nor any overt defence or praise of her own position, and she never refers to this disagreement again in the memoir, but worlds of feeling seem just barely disguised in the uncharacteristic words, "begged," "hated," "longed," and

"neglected." It is interesting that in this argument Allison accepts defeat and puts the husband's venture first, a position so much admired by Hiemstra as the daughter of such a mother in Gully Farm. However, in the first-person account of such a woman, she portrays her philosophical acceptance ("it had to be," and "his mind was made up and that was that,") more as a necessity than as admirable on her part. As well she de-emphasizes the degree of disagreement by not telling us for how long she argued her position. Allison does not tell us if she made her argument many times, as Hiemstra's mother did, or once only. It is interesting to note however, that in her portrayal of this typical female situation, Allison gives us a largely oblique and indirect account of it, but one which, despite or perhaps because of her understatement, leaves us more in admiration of her than her husband.

Allison's account is, to the end, a *mélange* of subject matter, at one point emphasizing the husband's business, at another the changing nature of the west, at another the plight of the Indians and at important moments gathering all these fragments into a whole though recounting her own activities, her own feelings and judgments. Thus like Sarah Roberts in Alberta Homestead, she takes the culminating position that makes her central to all the other stories without seeming to make her self central. Her moral vision is of a self that is industrious and capable but one that is ready to admire the competence of others, and learn from them as well. In addition to these qualities, Allison obviously does not see herself as a "housewife" unqualified to comment on the pioneer venture in general. She presents herself not only as observer and participant but also as historian of the experience.

Francis Russell Hart has commented on the type of personal memoir many women write as a "strange hybridization of the autobiographical genre." The women referred to in this description are writers like Lillian Hellman and Maxine Hong Kingston, accomplished twentieth-century professional writers. Yet many of the characteristics associated with these women's styles, which show them "seeking an intimacy with history that will give public meaning to personal identity", are shared by these pioneer women memorialists whom I have discussed.<sup>14</sup> After exploring their accounts we might also conclude that while they are "seeking an intimacy with history" through their autobiographical acts, they give history a personal, more literary face, by enlivening it with their own stories.

Marcus Billson points out that the most important difference between the traditional autobiographer and the memorialist is that the latter leaves the "subject-object" division "unresolved," whereas "the autobiographer sees himself as a psychic totality, and therefore he can be independent from the social matrix" (p. 277). The memorialist is always interdependent with other people, with events, with the "thisness," or "historicity," of his times. This necessitates the presentation of an encompassing moral vision rather than an individualistic creed. This vision demands "the author's personal act of witnessing the past, of ascertaining the meaning of his participation in the social matrix, and of remembering his experience as a moral metaphor" (p. 282). As such, the memoir form offers women a means to deal with their real existences, the personal life of family,

relationship, child-rearing, as well as their accomplishments as individuals, in a context that gives meaning to a life, not as it is lived as a psychic entity defining its difference from the world, seeking a transcendence of that world, but in terms of a psychic entity living and defining itself in the world and with the world. In creating their personal myths from the difficult realities of the pioneer experience, for women such as Johnston, Hiemstra and Allison the memoir is the appropriate retrospective form which allows them to keep the worlds of the spirit and the flesh joined.

## NOTES - CHAPTER 3

- <sup>1</sup>Spacks, "Selves In Hiding", Women's Autobiography, p. 112.
- <sup>2</sup>Elizabeth Lichtenstein Johnston, Recollections of a Georgia Loyalist (New York and London: The Bankside Press, 1901), pp. 1-36.
- <sup>3</sup>Gerda Lerner, editor, The Female Experience: An American Documentary (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publications, 1977), p. xxi.
- <sup>4</sup>William C. Spengemann, The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980).
- <sup>5</sup>Richard Hoggart, "A Question of Tone: Some Problems in Autobiographical Writing," Critical Quarterly, 5 (1963), 80.
- <sup>6</sup>John Barrett Mandel, "'Basting the Image with a Certain Liquor': Death in Autobiography," Soundings, 57 (1974), 188.
- <sup>7</sup>Saint Augustine, Basic Writings of Saint Augustine, edited by Whitney J. Oates, Vol. I (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 128.
- <sup>8</sup>Margaret Atwood, "Afterword" of The Journals of Susanna Moodie, p. 62.
- <sup>9</sup>Susan Sibbald, The Memoirs of Susan Sibbald (1783-1812), edited by Francis Paget Hett (London: John Lane the Bodley Head Limited, 1926), p. xi.
- <sup>10</sup>Mary Hiemstra, Gully Farm (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1955), p. 1.
- <sup>11</sup>Jessie Browne Raber, Pioneering in Alberta (New York: Exposition Press, 1951).
- <sup>12</sup>Edith Leona Van Kleek, Our Trail North: A True Story of Pioneering in the Peace River Country of Northern Alberta (Edmonton: Co-op Press Limited), 1980.
- <sup>13</sup>Susan Allison, A Pioneer Gentlewoman in British Columbia: The Recollections of Susan Allison, edited by Margaret A. Ormsby (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1976), p. 1.
- <sup>14</sup>Francis Russell Hart, "History Talking to Itself: Public Personality in Recent Memoir," New Literary History, 11, No. 1 (Autumn 1979), 209.



CHAPTER 4 - TRAVELING WOMEN: DISCOVERING THE STRANGER/  
DISCOVERING THE SELF

Literary historians have always been "a bit embarrassed by the literature of travel," Martin S. Day tells us in "Travel Literature and the Journey Theme." At best, it is seen as "non-artistic raw material that can be transformed into art by the imaginative artist."<sup>1</sup> Although one literary historian notes that Romanticism encouraged writers to use "the contact with strange physical environments and peoples.... [to] draw nearer to autobiography," the personal story is seen only as an intermediary stage between travel writing and what is seen to be a more mature writing form, the travel novel.<sup>2</sup> To such critics, autobiography is not a worthy aim in itself. However, as Day points out, autobiographers from Bunyan to Henry Adams "weld the spiritual quest to the journey archetype ... the journey as an individual passage" (p. 43). Given women's preference for a very solid connection with "historicity," x with their own actual lives and their tendency to find writing forms outside the traditional genres, they do find the personal story, autobiography, a worthwhile aim of their travel writing. Some women, rather than invent a metaphorical journey to correspond with their individual spiritual passage, have used their own actual travels as a means of self-discovery and self-actualization. Thus, for such women, travel literature becomes an autobiographical vehicle, one particularly suited to their need to disguise their own achievements, while at the same time accomplishing one of the chief aims of autobiography, creating and solidifying the changed self by writing about it. The travel

account's "disguise" is particularly useful to women who need to explore difficult, sensitive areas of their lives. Under the calm surface of the narration of the journey, disturbing truths about the self and others may be revealed.

In early Canada such an opportunity was seized by Anna Jameson who wrote about her own changing self as she recorded her travels through Upper Canada in 1836. On the surface her three-volume *mélange* of essays on music, literature, philosophy, feminism and travel, tells the story of how one well-to-do lady passed a rather dull winter in Toronto, and how she enjoyed the following summer touring the Great Lakes. But one needs to know only one extra-textual fact to see Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada (1838) in a very different light. Jameson came to Toronto to visit her estranged husband Robert Jameson, who became Ontario's Vice-Chancellor during her stay. In this time period a legal separation was arranged and, while waiting in America the next winter for the separation papers, Jameson wrote her "travel" book.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Jameson's book is really about herself, and her efforts to divorce herself not only from her husband but from a too masculine view of the world.

Jameson gives us permission to read her "studies" and "rambles" as autobiography in her preface:

I would fain have extracted, altogether, the impertinent leaven of egotism which necessarily mixed itself up with the journal form of writing: but in making the attempt, the whole work lost its original character--lost its air of reality, lost even its essential truth, and what ever it might possess of the grace of ease and pictorial animation: it became flat, heavy, didactic. It was found that to extract the tone of personal feeling, on which the whole

series of action and observation depended, was like drawing the thread out of a string of beads--the chain of linked ideas and experiences fell to pieces, and became a mere unconnected, incongruous heap.<sup>4</sup>

Not only does she encourage us to read her account as autobiography but she also tells us how: we must seek the "thread" of "linked ideas." Typically, this instruction is disguised as an apology for her writing style. As well, she uses quotations from German literature, which head her chapters, as a disguised method for telling us the real import of what we are about to read. Her first chapter begins: "Sinn denn die Baume auch so trostlos, so verzweiflungs voll in ihrem Winter, wie das Herz in seiner Verlassenheit?" (Are then the trees also so desolate, so despairing in their winter, as the heart in its loneliness) (I, p. 1). Jameson, under the disguise of the other language, is suggesting that we recognize her use of the pathetic fallacy as a key to her mood in chapter one. She further encourages a metaphorical reading of her words when she offers a detailed description of her emotional reaction to the town that is integrally connected with her husband:

What Toronto may be in summer, I cannot tell; they say it is a pretty place. At present its appearance to me, a stranger, is most strangely mean and melancholy. A little ill-built town on low land, at the bottom of a frozen bay, with one very ugly church, without tower or steeple; some government offices, built of staring red brick, in the most tasteless, vulgar style imaginable; three feet of snow all around; and the grey, sullen, wintry lake, and the dark gloom of the pine forest bounding the prospect; such seems Toronto to me now. I did not expect much; but for this I was not prepared. Perhaps no preparation could have prepared me, [her emphasis] or softened my present feelings. I will not be unjust if I can help it, nor querulous. If I look into my own heart, I find that it is regret for what I have left and lost--absent, not the present --which throws over all around me a chill, colder

than that of the wintry day--a gloom, deeper than that of the wintry night (I, pp. 2-3).

The passage is almost equally divided between the description of the new place and the description of Jameson's feeling. If, as she has hinted we should in her German introduction, we are reading the description as an objective correlative--Toronto as a desperate place on the frontier of this woman's life--we can conclude that she is speaking in a necessarily disguised fashion of her marriage when she speaks of "my present feelings." Read in any other way the passage's emotional import is too great to be caused by something as insignificant as a provincial Canadian town, a "Toronto ... a little, ugly, inefficient fort" (I, p. 1). In fact, it takes only a small imaginative leap for this "fort," this "vulgar style" to become a symbol of one of its chief inhabitants, Anna Jameson's husband.

That we are being asked to make such leaps is reinforced throughout the book by another strategy of indirection, Jameson's refusal to mention her husband even when it would be possible to do so in impersonal terms. In all her discussions of politics in the province--the problems of social development, education, roads, Indian welfare--even when other officials past and present are sketched or alluded to, Robert Jameson is alluded to only once and in the most unflattering terms. Seeing the locals turning against public education she proposes having a report on the subject--one which has had widespread attention in Europe--published in Toronto to help the people make an informed decision. She reports her failure in this regard: "I thought--I hoped --[to] obtain for it a favourable reception. But, no; cold water was

thrown upon me from every side--my interference in any way was so visibly distasteful, that I gave my project up with many a sigh, and I am afraid I shall always regret this" (I, pp. 35-6). Robert Jameson probably had the power to see this report published, but he is part of the "cold water" that restrains her.

Her refusal to refer to her husband except in this brief allusive and negative manner has the effect, paradoxically, of making him loom large, particularly in the early pages of the account before her Great Lakes journey. Every expedition out of Toronto, to Oakville, the Falls, the Credit River, and later to Port Talbot, St. Thomas, etc., seems an escape from imprisonment. The fact that when she goes to these places, Jameson chooses to describe happy families like Mr. M.'s at Erindale on the Credit River (I, pp. 293-315), or larger-than-life men of heroic qualities like Colonel Talbot, the hermit lord of Talbot Settlement (II, pp. 184-205)--whose fitness for the Canadian scene Elizabeth Simcoe also realized--does not add any positive touch to the unpleasant but unnamed figure of the husband back in Toronto. In fact these men, more admirable because of their close connection to the land, to the soil of Canada, are the beginning of a series of portraits of significant others which becomes the means by which Jameson frees herself of her own colonial mentality.

Other critics have also seen that what Jameson is really writing about is the freeing of her self. Both Marian Fowler and Clara Thomas in "Journeys to Freedom," see Jameson's journey as a metaphorical one. Wayne Fraser presents Jameson as one of a series of women writers who compare woman's colonization by a patriarchal society to Canada's

colonization by European states.<sup>5</sup> What I would particularly point out about Jameson's use of this metaphor is the way in which she uses important female "others" to develop her new version of herself.

When her winter of imprisonment in Toronto is over, she sets off for the Upper Lakes where she will escape colonial bureaucrats like her husband and find the real Canadians who will help her create her true self. She finds them in the form of an Indian woman, a Mrs. Johnston, and her two half-breed daughters, Mrs. McMurray and Mrs. Schoolcraft. Although all of these women have identities as wives of white men, each has another identity, taken from her strong identification with the mother's Indian background, one that emphasizes female strength and usefulness.

The entire third volume of the work is the story of Jameson's "Rambles", a kind of rambling exploration through anecdote, personal encounters, Indian history, feminist polemic, as well as descriptions of her own travels, which culminate in her relationships with these women. It is to them and their loving kindnesses that Jameson returns again and again as, through her rambling exploration, she builds a new vision of womanhood released from colonial bondage. The process reaches its most intense moment when Mrs. Johnston becomes her spiritual mother. Jameson, unwell with fever, is comforted as the Indian woman "took me in her arms, laid me down on a couch, and began to rub my feet, soothing and caressing me. She called me Nindannis, daughter, and I called her Neengai, mother" (III, p. 185).

Later the mothering act is made more explicit when, having successfully shot the falls at the Sault, Jameson is congratulated by

Mrs. Johnston: "As for my Neengai, she laughed, clapped her hands, and embraced me several times. I was declared duly initiated, and adopted into the family by the name of Wah,sàh,ge,wah,no,quà.... In compliment to my successful achievement, Mrs. Johnston bestowed this new appellation .... It signifies 'the bright foam,' or more properly, with the feminine adjunct 'qua,' 'the woman of the bright foam;' and by this name I am henceforth to be known among the Chippewas" (III, p. 200). In this way, Jameson creates an image of her new self being born, not as in masculine tradition, as a Venus passively borne up by her half-shell, but as newly mothered Canadian adventurer, paddling her own canoe through treacherous river rapids!

Fowler points out that the evidence of an eye-witness to this event shows that the "baptism" was not offered by the Indian woman but "insisted" upon by Jameson (p. 166). But far from detracting from the autobiographical significance of this moment, Jameson's "insistence" makes the moment all the more powerful. The autobiographer makes experience significant, builds the self, through the imaginative recreation of the fragments of the personal experience. Jameson's "insistence" on taking a new name, on its bestowal by the Indian mother figure, is a powerful act of self-creation. Thus far in her story, female identity has been tied to a degraded and exploited configuration, emphasizing the fact that Jameson has felt powerless to be her full self in her repressive marriage. Now she begins to identify with womanhood on another more positive level.

It is at this point in the book that Jameson begins to come to conclusions in her comparisons of conditions of Indian and white

womanhood. She notes that all "gentleman" travelers see the hard-working lives of Indian women as proof of the savagery of Indian society, and thus imply that white society is civilized because of its ideal of the leisured lady. Jameson points out that for every lady of leisure in white society there are many women who pay for that woman's leisure in their indentured lives as domestic servants, factory workers or prostitutes. Jameson argues that "however hard the lot of women [in Indian society], she is in no false [her emphasis] position. The two sexes are in their natural and true position relatively to the state of society, and the means of subsistence" (III, pp. 303-04). If we compare the Indian woman's life "with the refined leisure of an elegant woman in the higher classes of our society ... it is wretched and abject; but compare her life with that of a servant-maid of all work, or a factory girl,--I do say that the condition of the squaw is gracious in comparison, dignified by domestic feelings, and by equality with all around her (III, p. 305). Through her polemic she is realizing her own "false position" as vice-chancellor's wife, and seeks a new role in which she is as "useful," as productive a "laborer," as the Indian woman.

Her new "useful" position will be ultimately as a feminist (as much of her later writings are to show), but more immediately as social critic of the colonial administration, headed by men like her husband. The last forty pages of the text point out every abuse of the colonial system that meets her eye on her journey back to Toronto, from the plight of the commuted pensioners to the injustice done to an Irish gentleman cheated out of his money and land by an uncaring bureaucracy.



With hindsight available to someone writing several months after the event, Jameson alludes to traveling through country that will in a few months be in open rebellion against the colonial system, just as her autobiographical act shows her to be in rebellion against her former definitions of herself.

This new, stronger, feminine version of herself that Jameson is creating is connected to her Canadian experience not only through the events of the winter and summer she spent there but through her treatment of Victoria's ascension to the throne. She identifies the young female monarch with the young Canada: "what a fair heritage is this which has fallen to her! A land like herself--a land of hopes--and fair most fair!" (III, p. 263). The fair-haired Mrs. Jameson has also made an imaginative identification of her own new self with the new land. It is a strong, feminine and outspoken self, one able to shoot rapids and scold governments--what Marian Fowler calls her "androgynous self"--that Jameson has found on her journey through Upper Canada. When she returns at the end of the book to "my own house in Toronto" (III, p. 356) we cannot doubt that it is to begin the building of her "own house" in the form of her new self.

Jameson has been able to make an imaginative use of the travel book style in her autobiographical undertaking. Because the form allows the kind of loose-knit "studies," and "rambles" that she needs to undertake, it allows her to speak as the sophisticated European visitor, as the naive newcomer in the wilderness, as the feminist sociologist, as nature lover, as political observer and critic. Since what she is undertaking is a "journey of freedom" in which she must discard outworn definitions

of womanhood at every level, public and personal, this variety of strategies is necessary. At the same time she avoids being accused of breaking the societal rules that condemn women who overtly discuss the conditions of their private lives. The travel book has given her exactly the disguise she has needed for the accomplishment of her subversive act. As well, its loose-knit discursive quality has been complimentary to the "feminine" nature of Jameson's quest in which the aim is not the perfection of one overriding aspect of self-definition, but the continuing completion of self that insists on including all aspects of the self, the personal, the familial, the societal, the psychological, in the changing self. In this way, through the "tone of personal feeling," Jameson has managed to make a linked "chain" from what might appear to those unused to female autobiographical acts to be merely "an unconnected incongruous heap."

An understanding of this female autobiographical style, which fits itself so comfortably inside the leniency of the travel literature format, is nowhere more useful than in assessing the literary accomplishments of a book that continues to fascinate and frustrate Canadian literary critics. While seeking "Design and Purpose" in Susanna Moodie's Roughing It in the Bush (1923; 506 pp., originally published 1852), R. D. MacDonald asks if it may not be best to accept Roughing "as a work roughly hewn, an anecdotal travelogue, a work in which experience is half digested, a work digressive and discontinuous, a work filled with vigorous, humorous but rather pointless character sketches?"<sup>6</sup> MacDonald does find some unity in structure and the vision of nature, but such a conclusion is incomplete if we see Moodie as

taking a traveler's stance towards her experiences in Canada. In her exploration of Roughing, Janet Giltrow characterizes Moodie as holding "That 'hope of return' [which] may disappear in reality, but ... can always be renewed rhetorically by a literary communication with the Old World audience."<sup>7</sup> In Giltrow's view, Moodie "internalizes all those native institutions which had once supported her. She thus remains a traveler, never adopting the ways of the foreign place" (p. 134). If we keep in mind the idea of "journey" as metaphor for life and "traveler" as psychic condition we begin to see Moodie as autobiographer, using typically feminine methods of disguise to tell a life-story which, ironically, needs disguise to be honest. For what Susanna Moodie has to say about "roughing it in the bush" may well be too painful for herself and others if said without disguise.

MacDonald is correct when he points out that the various character sketches serve to create a cautionary "ominous picture of the British gentleman who fails in the bush" (p. 28). But this is only one of their purposes, a surface purpose that disguises Moodie's deeper autobiographical one, which is to show the progress of her relationship with her husband, her adjustment to the new life he has brought her to, her gradual acceptance of his weaknesses and his strengths, as well as her own, and her final compromise position that she reaches at the end of the book.

The various characters sketched by Moodie in her journey to the backwoods and her figurative journey to the heart of herself serve as a series of "others," the "real presences" that allow for her adjustment to the bush and her acceptance of the ultimate limitations of this life

for herself and her husband. These "others," rather than being like the dominant, always present paradigms described by Mason, are more similar to those described by Schmidt. Each "other" is present for only a part of the adventure, but while present dominates the narrative as the autobiographer discovers her selfhood through them. Schmidt sees such an autobiographer as presenting herself in the text as "a persona ... who lacks an intuitive sense of wholeness and who derives a sense of selfhood from how others view her and control her." Accordingly, such an autobiographer's subject is "the persona's struggle to create a sense of wholeness; to shed those false selves shaped by others' views of her; and finally, to emerge with a newborn sense of identity" (p. 25).

Such writers produce the "hybrid song" of a complex wholeness by internalizing the valuable and discarding what is not useful in each of the figures that become "real" for some period of the account. The traveler's stance is an excellent vehicle for this technique, because the traveler, by the nature of her task, is permitted to survey the whole human scene in the strange land, moving in quick sketches from one oddity to another. Under such a guise does Moodie carry out her autobiographical acts.

In the early chapters three figures act as "others" in Moodie's adjustment, Tom Wilson, the amusing but failing settler, Phoebe, the neglected and dying maiden, and Brian, the still-hunter, who makes the largest impact on Moodie. On the cautionary level of the book, Tom Wilson is John Moodie's double and his failure at farming predicts the later failure of John Moodie. Although of much lower class, he is quoted as comparing his situation to John Moodie's when he says, "but as

to our qualifications, Moodie, I think them pretty equal" and goes on to compare them in detail.<sup>8</sup> But Tom serves another, more positive purpose for the autobiographer. He teaches her a defence against the cruel assaults of the locals, and helps her handle the culture shock of her first weeks in the new land. In "Old Satan and Tom Wilson's Nose," Tom teaches Moodie to discourage borrowers by borrowing from them, and to get the better of her tormentors by means of the practical joke. He allows her to realize that superior wit and the sophistication of her old-world middle-class background can have its uses even in the bush.

A part of the old Moodie must die, however, if she is to survive the Canadian experience. That part is represented by Phoebe, the daughter of a local Yankee farmer, Old Joe. The ignorant family contributes to their daughter's illness by their neglect of her spirit, and Moodie attempts to help the girl by reading to her and talking to her, especially about religion which has been lacking in the girl's life. Phoebe dies and it would seem this venture of Moodie's illustrates once again that "gentle" folk do not belong in the bush. On the other hand, Moodie, through this experience, is able to kill the helpless maiden inside herself and undertake tasks that would have felled her pre-immigration self. At the same time, in a typical Moodie compromise, she values culture as much as bread, and while learning to milk cows (despite her terror of cattle), she maintains her painting and ladylike arts.

The latter are the means through which she gets to know a third significant "other," Brian, the half mad, but poetic figure who "haunts" the neighborhood. Although long since "bushed" and past association

with people, he comes often to see Moodie, to watch her at her painting. Brian and his tragic life are of course once more a caution to gentlemen, but it is through him that Moodie realizes an important, positive part of herself. Even the way she chooses to introduce him to the reader has the slightly mysterious and larger-than-life quality of the archetypal character:

It was early day. I was alone in the old shanty, preparing breakfast, and now and then stirring the cradle with my foot, when a tall, thin, middle aged man walked into the house, followed by two large, strong dogs.

Placing the rifle he had carried on his shoulder in a corner of the room, he advanced to the hearth, and, without speaking, or seemingly looking at me, lighted his pipe and commenced smoking (p. 191).

Brian's entrance is like that of the silent Indians whom Moodie is to know so well in the future. As well as this connection with a wilder more primitive humanity, Brian's physical appearance gives him the aura of a natural force, his complexion "brightly dark," and his eyes "resembling the eyes of a hawk". Like some forest divinity he addresses his animal companions, his dogs, by archetypal names "Down, Music; down, Chance" (p. 192), which reinforces his image as mysterious, wild man of the forest.

Several symbolic exchanges take place between Brian and Moodie. He sees that her "weanling" is in need of milk and brings the baby some. He brings her wildflowers for her painting and also reassures her of her husband's safety when she is alone and worried. As such, Brian represents the natural world, mysterious and threatening, yet bountiful and compelling in its attraction. It is a world that will feed Moodie's

children and offer her its beauty and peace if she learns to accept its presence in her life. What she gives to Brian is symbolic of the strength of her old life that she brings to the wilderness; she offers him the hospitality of a cultured woman, which soothes the troubled man and reminds him of his own past. In the same way she will bring her cultured self to the experience of the wilderness, insisting on its values, despite all practical problems and necessities. She will not yield to madness as has Brian, for as well as learning to cope with the wilderness she will not abandon her old self, an act which would destroy her chance for integrity.

Much later in her adventure, when the Moodies have lived years in the bush, she muses on her feelings about the natural world as she sits by moonlight in her own canoe on her own lake and concludes: "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" (p. 336). Part of Moodie's self-creation is to keep the old self always vital. The ability to love the Canadian scene is tempered always by her need to remember "home." In this regard, Brian is both positive other in her adjustment to Canada, and a cautionary figure, reminding her to keep the old values alive in order to avoid a similar disintegration.

Moodie's desire to adjust to the new while holding on to the old is reinforced by her style. She uses a tried and true stock skill of her old life--writing sketches of rural life and rustic characters -- to cope with the new experience. In doing so she changes the old writing style into something new. The "sketch" is no longer only an amusing

anecdote, which might find publication in one of the literary magazines that Moodie contributed to in the old life, but part of a skillful effort to build the new, stronger self, the "hybrid song," that is to become the autobiography of Susanna Moodie.

It is important to note that in creating the compromise of her Canadian self Moodie is using the same device that Gertrude Stein is later to use in creating autobiography. Moodie "begins again," several times in these first two hundred pages of Roughing. She goes back in time in many chapters to the beginning of her experience in Canada, to rescue the various characters that she will bring forward with her as part of her self. Her method is understated, anecdotal and humorous, as gossipy as Alice Toklas' description of "the party scene" in her description of the Canadian scene. Thus Moodie, the traveler who increasingly finds herself the settler, adapts the traveler's "sketch" to the needs of the "continuous present" of the autobiographer.

In some ways, Moodie's method continues similarly throughout Roughing, as characters as diverse as Simpson in "The 'Ould Dhragoon'", and Malcolm in "The Little Stumpy Man," represent the extremes of possible reaction to life in the bush. Simpson and his family represent the acceptance of frontier life, with all its disadvantages for the intellect, but with its compensating peace of mind. Malcolm shows Moodie what becomes of those who take a dilettante's attitude to pioneer life: they preserve their pride and outsider status to the disadvantage of others and their own ultimate alienation from the community. But Moodie's traveler position is a little different than Malcolm's status. She allows herself, through her duties as wife and mother, and



increasingly as farmer, to become a part of the community, as any serious traveler who is not a tourist does, but she tries to maintain her outsider status through her writing activities, although she admits that in the most desperate years this was difficult (p. 425). Her traveler persona (like her sister Catherine Parr Traill's scientist's persona), allows her not only to survive in the environment, but also allows her to keep what she considers valuable of the old pre-immigration self.

But two important elements emerge to make Moodie's life at Douro, begun in chapter twelve, different from her first Canadian residence. In the Peterborough region, where she can compare her situation to that of other settlers of her own class, especially her brother and his family and her sister's family (the Stricklands and the Traills), it becomes more and more obvious that a better adjustment is being made to the wilderness by some gentlemen than others. We learn indirectly of John Moodie's "debts" and frequent absences and his final long absence during the "outbreak" of 1837. The second element, which runs almost contrary to John Moodie's maladjustment, is Susanna Moodie's increasing ability to handle whatever fate and the backwoods give her. These two conflicting directions offer Moodie the opportunity for one of her typical compromises; she reacts to what others might call her husband's failures and neglect by more openly expressing her love of him and need for him. She treats her own often heroic behavior in a straightforward, unheroic manner, emphasizing how the instincts take over in times of necessity.

Therefore in the last half of the autobiography we are reading two

stories; one deals with Moodie's acceptance of her husband's unsuitability for farming, and the other with her own increasing ability to survive alone on the farm. The "outbreak" of the 1837 rebellion occurs just in time to make John Moodie the "hero" of the surface level of Moodie's story. He bravely enlists and she becomes the loving and grieving wife left behind: "Moodie and I parted; and with a heavy heart I retraced my steps through the wood. For once I forgot all my fears. I never felt the cold. Sad tears were flowing over my cheeks; when I entered the house, hope seemed to have deserted me and for upwards of an hour I lay upon the bed and wept" (p. 421). Later, she depicts her favorite activity, designed to cheer her up in his absence, as writing long letters to him in which she pours out her woes. True to the good wife image she is building, she burns the letters rather than send them, for fear they will worry him. She is rewarded for her love when her husband, becoming a more sensitive type the longer he is away, writes to her at the very moments when she is most upset, and later, much against his inclination, accepts her version of their special "mysterious intercourse" (p. 477) that makes their spirits aware of each other's sadnesses even while they are apart.

Parallel with the development of this devoted wife image, with her husband as the "real presence" that makes it possible, is the development of the super-pioneer image of Moodie that becomes especially obvious after John Moodie leaves. Interestingly, whereas previously men have been her major "others," now women become important to her adjustment. First there is her sister, Catherine Parr Traill, whose optimism and competence inspires a similar, if intermittent, attempt at

looking on the bright side on Moodie's part. Later, her maid Jenny becomes both her inspiration and her spokesperson in many ways. Jenny's loyalty and perseverance are inspirational to Moodie when she is learning to farm in her husband's absence, and it is Jenny who tells everyone of Moodie's resourceful and courageous behavior during a housefire. Jenny becomes the inspiration for "The Walk to Dummer," when Moodie and her loyal friend Emilia go on a mission of charity, at great risk to themselves, to rescue another woman and her children (Jenny's former employer), from starvation.

By late in the book the two images she is building of herself--devoted, long-suffering wife and courageous, independent pioneer woman--are both well developed and seemingly in opposition. Moodie manages a neat compromise which also gives her back her traveler's stance. She forsakes her backwoods farm to follow her husband to a good job as Sheriff of Hastings County, one she has solicited herself by means of her writing ability. "The first secret I ever had from my husband was the writing of that letter," she tells us in describing her unconventional act of appealing directly to the Governor on behalf of her husband (p. 435). John Moodie's soldiering record makes it obvious that he is a much better authority figure than farmer. On the surface all this is pictured in the most glowing terms, Moodie having been rescued from her heavy tasks by her husband's skills. But the other image of herself must be preserved also. She presents her new self in the latter pages of the book:

For seven years I had lived out of the world  
entirely; my person had been rendered coarse by hard  
work and exposure to the weather. I looked double

the age I really was and my hair was already thickly sprinkled with grey. I clung to my solitude. I did not like to be dragged from it to mingle in gay scenes, in a busy town, and with gaily dressed people. I was no longer fit for the world; I had lost all relish for the pursuits and pleasure which are so essential to its votaries; I was contented to live and die in obscurity (pp. 487-88).

On the surface there is still the element of thankfulness for her rescue from the rural life, but the emotional content of the passage points in other directions. She may be "rendered coarse" but she does not want to be "dragged" from her "solitude" to "gay scenes," enjoyed by "votaries" of "pleasure" in "busy" urban settings. Beneath the relief of giving up the hard life is the sense Moodie has of herself as a more substantial identity than the town life will demand. The passage gives the sense that what she really means by saying that she "was no longer fit for the world" is that she was stronger and finer than the town world because of her ordeal.

At this point in her story Moodie interrupts her narrative of "Adieu to the Woods" with one of those digressions that have so puzzled critics who wish for more "unity" in her work. Ten pages from the end of the book she describes for several pages a comic encounter between her brother who is escorting her to her new home and a farmer named Woodruff (pp. 498-501). The incident gains "unity" only when seen as part of her double story. The underlying effect of the recounting of the incident is to emphasize that Woodruff's farm is prosperous enough to give "promise of a land of abundance and comfort" and that her brother though struggling as a farmer is still seemingly happily "toiling" on "in the same place" (p. 499), unlike John Moodie. The fact

that Moodie herself has not failed as a pioneer, but has turned away from the possibilities of that life for the greater good of her marriage and her children is just below the surface.

In describing her arrival in Belleville, Moodie would seem to be allowing John Moodie to greet the family as hero of the story. But Moodie leaves the praise of "the masther's" new home and furniture in the mouth of the comic Jenny: "Och! who would have thought, a year ago, mistress dear, that we should be living in a mansion like this, and ating off raal chaney? It is but yesterday that we were hoeing praties in the field." Thus, with the comic patois of the servant, is the husband's accomplishment discounted and the reader reminded of Jenny's and Moodie's difficult but successful time as independent women. The husband's touching gift of new "chaney" (Moodie's china was all broken during their move to Douro) does not raise any comment from the autobiographer. Her only response to Jenny's praise of her husband is "Yes, Jenny, God has been very good to us, and I hope that we shall never learn to regard with indifference the many benefits which we have received at His hands" (p. 502). This is a correct and obedient statement for a woman loyal to her patriarchally structured old world-self, but perhaps not the one that John Moodie would have liked.

Moodie quickly ends her book with another caution to "gentlemen" contemplating settlement in the bush, neatly excluding herself by saying that if she has revealed the "secrets of the prisonhouse" she will not have "toiled and suffered in the wilderness in vain" (p. 503). In this final strategy of disguise, she completes her surface cautionary story, and also completes her "secret" story, her autobiography, in which she

has "toiled and suffered" to build her stronger self, a compromise self to be sure, but one no longer dependent on fine china and the non-essentials of civilized life. She is the traveler, speaking about the community she lives in (and this new one she will portray in Life in the Clearings). In both her Canadian and British identities Moodie is now the traveler, who enters into the life of the community, who knows it well, but is essentially not of the community.

Although few accounts, besides Jameson's and Moodie's, of women coming to Canada in the years following the mid-nineteenth century can be considered as journeys of discovery or autobiographical acts, the travel account continued in its popularity among women writers.<sup>9</sup> By the middle of our own century a new phenomenon in travel literature occurs: Canadian-born women are beginning to add their accounts as they undertake to discover the world outside of Canada.

When Margaret Laurence wrote The Prophet's Camel Bell (1963; 237 pp.), the need to disguise rebellions against repressive patriarchal structures had lessened. The need to hide one's achievement inside another's was also less strong. Yet Laurence's account still follows the pattern set by Jameson and Moodie, of using the exploration of the new land as the foregrounded material for a more muted discovery of the female self.

It was her position as an agent of a colonial power rather than her own colonization as a woman that worried Laurence when in the 1950s she accompanied her husband Jack Laurence to Somaliland where he was to work as an engineer building water "ballehs" to help the people through the dry season. Laurence hopes her husband's practical mission will bring

them closer to the Somalis and separate them from the British colonials that remind her of the remittance men of her own Canadian childhood, but to the young woman's surprise it is her femaleness that separates her from the Somali people whom she is so eager to know. She discovers that not only must she contend with being cast as a leisured but useless "memsahib," but must confront the problem of the limitations put on women by Muslim society.

In her first attempt at friendliness, she entertains some village elders that have come to see her husband, who is absent at the time. After they leave, her cook explains the elders' polite silence: "a woman alone in the house must never invite men in, not even if they happen to be about eighty years old. To do so was a terrible breach of etiquette. Further, the elders could certainly not discuss any serious matter with a woman."<sup>10</sup> Later some Somali women see her gardening in slacks and not realizing Laurence's hard-earned mastery of their language, discuss loudly whether she is male or female. They decide she is some "strange beast." Frustrated by her exclusion from male society, but mortified by being seen as unfeminine, Laurence confesses: "I went back into the bungalow and put on a skirt. Never again did I wear slacks in Somaliland, not even in the desert evenings when the mosquitoes were thick as porridge, not even in the mornings when the hordes of glue-footed flies descended" (p. 45). Much of the travel account of Laurence's years in Somaliland is concerned with seeking an identity that will neither deny her womanhood nor set her apart from the people.

At first she thinks she has found a comfortable place as healer.

She dispenses aspirins and cleanses wounds with antiseptic in the desert camps where her husband carries on his work. She soon realizes that the merciless nature of the country offers hurts far beyond her skill:

"What had I known of life here at all? .... It seemed to me that I had been like a child, playing doctor with candy pills, not knowing--not really knowing--that the people I was treating were not dolls. Had I wanted to help them for their sake or my own? Had I needed their gratitude so much?" (p. 62). The self-questioning is a technique by which Laurence dramatizes her personal search for her place as a woman and a stranger in another's land. When some Somali desert women come to ask for some potion to relieve their menstrual pain she abandons the immaturity of a "child, playing doctor" that she has unthinkingly held until this questioning process. Realizing that much of what they suffer at menstruation, as well as during childbirth and intercourse, is due to the medically crude but ritually necessary clitorodectomy that these women undergo at puberty, she achieves a new position through answering her own rhetorical questions: "What should I do? Give them a couple of five-grain aspirin? Even if they had money to buy future pills, which they had not, the lunatic audacity of shoving a mild pill at their total situation was more than I could stomach" (p. 64).

Stripped of some of her illusions, the intense young Canadian becomes more honest about many things. When Muslims give her the customary blessing of "I pray Allah grant you a son, memsahib," she accepts the blessing and admits to herself that she does very much want a child. She begins to see that the best way of helping the Somali people is to do as her husband is doing, to give what skill and talent



she has to some cause that respects the needs and the culture of the people. Laurence is a skilled writer and it is through writing about individual Somalians and through translating their poetry that she finds a useful definition of her relationship to them and verifies her own identity as writer.

In this regard her relationships with three Somali men teach her about their culture and about herself. These men become her "others," and in the chapters she devotes to each of them, she realizes her own maturing self. Although the worlds of men and women are far apart in Muslim culture, Laurence finds that she can extend her employer-employee relationship with her household staff to include more than just the practical business of housekeeping. When she first came to Somaliland she resented having servants forced on her, feeling that it reinforced the stereotype of the helpless "mumsahib." Now, ironically, she finds that by accepting her "housewife" position she may use it as a guise to obtain entrance to the Somali culture. She finds her servants useful sources of knowledge.

Her first mentor is Hersi, the "teller of tales," who begins her education in Somali poetry. He is careful not to tell her anything that a woman's ears should not hear, but by now Laurence has learned not to insist, to take what he is willing to give her. Her artist-self makes a strong identification with this man. He is not only a story-teller like herself, but an outsider, one who has lost his tribal place and finds no place "in the realm of clerks and book-keepers" (p. 160). Just as she is apparently disadvantaged as an inquiring reporter-writer by her womanhood, he is disadvantaged as an oral poet by his speech impediment.

Her cook, Mohamed, is Laurence's constant companion and teacher, as she is his. He makes a close identification with his employer to the point of asking her to teach him to read and write. Her failure to do so is a shock to both of them as he realizes that she is not the marvelous lady he imagined and she once again is forced to face her own limitations. As well, through Mohamed she discovers that Muslim women are not all the obedient slaves she thought they were, as she sees that Mohamed's wife gets her own way in almost everything. At one point servant and employer become so close that Mohamed asks Laurence how to handle his disobedient wife who has gone off to live with his mother-in-law. Without realizing that the situation is a little more complicated in tribal society than in North America, Laurence gives advice that makes matters worse.

At this point the Laurences discover to their horror that they have become Mohamed's "mother and [ ] father" (p. 170). He sees them as the rescuers that will take him out of the restrictions of Somali tribal life. They cannot, and Laurence realizes that "we had encouraged his feeling of our adoption of him .... perhaps we had needed him to like us, more than we knew. And now, to our dismay, we found we had apparently acquired responsibilities towards him of which we had no knowledge and with which we felt unable to cope" (p. 171). The Canadian couple extricate themselves from the situation, but Laurence is beginning to understand the unfairness of thinking she can form equal friendships with people who see her as a powerful figure, themselves as powerless. Such a friendship can flatter the powerful but can leave the

powerless one worse off than when he started.

This is the beginning of Laurence's understanding that she is implicated in the very process she has disowned, the colonial experience. This truth is brought home to her by a third male figure, Abdi, the old warrior. She heals his infected eyes and he tells her husband, "Your Memsahib--a queen" (p. 181). She is flattered and the old warrior, now reduced to driving Land-Rovers for the "Engrese," becomes a special favorite of the Laurences. He becomes increasingly so when he is responsible for saving their lives during a desert storm. Unfortunately, the old man begins to take advantage of his status and his behavior becomes so bullying and childish around the camp that the other Somali employees take up a petition against him. The old man is fired and Laurence feels guilty and disturbed about this for a long time.

She writes that it is only a long time afterwards, when reading Mannoni's The Psychology of Colonization, that she realized "with [a] shock of recognition" (p. 188), that she and her husband had been like colonial powers on whom the colonized person is encouraged to develop a childlike dependence: "We did not comprehend his outlook, and he did not comprehend ours. He could not have acted in any way other than he did, and we could not have, either. And yet now I think that we would all have wished it otherwise" (p. 189). The young Canadian sees that she does not have the power to shape the world and herself to her own political idealism, but that rather the world will shape her despite her wishes. This gives her a greater acceptance of all the people around her including the despised colonial British.

It is her female condition, this time as a pregnant woman, which allows her once again to discover herself through the vehicle of significant others. She can no longer spend her time out in the desert with the workers so she takes a job in the colonial administration. Just as she has devoted separate chapters to her significant Somali others, she now devotes a chapter to sketching the "imperialists" that taught her by their example that even they can be human. Disillusionment teaches the young Laurence that there are decent people even among the despised memsahibs whom she has avoided like a plague. One suspects she has avoided them not so much because they are British colonials, but because they represent a version of powerless femaleness that Laurence does not wish to emulate. In fact, up until now, as a childless foreign woman she has been able to avoid much female contact and live very much as a man would. She discovers that an administrator's wife, on the outside a conventional woman, has translated Kenyan literature just as Laurence has translated Somalian works. Thus by accepting the compromises forced on her by her womanhood she has found, ironically, another occasion for correcting her illusions. In a final irony, Laurence learns that even the publication of her translations is made possible only by the efforts of a colonial administrator.

Through the "mirrors" of her Somalian servants and her European "imperialists," the young writer has gone through a journey from innocence to experience that is essential if she is to write. She has lost her preconceptions of the "other" and discovered the unique

individuality that each offers her. She has learned to accept her female status and learned how to use it as part of her writerly endeavors. After she has left Somaliland she begins to understand that it was her very status as outsider, caused by the fact of her Canadian identity in a British colonial world and her female identity in a Muslim world, that has enabled her to learn these lessons. As she observes: "it was possible that my real reason for loving it [Somaliland] was simply because I was an outsider here. One can never be a stranger in one's own land--it is precisely this fact which makes it so difficult to live there" (p. 227).

The young writer finds that she must put herself in the stranger's position to realize the stranger that is herself. She has intuited two conditions necessary for the writer, a deep love of the subject and, paradoxically, a status of "outsider" that allows the writer to view all the aspects of her subject. In other words the writer has achieved the "traveler's" status. This position, that Laurence attained as a result of her experiences in Somaliland and through her autobiographical act, allowed her to go on to the fiction writing of her Nigerian experience and eventually to write of her own place, Canada. Her long exile as a traveler in other peoples' lands allowed her to find the writer's stance of being the insider and outsider at the same time.

It is important to note that although twentieth-century women do not need the "disguise" of the travel account to tell their own stories which might be unacceptable in a more open forum, they still find such disguises useful. For Laurence the form provided a way of showing how her intellectual, emotional, and feminine development progresses as in a

journey. But until recently Canadian women have not used this useful "disguise" to explore their sexual identities. The elasticity of the travel account is further verified by Joyce Meyer's Ricordi: (1982; 383 pp.). Meyer, a Winnipegger, spent eleven years of her adult life traveling, living and working in Italy. In her "remembrances" she is performing an autobiographical act not attempted by the other "travelers" that I have discussed, that is, the exploration of the sensuous-sexual self. Meyer feels that her Canadian, rational upbringing has left underdeveloped the feeling part of herself. Despite the fact that her subject matter, her sexuality, seems very different from that of the other accounts considered in this chapter, she uses very familiar means of presentation, the creation of others who are "real presences" in the autobiography and through whom the writer's progress is achieved. For Meyer the "others" are not mother figures or husbands or intellectual mentors, but lovers. Three men represent, in their characters and their relationships to her, the three stages of her sexual maturation.

Her first "Italian" lover, a Sicilian-American, a tourist like herself, represents the immaturity of her sexual self which sees the male only in terms of his aggression and domination. He makes love, "as if we were locked in combat, and he was using his penis as a weapon, a piercing insistent tool .... My own identity faded, blotted out by his."<sup>11</sup> She speaks of herself as "a frail prairie sparrow trying to soar with an eagle, not being strong or daring enough" (p. 18). It is her Canadian self that is the "prairie sparrow," and in that regard her sensual-sexual maturation is also tied to her experience of Italy as a

country unlike her "rational, anglo-saxon" home. She begins to experience Italy as an expression of her sensual self and she no longer has need of her first, violent lover: "The disorientation produced by the first few weeks with Mike, and our fantasy trip down the Via Aurelia, was fading. I was being knitted into the life of Rome by its strange and beautiful street-pictures, by its food and colors, its markets, its voices, its textures and sounds" (p. 25). Meyer makes it clear that the lover has prepared her for a greater love-affair with the country when she compares her feeling for the city to falling in love: "Who has ever fallen in love with a landscape? Or a farmhouse? Or the buildings of a city? ... looking out my window ... I felt the light fingers and the airy nets of love twining me up. There was no mistaking it: some lovely and joyous thing was happening. A real thing" (p. 56).

As her love of Italy matures and Meyer takes up residence in Rome, she takes a lover more integral to the place and her maturing self. His love-making is figured in language that is a direct contrast to the near-rape imagery of her former affair: "he came to me like water flowing into an inevitable channel but slowly, amazingly slowly, full of grace, a natural lover" (p. 97). Her imagery also indicates her new acceptance of her sensual self. Her second lover also has aspects of the forbidden about him (he is a good deal younger than her and he has recently abandoned a preparation for the priesthood), which allows her to realize her repressed sensual self. Through him she feels her sensuality openly; it is as youthful as her lover. She feels it without shame, as if her love-making with her ex-divinity student were sacramental, rather than profane. Carlo comes to her "like water" as

she achieves a new self-confidence as a woman. She begins to feel the same admiration as her lover does for beauty, her own as well as his and his country's.

In this second stage of her sexual maturation her lover introduces her to a wider Rome, particularly the Rome of Italian family life where Meyer finds woman firmly at the center. Carlo's mother, "Antonio, was the focus and strength of the family, . . . She was modest, self-denigrating, couldn't accept compliments about her food or being 'queen of the household'" (p. 101). At this stage, Meyer is no longer the dominated maiden but a maturing "queen," in a sexual sense.

Her choice of a lover during the third stage of her life is illuminating. He is Pietro, a real-estate dealer like herself. He knows the Tuscan Hills, their sales area for rural properties, as well as she learns to know it and offers her a more equal relationship than the other lovers. Like the others he is Italian but also connected to her "anglo-saxon" northern self. Mike was North American by birth, Carlo studied in America, and Pietro's "curly blond hair and eyes of a startling, intense blue" make Meyer wonder "if the Normans had reached the Sabine Hills where he lived" (p. 182).

One of the important aspects of the phenomenon of the "other" is that the autobiographer must be able in some way to be part of but separate from that person. That is necessary to identity formation so that the autobiographer can form the self by a close merging with the other, but not lose identity by complete union. The autobiographer often (unconsciously) chooses others with this qualification. So Moodie chooses people who for one reason or another are destined to be excluded



from her real life, Jameson finds women who, because of their physical remoteness from her own world, she will never see again, Laurence chooses men who cannot ever be a part of her world, as she cannot be a part of theirs', and Meyer chooses lovers who disqualify themselves as husbands--Mike because he cannot stay with one woman, Carlo because of his youth, and Pietro because he is a married man with a young child.

Meyer's relationship with her last lover is very much one of yearning chastity. When they do consummate their relationship it is with guilt and regret. Ironically, the mature woman can no longer see the parts of her life outside the sexual relationship as separate from her sensual-sexual self. At the same time, her Canadian, rational self is reasserting its claim to an equal share of her personality, and in the female search for self-completion rather than perfection she begins to see that Italy is becoming less the adventure it was eleven years before, and the list of advantages to be gained by returning to Canada grows longer. As her relationship with Italy becomes more distant, so does her relationship with her lover. She knows he belongs to another woman and another family, just as Italy belongs to another people, a people she finally realizes are not hers.

Meyer's travel-autobiography ends with her feeling a large measure of dissatisfaction with the shape of contemporary Italian life, as well as with the Canadian world to which she has returned. Her descriptions of her life in Toronto seem to indicate that a woman that has achieved a high degree of self-completion may not feel at home anywhere. Where then is the satisfying sense of arrival and completion that her travels and her homecoming should have achieved? I would suggest they are to be

found in the writing and publication of the autobiography. The writing confirms and articulates the new self, which the journey has made possible. She has written herself into existence and the publication announces it to the world. A woman such as Meyer, who has written so feelingly and intimately about the most private aspects of her life, can not easily deny any part of her complex self. That self is an achieved identity, public, on record. In a sense the public self holds the private self accountable, keeps it whole, despite the insufficiencies of external contexts.

Each traveler is always writing to and for the people back home. The travel account is, as Janet Giltrow points out in her study of Susanna Moodie, "the verbal signal of [her] reincorporation into [her] native milieu; it repairs the breach which occurs when one group member is estranged from [her] community, and the publication of details of the writer's whereabouts during [her] absence compensates for the alienation [she] has experienced" (p. 131). In this way, the choice of the travel account as an autobiographical form is entirely suitable to the feminine urge to leave nothing of the self behind, to include every part of experience, no matter how contradictory, in the evolving self. The autobiographer's experience as traveler is one of incorporation. Under the guise of traveler she experiences the community and its members as "others" that represent desired parts of her self. Through the act of incorporation, accomplished through her relationships with them and her writing about them, she realizes difficult and complex truths about herself and grows as an individual. But the traveler, by nature, returns home, not always physically, but through the vehicle of the

travel account. Thus she reincorporates herself into her own community to effect her greater completion as an individual who values an identity based on relationship rather than separation.

## NOTES - CHAPTER 4

- <sup>1</sup> Martin S. Day, "Travel Literature and the Journey Theme," Forum, 12, No. 2 (1975), 38.
- <sup>2</sup> Christopher Gillie, Longman's Companion to British Literature, 1978, p. 837.
- <sup>3</sup> Clara Thomas, "Journeys of Freedom," Canadian Literature, No. 51 (Winter 1972), 13.
- <sup>4</sup> Anna Jameson, Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada, 3 volumes (London, 1838, reprinted Toronto: Coles, 1970, 72), I, p. vii.
- <sup>5</sup> Wayne Fraser, "The Dominion of Women: The Relationship of the Personal and the Political In Canadian Women's Literature," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Manitoba, 1985, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>6</sup> R. D. MacDonald, "Design and Purpose," Canadian Literature, No. 51 (Winter 1972), 21.
- <sup>7</sup> Janet Giltrow, "'Painful Experience in a Distant Land': Mrs. Moodie in Canada and Mrs. Trollope in America," Mosaic, xiv, No. 2 (Spring 1981), 134.
- <sup>8</sup> Mrs. Susanna Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush or, Forest Life In Canada (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1923), p. 76.
- <sup>9</sup> See Elizabeth Waterston, "Travel Books (1860-1920)," in Literary History of Canada, edited by Carl F. Klinck, 2nd ed., I, 361-79, and "Travel Books (1920-1960)," II, 108-18.
- <sup>10</sup> Margaret Laurence, The Prophet's Camel Bell (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963, 65), p. 30.
- <sup>11</sup> Joyce Meyer, Ricordi: (Winnipeg: Queenston Press, 1982), p. 12.

## CHAPTER 5 - ACHIEVING WOMEN/ACHIEVING WOMANHOOD

The autobiographical genre flourishes, as Misch has observed, in times when people find themselves "turning away in spirit from past existence." The present can be considered such a time, since we live in a society "where so many values have been overturned without our admitting it, where there is an obvious gap between the culture we profess and the dangers among which we really live, [and in such a society] the autobiographical mode can be an authentic way of establishing the truth of our experience. The individual is real even when the culture is not."<sup>1</sup>

Certainly for women, perhaps more than for any group in contemporary society, this sense of dislocation is strong. As women move from the private world of the home to achieve in the more public world, there is an increased sense of lost values and unmarked paths, of being thrust into what Sandra Frieden calls, in her exploration of German women's autobiographies, "a life without role models."<sup>2</sup> As women enter the more "masculine" arena of public achievement, however, their autobiographies do not follow the Augustinian or Rousseauian prototypes, but rather continue to exhibit the characteristic need for the "real presence" of significant "others."

Perhaps the reason for this consistency can be found in the fact that women, in terms of their psychological and ethical development, speak in what Carol Gilligan calls "a different voice" than their male counterparts. Gilligan, in exploring the researches of Freud, Piaget, Kohlberg, Erikson and others in the area of human maturation, discovers

that women always "score" lower than men on male-oriented moral development rating systems because their maturation is qualitatively different from men's. She concludes that, "From the different dynamics of separation and attachment in their gender identity formation through the divergence of identity and intimacy that marks their experience in the adolescent years, male and female voices typically speak of the importance of different truths, the former of the role of separation as it defines and empowers the self, the latter of the ongoing process of attachment that creates and sustains the human community." Gilligan finds that women's developmental process is ignored by theorists and she wishes "to restore ... the missing text of women's development."<sup>3</sup> For social scientists such as Gilligan, as well as for literary theorists concerned with identity formation in autobiographical writing, the "missing text" can be found in autobiographies by achieving women.

Such women, in entering the public world of work and physical adventure, typically choose others who are male: a father, brother, husband or teacher, who act as role models and represent aspects of her self that the woman wishes to incorporate into her identity. But at the same time, these women do not want to be men, and following a life based on admiration for their male other leads them into conflict with the feminine self, with the self that demands "attachment" rather than "separation." The tension between these two contending factors and the balance between them that achieving women seek, give their autobiographies a unique vitality.

Even in autobiographies that do not reflect this balance, the desire for it exists. In Memoirs of a Bird in a Gilded Cage (1968), we

find the politician, Judy LaMarsh, defending herself against the possibility of being considered unfeminine. LaMarsh begins her autobiography by stating: "I did not spring, when first I entered Parliament ... 'fully armed, with a mighty shout' from a breach in Lester B. Pearson's skull, like the Pallas Athena from the head of Zeus."<sup>4</sup> If the Athena prototype is unsatisfactory for such public women so also is the Aphrodite image. Margaret Trudeau, in the two volumes of her autobiography, Beyond Reason (1979) and Consequences (1982), finds that playing the love-goddess as a means of achieving in the world leads to a life of artificiality and to a painful loss of self-esteem and self-control.

Neither LaMarsh nor Trudeau are my major concern as achieving women, however, for neither of them, in any significant way, seems to have achieved the balance she sought. Perhaps the reasons for this are contained in their autobiographies. LaMarsh avoids an exploration of her personal life, and Trudeau seems to lack the will for a public life that is truly her own. But both these women share the two characteristics found in the life-writing of other achieving women: admiration for a significant male "other" combined with a contradictory need to connect with a more feminine, often maternal, ideal. Trudeau speaks to the root of many achieving women's conflicts when she says of her parents: "I was my father's son, the boy he never had .... I was the one singled out, the one with the extra spark, the child most like my father. My mother considered me the most selfish of the family--and she was probably right."<sup>5</sup>

The turn-of-the-century feminist, Georgina Binnie-Clark certainly

shared Trudeau's need for her father's approval. The first of her two autobiographical accounts of her life, written as a visitor from England and later as a farmer on the Saskatchewan prairies, is in many ways an effort to obtain her father's support and respect. Dedicated to him and often not too indirectly addressed to him, A Summer on the Canadian Prairie (1910; 311 pp.) is on the surface a light-hearted travel account telling of the foibles of well-to-do sophisticated English gentry who are ill-suited for the hard work of the frontier. But Binnie-Clark's real intention is the discrediting of her brother, Lal, who is in her opinion dependent and shiftless. He holds her father's affections only because he is male it seems, and Binnie-Clark's presense in Canada is primarily to resuce him with their father's money. In defining her own strength through the disparagement of her brother, who acts as a kind of negative other, she creates her independent self, which is realized more fully in the writing of Wheat and Women (1914; 413 pp.), the book that comes out of her real experience as a prairie farmer.

At first, in A Summer, there are only hints that Lal may care more for brandy and horses than hard work. These hints are given through reconstruction of conversations and incidents in which he does not show in the best light. Another tactic of indirection Binnie-Clark employs is to put criticisms of her brother in the mouth of Hilaria, her sharp-tongued sister who shares the adventure in the new land. The latter comments on Lal's farming: "The bit he calls the garden is as long as the shack, but not nearly so wide; and the crop-land is about the length and breadth of a billiard-table .... What would father's face



be like if he could share the view?"<sup>6</sup> At other times Binnie-Clark places her criticisms in the observations of seemingly impartial neighbors. One immigrant woman observes that, "In England I used to think that men worked whilst women gossiped. On a prairie settlement the women work, and it isn't the women who gossip. I owe one debt to my life on the prairie, and that is a fair appreciation of my own sex" (p. 278).

Through her dramatic recreations of such moments, Binnie-Clark attempts to supplant her brother in her father's affection. This she does not actually manage, for she informs us of her father's further subsidization of the son, this time in a brewery operation in Minnesota. But she does begin to create a new self-image, which is reflected in the fact that towards the end of A Summer she drops her disguises to observe bluntly: "You can't get over the fact that in the entire settlement we are the only real failures. Our two men, who have had more advantages than the rest of the neighbors put together, are the only ones who have failed. And it isn't even because they are helpless: it is because they won't lend themselves to small beginnings" (p. 272). Binnie-Clark soon makes it obvious that she plans to make the best of her "small beginnings."

Although A Summer presents itself, almost to its last pages, in a light and humorous style, Binnie-Clark largely abandons these strategies in Wheat and Women; here she relates in a more discursive, descriptive and sometimes polemical style, her setbacks and successes as a farmer of her own land. Her earlier cloaked sarcasms have turned to open disapproval of the ways in which women are treated by governments as

well as individuals. She begins actively to campaign for the rights of women farmers. She is most offended by the injustice built into the system by which a woman "may be the best farmer in Canada, she may buy land, work it, take prizes for seed and stock, but she is denied the right to claim from the Government the hundred and sixty acres of land held out as a bait to every man."<sup>7</sup>

Binnie-Clark's progress from discontented individual to political activist can be traced in both the style and content of her two autobiographies. Whereas in chapter two of the first work, her example of appropriate feminine behavior is herself as fine and sensitive literary companion to her shipboard male "philosopher and [ ] comrade" (p. 15), her later view is of a more maternal figure, as in the example at the end of the book when she describes her ideal as it is embodied in an immigrant neighbor: "I sat down ... and glanced round the garden, which was racing towards a fulfilment of the promise, and the end of the story of what a brave, patient, loving English mother can accomplish under the stress of circumstance" (p. 276). Thus despite the straight-forward, assertive, "masculine" tone of the second book, she seeks a similar "end of the story" for herself. For although she has desired to take the male path and pursue and broadcast her success as a farmer, she typically seeks to reconnect with the feminine, but on a more positive level than the complaints against injustice and the personal animosities that have preoccupied her previously.

She finds this connection through another strategy of indirection, what Spacks has called the "mythologization of difficult reality." The struggle and back-breaking labor of frontier Canadian farming is

metamorphosed into the mythology of "the virgin" land at the end of the second book. She figures Canada as "the virgin side of the Great Mother" who demands from her children "courage and kindness, swiftness and patience, strength and sympathy, unflinching purpose, unfailing energy, untiring philosophy." This, Binnie-Clark believes, will produce a people that are of the "old giant kind" (pp. 412-13). In her ringing affirmation of "virgin" motherhood at the end of her second autobiography, the unmarried and independent autobiographer has created her own ideal self, the self-sufficient, single woman working her own land, feeling a part of all nature, a view of woman as a separate individual but attached spiritually to a firm vision of the land as the feminine self.

Even in the twentieth century, as in the early days of settlement, Canada still acts powerfully on the imaginations of women who come here seeking a greater role for themselves than society normally allows women. Such was the case for Martha Black the Yukon pioneer and member of parliament, who writes in My Seventy Years (1938; 317 pp.), of her beginnings in a prosperous and close-knit Chicagoan family, where women's roles were narrowly defined by the example of Black's devoted, modest, uncomplaining and completely subservient mother. Black describes her parents' reaction to her birth. The father complains to his wife: "Susan, I am disappointed. I expected a boy." The mother replies meekly, "Yes, I know, I am so sorry."<sup>8</sup>

The recounting of this moment and Black's recreation of an incident in her childhood in which she physically attacks a little girl who was behaving with prescribed feminine submissiveness, as well as her obvious

admiration of her father who saved the family and their fortunes during the Chicago fire, indicates Black's desire to be more like the boy her father wanted than the daughter her parents expect her to be. But this desire conflicts strongly with her desire to be feminine. This conflict is indicated when she refuses to take pride in her independent and assertive childhood self by saying: "Today I am grateful to that dear mother of mine who so wisely showed me the unhappiness that inevitably follows ungovernable passion, vanity and covetousness. Of course, being naturally hot-headed and vain, I was not cured for ever of those faults" (p. 37). This condemnation of some quality in herself, which she has just presented to the reader through the dramatic recreation of an event (to the point where she has solicited the reader's admiration for her pluck and independence), is the typical strategy by which Black holds together the two strong and contrary drives in her personality: to be like her entrepreneurial father while remaining loyal to the vision of womanhood presented by her saintly but passive mother.

Black leads a conventional life until her thirties, marrying and having two sons. Although she complains of the confining life of young motherhood and the wandering eye of her husband, she accepts her place, since it means being part of the close family life and having the parental approval that she needs. Her rebellion comes when she, her husband and brother arrange to go on the great adventure of their lives, to pan for gold during the Yukon gold rush. At the last moment, while in San Francisco, her husband decides he would prefer the Hawaiian Islands. It is at this point, when she is about to take a path not in keeping with wifely submissiveness, that Black begins to use the

elevated language of the mythologizer: "It was the pivotal point of my life--my destiny. The North Star, my lodestar, beckoned me. It lured me onward. My whole being cried out to follow it" (pp. 92-93). It is with such language that the fulfillment of the adventuring side of her personality is consolidated. The reader may note that the decision is facilitated by several factors: the Yukon adventure had her father's blessing in the first place, she has not been happy with her husband, her brother is easily convinced by his persuasive sister, and she is too far from Chicago to be easily stopped. But such mundane considerations have no part in Black's mythology, for the new self she is creating needs validation on a level above the prosaic.

The Yukon proves the place where her independent "headstrong" self, the part of her that emulates her father, can blossom. She not only crosses the Chinook pass in winter and sets up placer claims of her own, but delivers her own baby in a small shack. The arrival of the child is given the kind of elevated treatment that autobiographers often use--not so much "to freeze the past but to turn it into a kind of mythic narrative," with the result that the autobiographer's life seems "shot through with Adamic significance."<sup>9</sup> Yet it is not so much an Adamic significance but rather one more reminiscent of the Holy Mother that Black seems to be seeking as she describes the "men-folk" gathered around her as she, like the virgin with her divine son, is given ~~by~~ <sup>is</sup> by the worshipful sourdoughs. She boasts of her incredibly easy labor as "Mother nature's gift to women who live a natural out-of-door life such as I had done" (p. 130). After surviving an avalanche during which her quick thinking saves her infant son, she describes herself as caught

up in the "magnificent beauty" of the place and feels she too "had become a Sourdough" (p. 143).

Despite her successes as a business woman and her new position as maternal figure, Black obediently returns to the States when her father comes for her. But her assertive self is merely curbed not crushed, for she becomes physically ill when separated from the country with which she now identifies. Always able to get her way with men, she convinces her father to back her financially in a new adventure in the Yukon in which she is successful not only in making money but in quelling the spirits of men who at first will not work for a "damn skirt" (p. 160). Thus, by showing herself meek in the face of her father's wishes, until he too respects her "destiny," she is once more able to join the two contradictory sides of her self.

Martha Black's marriage to George Black, whereby she becomes the perfect wife of the Yukon's commissioner and later his exemplary spouse when he is speaker of the Canadian parliament, would seem to be a direct refusal of the American entrepreneurial spirit that made her a Yukon legend. But for Black it represents one more successful harnessing of the opposing selves, for unlike her first marriage this one gives her considerable scope for the realization of that part of her she once labelled "vanity"; carving out her place as the Yukon's chief lady, she manages to contain independence and ladylike respectability in one role. The fact that she finds it necessary to give us a detailed account of her social accomplishments in this position, to the point of undermining the fast-moving, action-oriented narrative, indicates how important this respectable mode of achievement is for her.

This is verified by the way in which Black chooses to end her autobiography. She considers her crowning achievement to be her election as member of Parliament as the widow of George Black, an election result that came about as much from the Yukon people's respect for her husband's memory as from respect for her. Once again, the personal achievement of power, but through her relationship to a man, is the type of accomplishment most satisfying to Black. In the last pages of her autobiography she describes, in dramatic detail, her maiden speech in the house. The Commons is about to send a message of sympathy to Queen Mary on the death of George V. Her house-leader has declined Black's private suggestion that the sympathies of the women of Canada be added to the telegram. Torn between obeying her male leader and her need to speak on behalf of women she finally rises to offer sympathy to "Her majesty the Queen [who] has set the women of Canada an example of devotion to family, devotion to business that comes up every day--an example by which we must all profit" (p. 314). The mention of "devotion," her mother's chief characteristic, and "business" and "profit," her father's entrepreneurial preoccupations, in the same sentence, joins the significant others that have shaped Black's personality. It is suitable that Black manages this union through an act of praising a conventional mother figure, in a context in which Black has always felt safest (the Canadian Parliament in the 1930s being at least as respectably patriarchal as the family she grew up in), and in a moment of rebellion against an authority figure who has just told her in symbolic terms to be the kind of female she has always

rebelled against being--the silent obedient, girl. Martha Black creates a self motivated by two contradictory drives: the desire to be an assertive, self-actualizing individual who defines herself separately from family and roots, and the desire to remain connected to all the ideals of feminine submissiveness, loyalty, and conservative values, especially the placement of relationship ahead of self.

Through her life and her autobiographical remembering of that life, she has successfully managed to join the opposites, but it should be noted that the accomplishment has involved a large measure of unconscious adjustment. This is not the most serious criticism that can be made of an autobiography. An autobiographer's first task is the difficult one of recreating the life authentically. If she manages that, then the style will in a large measure reflect the content and the aspects of change that remain unconscious, the "dark core of unawareness" that Roy Pascal finds at the heart of even the greatest autobiographies but which can be elucidated by the act of the critic.

But other women caught in similar dichotomous life situations have been more conscious of their dilemmas. One of the ways they have tried to overcome their problem is consciously to use stylistic approaches to dramatize their situation. In this way Nellie McClung, the writer and feminist, writes her first autobiography, Clearing in the West (1935; 378 pp.), in the style of the inspirational novel for young women (a style which her own experience as a novelist makes quite familiar), in an effort to show herself as the confident positivist who manages to remain feminine and conventional while pursuing achievement and success in the public world. But much is left unresolved and ambiguous by the



more or less straightforward account, so in the second autobiography, The Stream Runs Fast (1945; 316 pp.), McClung varies her stylistic approaches in an attempt to accommodate a mature view of her life as one of many dimensions, not all of which can be formulated in a female version of the Horatio Alger prototype.

In the preface to The Stream McClung remarks on how she has used her life: "Like the impatient prairie farmer, I have cropped it too steadily, forcing it to yield. Now I can construct a new life on a new pattern. For the first time in my life I can disregard the clock and the calendar, and write as I please."<sup>10</sup> This is an interesting admission for a woman who has already written eight novels, an autobiography, and has produced much polemical writing in aid of the feminist movement. It suggests that a comparison of the style of the first autobiography--in which we assume McClung had not written entirely "as I please"--with that of the second autobiography, may yield new insight into the conflicted psyche of an achieving woman.

McClung's feelings of being drawn by very different role models begin early in life. When one of her most admired influences, her school teacher Mr. Schultz, gives her a version of the Riel rebellion that makes the Metis people less the guilty party than McClung's mother, Mrs. Moonie, would have them, her mother threatens to call in the school board. McClung becomes physically ill and cannot attend school as a result of the disagreement. Since success at school is the way McClung thinks she can overcome the "limitations" of being female, the situation is a desperate one for the young girl. Fortunately, Mr. Schultz smooths the rough waters and resolves the young girl's conflicts of loyalty by

telling her to "learn all you can from your mother . . . . You'll be proud of her skill when you grow up."<sup>11</sup> When, later, McClung sees her mother ministering to the physical illnesses of a group of Indian people who visit the Moonie farm, her desire to be competent as a woman as well as to overcome female "limitations" increases.

In her youth, as described in the first autobiography, the solutions to the problem of her divided ambition are relatively simple. For example, she justifies giving up her independence and her job as a school teacher to marry Wesley McClung by explaining that she judged the man by his mother, implying that she marries the man to be more like his admired mother: "I felt sure Mrs. McClung's son must be the sort of man I would like. She had all the sweetness, charm and beauty of the old-fashioned woman, and in addition to this had a fearless, and even radical, mind. I had been to the parsonage quite a few times before I came to board there; and I saw her methods of training her children. Her one girl, Nellie, who was my age, did no more than one share of the work; being a girl, did not sentence her to all the dishwashing and bedmaking. . . . And there was no talk of having to be accompanied by a brother every time she went out" (pp. 313-14). The only recommendation that McClung makes for the man himself was that although he and she did not always agree, he was nevertheless "a fair fighter" (p. 374).

McClung's positivist text forces the reader to "read between the lines" and to interpret the ambiguities that lie just below the surface. Beneath the praise of Mrs. McClung senior is an obvious desire to be her "Nellie" rather than her mother's daughter, and as well, a not too hidden criticism of her own restricted life as Mrs. Moonie's girl-child.

When she receives her mother's approval of Wes as a husband, McClung quotes her as saying that her daughter has "more sense than I ever gave you credit for ... I like your young man--I couldn't have picked out a finer one myself. Now, if you cannot get on, I'll be inclined to think it will be your fault" (pp. 375-76). The back-handed compliment, as well as the characterization of Wes as "a fair fighter," belie the positive stereotypical configuration with which McClung ends her first autobiography--that of the newly married couple traveling away from their wedding on a stormy day, but one which shows signs of "clearing in the West" (p. 378).

The form of the first book is in contention with much of what McClung wants to say about her life, and she seems to realize this herself in her first chapter of her second autobiography when she jokingly summarizes her own ending: "Clearing in the West ended in the approved manner. The two young people stood on the rear platform of a 'mixed' train and saw the sun break through the dark shoulder of a rain-cloud and knew that 'tomorrow would be fine'" (p. 2). In the second work, McClung seems intent on breaking out of the "approved manner" and on allowing for more of the ambiguity and tension which result from living a life of accomplishment within a framework of conventional wifhood and motherhood. For example, she describes the depression and panic with which she greeted her first pregnancy: "It was a low moment in my life; surely a climacteric, when the eyes that look out of the windows are darkened. Many bewildered women have gone down this same dark road" (p. 17).

It would appear that McClung is determined to follow the advice of

Laura Salverson who wrote to her after her first autobiography that she should be "more personal in your new book.... Break down and tell all! We want to see you and know how your mind was working" (p. 145). But, in fact, for most of the book McClung's revelations do not measure up in intimacy to the revelation of her state of mind during her pregnancy. In that retelling she successfully joins her own condition to that of "all the overburdened inarticulate woman of the world" (p. 17). However, when later detailing the conflicts around her feminism and support of the Canada's participation in World War I, McClung is less than forthright, and the reader must go outside the text to appreciate the full conflict of interests that confronted women like McClung who were both mothers of soldiers and feminists as well.

McClung's biographer explains that as a feminist McClung believed that war was "murder" and was particularly upset that women so easily gave sons to the cause, characterizing them as being like "Abraham" who so easily accepted his son's sacrifice.<sup>12</sup> In Stream McClung speaks very little of her opposition to the war, dwelling instead on the difficult time it was for her family because her oldest son Jack had decided to serve. Jack's mother cannot very well condemn war as "murder," without condemning her own son's activity. McClung's feminine instinct to put "attachment" ahead of the "separation" idealism of the ego-self is most obvious in the recounting of this stage of her life; she dwells on the sadness of moving to Edmonton and leaving Winnipeg friends and family, on her maternal anguish on parting with her oldest child, and on the more positive uses that feminists made of the wartime mentality and its concomitant desire for reform.

But the "climacteric" nature of the experience of sending a son to war, like the experience of bearing him, cannot be entirely removed from the autobiography; it enters under other disguises. For example, she mentions meeting a woman with eight children at a railway station who is saying goodbye to her husband who is going to war. The woman observes bitterly: "there should be a lawr to stop a man from going who has eight children. But what can a woman do but just take what comes. 'E'll be a 'ero and I'll be a drudge with bunions on my feet" (p. 140). Thus, like Susanna Moodie criticizing her husband or Binnie-Clark undermining her brother's privileges, McClung places her very real disgust with war in another woman's mouth, a woman who in her accent and situation is more typical of the "common" woman.

As well, McClung details the life of her son Jack after his return from war. In telling of his heroic efforts to put the war behind him and fulfill his part as the family's eldest son, McClung makes him the "hero" of the autobiography. But she makes it obvious that the war has broken him in some significant irrevocable way: "When a boy who has never had a gun in his hands, never desired anything but the good of his fellow men, is sent out to kill other boys like himself, even at the call of his country, something snaps in him, something which may not mend." Then, McClung observes in a separate paragraph, that "A wound in a young heart is like a wound in a young tree. It does not grow out. It grows in" (p. 195). Jack McClung died during the writing of The Stream Runs Fast, and McClung's biographer quotes a close associate of McClung as saying that "Jack's death was the greatest calamity in

Nellie's life, and she did not rebound easily" (p. 198). One of the ways McClung does rebound is by making her son the significant other of her autobiography, and like Elizabeth Johnston in Georgia Loyalist, she uses the autobiography as a confessional tool, absolving her own guilt and grief by memorializing her son. In the same way the memoir aspect of her autobiography functions as a tool for absolution when she chooses to highlight late in the text her contribution as one of Canada's representatives to the League of Nations in 1938. Despite the fact that she is completing her autobiography during World War II, and patriotism is the national mood, there is a noticeable emphasis on the importance of the search for world peace. Ironically, by recreating her son's life, and highlighting her own earlier activities as a peace-maker, she is able to make a powerful anti-war statement, one she felt she could not make during World War I for fear of alienating her son.

Thus in an unexpected and ironic sense McClung does manage "to write as I please," in her second autobiography. Both autobiographies are subtitled "my own story," but the first book presents quite a masculine-defined young woman who is the central character of her "own story." The second autobiography, more episodic, more openly feminist, but tempered with a self-mocking humor and a more philosophical stance, often presents others as central to the action while McClung becomes the perceiving consciousness that interprets and arranges others' stories. Part of the change of style is attributable to the fact that she was in her fifties when writing the first book, a woman filled with success as an active feminist, mother, and writer. The second, written ten years later, is the book of a woman who has suffered the death of her beloved

son and seen her accomplishments eclipsed by depression and war. Nevertheless, the ways in which McClung chooses to mute her battles and causes is a typical choice of the woman attempting to achieve a compromise between her drive for success and her need to define herself as a feminine being. As McClung concludes: "Do not look for safety in this world. There is no safety here. There is only balance" (p. 316).

And yet, in its drive for balance, the life of an achieving woman can often leave the reader of her autobiography with the feeling that too much has been compromised, too much left unsaid. One suspects that "balance" can become a flight into safety, an avoidance of the public success not only to preserve the private life intact but to avoid the further problems posed by success. When McClung left Manitoba in 1914, because her husband was transferred to Edmonton, she regrets the fact that she will not be able to go on to become a Cabinet minister as every one predicts:

I knew I could persuade people and I knew I had a real hold on the people of Manitoba, especially the women, but I also knew that the whole situation was fraught with danger for if I, as the first woman to hold a Cabinet position failed, it would be a blow to women everywhere. I could easily undo all I had done for I knew the world would be critical of women for a long time. If a woman succeeded, her success would belong to her as an individual. People would say she was an exceptional woman. She had a "masculine" mind. Her success belonged to her alone, but if she failed, she failed for all women everywhere. With this in mind, I hadn't the nerve to go on to the sixty-four-dollar question. I said nothing to anyone but it reconciled me to the move. I felt I was being let down over the wall in a basket (p. 143).

In this rare glimpse of how deeply troubled the normally positive McClung really was about her success and the possibilities it presented

for failing (and thus losing "connection" by failing other women), we can begin to see how complex is the female drive for relatedness as it acts itself out in the situations of a life-time. McClung's autobiography does not succeed in a full presentation of that complexity, but it does reveal the degree of the problem.

The irony of McClung's "failure" to find a stylistic vehicle complex enough to carry her life-story is that women who are more adept at achieving while seeming not to be achieving women seem to be more easily content with established stylistic patterns and thus write autobiographies which seem more immediately effective to the reader. Such is the case with women who hide their achievements in the life or accomplishments of a man. Luta Munday wrote A Mountie's Wife (1930; 217 pp.) after twenty-five years of married life in which she accompanied her husband to posts in Alberta, Cumberland House, The Pas and Chesterfield Inlet. For her, life seems to begin the day she married her mounty, and that is how she begins her autobiography, telling nothing of her early life and giving no hint of what experience or qualities prepare her to survive the next twenty-five years.

The immediate motivation of the book may be a form of social protest against the lot of mounties' wives, for she recounts her feelings on the death of a Mrs. Clay, who was killed by husky dogs: "It had been found desirable to have a white woman stationed at that post, and I have been disappointed at the fact that the powers that be have not in some way recognized the sacrifice made by Mrs. Clay, who has given her life for the force just as truly as our men in France gave their lives for their country."<sup>13</sup> Munday subtitles her book "Being the



life story of one attached to the force but not of it." In her forward she dedicates her book "to those women of the force who have endured, who have watched and waited with an aching heart, as I have done, and so will understand" (p. vii).

But dedications and minor protest cannot change in one book her lifetime of effectively burying her achievements in those of her husband. The autobiography's organization and style reflect a very conventional acceptance of the premier place of her husband and his career. Not only the exclusion of personal history, but her arrangement of the book into chapters based on where the force posts her husband, so that the list of chapters is a history of his career, reflects Munday's traditional definitions of herself. Within the chapters, although she expresses her personal feelings, her emphasis is at all times on "Walter's" heavy responsibilities, courage and fortitude, and her efforts are important only in that they support him. It is only in the Chesterfield Inlet experience that she moves away from her central concentration on her husband, not to speak of herself so much as to speak of the Eskimos or show her almost maternal relationship with her dogs who seem to take the place of children.

In many ways, Munday fits Mason's paradigm of the woman who relates her life by relating the life of her husband. But as in Mason's exploration of Margaret Cavendish's writing, we find in Munday's book not a biography of her husband but an autobiography. Paradoxically one of the results of Munday's modesty is to achieve the opposite effect, that of creating even more admiration for her in the reader, than if she had taken center stage.

The proof of her effectiveness is to be found in exploring the autobiographies of women who have not been as effective in the delicate task of writing about the self while seeming to write about another. In Memory's Wall (1956; 210 pp.), Flora Eaton cannot resist making herself more important than her husband. The first forty pages are filled with her own background, praise of her Southern Ontario respectable burgher family, showing that the only difference between them and the Eatons was money.<sup>14</sup> This is certainly true, yet in a book beginning with a portrait of "Lady Eaton" in "Eaton Hall" one must conclude that Flora McCrea's true claim to fame is that she married an Eaton. Since Jack Eaton is not mentioned until page 40 and dies young (by page 140) a good half of the 210 pages is proudly about the autobiographer. It is not as compelling or interesting a story as Munday's is, not because Flora Eaton was not integrally involved in her husband's life and the life of the great commercial enterprise his family headed, but because she fails to make that essential imaginative identification with his personality that women do who write of the other in order to discover the self. Eaton's book remains a memoir of social achievements rather than a memoir that through its identification with its people and times becomes an autobiography.

A different but related problem is encountered in I Was There (1938; 131 pp.) by Edith Tyrrell, whose husband was a pioneering geographer and geologist in the Shield country. Tyrrell's "reminiscences" are successful autobiography when she tells of her upbringing as the daughter of a nineteenth-century clergyman.<sup>15</sup> In

recreating her parents' happy marriage, their solid faith, their careful raising of their daughters, she presents an effective self-portrait of a happy woman. When she turns to her husband's life, one that certainly offered the excitement of personal risk and adventure, Tyrrell's writing is not as effective, principally because she is in Ottawa raising children while her husband undertakes his adventures. Not that the autobiography of a nineteenth-century Ottawa mother could not be a good one, but it must be told from the point of view of someone integrally involved with the experience being related, not by a distant voice. Thus, to succeed in the "hidden" autobiographical style of the wife who tells her story through her husband's life, two features are essential: to identify the self very fully with the other, and to share a large part of the experience of the other.

The woman who is most successful as an autobiographer in this regard is Mina Hubbard who wrote A Woman's Way Through Unknown Labrador (1908, 1981; 305 pp.). Hubbard is so modest in her identification with her husband that her name appears in the 1908 edition only as Mrs. Leonidas Hubbard. As Pierre Berton explains in his forward to the 1981 edition, she undertook her amazing journey through Labrador, which supplies us with the first eyewitness accounts and usable maps of the district, to uphold the honor and reputation of her husband, who had died in a similar effort. His integrity as an explorer had been impugned and his wife follows his lead for the purpose of "correcting misleading accounts" of his doomed journey. Hubbard is able to recreate her husband's adventure, yet the adventure is her own because he is dead. At the same time, she commits no act of rebellion in undertaking the

journey, since she does so in the name of love for him and with companions that he would have approved of. It would seem that Hubbard is one of the few traditionally defined women who can really have her cake and eat it too (autobiographically speaking) as she sets off on her great adventure.

She succeeds largely through writing about the men to whom she is so grateful, her husband's friends, her own guides, and by contrasting her own inexperience with their competence. As well, her faithful descriptions of the actual conditions, both the beautiful and the terrible, of a trip through Labrador, enliven the account. With the men and the landscape acting as the "others" which dominate the pages, the occasional inclusion of what Berton calls her "cris de coeur," functions to intensify the authenticity of the account, to make it truly autobiographical. On one occasion, after describing the various good qualities of her male companions, then describing the beauty of their camping spot, she muses that "It was wild and beautiful, but as an exquisite, loved form from which the spirit has fled. The sense of life, of mystery, and magic seemed gone, and I wondered if the time could come when beauty would cease to be pain."<sup>16</sup> Thus, by focusing on others, then the physical environment infused with the presense of a lost "other," then binding these together in the reader's awareness with the personal reflection, she creates the considerable autobiographical achievement that is the result of balancing the need to put the other before the self and the tension of needing nevertheless to be one's own person. For Mina Hubbard the journey through Labrador and the writing about it acts as that life-defining experience that can powerfully

inform the memoir that concentrates on one historical experience. Her "woman's way" allows her to become the autobiographical consciousness, the aware, perceiving, feeling, achieving consciousness that binds the experience of the other to the experience of the self, creating a definition of self that is inclusive rather than exclusive. ]

All of the autobiographies of achieving women considered thus far were written before the second wave of the feminist movement in the 1960s and '70s. After the "consciousness raising" experience of those years, autobiographies by Canadian women begin to appear in which the writers confront society and its failures regarding women in a more assertive manner. As well, these autobiographers tend to emphasize their self-growth as individuals who take responsibility for their own lives. The women who write before this time (except McClung to a limited degree) are usually fairly comfortable with a memoir-style of autobiography in which elements of confrontation are muted and in which shifts in their own psyches are backgrounded, rather than foregrounded material. Before the '70s, the memoir style dominated the other elements in achieving women's autobiographies. After the '70s women find the need for a more recognizable "hybridization" of forms that is a phenomenon common to contemporary (particularly women's) autobiography. At the same time, although such women often seek revolutionary changes in society, they feel the same need for "connection" that previous women autobiographers felt and thus attempt to meld their confessional and confrontational needs with the traditional memoir style which emphasizes connection with the community rather than separation from it.

Even such a traditionally structured account as Anne Francis, An

Autobiography (1974; 318 pp.), in which Florence Bird recounts her early life as a privileged daughter of a well-to-do Philadelphia doctor and her later life as the Canadian media personality Anne Francis-- breaks through its conventional pattern in that Bird confronts our contemporary society, not with its injustice to herself, but its injustice to all women.

In many ways Bird's life-story is a paradigm of the achieving woman's life. Her early years, privileged in important ways, such as in her superior education, contains that tension of early identification with the father and ambiguous but strong feelings about the mother that make the lives of these daughters a restless search for the male path of achievement combined with a need to connect with traditional aspects of womanhood.

Bird identifies two life events as shaping her destiny. Both are connected to "others" that are by now familiar from earlier autobiographies of women who immigrate: the husband and Canada itself. Her marriage to an English reporter, who views the world more internationally than her establishment American family, and their decision to move away from both their origins to find a new and equal relationship in Canada, changes the patterns of her life.

As a reporter's wife, learning to be a reporter herself and unburdened by family responsibilities, Bird lives a largely unconflicted "masculine" existence while she and her husband pursue lives as investigative reporters and intellectuals in Montreal in the 1930s. But it is in Winnipeg during World War II that Bird begins to find the truly significant others, ones that will not only give her life its

full-definition by completing her feminine view of herself but will ask her to confront society in a different way. This confrontation moves the last part of the autobiography out of the purely memoir style to one verging on the kind of identification with a religion or cause that marks apologists' accounts.

By the outbreak of the War it is obvious to Bird that she will not have children, and at the same time there arrives from England the wife and children of an old friend of her husband's who seek sanctuary. In describing the adjustments made by this woman in the years she lived in Canada, Bird observes that "her extraordinary will to survive, her sheer gut courage, carried her through. She grew amazingly .... She was an inspiring example of the way a woman, who for years uses only a small portion of her ability, can realize hitherto undeveloped potential under the pressure of harsh necessity."<sup>17</sup> Bird could just as well be describing herself, as she begins to see the ways in which she has not taken responsibility for her own life. In addition, an accident in which her house-maid almost dies of a self-induced abortion, turns Bird's attention to the plight of women as second-class citizens. As her own career grows, and as she helps her previously strong husband fight alcoholism, Bird is forced out of her position as protected girl-wife into a life where she feels completely changed; at the death of her difficult but beloved mother she observes: "Yesterday was gone forever" (p. 199).

Such confessional statements on the part of achieving women always contain a large measure of irony, whether intentional or otherwise, for although Bird feels that she is leaving behind the image of womanhood

her mother taught her, in her new image of herself as freer more active woman she seeks a connection with womanhood that is in a profound sense "traditional." Shaping her autobiography around the great change in her feeling about womanhood, Bird begins her prologue with the moment that Lester Pearson asked her to head the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, and she views her life in hindsight as leading to this moment. In many ways the account of her struggles against an uncaring and often hostile Canadian public is the way in which she reestablishes her closeness with her maternal sources, a closeness she could never feel with her own mother.

This theme of connection culminates in Bird's recreation of an incident in which she, after many months of hearing the stories of Canadian women, is able to facilitate one woman's personal goal, an Eskimo woman's adoption of children under her care. Bird recounts the moment in the iconography of mythic fiction: "The mother stood up and faced the now silent women in the room. Her face was beautiful with relief and joy as she looked at them. She stretched wide her arms, her hands open-palmed, in a spontaneous, embracing gesture of happiness. I found that I was weeping. I was poignantly aware of the deep kinship of all women everywhere and in all ages" (p. 281). Thus, despite her rejection of women's helplessness and of her own dependence as a young woman, it is the building of an image of herself as the kin of the traditional woman, fulfilling a traditional though newly-defined mothering function, that Bird seeks.

Despite her stance as apologist for the rights of the excluded (female) half of society, however, Bird's is never really the voice of



the outsider, for even her work as Head of the Royal Commission is undertaken under the protection of male authority. Yet, at the same time as Bird wrote her autobiography, other women were writing life-stories which began to express the experience of females who receive few or no benefits from the established social structure. A most important characteristic of these autobiographies is that despite the change in tone from the confident memoir style of the works previously discussed and the presence of greater confessional and apologist characteristics, these autobiographers, like the "insiders" I have highlighted, continue to find that even though there are strong male influences in their upbringing, a connection with a powerful feminine ideal offers them a sense of self-completion.

One of the earliest memories of Ann Henry, recounted in her autobiography laugh, baby, laugh (1970; 187 pp.), is of her mother's being taken away to a mental hospital because she has tried to kill Ann and her older sister with a knife. Because she grows up without maternal protection, losing even her older sister in her late teens due to a dreadful medical error, Henry learns more and more to put her trust in men and to shape her personality in their image and style. She is left largely unprotected from exploitation by individuals and society when, lacking maternal protection, she undertakes male-style adventures. Her father, urged on by Henry's assertive self-confidence, allows her as a sixteen-year-old to work as a high-diver in a circus, though she can neither swim nor dive. His only caution is that she must write him everyday so he can be assured, not that she is alive and well, but that her virtue is intact!

Henry presents herself as a dichotomy consisting of two unhealed parts, a heroic self that exists in her imagination, an imagination inspired by the confrontational political stories of her father, and a real-life self, a completely innocent, often victimized self. In fact the personality Henry presents to the reader is in many ways like the part in a play she humorously describes herself as having played at seventeen: "Lil-Mim, half-savage, half-civilized, half-woman, half animal." She adds that after the play she took "the cast of eleven hungry actors home one night for tea."<sup>18</sup> This mothering act on the part of the young women who played the part of a divided self is similar to the one that Henry wishes to accomplish in her own life. In fact, the autobiography is Henry's effort to bring her "half savage, half-civilized" selves together in a vision of motherhood that accepts both aspects of herself as valid.

From the beginning of laugh, Henry characterizes herself as wanting to escape from real life by imagining fine destinies for herself as a kind of Isadora Duncan free spirit: "Stirred by the rousing theatricals of my father, my heart was the repository of a thousand and one vague hopes and dreams .... I would ... become a Heroine, one of those heroic martyrs my father admired, immortalized in song and story" (p. 22). Part of Henry's technique is to deflate her own dream-self by presenting the reader with the reality that surrounds her own naive hopes, the realities of poverty and victimization. She and her sister are farmed out to cruel foster parents, and even when they are with their father they suffer from poverty and lack of care.

The device that prevents Henry from rejecting either side of her self as unworthy is the device of the "laugh" that she highlights in her title. She is able to see the humorous in the most horrendous moments. For example, when, as an adult she spends some time in rural poverty burdened with the care of her three children, she portrays her romantic self taking pastoral delight in the Pembina valley where she and her little ones, children of nature, "lifted our faces to the hills and sky, lay on the sun-hot river bank and laughed, becoming one with the earth" (p. 104). But winter makes the child of nature the victim of an uncaring society; her husband leaves her (an event which by this time in the autobiography has reached the last of its several repetitions) and the community turns against her. Henry tells of these events without bitterness, finding the humorous as often as possible. Writing of how she intends to earn her living as a chicken farmer she mocks her own naivety in this description: "Soon, like Joan Crawford, in dirndl and kerchief, I would stand behind a gay stall at a market, selling my plump, dressed birds and bring home bagfuls of cash .... [this hope] was based on the assumption that the chicken-raiser knew something about chickens and also had plenty of food and other facilities" (p. 106).

The writing act, informed by humor, becomes the way in which Henry heals the division in her personality and maintains her sanity, as her mother could not. It also becomes her means of earning a living, for by now her own experience as a victim has allowed her to write feelingly of others' problems and leads eventually to a job as a reporter. But as well, the writing of laugh becomes the means of confronting the society that victimized her and the vehicle through which she confesses the ways

that she has needed to take control of her own life and end her victimization.

The romantic self, that invited some of her own victimization, is not rejected but made a functioning part of the strong maternal figure she presents to the reader at the end of the book. Whereas in the past, part of her romantic dream was to find a strong maternal protection--she even marries her husband partly because she romanticizes his very domestic mother--now she can use her imaginative abilities to make herself, in the very practical sense of earning a living through her writing, a strong maternal figure to her own children.

Typically, instead of concluding with her own accomplishments as a writer and media personality, she recounts the victory of her most significant "other," her son, the actor Donnelly Rhoades. She has brought him up to remember only the strengths of his male parent, rather than his father's desertion of the family, and at the same time she has tried to show her son how he can be more responsible as a man than his father. She largely succeeds, for the precociously responsible son is as much the hero of the autobiography as Henry is the heroine. When he plays an acting role in which he must tell his play-father that he hates him, Henry sees that he has been able to build a self that makes positive use of all the terrible emotions of his childhood. She thus identifies with his success, since she was the one who kept her children free of emotional crippling. In her epilogue, she celebrates her own success as a mother as well as her son's success as an actor by telling of sending her son a telegram which might well be her own motto: "Sweet are the uses of adversity" (p. 187).

Henry's insistence on acceptance of all parts of the self, of the whole personal past, as opposed to trying to exorcize its influence and show the self as a "convert" from one way of life to another, is typical of women's autobiography, as also is her desire to place her success as a mother ahead of her success in her career. In addition, her continuing search for maternal stability, which she finally finds in herself is a typical act of women autobiographers.

In her consideration of American women in "The Metaphysics of Matrilinearism in Women's Autobiography," Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos states that there is a "collective though sometimes unconscious urge in many of these autobiographies ... to give flesh once more to the archetype that the Eleusinian rites embodied."<sup>19</sup> The personality type that Demetrakopoulos describes as typical of these autobiographers is certainly applicable to Ann Henry: "Women can be more complex than most men because they grow in a non analytical 'both/and' way that defies and exceeds perfection. The pressure of different roles that conflict with perfection of any one role makes, furthermore, a great deal of women's individuation intra-psychic (perhaps more necessarily than a man's because of the pressures on her of mothering and wifing); that is, her imagination and fantasy life complete her sense of self" (p. 199). Henry finds that through her writing she can not only bring together her imaginary and real worlds but create her maternal security by quite literally writing herself into existence as a strong mother figure, both by earning her family's living as a writer and by drawing her self-portrait as mother in her autobiography.

The struggle to become strong despite the deprivation of an important maternal element in childhood seems to mark the lives of many achieving women. In the case of Maria Campbell, the author of Half breed (1973; 157 pp.), the effort is complicated not only by poverty, as was Henry's, but by her position at the bottom of everyone's social scale, that of a Metis. It is a typically feminine move on her part to give her autobiography the same name as has been used as a term of scorn by whites and Indians in Canadian society. Instead of rejecting the title of abuse, she transforms it into a term of pride, just as she rescued her own life from degradation.

Like other achieving women, she starts life as her father's favorite. Until a younger brother grows old enough, she is the one who accompanies her father hunting and engages in other father-son activities. Her identification with him seems to be part of the cause of her later abuse of her feminine self. Her father, though often generous and loving, beats and abuses her mother in response to his own frustrations as a Metis persecuted by white society. The death of her mother when Campbell is still a child leaves the daughter prematurely responsible for herself and others. Later in life, Campbell not only subjects herself to the exploitation of men, but exploits her own body through prostitution, as well as through alcohol and drug abuse. Just as her father abuses the feminine, so does she in trying to follow the "male" path that he has exemplified for her.

The autobiography becomes a powerful confessional instrument which Campbell uses to put her own degradation behind her. It is also a means to help other Metis. Through the detailing of her own pain and

accomplishment she shows how such a renewal can be gained. At this point in her life, when she is attempting to restructure her personality in a less self-destructive mode, she finds she cannot do so without reference to strong maternal models. Another Metis woman helps her to return to the model that has always been available in Campbell's life but not realized until she undertakes a conscious journey towards self-completion. Campbell's paternal great-grandmother, "Cheechum," was a Metis woman who was a niece of Gabriel Dumont. She never swerved in her loyalties to Riel and the Metis cause in her long and difficult life in which she had to fight not only the prejudices of whites but also the treatment inflicted by Metis men on their women. In her dealings with Campbell she emphasized pride in herself as a Metis and as a woman. It was Cheechum who had once told Campbell that she would have to go out into the world and find her own answers. Close to the end of Half breed, Campbell realizes that she has "misinterpreted what she [Cheechum] had taught me. She had never meant that I should go out into the world in search of fortune, but rather that I go out and discover for myself the need for leadership and change."<sup>20</sup> In other words the ego-shaped journey for individual "fortune" is not suitable for the Metis woman; hers must be a journey towards "leadership."

For Campbell that has meant a strong political involvement in the progress of her people, one often hampered by the attitudes of men inside the Metis community. But she takes a philosophically embracing stand on this matter: "I've met many native leaders who have treated me the same [as an inferior because she is female] and I've learned to accept it. I realize now that the system that fucked me up fucked up

our men even worse. The missionaries had impressed upon us the feeling that women were a source of evil. This belief, combined with the ancient Indian recognition of the power of women, is still holding back the progress of our people today" (p. 144).

Through her use of Cheechum as a paradigm, and through her own autobiography, Campbell attempts to restore an archetypal image of woman as powerful and good. The importance of this concept as the explicit intention of Half breed is emphasized by the way in which she traces her own fall from innocence to an "evil" life and her restoration of herself to a position of "good" woman, as mother and political activist. Her final emphasis on the importance of the strong and good woman as archetypal leader for Native people is made by ending the autobiography with the death of Cheechum who "waited all her life for a new generation of people who would make this country a better place to live in" (p. 156). By implication Campbell sees herself as a leader of that "new generation," in the way that Cheechum once predicted she would be.

Campbell's emphasis on the feminine continuum between herself and her female ancestor is implicitly at the heart of the autobiographies of most achieving women. Psychologically, if not mythically and physically, women who define themselves by male patterns, nevertheless seek a reunion with older feminine values. Thus, Binnie-Clark conjuring up her "virgin" Mother-Canada, Martha Black seeking her "lodestar," McClung limiting her ambitions to keep her grasp on the maternal, Florence Bird weeping at the maternal gesture of an Eskimo woman, Ann Henry healing herself to create herself as mother--all feel the same, often unvoiced need that Campbell makes more explicit: the need for a



tradition of feminine strength in order to undertake a life of achievement nurtured by female rather than male values. In this way, although these women "turn away in spirit from past existence," in a personal sense, they do so for the purpose of seeking an archetypal configuration that is part of the collective past of all women. *K*

## NOTES -- CHAPTER 5

- <sup>1</sup> Alfred Kazin, "Autobiography as Narrative," Michigan Quarterly Review, 3, (1964), 216.
- <sup>2</sup> Sandra Frieden, "Women's Coming to Consciousness," in Autobiography: Self Into Form, German-Language Autobiographical Writings of the 1970s (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang GmbH, 1983), p. 103.
- <sup>3</sup> Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice, Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 156.
- <sup>4</sup> Judy LaMarsh, Memoirs of a Bird in a Gilded Cage (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1968, 1969), p. 1.
- <sup>5</sup> Margaret Trudeau, Beyond Reason (New York: Paddington Press, 1979), p. 20, and Consequences (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1982).
- <sup>6</sup> Georgina Binnie-Clark, A Summer on the Canadian Prairie (London: Edward Arnold, 1910), p. 114.
- <sup>7</sup> Georgina Binnie-Clark, Wheat and Women (Toronto: Bell and Cockburn, 1914), p. 396.
- <sup>8</sup> Mrs. George Black, F.R.G.S., M.P. for the Yukon, My Seventy Years, as told to Elizabeth Bailey Price (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1938), p. 17.
- <sup>9</sup> Roger J. Porter, "Edwin Muir and Autobiography: Achetype and Redemptive Memory," The South Atlantic Quarterly, 77 (1978), 505.
- <sup>10</sup> Nellie L. McClung, The Stream Runs Fast, My Own Story (Toronto: Thomas Allen Ltd., 1945), p. viii.
- <sup>11</sup> Nellie L. McClung, Clearing in the West, My Own Story (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1935), p. 177.
- <sup>12</sup> Candace Savage, Our Nell, A Scrapbook Biography of Nellie L. McClung (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1979), p. 115.
- <sup>13</sup> Luta Munday, A Mouny's Wife, Being The Life Story of One Attached To The Force But Not Of It (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada, Ltd., 1930), p. 211.
- <sup>14</sup> Flora McCrea Eaton, Memory's Wall, The Autobiography of Flora McCrea Eaton (Toronto: Clarke Irwin and Company, Limited, 1956).

15 Edith Tyrrell, I Was There, A Book of Reminiscences (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1938).

16 Mina Hubbard, A Woman's Way Through Unknown Labrador (1908; New York; Portugal Cove, Nfld.: Breakwater Press, 1981), p. 64.

17 Flora Bird, Anne Francis, An Autobiography (Toronto: Clarke Irwin and Company Ltd., 1974), p. 175-176.

18 Ann Henry, laugh, baby, laugh (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1970), p. 1.

19 Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos, "The Metaphysics of Matrilinearism in Women's Autobiography: Studies of Mead's Blackberry Winter, Hellman's Pentimento, Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, and Kingston's The Woman Warrior" Women's Autobiography, p. 181.

20 Maria Campbell, Half breed (McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1973), p. 143.

## CHAPTER 6 - LITERARY WOMEN: UNMASKING THE SELF

In her chapter "The Unveiling of Woman" in A Woman Speaks, Anais Nin says that one of women's chief strengths as writers is their ability to speak of the "personal world." She notes, however, that "This personal focus was actually treated in a very derogatory way by men critics--as a very small kingdom, as a minor world, as a world that didn't have stature because it wasn't concerned with larger movements of history."<sup>1</sup> The critical repercussions of this dismissal of the personal as a "very small kingdom" probably best explains why so few women writers have turned to autobiography, just as the recentness of autobiographical scholarship in Canada possibly accounts for the reluctance of Canadian women artists to write openly about themselves. Instead, their life stories come to us in highly disguised forms, or seriously compromised by an inadequate grasp of how to write with a truly "personal focus." But in the moments when Canadian literary women have broken through the restrictions of disguise (or more often found ways to use the disguises artfully), and have overcome the formal problems connected with the genre, the results indicate that a great possibility for literary excellence lies waiting in the "small kingdom" of the personal story.

One of the disguises under which literary women have tested the waters of autobiography, involves the use of the reportage style, whereby the personal story is told while other material with which the "reporter" claims to be concerned is foregrounded. This subtle use of this kind of "other" is well illustrated by a series of articles that

Gabrielle Roy wrote for various periodicals over three decades. Collected in book form in The Fragile Lights of Earth (1982; 222 pp.) the articles at one level would seem to be observations on Canadian ethnic and political topics with a few personal memoir pieces added. But read as a continuum, the reportage "disguise" becomes background and the personal story becomes foregrounded. This is made possible because of the editor's selection and arrangement of the individual works. Roy says in her preface that she "entrusted François Ricard with the task of choosing these texts out of a much larger number, and of grouping them as he saw fit."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in the strictest sense, we must consider Fragile Lights as a kind of mélange of autobiography and biography, a kind of "auto-biography," another mixture of forms that women find when they seek to write of their "mixed" lives. Roy indicates that she has understood the unusualness of the formal direction she and her editor found when she continues her comment on the tandem relationship of editor and writer: "Progressing through these writings as through a labyrinth, he managed to grasp I know not what Ariadne's thread that led him toward a point of light, glimpsed by me but found by him and so, perhaps, made accessible to others" (p. 5). In fact, Fragile Lights provides a very well-marked path by which we begin with the writer's more public persona, and arrive at "a point of light" that is Roy's personal story.

The first section of the book is entitled "Peoples of Canada," in which articles from the 1940s give Roy's personal impressions of various Canadian ethnic groups. But whether she is writing of Hutterites, Mennonites, Jews, Germans or Ukrainians, in each article she presents

the personal story of one individual, usually a woman, with whom she has had a revealing personal contact. The use of this strategy repeatedly in the articles gives these figures an archetypal significance as representatives of each ethnic group and ultimately as symbolic of some personal quality important to Roy in her own identity.

In "The Hutterites," it is the young girl Barbara, who despite her hard-working, confined life, typical of her sect, also has the same determination as her ancestors to know the truth through her own efforts. She asks Roy to send her books that will help her know all of Canada. In "The Mennonites" her female figure is an old "Martha" who cannot be comfortable dying in a hospital because her husband is home milking the cows, which is "women's work" (p. 43). Ironically, Martha's conservatism is part of the composite figure that Roy is building, just as is Barbara's desire for new knowledge. In the same way women's desire to make the stranger welcome, to know the larger world through personal contact with individuals, is figured in Rebecca Goldsberg, who in "Palestine Avenue" hurries through multitudes of tasks to entertain the outsider (Roy) with energy and delight.

The examination of the "others" of the various ethnic groups ends with an article about Gaspé fishermen in which one of the fishermen calls Roy "the story-telling woman" (p. 89). With her own identity established as one who tells the stories of others, Roy's personal story-telling begins. In "Manitoba," originally published in 1962, and throughout the second section of the book entitled "Memories," we follow a more personal thread that builds a picture of Roy as coming from a strong but small ethnic minority, one that also survives by the strength

of its women. "My Manitoba Heritage," published first in 1970, stands at the center of this maze-like movement from the public Roy to the private Roy. In it she speaks especially of her maternal heritage: "If she lived now ... my grandmother would likely be director of some big business or heading up a Royal Commission on the status of women. In her day her talents were fully occupied from dawn till dusk making soap or cloth or shoes" (pp. 145-146). She goes on to describe her own mother's life, exiled from Quebec, and her father's work with the settlement of new immigrants. In this way she reveals the sources of her own identity, for these "others" represent her own feeling about exile from Manitoba and her keen interest in ethnicity.

Each "article" emphasizes the "fragility" of identity, and in doing so leads us to the writer's own "fragile" position. Every factor in her life, her ethnic position as Franco-Manitoban, her national origin, her gender, her place of birth and upbringing, would argue for a "fragile" chance at success as an internationally known writer. This is illustrated by "How I Received the Femina," in which Roy describes the reaction of French women to her winning this award for The Tin Flute. To them she seems such an unlikely type that they ask, "is she indeed a real person? Is she not, perhaps, a myth?" Her answer: "All right, let's say I'm a myth ... and we'll make peace on that" (p. 175). The odd mélange of biography, social commentary, memoir, and personal philosophy that The Fragile Lights of Earth becomes is a kind of creation of a personal myth of identity which Roy manages without ever seeming to write autobiography. The reader must, like the maze journeyer, discard appearances and trust the thread of metaphor and

image that makes each of these separate articles a part of the "pathway" that Roy describes in her preface: "but do we think of our passage through life and work as a pathway while we are creating it? With hindsight we may find some trace of a design" (p. 4).

The design that allows us to read Roy's collection of "articles and memories" as autobiography is largely due to the "trust" she put in her editor. But, ironically, perhaps more can be learned about the autobiographical impulse when an author reneges on that trust. Such is the case with Dorothy Livesay and her editor David Arnason, in the creation of Right Hand Left Hand (1977; 280 pp.), a collection of documents, poetry, fiction and non-fiction by Livesay and others which illustrates the major social, political and literary events important to Livesay's life in the thirties. Subtitled (in the paper edition), A True Life of the Thirties, the book contains items as contrasting as socialist handbills, social-realist art, photographs of the unemployed, Livesay's poetry, personal accounts of the times, excerpts from her letters, her associates' letters and even a hazy picture of Livesay and women-friends in the nude!<sup>3</sup>

According to Arnason, the Press Porcépic originally wished to do a book about the left wing in the 1930s using Livesay's life as illustration.<sup>4</sup> Arnason was approached by Livesay to act as editor and saw the book as an opportunity to use some of Livesay's unpublished or forgotten work from that period. It was his conception to make the book a "collage" of many kinds of items that would illustrate the texture of the times and the life of a poet whose political commitment was as great as her literary commitment. On Livesay's specific instruction the book



was not meant as a memoir or autobiography, for she was at that time (the mid-seventies) involved in writing her memoirs. Eventually, since she had abandoned that project, Livesay agreed to the use of certain parts of the memoirs. Arnason completed two-thirds of the work toward the book, choosing from the mass of material offered by Livesay, editing the poetry and fiction that were to be included from the period, gathering the external materials and working out the chronology of the book and of Livesay's life during the period. At this point, however, Livesay took the materials out of Arnason's hands and completed the selection of photographs, the final selection of letters and the final positioning of items with the help of the book's designer Kim Todd, at Press Porcépic. Since part of the "collage" was thus the work of Todd, Arnason insisted that her name appear as editor as well as his own.

Arnason has pointed to specific ways in which the order and selection of items changed after the book left him. In examining these changes, one finds that they seem connected with Livesay's personal life and her feelings about being a woman. Such additions are several letters to "Dear Jinnie" (pp. 36-48) which Livesay wrote in Paris to Jinnie Morton in Canada and which describe her personal life as a student, including reference to the man with whom she lived. Arnason had intended to use only one of these letters. A projected section entitled "Toronto 1934" has items such as "Women are Mugs" inserted and is headed by a quotation from Livesay: "Such were the dichotomies I found in male-female relationships in the thirties. In theory, we were free and equal as comrades of the left. In practice our right hand was tied to the kitchen sink!" (p. 115). The new inclusions put the section

in contradiction with itself. "Toronto 1934" at one level would seem to be about conditions of unemployment in Canadian cities in that year, but the new material and commentary adds a feminist dimension and -- with the nude picture--a quasi-erotic dimension that does not seem to be the intention of the original book.

Arnason's introduction ties the title of the collection to the divisions between the wealthy and the poor in Canada, whereas Livesay's reference to the right/left dichotomy in the "kitchen sink" comment, as well as some of her other additions, seems to point to the hypocrisies of leftist males who preached equality as long as it did not apply to their women. Arnason's ideas about the "massive contradictions" of the thirties, of which he writes in his introduction, do not propose such an exploration of male/female "dichotomies."

Why did Livesay not simply tell her editor that her conception of the "collage" had changed and then work out a new arrangement that used more of the material of her personal life and her feelings about relationships between the sexes? Perhaps the answer lies, at least partially, in the fact that Livesay has always had a strong impulse to write autobiography, but has had a problem finding a form which would allow for full expression. A consideration of the autobiographical works she has published and the unpublished autobiographical materials in the Dorothy Livesay papers at the University of Manitoba, supports this suggestion. Besides Right Hand Left Hand, Livesay has published a series of short stories, collected as A Winnipeg Childhood, which are, by her own testimony, autobiographical in all aspects except the names of characters. Her papers also include the journals she kept over many

years and in which reference is made to several autobiographical projects, including a proposal for an autobiography based on comparing her own experience of Africa with that of her mother's travels on that continent.<sup>5</sup> Livesay's failure to bring all these projects together into one coherent autobiography may be explained by her traditional and exclusive definition of the genre: "autobiography ... concerns one's self, one's inner life; whereas memoirs are recollections about other people."<sup>6</sup> By accepting these traditional divisions, Livesay has hindered herself in the sense that women's autobiographies require deliberate bridging and mixing of forms.

Although Gabrielle Roy seems to have had a kind of autobiography created for her by the insight of her editor, and Livesay seems to have been trying to use her editor to create autobiography while not even admitting to herself that she was doing that (truly not allowing the left hand to know what the right hand was doing), these extreme and largely unconscious strategies of indirection can sometimes be made more conscious and deliberate by a writer who wishes to tell the personal story while not seeming to do so. Such is the case with the Winnipeg writer Melinda McCracken.

McCracken did not set out to write a memoir when she undertook Memories are Made of This (1975; 118 pp.), the personal reminiscence of her Osborne street neighborhood.<sup>7</sup> She speaks of the motivation of the book as sociological. In an interview McCracken explained that "the dust of the sixties" was beginning to settle and she was asked by the book's publisher, also from her childhood neighborhood, to interview her old classmates who had graduated from high school in 1957 to discover

the ways in which the changes of the sixties had effected them.<sup>8</sup> With the background of her years as a writer and columnist for The Globe and Mail, as well as having her fiction published in national magazines such as Chatelaine, and the fortuitous circumstance of coming from such a typically Canadian neighborhood as the Riverview area of Winnipeg, with its mix of working-class and middle-class citizens, McCracken anticipated no problems with the assignment. But when she produced the interviews she had made with old classmates, her publisher commented that the interviews were not "insightful" enough, that "it was as if people had lived their lives without the sixties ever having happened." Rather than abandoning the project, McCracken explains that she felt that "what was true of my childhood would be true of others," and proceeded to write the text of the book as viewed through her own position as typical child of the neighborhood and with the additional hindsight of someone who had fully lived the adventures of the sixties.

Although the library cataloguing data at the beginning of the book classifies Memories as "social life and customs," and its subject matter as "Winnipeg," it is also very much the story of Melinda McCracken. In each section some part of the writing ties the place and its customs to the personal life. The very impersonal first section--"Out Osborne Street" in which the geography and the history of Riverview are outlined --ends by identifying four families, her own and those of her close friends, thus violating its geography and history-lesson style with this kind of personalization of the neighborhood. McCracken continues this strategy in her concluding paragraph: "All four families were middle class, had had baby girls in 1939 or 1940 and lived near each other.

The four girls, Sue, Barb, Fran and I, were friends from the very beginning" (p. 8). Although her titles for the individual chapters are broad and impersonal ones, such as "The Great Flood," "Music," "Sex" and "High School," McCracken is able to lead the reader through her own personal history, by allowing us at key moments to see her particular place in the mosaic of the neighborhood.

As well as using the neighborhood as "other," McCracken brings a specifically autobiographical tone to the work of one looking back on a way of life through the adult experience that has been radically different. As McCracken put it in our interview, she came to view her childhood neighborhood through "Toronto eyes." This ironic viewpoint adds to the autobiographical impact of the book. For example, when McCracken tries to explain the reasons why her childhood friends resisted the great changes of the sixties and choose lifestyles similar to their parents', she writes:

There was just too much of a good thing. There was the security of prairie uneventfulness, the security of marriage, of a warm house in winter with snug padded rooms. The security of health, of youth, of good people to help you, of father's job and mother's love and good meals. The security of public morality forbidding mention of sex, violence or bad language. Life was stuffed with security. It filled the air around you like cotton batting. You had no idea of what it felt like to need something. You knew only good; you had no idea of what bad was at all (p. 65).

This paragraph moves a long way from the tone of the social-history reporter offering personalized comment on her subject. The language contains the conflicted psyche of one who loves the past and perhaps yearns for the security of her childhood and yet feels how unrealistically it prepared the child for the real adult world of the

late twentieth century.

The "you" of this passage is very definitely an autobiographical "I" who undercuts the nostalgia of childhood memoirs with the adult voice that rejects the past with phrases like "stuffed with security" and "cotton batting." As well, McCracken's techniques of personalization include those familiar to the reporter, such as the shading word or phrase which hides itself behind the straightforward statement of fact. For example, McCracken ends her book by describing a visit to her old high school in the 1970s. The visit shows that only externals seemed to have changed. She concludes: "I walked home, down the sidewalk ... remembering how worried we used to be that we'd freeze our legs beneath our short tunics before making it home. It was as cold as it ever was" (p. 118). The last sentence is a simple statement about the weather, but given its position as ending, and given McCracken's style of undercutting nostalgia with her "Toronto" eyes, the last line sums up her ambivalence about her own childhood. It was an upbringing in which nothing bad happened, but one that in its attempt to insulate leaves the child unprepared. The "cold as it ever was" describes not only the physical climate of her neighborhood but the feeling of coldness that McCracken manifests toward a falsely insulated past. The well-researched reportorial pieces, the statistics and the detail of place, custom and persons all increase the feeling of a writer holding at a distance a past that could be too easily romanticized as the "good old days," in order to discover how one can be hampered by a safe childhood.

McCracken is reluctant to identify her book as personal memoir, but

does speak of the neighborhood as "primal territory where all associations begin." She observes that for a writer the return to the childhood neighborhood can have a "powerful effect on the mind." She also believes that the "richest part of life is memory," but finds she has few memories of her personal childhood because it was so secure and uneventful. The task of writing about an uneventful middle-class upbringing, particularly that of the more protected females of that class, is a difficult challenge. The method fortuitously hit upon by McCracken succeeds by telling the story of the significant others, of place, home, school, by gathering the trivia of all the seemingly unrelated activities, from speed-skating to music festivals, in order to create a kind of memory, not of traumatic event or ego-consciousness, of psychic and spiritual development, but a rich memory of "thisness," that informs the materialistic-centered lives of much of middle-class North America. Titled after the popular song of the fifties "Memories are Made of This," her work places emphasis not so much on the "memories" as on the "this." Her choice confirms the woman autobiographer's desire to connect with the "historicity," the "thisness" of her life, as a way of achieving connection of the self with the broader community. Thus the "sociological" examination which covers the personal story is a necessary art, one which expresses the female desire for connection.

In this regard, one of the fundamental characteristics of women's accounts continues to be the need to explore the intimate relationships of the life, especially of the family, in order to discover the self. In doing so many autobiographers tend to encounter the same problem: the modes of expression available, particularly in the written language,

do not deal well with the intimate aspects of our lives. The public language of psychology and medicine, or the private language of vulgarity, distances and demeans what should be intimate and noble. Canadian women autobiographers who are also creative writers have had limited success with this problem of articulation. Fredelle Bruser Maynard, who wrote of her upbringing as the daughter of poor Jewish store-keepers on the prairies during the twenties and thirties in Raisins and Almonds (1972; 189 pp.), is one writer who attempts to grapple with the problems of describing the effect of an intimate personal relationship on the developing psyche.

She explores the relationship which often seems so central to achieving women's psyches, the father/daughter relationship. Maynard's father becomes what Mary Mason would call a "real presence" in the memoirs through his delineation as a central character in almost all of the "short stories" that comprise the book. Maynard calls him "an infinitely gentle man," a man who "felt himself privileged to serve."<sup>9</sup> It is he who, despite or because of his own failures, fills his youngest daughter with ambition to be a writer. She credits her lack of conflict about being an achieving woman to her father: "I was born a woman in a family where women were valued" (p. 181); "In a quite innocent and unselfconscious way," she recalls, her father "treated us as sexual persons--future mothers, future brides. Being a woman, I knew, was a privilege. Women were special" (p. 182).

As her father becomes aged and must be cared for as a small child, Maynard describes the effect on her of having to perform the kind of personal tasks that fall to female children in such situations: "When I



was a child, I often tried to see my father naked. I remember hanging about the kitchen door on bath nights, but for all his earthiness he was careful about that. It was no good, now, trying not to look .... Even now, in age, his sex hung enormous." She attempts to treat the bath as a normal event but her father, who has been distant in senility for some time reacts to the situation: "Drifted away he was, and confused and wandering, but that brief indignity had summoned him back to protest. A woman does not look upon her father's nakedness" (p. 174). Maynard has the ability to reveal such very personal moments through her choice of language, which is both intimate and biblical, thus emphasizing the personal and archetypal dimensions of the experience and the relationship. She carries the language of her upbringing--that emphasized the nobility of both the ordinary physical world and the world of the spirit and imagination--into her discussion of the very personal in life; she is thus able to give us an understanding of the many levels of the influence of the father/daughter relationship in creating the psyche of the woman writer.

In the last pages of Raisins and Almonds, Maynard admits that although her father was the admired person in her life, the one who through his "clear nobility provided a standard of value in my life" (p. 185), it is her mother, with her action-oriented practicality, her good sense and good health, who is the model she emulates in her own everyday life. The father, for Maynard, seems to be the "other" that represents her less easily seen characteristics, the desire for nobility of thought and spirit, and an admiration for a "physical grace" which is the embodiment of that spirit, and which seems to be the effect of the

father's masculinity on his daughter.

This embodiment of the spiritual and the physical is one Maynard seeks in her own life through the writing of her autobiographical "short stories." Her stories are an attempt to recreate what is the dichotomous essence of life, the sense of a very real physical world, as real and mundane as "Eaton's catalogue," and a sense of the spiritual that is not a transcendence but an embodiment. At its best her form combines the contrast of materially-anchored memoirs and spiritually-explorative confession, a form of autobiography that joins the seemingly contradictory elements of self and community. For Maynard the joining is figured by her recreation of her father.

Raisins and Almonds achieves its authenticity because Maynard finds formal ways in which to deal with the intimate formative relationship of her life. Conversely, such authenticity is lacking in the autobiographies of writers who have such a relationship at the center of their artistic selves and yet who fail to find a way to articulate that relationship. A case in point is Maza de la Roche's autobiography Ringling the Changes (1957; 304 pp.). The book's dedication, "for Caroline from first to last," and the prologue promise an insight into a lifetime intimate relationship between two women, that was probably responsible for de la Roche's writing career. In her first sentence she announces the centrality of this relationship: "Although I did not realize it at the time, or for many years afterward, that January day in my maternal grandfather's house, was the most important day of my life."<sup>10</sup> She describes Caroline's arrival in her life in the language one reserves for the sacred, the magical: "We were listening for the

sound of sleighbells." De la Roche goes on to embellish the scene with a "sleek bay mare," a "bright red sleigh, with its bearskin rugs," "the massive figure of my father," the mysterious bundle, unwrapped with care, and finally: "The climax was a small girl, sitting demurely on his knee, her thin little hands folded on her lap while she stared about her, dazed by the sudden change of scene which lately had befallen her . . . . She looked as though she would never smile" (p. xi-xii). The little magical gift, who is in fact her first-cousin, becomes the young writer's soulmate in their first meeting, which climaxes when the seven-year-old writer reveals her most important secret to Caroline: "'It was a dream,' I said. 'First it was a dream--then I played it--all by myself. I play it every day. But now you are here, I'll tell you and we'll play it together'" (p. xvi). The co-operative Caroline agrees and the budding writer thus shares her desire to create plays and makes her early connection with her muse figure.

Caroline remains de la Roche's life-companion. When they are adults, they share a home and adopt two children together (although de la Roche refers to Caroline as the children's aunt). Caroline, the co-star in the childhood plays, seems to play the feminine roles in the relationship: "She sewed beautifully and made herself charming clothes, while I was comparatively helpless with a needle" (p. 93). This is as deeply as de la Roche will allow the reader into the later life of the two women. The early promise of the prologue is never fulfilled, for as the autobiography proceeds it becomes less intimate and more a recording of de la Roche's family history, publishing successes, the two women's travels and social acquaintances -- in fact a memoir that lacks a

center.

The reason this happens is that de la Roche fails to reveal the nature of her relationship with Caroline. Whether or not it was a lesbian love relationship is not the most important aspect of this reticence, since such a concealment might reasonably be expected in someone writing before our contemporary habit of open sexual disclosures. What is most noticeable is de la Roche's seeming inability to articulate the intimate emotional and psychological factors of this relationship. She does not attempt to give an explanation of why and how her's and Caroline's creativity together is the most important element of her life. As a result, the reader misses any insight into de la Roche's creative process or its emotional and psychic supports.

If women's autobiographies, which as a whole emphasize the importance of personal relationship over personal ideals fail to give insight into the intimate life, they fail in a way that the career-orientated autobiographies of men do not. Whereas male confessional autobiographers from Augustine through Rousseau to the present can accomplish their purposes by using the personal life only as illustrative material in describing their psychological or religious transcendence, it would seem that the female autobiographer needs to submerge herself in the intimate details of her life in order to achieve a mature articulation of her self.

The professional female writer in Canada who is credited by the Literary History of Canada with having written the most mature autobiography<sup>11</sup> is Laura Salverson. In Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter (1939, 1981; 415 pp.) Salverson's stated aim is both societal

and personal, requiring both a memoir and a confession. She wishes "to make of a personal chronicle a more subjective therefore more sensitive record of an age."<sup>12</sup> To a large degree she is successful in fulfilling this aim: we discover through her story what it is to be the child of poor Icelanders transplanted to a new country, what it is to begin to discover one's Canadian identity as a person and a writer at a time when Canadians took little pride in their artistic accomplishments, what it is to grow up female at the beginning of the twentieth century and as a result to become near slave labor in the work force. To a large degree Salverson is able to embody these typical stories in her own story.

At the same time she is able to transmute some of the real experiences of her inner self to the page. For example, she describes the first coming to consciousness of the child through the image of her trip across the dark prairie at night: "Far ahead, in the midst of an ocean of darkness, two small jets of light stood out like candle flames braving the night. Why it should be so, I cannot say, but those wavering jets of yellow light marked a division of time for the little girl at her father's feet. From that moment her little thoughts and starry impressions were distinctly individual, and she herself no longer just the little girl who existed as a small obedient extension of her mother" (p. 12). Both her ability to use the physical environment as metaphor and her strategy of speaking of herself in the third person create the sense of wonderment at the birth of the individual consciousness in the surrounding vastness of the universe, suitably symbolized by the prairie at night.

But an equally important part of Salverson's method is shown in the

words she puts in her own mouth immediately following this discovery of separateness. Looking ahead at the house they are about to arrive at on their journey, the small child resolves: "'Even if it's a troll's house, I WON'T eat an EGG' .... In which fine frenzy a predestined rebel was born--the rebel who is myself" (p. 12). Both Salverson's humor and her ability to dramatize important moments in appropriate dialogue, give her text additional force and immediacy.

Salverson is able to describe the kind of consciousness that leads to a desire to compose. She takes time for chapters of contemplation in which she reveals her thought processes, her philosophical and psychic self: "Practical natures are not prone to vagrant dreams, nor even dimly aware of the bright immortality of illusive ideas. It is not in such a one to understand how the dreaming heart cries out against the swift eclipse of beauty, and mourns with a mist of tears the golden leaves of a thousand yesterdays. Such facile, foolish pain is very real to me--real as the purple shadows that veil in mystery the sailing horn of the young moon and the little winds that run before the night on softly whispering feet. Real as are all the innermost senses which life has stirred to passion by its flaming sword" (pp. 95-96).

Ironically, this romantic temperament lives in the body of a sickly child who must grow up to a world where daughters leave school early to become domestics, factory labor, waitresses, and seamstresses (all of these jobs Salverson herself took on at one time or another). Because of her unapologetic feminism balanced by her humor, Salverson is also able to bring alive this side of her experience as well. Describing herself at the sewing machine, at which she was expert, she writes,

"Whirling the old machine, I thought of the millions of women committed to this sort of thing, world without end. To drudgery, and pinching, and those niggardly economies that stifle the spirit and slay all hope" (p. 291). But always her outrage is tempered with humor. For example, she describes one of the emergencies of her life as a landlady while her husband is unemployed: "When I came down to get breakfast the house was like ice, all my cherished houseplants frozen, and the water pipes emitting gay fountains all over the kitchen floor .... But breakfast must go on. While George, who is a cheerful soul, though sometimes short of temper, fired the furnace with something more than wood, and flew about with a wrench, dismembering water pipes, I fed my sizable family, sloshing through the icy water in rubbers" (p. 391).

Salverson is also able authentically to recreate her relationships with her parents. Most of the first ninety-four pages are their stories, suggesting that she considers their personal background and their Icelandic heritage as important aspects of her own character. She admits quite frankly that they were often at odds with one another:

Temperamentally, they were poles apart. He was impetuous, warm-hearted, and, like every romanticist, superficial in his emotions; quick to forget both pleasure and pain. On the other hand, she was deeply reserved, somewhat cold in deportment, and, although far too sensible for neurotic brooding, seldom forgot either an injury or a kindness. Father, whose feelings were coloured by the passing moment, found it easy to express himself; whereas mother, whose sentiments were fixed, was always helplessly inarticulate where her innermost sensibilities were concerned. She had the keenest wit, in latter years often devastatingly caustic, but in those early years of growing disillusionment I think she must have

suffered mental agonies for which she found no words,  
and pride drove deeper and deeper into her heart  
(p. 69).

In revealing her parents she reveals the two sides of her own  
personality.

Despite her love and admiration for her mother, Salverson has no  
hesitation in making the following judgment: "For no matter how gentle  
and kind mama might be, and everlastingly concerned for my health, I  
knew quite well that it was papa who came nearer to understanding me.  
That this incipient understanding was not permitted to grow and outlast  
childhood was, I think, my mother's fault. In the end, she weaned me  
completely away, made an alien of the parent whose vagaries I share, and  
as I now know, diverted my normal instincts into channels of activity  
for which I had no natural talents" (p. 108).

It is this desire to emulate the father and this stated resentment  
of the mother that is at the core of another intriguing aspect of  
Salverson's autobiography: the many ways in which she attempts to bring  
together the various aspects of a divided self. As autobiographer,  
Salverson can be seen as writing two stories, the American success story  
in which the young person, against all odds, succeeds in her stated goal  
through her enterprise and persistence. The other story is less  
optimistic: that of the misunderstood and underrated child who starts  
life as a wanderer and who never really overcomes this position.<sup>13</sup>

Salverson herself was aware of this dichotomy:

In a really smart chronicle, any struggle ends at a  
prescribed climax, preferably with a happy recompense  
for all concerned, save the wilful sinner. But,  
unfortunately for the artistry of this tale, life is  
not smart. Life is a colossus too great for smart



declensions, and as indifferent to human vanities as to individual destiny. It cares nothing for the canons of art, and pursues its ironic rhythm, piling up anticlimaxes as a tidal wave piles up the wreckage it has made of some once seaworthy ship (p. 34).

Salverson wishes to achieve--and in her life, if not in her autobiography, did achieve--despite "anticlimaxes," a successful or "unified" ending of her story as immigrant's daughter, and her ambitions to be a North American success. Whatever the criticisms in her native land about the authenticity of the Icelandic elements of her novels, whatever present-day critics might say of her style, Salverson really did fulfil the import of that confessional moment that is Augustinian in its mood and structure, when in the Duluth public library the adolescent girl looks around her and vows "in a blinding flash of terrifying impertinence .... I too, will write a book, to stand on the shelves of a place like this--and I will write it in English, for that is the greatest language in the world!" (pp. 237-38). The child who did not learn English until she was ten, who came from an economically deprived background, who lived under the disadvantages of being a female, went on to become that most rare of types, a successful Canadian writer in the 1930s. Not only that, but she did it by writing about her own ethnic group, the Icelanders.

But the autobiography does leave one important area of Salverson's self insufficiently explored and unreconciled: her feminine self. The first eight years of Salverson's life were filled with the deaths of her mother's infant children, the effect of which "was a kind of fearful distaste for all babies. They were such unstable entities, predictable in nothing save the certainty of their sure departure" (pp. 138-39).

Later, as a teenager, her mother's pregnancy alienates her:

my cognizance of her condition had erected a wall of inhibiting reserve between us .... Mamma was my unquestioned voice of authority, my inspiration and source of wisdom. I had not thought of her in terms of human weakness, nor expected from her the kind of easy sympathy I had found in papa. Consequently, I was completely dazed by the shocking realization that even mamma was not exempt from the arbitrary fates. For the same intuition which had quickened my first understanding left me in no doubt as to my mother's own secret resentment. She had had enough of babies (p. 211).

As she grows into a young woman herself, Salverson shows little interest in the grooming and fashion obsessions of young girls. However, although she gives no physical description of herself as a young woman, she cannot resist, with much self-mocking humor of course, telling the reader that she was once offered a job in a chorus line because of her "perfect" legs! For Salverson, her fear of the feminine is confirmed on a visit to her Aunt Haldora's midwifery establishment:

My impulse was to flee, but my feet refused to move. What followed was so hideous, I felt as though my own flesh were riddled and torn with a battery of javelins. The sudden assault upon the nerves was nothing compared with the subsequent shock of horror when the significance of those ghastly cries flashed upon me. Everything in me revolted, every quivering sense rebelling hotly against this obscene anguish at the roots of life .... A shambles of suffering, senseless and cruel. And, I thought with fierce loathing, no life was worth such a trial of suffering (p. 259).

But as well as the suffering of childbearing, the impressionable girl is presented with the example of her Aunt, who not only pulls women safely through their agony, but defends the rights of unmarried mothers, and acts as lawyer, social worker and financial resource for many oppressed women. As Salverson observes: "Those awful moments were

often to infest my dreams, awake and asleep, but always the sturdy figure of my aunt came to the rescue. Life was full of terrors, that I perceived, but courage, plain human courage, was a force that worked miracles" (p. 260). The aunt takes on enormous stature in Salverson's life, being the woman who, when she meets St. Peter "will wave [her] forceps under his nose" (p. 260) to silence him.

Despite her admiration of her aunt, and the fact that she lived in her aunt's home for a while and trained in mid-wifery under her, Salverson remains unreconciled to the maternal world: "a world I frantically sought to dodge by burying myself in books more deeply than ever" (p. 260). So literature becomes the way, not to explore the feminine world, but to avoid it. This desire to "dodge" the female world carries over into the last part of her autobiography. When describing her reaction to becoming a mother herself she attempts to reduce the experience to just another nasty aspect of life, like faulty plumbing, or cold winters, to be coped with in a competent, no nonsense manner. Of the birth of her son she says: "There is nothing to say of my baby, except that the prospect bored me, and to give it an enterprising turn, I decided to travel fifteen hundred miles two weeks before he was born, to test the twilight sleep" (p. 375). The desperate fear of pain and loss of control that would drive a woman to make such a trip is not successfully covered by her flippant humor.

This inability to be truly open, to come to terms with what must have been a great problem for Salverson as a married woman, colors the whole final section of the autobiography, from the time she marries onward. Because of her ambivalence about the feminine roles of wife and

mother, she says little about her relationship with George Salverson, though she does record, almost as an aside, that he typed the manuscript of her first novel. Her comment on her marriage is that it was "A good way to end all my foolish fancies, and assume a time-honored business of commonplace existence" (p. 374). Her dismissal of her "foolish fancies" --in a sense the material of selfhood that she had been asking the reader to take rather seriously for almost four hundred pages--is a serious compromise of her autobiographical endeavor. As a result, Salverson deals with the important years of her adult life, as she struggles with home, family and writing, in a short forty pages. Perhaps, like her mother before her, she was "inarticulate where her innermost sensibilities were concerned" and could find "no words" to express her female condition.

Salverson cannot join the mundaneness of the housewife's world with the loftier world of the writer. When her husband urges her to come to a book store and see her first published book, she wishes to take "an hour to cut myself off in spirit from pots and pans and the four enclosing walls of a jealous house" (pp. 412-13). She confesses that she did not experience "any of that marvellous elation that embryo authors are supposed to feel on such an occasion." She is too busy remembering "all the hundred things that had stood in the road of this simple ambition" (p. 413).

The autobiography ends with a forced philosophical tone in which Salverson states her belief that life can become what we "earnestly believe and relentlessly strive to make it" (p. 415). The American Horatio Alger ending seems too simplistic for a book of such ambitious

scope and one which largely succeeds in the artistic rendering of a complex selfhood that attempts to join the dichotomies of ethnic, national, sexual and personal identities. Because of its scope and its artistry Salverson's autobiography is unique in Canadian literature, and deserves a place on any list of the world's great autobiographies. Yet its failure to come to terms with the positive and negative aspects of the feminine-maternal puts the final chapters of the autobiography under a kind of "twilight sleep" of a flawed artistry. The text loses its intimacy, the humor its healthy cathartic effect, and the personality of the writer moves away from us into self-defensive pride and protective aphorism. At the same time the irony exists that it is this aspect that presents the critic with that "dark core of unawareness" that allows the interpretive elements of the critic's reading.

In some ways, Salverson's failure to come to terms with her life as a woman is part of a societal problem in which no adequate forum, no established contexts, exist to portray certain aspects of life, particularly of female life. Writers and artists have spent a great deal of time in the twentieth century finding ways of dealing with the intimacies of sexuality, but an equal effort is needed if the physical and emotional lives of women, particularly those who spend their lives in the intimate world of the wife and mother, are to be portrayed. In A Woman Speaks, Anais Nin described this problem as one that has its origin in the extent to which our language was designed to present abstractions. A new kind of articulation, "the language of the feelings, instincts, emotions and intuitions" must come into being. Nin adds that this is "the hardest language to gain" (p. 82).

Perhaps published autobiography has been too public a forum for the development of such a language. If so, then the more private world of the writer's diary should offer an area of experimentation. Diaries exist as a kind of pre-literature, where the writer, because publication is not an immediate possibility, can risk exploring states of being not explored in more publicly established genres. In Canada, there are almost no published diaries of women writers; however, the first published volumes of L. M. Montgomery's diaries, covering the years of her youth until age thirty-six begin to give us an insight into the creative female psyche.

The 393 pages of Montgomery's selected journals covering the years 1889 to 1910, show a childhood often associated with the artistic temperament: fragile health, a supersensitive temperament, a lively imagination and an early trauma (in Montgomery's case the death of her mother).<sup>14</sup> At fourteen she begins keeping her adult diary, and for the teenage years the kind of girl that is revealed is a highly motivated, bright scholar, a happy girl bent on academic success. In fact, this is the kind of positive portrait which Montgomery later presented in her published autobiography, The Alpine Path: The Story of My Career.<sup>15</sup> But the diary also reveals a darker side. In her twenties, after proving her ability to earn her living as a teacher, and after some success as a writer of poetry and stories for magazines, at the very time of life when the personality of the writer would be expected to flourish, the shadow of her place as adult female begins to interfere with her development.

The first and most spectacular occasion was in 1898 when she broke her marriage engagement to what must have been considered an entirely suitable young man. She discovers that if she is tied to one she does not love, "My haunting humiliation and sense of bondage would never be lessened and would wear my life out" (p. 207); yet she finds that the effect of the man to whom she is really attracted is quite frightening: "like a spell [,] the mysterious, irresistible influence" (p. 209). The psychological effect of being pulled between two impossibilities takes a tremendous toll on the young romantic temperament. She can take no pleasure or feel no power in the attraction the young men feel for her. In describing how she feels when she finds herself in the same room with both of them she writes: "What I suffered that night between horror, shame and dread can never be told. Every dark passion in my nature seemed to have broken loose and run wild riot. I wonder the strife of them all did not kill me" (p. 212). The words are not a mere romantic exaggeration; the journals show the degree to which she suffered in the next years. She knew intuitively that marriage to either man would destroy her creativity, one because of his possessiveness, the other because she would have to adopt his place in society and be a farm wife.

So far, this situation (emotionally at least) could happen to any sensitive young artist, male or female. We are accustomed by various autobiographies and *kunstlerromans*, to the phenomenon of the young man leaving the homefront because it confines his spirit, to go on a quest of self-discovery, usually in foreign lands. What are the options for the female artist? They are certainly not those of Stephen Daedalus. Montgomery had two which were typical of her time: the life of an

overworked teacher boarding in other people's homes or a return to the childhood home where she must live in a state of semi-childhood, bearing many responsibilities but with no power.

In addition to there being few other options, home is the necessary choice in other ways for Montgomery. As last unmarried female relative it is her duty to look after her grandmother who raised her. As well, as the years go by she finds it harder and harder to write anywhere except in her native place. She attempts to work elsewhere, but returns home, despite the fact that home becomes more and more imprisoning, a place where she feels her presence is essential and unappreciated at the same time. As she reaches her thirties and her personal opportunities narrow, even though she has begun to have considerable professional success with the publication of Anne of Green Gables, she begins to suffer through bouts of depression and nervous illnesses, with an increase in the migraine headaches that she had had since youth. She writes: "I have had a month of nervous prostration--an utter breakdown of body, soul, and spirit." She finds that she must compel herself to do her simplest duties. She cannot eat, work, think, read or talk. She is "possessed by a very fury of restlessness, only to be endured by walking the floor until my limbs failed from exhaustion" (p. 392). Her only help is "writing it out" in her diary which she describes in the final words of the concluding entry as her "comfort and refuge" over "all these long hard, lonely thirteen years" (p. 393). Those thirteen years have been the years from age twenty-three to thirty-six, years that in a "normal" life cycle should be the most productive, most optimistic.



If the few accounts we have available are any indication, these years are often the most frustrating ones for creative women. Dorothy Livesay spent them largely as a social worker and political activist, giving too little attention to her poetry. When toward the end of these years she married, she writes of settling into private life as if it were a withdrawal or defeat (p. 278). Laura Salverson often became dangerously ill from attempting to live several lives, in which writing occupied the hours between eleven pm and three in the morning. It would be a mistake to generalize from too few examples, but these women's lives seem to support the conclusions of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar about the lives of creative women. In Madwoman in the Attic they examine the creative woman's confrontation with the female role. Gilbert and Gubar are speaking of the writing of nineteenth-century women when they compare female creativity to a damaged quality, not permitted its proper expression because of the limitations put on female life, but it would seem that this is true in Canada into the twentieth century if lives like Salverson's or Montgomery's are typical.<sup>16</sup>

One woman's life-writing does offer us some insight into all the stages of the creative female's life, even the middle stage. Emily Carr was born in 1871 and during her youth and early adulthood received the advantage of a first-class art education in San Francisco, England and France. Yet, after some years as an artist and as a teacher of art in Vancouver, in her middle years, she went through a long period of inactivity as an artist. This is partially explained in her autobiography Growing Pains (1946, 1966; 281 pp.), in the chapter

"Rejected," as being the result of the public hostility to her work which was hung in showings "either on the ceiling or on the floor."<sup>17</sup> Carr becomes a landlady, a job she "loathed" in order to earn a living and in the autobiography writes: "I never painted now--had neither the time nor wanting. For about fifteen years I did not paint" (p. 232). Carr devotes less than a page to this period of her life, and for the reader, the public rejection is not sufficient to explain this turning away from her art.

Ira Dilworth explains that to those around her, in those years, she seemed to have lost all her identity as an artist and become "an eccentric middle-aged woman who kept an apartment house ... who surrounded herself with numbers of pets."<sup>18</sup> At age fifty-six, Carr went east, where she saw the work of the Group of Seven and realized what her own art was striving toward; thus began the decade that produced her greatest paintings.

But this was not the only burst of creativity in her late years. When in her late sixties her doctors limited her access to her beloved forests because of her declining health, she began to write, a pursuit that had been secondary until that point. Her first autobiographical book, Klee Wyck (1941, 1971; 111 pp.), won the Governor General's award. The four years before her death produced the series of autobiographical books that together with her "official" autobiography, Growing Pains and her published journals, offer as nearly a complete a self-portrait of a Canadian female artist as is possible.

The books, taken together, offer us a guide to how Carr views the stages of her life, and in their stylistic variations show interesting

changes from one stage to another. The Book of Small (1942, 1966; 168 pp.), covers the years of her early childhood, beginning with an irreverent and humorous description of her first memory, her christening at age four. She describes a childhood in which, as her father's favorite, she resented the privilege of being so much in his company and yearned always for attention from her gentler mother. The trauma of her mother's death when she was twelve was emotionally catastrophic for Carr and for the family's life together. Carr describes the early years as a chronologically-centered tale, but half-way through the book becomes a series of chapters based on topics that center around the heading "A Little Town And a Little Girl."<sup>19</sup> Carr, whose instinctive feeling for form carried through from her painting to her writing, makes this major change in narration in order to show the small child's intimate world of home becoming the older child's memory of the larger social milieu that shaped her.

Klee Wyck (the name of a bird Carr was given as a nickname when she was an art student in England) takes the form of an archetypal fairy tale, that Dilworth describes as giving an impression "almost of magic, of incantation."<sup>20</sup> Like Carr's paintings, a series of swift deceptively simple sweeping sketches tell the story of her relationship with an Indian mother figure, Sophie, Carr's discovery of the great totem poles and the Indians that made them, which become the inspiration of her art.

The archetypal simplicity of Klee Wyck is replaced by a style of defensive, assertive apology in Growing Pains. The confident and often polemic defence of her life and reputation has as its penultimate chapter "Seventieth Birthday and a Kiss from Canada" in which Carr basks

in the long postponed fame and the implied pleasure of finally having all the people who jeered her, applaud her as she accepts her due proudly: "My voice rang out strong as a bull's and I was not scared" (p. 274). Although the official autobiography reveals a more "bullish" Carr than the other books, it also reveals an interesting similarity between Carr, Montgomery and Salverson, all of whom felt that they could do their creative work only on home ground. Carr was so homesick in England that, after she developed tuberculosis, doctors advised her that only living in her home place would restore her completely to health.

To discover the private woman behind the brave public front of Growing Pains, to find some of the real pain, one must read Hundreds and Thousands, The Journals of Emily Carr (1966; pp. 332). They are a moving commentary on her struggles as an artist and reveal the fragile ego behind the public courage. In an entry late in 1935, she writes, "I am sixty-three tomorrow and have not yet known real success. When someone comes to my door I hide my canvas, as if it was something shameful, before I open to a stranger .... It is torture to exhibit to some."<sup>21</sup> And yet, the journals, which begin with her inspirational trip east to see the Group of Seven, indicate that no amount of public ridicule in these later years could keep Carr from her course. Then what, we may well ask, kept her unproductive during those middle years of her late thirties, forties and early fifties?

Unlike the middle years of many other Canadian creative women, Carr's are documented in The House of All Sorts (1944, 1971; 166 pp.). It tells of her years as an eccentric landlady. Ironically, but in a strategy typical of women's autobiography, it is a book primarily about

other people, vignettes concerning the amusing and not-so-amusing series of tenants that occupied the modest apartments of her establishment. She enters as the harried and inefficient landlady, appeasing tenants, fighting city officials, and raising her beloved bobtails as a kind of relief from too much humanity.

But at the center of the various vignettes, which are in style like portraits on canvas, are two central chapters entitled "Studio" and "Art and the House," in which she describes her attempts at art during those years. The studio, symbolically and actually, was built so that one could not enter Carr's life without coming through the Studio. It was the entrance way to her own small apartment and every complaining tenant, every city inspector, every frowning relative, in fact any curious stranger had easy access to Carr: "A tap on the door--I was caught at my easel; I felt exposed and embarrassed as if I had been discovered in my bathtub."<sup>22</sup> The studio is "'everything for everybody' ... Its walls were cut by five doors and five windows" (p. 88). Exposed in this manner by an architect who had not understood the need of an artist, and by her own need to be all things to all people, Carr accomplishes little: "The pictures on the walls reproached me. All the twenty-two years I lived in that house the Art part of me ached." Suitably, Carr keeps her sketches in the center of the room in "a long narrow black box not unlike a coffin" (p. 89).

Several of the stories in House center around Carr's rearing of bobtail sheepdogs, an energetic breed that took much of her time. Why she undertook this additional distraction from her art is revealed in the overwhelmingly maternal tone of her vignettes concerning these

animals, culminating near the end of the book with the story of "Flirt" who very reluctantly becomes a mother. The dog is frightened at the birth of her first puppies and Carr has to run around the yard digging up the puppies from the holes the mother had tried to bury them in. Carr "restores them to life" and brings another dog to show the animal how to mother. Then she "sat an hour in Flirt's pen reasoning with her," and watches as the dog's "realization of motherhood came with a rush. She gave herself with Bobtail wholeheartedness to her pups and ever after was a genuine mother" (p. 152).

It would seem that Flirt's maternity came with the same "rush" that Carr's renewed creativity arrived when she first saw the work of Lawren Harris and the Group of Seven and returned home to dig up her art from the psychic places she had "buried" it. The love with which Carr writes of her pets, indeed the care and delicacy that she shows in the writing about her tenants, indicates that the "barren" period was at least partially self-inflicted, despite her complaints of the world's being too much with her. The eccentric woman who pushed her puppies in a baby pram down Simcoe Street in Victoria to do her grocery shopping often seemed thoroughly to enjoy the life of the house-mother, living the completely interruptable existence in her studio/office/living room at the top of her own apartment building.

I would suggest that the lean years, artistically speaking, were full years in terms of her personal development as a woman and as an artist able to see the way the spirit embodies itself in the flesh. The submergence of herself in life rather than art for this period must have reinforced the artist's credo which Carr writes of in her journals:

We are still among material things. The material is holding the spiritual, wrapping it up till such time as we can bear its unfolding. Then we shall find what was closed up in material is the same as is closed up in our flesh, imperishable -- life, God. Meantime bless the material, reverence the container as you reverence a church . . . . We cannot elude matter. It has got to be faced, not run away from. We have got to contact it with our five senses, to grow our way through it. We are not boring down into darkness but through into light (p. 197).

Carr expresses the unspoken, often unconscious aim of the autobiographical writings of other Canadian women writers. They desire to present a life beyond the public mask. They wish to reveal the intimate centers of their lives in which the "material is holding the spiritual." In doing so each writer experiments in style and language. The reportage style chosen by Roy and the documentary collage of Livesay are both forms which tend to keep the reader at a distance. These modes offer limited success for the autobiographical urge, for even when skillfully used, the revelations of the intimate life remain cast in the forms of a sociological or political discussion. While McCracken and Maynard write effective autobiographies in forms suited to their material, they limit themselves to revelations about the childhood years and offer little insight into the struggles a creative woman faces in adult life. The difficulty of transmuting this stage of life into written language is indicated by the last section of Laura Salverson's autobiography, in which a writer who has shown that she can write effectively and feelingly of the personal life has difficulty joining life and art, and leaves the reader feeling that the autobiographer has not spoken truly from inside her own experience. With Montgomery's use

of the diary style we gain insight into the traumas faced by the adult female artist. Comparing the intimacy of the diary's narrative voice to that of the more "public" forms of autobiography suggests that modes that adopt such a voice offer more opportunity for effective expression of women's experience.

It is in such a voice that Carr speaks to us in her journals, establishing the first principle of a feminine art that concretely deals with life, not one that abstracts from it: we cannot "elude" matter, we must "contact" it, live "through" it to get to the light.

Much of the effectiveness of that "contact" for a writer depends on the language and the forms available for her expression. We see these writers reaching for forms that will keep the reader intimately embedded in the detail of life, while allowing the articulation of a spiritual dimension of life. In this search they have been limited by the lack of a respected autobiographical tradition in this country. In a sense, each woman who experiments with autobiographical writing is part of that necessary effort that Nin calls the "responsibility" of women writers, whereby by "articulat[ing] our own reality," we finally refuse to be "accomplices in the mystification of the female" (p. 114).



## NOTES - CHAPTER 6

<sup>1</sup>Anais Nin, A Woman Speaks, The Lectures, Seminars and Interviews of Anais Nin, edited with an introduction by Evelyn J. Hinz (Chicago: The Swallow Press Inc., 1975), p. 86.

<sup>2</sup>Gabrielle Roy, The Fragile Lights of Earth: Articles and Memories 1942-1970, translated by Alan Brown (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), pp. 4-5.

<sup>3</sup>Dorothy Livesay, Right Hand, left hand, edited by David Arnason and Kim Todd (Erin, Ontario: Press Porcepic, 1977).

<sup>4</sup>Helen Buss, "Interview" with David Arnason, 14 March, 1986.

<sup>5</sup>Dorothy Livesay Papers, University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections, Box 1, Fd. 4, 5, and 6; Box 2, Fd. 1, 2, and 3.

<sup>6</sup>Dorothy Livesay, "Behind the Lines (an answer to my critics)," Dorothy Livesay Papers, Box 100, Fd. 1, 1978.

<sup>7</sup>Melinda McCracken, Memories are Made of This (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company Publishers, 1975).

<sup>8</sup>Helen Buss, "Interview" with Melinda McCracken, 22 March, 1986.

<sup>9</sup>Fredelle Bruser Maynard, Raisins and Almonds (Toronto: Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1972), p. 159.

<sup>10</sup>Mazo de la Roche, Ringing the Changes: An Autobiography (Toronto: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1957), p. xi.

<sup>11</sup>Jay MacPherson, "Autobiography", in The Literary History of Canada, 2nd edition, Vol. 2, edited by Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 131.

<sup>12</sup>Laura Goodman Salverson, Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 5.

<sup>13</sup>See Kristjana Gunnars, "Laura Goodman Salverson's Confessions of a Divided Self," forthcoming in A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writers (Edmonton: NeWest-Longspoon).

<sup>14</sup>L. M. Montgomery, The Selected Journals of L. M. Montgomery, Vol. 1, 1899-1910, edited by Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>15</sup>Lucy Maud Montgomery, The Alpine Path: The Story of My Career (Don Mills, Ontario: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1917).

- <sup>16</sup>Gilbert and Gubar, Madwoman, p. 76.
- <sup>17</sup>Emily Carr, Growing Pains: The Autobiography of Emily Carr (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co., 1946, 1966), p. 228.
- <sup>18</sup>Ira Dilworth, "Foreword" to Klee Wyck by Emily Carr (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co., 1941, 1971), n.p.
- <sup>19</sup>Emily Carr, The Book of Small (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co., 1942, 1966), p. 73.
- <sup>20</sup>Klee Wyck, "Foreword," n.p.
- <sup>21</sup>Emily Carr, Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co., 1966, 1978), p. 209.
- <sup>22</sup>Emily Carr, The House of All Sorts (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company, 1944, 1971), p. 91.

## CHAPTER 7 - "FOUR AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ACTS: FINDING A FEMININE GROUND"

When women writers feel the same need that Anais Nin felt to "articulate their own reality," then a wide variety of expression can be expected, especially in autobiographical forms. Such is the case with the four autobiographers whose works are examined here. They are chosen for consideration because in their background, education and interests, they represent a wide range of female life, which leads them to adopt a variety of strategies in telling their life stories. At the same time they share Nin's need to demystify the feminine by recording the reality of their lives.

Smaro Kamboureli's in the second person (1985; 87 pp.) offers an example of a critically aware autobiographer who self-consciously uses a variety of strategies to achieve the effect of a life lived at many levels. Kamboureli's book is interesting not only in its self-conscious use of that feature most often seen in women's autobiography, the significant "other," but also in its use of a collage of narrative strategies which include the intimate journal entry, formal poems that spring from these recordings, and the personal essay style which bridges diverse materials. Since the text of second person is concerned with how the Greek student immigrant changes in identity while changing the language of her life to English, identity formation and language formation tend to be synonymous.

As the essay "An open parenthesis," at the beginning of Kamboureli's book suggests, "Playing hide-and-seek with one's mother tongue is one of the many ways of adopting a second language, of

entering into the labyrinth of language."<sup>1</sup> The "adopting" of a new language is a way of becoming a new person. Kamboureli, in the journal entries that follow, covering from December 1980 to July 1982, creates two personae, one living in the new language, English (the Canadian immigrant), the other a remembered Greek persona that precedes her new identity, but which haunts it also. Throughout the text, these two identities converse with one another. The "conversation" sometimes takes on the imagery of a romantic, sexual relationship, a suitable one since the cause of Kamboureli's immigration is to make her home with the man she loves. Thus, the "real" or external relationship with the man plays a reflective and catalytic role in disclosing the inner romance of the two selves.

In the second entry Kamboureli states: "My journal is a thread that links loops of memory. It writes itself. Leaf by leaf it grows. It begets its own shape. A frugal self which desires an abundance. I'm only an amanuensis. I ride on that littoral line that holds together my reality and my dreams" (p. 13). She is describing the change that is taking place in her as a person. Like her journal she grows "leaf by leaf," still "frugal" because of the new language. In the new life she hugs the boundary, "the littoral line" between the old and new self. But embodied in this imagery is the technique of the text itself. The reader will live the "thread that links loops of memory" as s/he moves through the journal. The writer is the "amanuensis," that formal but familiar voice, that will take the reader through the labyrinth of "my reality and my dreams" of the two selves. When at the end of the entry Kamboureli says "I need the other, that you, that presence whose scent

follows me wherever I go" (p. 13), the "you" can be the other self or the reader who must involve her/him self intimately with the journal entries in the act of reading.

The early entries reveal a self that is self-conscious in the new language, that regrets the loss of the old: "My language/ my Greek rusty/ my awareness of making mistakes when I use English/ My language that tortures me every time I dare use it./ My language that refuses to flow from the pen onto the page./ My language locked within my body./ My astonishment when I realized I was dreaming in English" (p. 19). She is aware of her lack of control over her new self: "The accent I can't hear. My own voice deluding me" (p. 20). She sees the new identity as emerging as "a second skin," but also as an injury to the old self "A fractured bone that heals itself" (p. 21). Yet the act of making a new identity in a new language is also an act of love: "How do I make love in a new country?/ How does my body draw foreign figures of desire on another body?/ How do I love in a new language?" (p. 23). She sees her "difference," her old self, as her lover's "rival."

Indeed, the old self emerges as more than a ghostly presence, when a trip back to Greece brings the family, the places, the friends of the old self into the new life. The effect is at first painful: "to hear your own voice reaching inside your ear feel your body touching the belly of your body between white sheets breath breeding despair at this splitting image of the self." She asks: "what discourse what story could tell of this nocturnal search for the other" (p. 40). The answer lies partially in a journey to the island of Sifnos, the place closest to the old self, as well as in the people met there and the poems

written there. All of these are recorded in the journal, the culmination of which are poems showing the old and new selves confronting one another. The new self is not sure if she wants to "run away from you, or whether I want to meet you, to blend with your historic present." The old self speaks: "you can't spit me out/ I am the image/ of your life locked/ between the folded/ wings of a butterfly" (p. 52). Returning to the Canadian setting the writer tries to rid herself of the old self by making "a bonfire out of my greek alphabet," but realizes it is "hubris" (p. 59), as now that she has rejected the Greek self "the absence of the other permeates everything here. the here is there, in the past, where you are now" (p. 62). Ironically, the most "present" part of the women's identity is the part she refuses to recognize.

Eventually, Kamboureli becomes aware that she is starting to keep three journals: "one in Greek (with many blank pages), one that is very personal (so personal I can hardly recognize myself there), and this one" (p. 85). The idea that one book cannot contain the whole self, that there are other selves, hidden, hinted at, may be a natural consequence of the journal style in which fragments are recorded, recollected, remembered, indicating an always incompleting task. Nevertheless, the fact that Kamboureli chooses to exclude the other journals, while mentioning them, particularly the one "so personal I can hardly recognize myself there," inhibits the autobiographical act. Inclusiveness, full disclosure, the exploration of the many dimensions of the personal life, are important parts of the achievement of authenticity in female autobiography in which the personal life, its psychic events, its relationships, its mysteries, are placed in

preeminent position.

For Kamboureli, a partial healing of the pieces is indicated in her last entries, when preparations are made to return to Greece where she will marry her Canadian lover. As relationships in the outer life have been metonymous with the discourse between the inner selves, so the marriage indicates an effort to bring together the Greek and Canadian selves, the younger and older selves in a marriage. There is no sense in the Kamboureli text that the process of integration, of embodiment of new versions of the self ever ends. The book does not end; it stops.

The sense the reader has of a "partial healing" is acceptable in that it reflects the true nature of the life lived in its relationships. At the same time this "partial" sense may arise from the fact that Kamboureli does not always deal directly with the day-to-day "material" of life, in which the spiritual is embodied. Actual conversations and interactions are recorded occasionally, but much of the "action" of second person happens in the psyche of the writer. Thus, the ways in which the maturing self acts out its new dimensions in the life of relationships, or indeed the way in which discoveries about self are made in the course of everyday activities, is sometimes missing. An exception to this is in the entries that deal with the interaction of the journal writer with her family in Greece. These entries dramatize the changes that are occurring in her internal life. The general lack of such dramatization at other times is particularly noticeable in the area of sexuality. In a book that adopts the intimate style of the diary, and uses the images of merging and marriage as unifying features, there is a curious lack of a sense of the maturing female sexual self, a self

that must be part of the growth experience of entering a new language, adopting a new land in order to facilitate a relationship with a chosen marriage partner.

As has been seen in other autobiographies, finding a suitable expression of the intimate experiences of adult feminine life is not simple. One writer who does deal fully and articulately with a primal female experience is Daphne Marlatt, who in What Matters describes her pregnancy and the birthing of her son.<sup>2</sup>

In the late sixties, Daphne Marlatt wrote poems inspired by the life going on around her, especially as she perceived it as a foreigner in the United States. At the same time she wrote "Rings," a long poem about the birth of her son, Kit. During this period Marlatt was keeping a journal which recounts the moods and events and people of her life at a time of great personal change--a move to Wisconsin, her pregnancy, the growing alienation between herself and her husband, their return to Vancouver and Marlatt's eventual realization that Canada and Vancouver are home and that she cannot return to the American life her husband wishes. It was not until 1980 that these materials (some of which were published separately) were gathered together under one cover.

Marlatt makes a statement about her own life, about writing and about autobiography in the title of the book, What Matters. If the title is phrased as a question, then what obviously matters to Marlatt is not only the formal poetry produced in this period, and the long poem about birth, but the daily matter of her journal, in which she stitches together the consciousness that creates the poetry.

In a recent interview with Janice Williamson, Marlatt says that "My



work has been extremely autobiographical. I think that most women's lives have been so fictionalized that to present life as a reality is a strange thing. It's as strange as fiction. It's as new as fiction. I'm not interested in inventing because what actually happens is so huge .... what's the necessity of inventing? Whatever it is that writing gets at, it's precisely that remarkable quality of being alive at this point in time. I don't see any way of honoring that quality except by writing directly out of your own life. It's the real I want to get at, in all its facets, in all its multiplicities."<sup>3</sup> In this way Marlatt is responding to the same need that Anais Nin felt to demystify the feminine. Marlatt is not articulating a theory of women's autobiography as such, but it is interesting to observe that in an interview with Eleanor Wachtel, Marlatt speaks of being "fascinated by that vision of spirit and matter, together, inseparable."<sup>4</sup> This "vision" is the same one that Emily Carr has pointed to and which lies at the heart of the autobiographical impulse in women. An examination of What Matters will show a very direct expression of this phenomenon of embodiment.

The problem that Marlatt is dealing with throughout What Matters is the problem of establishing an adult feminine identity which is her own, in a context she has created for herself. She is quickly becoming discontent with the identity of wife, in which she follows her husband to locations important to his life, and creates a home, friendships and interests centered around him. She feels a disembodiment, a sense of alienation from this life. At the same time she is moving through the stages of her first pregnancy, discovering the life of her body. The events of this very "embodied" existence begin to become more "real"



care with words means/ words mean, with their interactions  
(p. 23).

This is certainly not the first time that a poet has insisted on the inseparability of form and content, but in What Matters Marlatt makes it clear that she intends to interpret her poetics literally in her own life, her own body. As Marlatt's life and poetry are shaped more and more by the pregnancy, she recognizes her "need to feel at home here at impenetrable skin" and yet fears that "Mother is inarticulate dark?/smothering?" The child generating inside her is also the poem "Rings" generating, with "Kicks, suddenly unaccountable unseen, make their way felt thru skin anyway a fact beginning" (p. 83).

At a later stage in the poem the answer to the poet's self-questioning is given in the act of laboring. It is seen as metonymous with all creative activity and has the characteristics of an act that is at the same time unconscious and controlled. This paradox of creativity is expressed by Marlatt when she describes the beginning of labor: "Eyes shut. Relax now , can relax all over, breathe like asleep, pretend to be sleeping if you can remember how it feels, whole, your whole body, before it comes again. But don't think of that now, relax" (p. 94). The climatic build of each contraction is seen as both an act of rhythmized artifice and an irresistible urge: "Beginning to tighten now, lie still, Relax everything but that, now, A breathing, climb, higher, B, breathe higher, C, its all turning to, liquid, hot, spasm (smother), OH, very deep in, all, in it grinding me to liquid shit

again ... shit" (p. 94). The word "shit" here is an expletive within the context of the laboring woman, but as well, it is metonymous with the act of laboring and is given the value of "matter" by Marlatt, who often takes as her special mission the recreation of words in our vocabulary that have become clichéd. In this way, by expanding the meaning of "shit" beyond its current place as a vulgarity, she hopes to recreate a fuller language for the expression of the life.

The breathing rhythms are also essential parts of the creative act: "panting's a familiar place at work, its going, it does work, the breathing does ..." (p. 97). Thus, the sound of panting becomes the rhythm of the poetic line. The birth, when it finalizes itself through its own force and the woman's effort feels "something like a loss, like the end of a sigh" (p. 100). Marlatt continually makes connections between acts of the female body and acts of language. "Rings," or the creative process, does not end with birthing, for the creative act is seen as a continuum as in "Those first days how, with every suck I could feel the walls of the uterus contract. You isolate now, & born, healing my body for me" (p. 105). Thus creativity is a symbiosis wherein the artist creates and nurtures the artifact and the art in turn heals the artist.

This close connection between pregnancy and artistic creation that Marlatt makes through writing of the birth of her son in "Rings" is a confirmation of the poetics she enunciated earlier in her journal. In these earlier entries she had already realized that "pregnancy would be time made matter in me" (p. 25) and as well she has a feminine connection with the other that makes her write: "inspiration I've since

called it, interweaving of my life & a life outside me, as if I could see myself as an object within a more total relationship" (p. 24). Thus the concept of the other, in What Matters, is metonymous with "inspiring" the outer world not only through breathing and perception but through the implantation, development and birthing of the "real" other, the child. In this way the autobiographical act of embodiment is metonymous with the essential female act of creativity.

The importance of the "other" in women's autobiography is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in Marlatt's relationship to her new child: "I felt reborn with him, that clear, pure feeling, childlike, & in my emotions I was ... often [there is] a tremendous sympathy with his tears, his hunger or miserableness ... never felt so plentiful, never been so delighted with my body, that it was more than adequate" (pp. 115-16). And at the same time she feels a similar relationship with language, a "sense of being in the service of (poetry, language)" (p. 121). Marlatt observes: "I think that to realize our life is the same as to write" (p. 124). Punning on mater/matter she concludes the journal entries of this period: "made matter: the issue: what matters: issuing thru the ring of the invisible to ground--or hearing; as the vowel carries breath to make a sound/&/sounding, thru the ring of surrounding phonemes, it changes--hearing change the very matter of" (p. 127).

In this way Marlatt exemplifies a creative process that Erich Neuman has described as the matriarchal consciousness:

understanding is not an act in of the intellect,  
functioning as an organ for swift registration,  
development, and organization; rather it has the

understood must first "enter" matriarchal consciousness in the full, sexual, symbolic meaning of a fructification. This means that the conceiving and understanding have brought about a personality change. The new content has stirred the whole being, whereas in patriarchal consciousness it would too often only have been filed in one intellectual pigeon-hole or another. Just as a patriarchal consciousness finds it difficult to realize fully, and not merely meet with "superb" understanding, so the matriarchal consciousness finds it difficult to understand without first "realizing" and here to realize means to "bear" to bring to birth: it means submitting to a mutual relation and interaction like that of the mother and embryo in pregnancy.<sup>7</sup>

In enunciating a theory of poetics based on this view of matriarchal consciousness, Marlatt must do so, of necessity, by realizing it through her own life, autobiographically. The form of autobiography that she chooses, or that chooses her, is integrally female, the *mélange* of journal, the autobiographical long poem "Rings" and the shorter meditative lyrics that emerge along the road of her growing awareness. She defines herself through another, in this case her child, and the entire body of What Matters has a sense of searching, of change, of process, of connections with forces inside and outside the poet that she does not "understand" but "realizes." Thus the various entries are fragments that make a whole finally only in the reader's act of embodiment.

As an example of women's autobiography, What Matters presents one difficulty which results from a characteristic which this genre shares with the contemporary long poem, the genre in which Marlatt primarily works. As Frank Davey observes, the text of the long poem is always concerned with "new languages."<sup>8</sup> Language is always the text of the long poem, which then uses "a subtext of low cultural standing" (p. 11).

Davey gives as examples Kroetsch's use of the seed catalog and his ledger and Atwood's use of Susanna Moodie's journals. Such "low cultural" subtexts act as "metaphor" for the main text of language. Thus, Marlatt's text in What Matters is primarily concerned with language and the life-story becomes the "low cultural" metaphor of the subtext.

The long poem writer's preoccupation with language-making, however, leads to a distancing of the reader from the base materials of the poem, in this case the autobiographical material. This may be the poet's purpose in the effort to foreground language, but ironically it often creates an artistic situation that practitioners of the long poem wish to avoid, in which the poet tells stories "about" or outside some subject (in this case the creation of a child) rather than a poem anchored in its subject matter. In such cases, the poet circles around the subject of words, their meanings, the way they connect, the way they create thought, meaning etc., weaving the high art of the text of the long poem. Thus, the low art material of the subtext is de-emphasized. This may suit the purposes of the long poem, but it does not result in effective female autobiography which insists on the indivisibility of the high and low, on the embodiment of the language concerns in the subject matter of the autobiography. For example, Marlatt, as autobiographer, is at her best when her concern with the language of "breathing" is embodied in the telling of the laboring woman's breathing acts. The contemporary long poem's tendency to transcend the emotional content of its subtext, in favor of the more intellectual content of the language discussion, makes it ultimately an unsuitable form for the

writer whose principle aim is the creation of autobiography.

Nevertheless, Marlatt's What Matters, at its best, gives us an example of meta-autobiography similar to that created by Gertrude Stein in her autobiographical works.

An autobiographer who, like Marlatt, wishes to give full disclosure of female experience and yet does not subordinate the life story because of other preoccupations is Marguerite Clement. In My First Thirty Years (1920-1950), (1981; 32 pp.), Clement writes of growing up in rural poverty in western Canada. She has no genre preoccupations that distract from the autobiographical act because she is, in a formal literary sense, a "naive" writer. Although she lacks education, she is not, however, naive in her ability to present a dense texture of event, person and place in which she acts as the perceiving consciousness of her story. Take for example her first paragraph:

I was born in Bodwin, Saskatchewan in 1920. I was the 10th child of 11 children. I was the baby for 4 years. I had six sisters and three brothers; also Mom and Dad, uncles and aunts to spoil me. I was a cute little fat kid and I got my own way all the time. When I was a year old, I got whooping cough and nearly died from it. I don't remember much about life here. My mother told me that if it were not for my two older brothers, who were no more than 14 and 15, we would have starved; they had a trap line and they sold the furs and we ate muskrat, porcupine beaver, prairie chicken, fool hens and moose and deer, as our father could not find a job and so he stayed in the house and kept warm. Oh, he cut all our stove wood.<sup>9</sup>

In this paragraph Clement gives us the personal details of place of birth, time, position in family, number of children, a comic characterization of the infant self, a childhood illness trauma, heroic figures, the family's rural situation, her ambiguous feelings about the



male parent, as well as an idea of the subsistence level at which the family lived. Most of the paragraphs of this compressed autobiography offer the same, sometimes difficult to read, density of detail which often forces the reader to slow down to consider the words individually and then in relation to one another; the account is difficult to follow by the logic of sentence structure and chronology alone. The leaps from subject to subject are not always connected on the surface of the text, but are connected only in that they are forces that have created the child. For example, in a paragraph that might be called "The child in the world," the following shorthand of existence is given us:

There was a sawmill in town where my dad and brothers worked, then it was O.K., as we had something to eat. My older sisters and brothers went to school in town. I made lots of friends. I guess I was a good listener as I used to go visit this old couple. Their name was Barrette. He was about eighty-five and she was seventy-five. I would sit on a cushion at her feet and listen to her telling of when she was a young girl, for hours on end. Then we would have lunch, then I would go home, about half a mile. There was a Chinese, who had a market garden just below our mountain. Us kids and older ones would steal his vegetables, so one time he saw us and chased us with a pitch fork, while he swore in Chinese. There were quite a few big rocks where we lived. I guess, you would call them, mountains without snow. Our brothers told us there were some bears there, so we did not go. We also had a stream or creek. One day, my sister Armen and I were playing in it, when we saw a water snake. We did not play in it again. We named the creek Auntie Picola and a big rock Auntie Annie. We lived by the dump road and us children were there at the dump every day. The things people throw away! There were some people who had a big white house on a hill. Their name was Nickle. They had two boys and two girls, the age of my brothers and sisters, and the lady of the house used to give us their used clothing. We were very grateful for them. My older sisters worked as maids there and when they came home, they always were loaded down with goodies. I used to go to town

with my dad and sit very quietly, while he got a shave and hair cut. One time the barber got mad at a man who was stealing his wife's affection and he cut the man's throat. The man screamed and started running for home with blood spewing out of his throat. He did not get far, he died right on the street. There was no law in those small communities, so by the time some one notified the law from Prince George, B.C., the barber had killed his wife and himself. It was very gruesome (pp. 2-3).

On the surface such passages are no more than lists of the remembered detail that Clement presents to us without shaping and with little commentary. And yet there is a subtle, perhaps unconscious, shaping. The focus moves outward from family to neighbors to strangers to wilderness where through "play" experiences the child creates and names her own world. This first half of the passage shows the child both growing in and being limited by contact with the larger world, revealing the small world of home and neighborhood as both safe and dangerous at the same time.

The second half of the paragraph documents the extremes of the larger community. The contrast of the child's social position with the charitable rich family's gives us a sense of the inequalities of the child world which then reflects its increasingly fearful contrasts when the nostalgic story of the little girl's going with her dad to the barber is set side by side with the violent story of jealousy, murder and lawlessness. In fact, the microcosm and the macrocosm are both places of security suddenly violated. In many ways this paragraph describes the style of the book. The world is a multiplicity of fragments happening to an individual. Danger overcomes safety without logic. The teller does not attempt to impose a logic. We are allowed to glimpse

not only the variety and contrasts of the child's life through the use of a low-key conversational voice by the adult narrator, one that is sure enough of its facts to lead us, but which also does not explicitly make us aware of the effect of these events on her. The adult narrator does not intrude on the even emphasis the child gives to all events, and therefore, because she does not judge, we are encouraged to withhold judgment. This forces us to carry the entire burden of the growing detail of our reading in our conscious mind without being permitted to digest, store or dismiss it by means of rational methods such as generalization.

This reading act is similar to the one demanded in reading Marlatt's or Kamboureli's more literarily sophisticated accounts. George Bowering has described this kind of reading as one in which the text demands a reader's active participation, an ability to "stay with what a [text] is doing moment by moment."<sup>10</sup> The effect of this reading act on the reader is a greater acceptance of what the text is actually saying, and less of a tendency to file the detail of the text in convenient preestablished molds of thought. This method of reading is especially useful in Clement's account when we are given the detail of her sexual history. Throughout the book the details of what in most fictional accounts would be shocking sexual events are told in flat, almost unemotional language, the same tone as used to describe other parts of her history. Thus the reader is required to "stay with" the flow of words, withholding judgment or conclusion until all aspects of the situation are appreciated. Take, for example, her description of her older brother's incestuous relationships with her sisters: "Our

older sisters were all bad; they all had babies with my older brother, Nelson, and gave them away. My brother Nelson was not right in his head, he had been disappointed in so many love affairs that his mind went berserk. He never came near me because I would of beat him severely. He was not a very big man, about five feet, he weighted a hundred and ten pounds" (p. 6). In context there is no sense that the sisters are "bad" except in the sense that they have broken the mother's code which assigns the female blame for unwanted pregnancies, and that they cannot mother such children but must give them away. Even Nelson is not judged, as he is "berserk," from due cause, and at other times in the book Nelson aids the family in various ways. Even Clement's own determination to repel her brother is told in the same unemotional manner. We must accept the detail of her life as it stands, for she makes little attempt to explain or rationalize it.

In the same unsensational tone she details her own sexual history which begins at age twelve and leads to gonorrhoea at thirteen and a decision to sleep with an old man for material favors at age fourteen. These events are told laconically and no overt attempt is made by Clement to justify her sexual life in conventional rationalistic, moral terms. Indeed, in making the decision to keep a baby that she conceived by a man other than her husband as she does at the end of her book, Clement avoids resting her argument on conventional grounds. After the experience of years of marriage and several children Clement offers only this explanation: "*He is my mistake. I'll have him, love him and I did [her emphasis]*" (p. 32). And yet the very unconventionality of her life and her account, makes her moral position believable.

A different kind of psychology than we are normally accustomed to in novelistic fiction underlies Clement's position of maternal responsibility. It is the psychology of acceptance of things as they stand, which is reflected in the telling of her life. No attempt at a unified portrait is made by avoiding aspects of the life. All that Ben Franklin called "errata" is included. At the same time the life history is not ordered to show a rationalistic progress towards a more "mature" or learned morality. Rather, Clement relies on personal instinctive choices with the result that her autobiography shows an amazing absence of self-justification, self-rationalization, self-explanation, self-intellectualization, and the inevitable self-glorification and self-deception that are so much a part of the patriarchal tradition of confession and apology. Clement's style is thus a natural outcome of her life, and expresses an instinct towards inclusion and embodiment, rather than exclusion and transcendence.

The desire to include everything, without hierarchy, without judgement, including detail of the female life that is by most traditional standards considered trivial in the extreme can be also seen in Margaret A. Galloway's memoirs of growing up in Gladstone, Manitoba, I Lived In Paradise (1941; 257 pp.). Whereas Clement's account exhibits an unsophisticated mentality, Galloway's does not. She explains in her foreword that she knows what forms she is playing with in her memoirs: "Though the lives of each of us contain things that all together make history, this little book is in no respect a history. History is exact, and I am not interested in dates nor sequences."

Thus, she rejects the kind of memoirs that sees itself as history made personal. At the same time she states: "Neither is it an autobiography --I am not so foolish." With the humorous familiarity that is to become the tone with which she most often speaks to the reader, she rejects the route of ego-consciousness development that has been the dominant style in autobiography in the last two centuries. Galloway tells us that her personal story is being told "for my own peace of mind" (thus the writing serves the shaping of the self), and that it is of interest to others only if "My dear old-fashioned home, my constant river-friend, my general store, my log church and school are YOURS too if you were young when the West was young."<sup>11</sup>

Assuming a narrative voice that is intimate, rambling, humorous and conversational in tone, Galloway explores the nature of an early prairie town, its history, settlement and geography. However, the result is not a textbook lesson, but a very sensuous personal account that leads to a six-page description, beginning on page five, of the prairie itself. The description is characterized by many digressions into personal memory, feelings about what it is like to be away from the prairies, history of the first-comers, dramatizations of past events, rhetorical questions, snatches of poetry, facts about Manitoba, etc. Such a *mélange* of digression, anecdote, opinions, feelings and commentary, in which constant interruption prevents a one-dimensional picture, creates a style that not only breaks genre limits between history, autobiography, memoir and fictional modes, but creates a feeling about her home soil that is more complex and subtle than the prairie's smooth surface would seem to outsiders. This is Galloway's intention: to

recreate the complex texture of a life that on the surface would seem to be very ordinary.

Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of predestination and the need for each organism, town or child, to have its own development, and works indirectly toward a view of Paradise, the town, as metaphor for youth: "Paradise, born one day on the banks of a river, was growing up along its edges" (p. 21). At the end of the chapter the town reaches the end of its early growth spurt and the young men "spend more and more time thinking about the girl back east" (p. 21). Thus, Galloway sets up two distinct frames for her story, one which is chronological, in which she has not yet been born, and another that is more like a lengthening personal essay, in which she is the central guiding figure who points our attention to significances in the chronological story. By thus informing social history with personal philosophy she once again uses a *mélange* of forms to make her point; that is, as a "life-story" her own begins outside herself in the significant others of the town in its pioneer phase and the parents that helped create it.

At this point in the story Galloway begins portraits of her parents that occupy most of Chapters 3 through 8 (pp. 23-94). In this way she is typical of women autobiographers in that the parents become real presences in the text. But Galloway gives this "otherness" a further stylistic twist by spending most of Chapters 3, 4, and 5 describing the house that her father built for her mother in Paradise. A typical descriptive detail, in Chapter 3, in which she describes how a painter finished the oak front door of their home, illustrates Galloway's style:

He must have had the soul of an artist but being always told to do this and that while he prepared and painted, had no opportunities for expressing his real ideas of beauty.

When the chance came to grain our big front door, he burst through all his inhibitions and really went to town in a big way.

He grained a knot in that suffering oak that would have made a satisfactory target on a rifle range at regulation distance, working the graining comb in all sorts of fantastic loops and whorls.

Graining is fascinating; it leads you on and on; teases you into flights of fancy, and has one big advantage. Nothing that you accomplish is final; if you aren't satisfied with the result, one stroke of the paint brush and your ground is all ready to be worked on again. Just like your school slate is after an application of palm and spit (pp. 32-33).

She creates John the house painter, an artist like herself, who exists as part of the "other" of the house which represents her parents' love. In this way Galloway comments on her own style, one which is a freely associative kind of "graining," a style necessary to describe the permutations, the complexities, the subtleties, the impermanence of the mark a human life makes on its setting. Since this is a book that sees the female life as absolutely located in place, in home, the image of the life being a carpenter's design on the yielding but more permanent wood of place is an apt one for Galloway's life-story.

Even when she is finished with her antecedents, the town, the house, her parents, she refuses to tell a life-story directly about herself. In Chapter 9, she tells her story through observations about her older sister who is both her model and competitor. Galloway says of her sister: "This is not my sister as I know her now, maybe not even my sister as she really was then, maybe not as she thinks of herself then



or now, but it is my sister as I thought of her when we were children at home in Oak Villa, Paradise" (p. 97). For Galloway, identity is a construct, a result of the autobiographical effort rather than a fixed set of traits.

Even in the final chapters, in which most life stories, even of women, begin to center more on the subject's own life rather than the shaping influences, or at least on the self in relation to outside event, Galloway insists on the "otherness" of her life. Chapter 10 shows her town as a community of relatives and friends (including the Indians), whose commercial activities seem to center upon making life safe for little girls. Chapter 11 concerns the life of the town's river and how it relates to the activities of childhood. Even here there are informing digressions as Galloway lists the names of places and rivers, lakes and towns which informed her childhood.

With the river chapter, the book subtly turns to a seasonal rhythm as Chapters 11-14 describe the life of the child in relationship to the river in its four seasons. At all times these chapters are filled with the digressions of personal opinion and anecdote, even to an explanation of why Galloway gives up swimming in middle age, when a daughter comments on her figure! This digression like others that bring Galloway's past into her present is another way in which she breaks down the chronology of her story and reminds us of the perceiving consciousness who is our narrator, our autobiographer.

The short chapters continue to locate Galloway's life in the life of her community, as she writes of life in the school, the church etc. Even the description of a typical day is principally concerned not with

herself as central character, but with the household activities of females as a group. The last chapters become a veritable orgy of memory, as if Galloway herself has lost her ability to place them in context as they pour onto the page one after another, finally ending with her exclamation "what unimportant sights and sounds make up the queer pot-pourri of memories!" (p. 251). She seems to give up on words for a moment when the book presents us with two pages of ancient black and white photographs of Gladstone, Manitoba. The final, brief chapter is an elegy mourning the loss, not only of her personal past, but the brief period in which such frontier towns existed.

Not just for Galloway, but for all four of these women, home ground is important. Kamboureli says that "it hurts not to know where home is" (p. 27), Clement feels it necessary to describe the houses she lived in and their surroundings, even though her family is constantly on the move. Galloway is anchored always by the concept of the childhood home as "Paradise." Marlatt, who in many of her public statements makes a point of emphasizing the importance of the home place in her poetry, now extends that sense of place into a sense of her femininity: "my 'region,' I'm writing out of, is not so much place or landscape these days as life as a woman."<sup>12</sup>

In the same way the true home ground of these women is the flesh and the spirit that together make the self that is realized through the autobiographical act. The kind of self expressed is in each case one that seeks through its use of language to express the fragmentary in life. Kamboureli's and Marlatt's use of several frames of reference, from poetry through narrative, to diary entry indicates this effort as

does Clement's collage of apparently unrelated detail and Galloway's short paragraphs and deliberate gossipy interruptions of her chronological story with her philosophical stances.

The various forms of digression are joined by the intimate, sometimes humorous voice of the narration which through its intrusions reminds the reader that writer, narrator and subject of the work are a unity. Marlatt and Kamboureli do this primarily through the intimacy of the diary entries, Clement and Galloway by way of the directness of their address to the reader, as if they were in direct oral connection, in conversation in the way that the Alice narrator is in Gertrude Stein's work.

Connection is the supreme value for these autobiographers, as is illustrated by Clement's refusal to recognize the taboos of traditional concealment and disclosure, Kamboureli's preoccupation with the survival of the past self, Marlatt's need to express the unity of mother and child, and Galloway's memorialization of every part of the childhood experience. They break down the divisions between public and private selves, past and present existence, the limits of individual ego existence and the limits between self and place. In this way they seek a sense of community.

The importance they give the "other" is the primary characteristic of this sense of community, Galloway creating the real presence of her childhood home, Clement of her family, Marlatt her son and Kamboureli her Greek self. In the intimacy of their addresses to the reader they include the reader in this sense of community. They verify in their autobiographical acts the importance of what for Nin was the "personal

life deeply lived."<sup>13</sup> For it is in the act of writing that the "depth" of the life is explored. The psychologist Jacques Lacan has said, in speaking of the psychoanalytic act, that "speech is the key to ... truth."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, these women create the "truth" of their lives through the act of writing, for in the articulation is the discovery of their personal reality, of a feminine ground on which their sense of self may stand.

## NOTES - CHAPTER 7

- <sup>1</sup> Smaro Kamboureli, in the second person (Edmonton: Longspoon Press, 1985), p. 7.
- <sup>2</sup> Daphne Marlatt, What Matters (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1980).
- <sup>3</sup> Daphne Marlatt and Betsy Warland, "Speaking In And Of Each Other," Fuse, an interview with Janice Williamson, Vol. VIII, No. 5 (February-March 1985), 26.
- <sup>4</sup> Daphne Marlatt, unpublished interview with Eleanor Wachtel, Vancouver, p. 1.
- <sup>5</sup> Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," Poetry New York, No. 3 (1950), 24.
- <sup>6</sup> Daphne Marlatt, unpublished interview with Eleanor Wachtel, p. 2.
- <sup>7</sup> Erich Neumann, "On the Moon and Matriarchal Consciousness," Spring, 1954, Analytical Psychology Club of New York. Quoted in Knowing Woman, A Feminine Psychology by Irene Claremont de Castillejo (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1973), pp. 61-62.
- <sup>8</sup> Frank Davey, The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem (Lantzville, B.C.: Island Writing Series, 1983), p. 19.
- <sup>9</sup> Marge B. Clement, My First Thirty Years (1920-1950) (Markham, Ontario: Initiative Publishing House, 1980), p. 1.
- <sup>10</sup> George Bowering, "Lines on a Grid," Open Letter, Series 2, No. 8 (Summer 1974), 96.
- <sup>11</sup> Margaret A. Galloway, I Lived in Paradise (Winnipeg: Bulman Bros., 1941), unpaginated foreword.
- <sup>12</sup> Daphne Marlatt, Wachtel interview, p. 6.
- <sup>13</sup> Anais Nin, A Woman Speaks, p. 148.
- <sup>14</sup> Jacques Lacan, Ecrits: A Selection, translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), p. 147.

## CONCLUSION

From the earliest Canadian diarists we observe that the need to stay connected is the prime motivation for writing. Elizabeth Simcoe writes to her daughters, Mary O'Brien to her beloved sister, Sarah Ellen Roberts to her personal posterity. Ironically, in their attempt to keep connection with individuals far away in space or time, they establish a connection of their growing selves with the new land, Canada. Simcoe's observation concerning "our bright Canadian sun," O'Brien's feelings on first traveling on Lake Simcoe, Roberts' imaginative identification of herself with the language of the spring soil of the prairie, which "speaks" to her, all indicate the growth of identity, tied to the home place, Canada.

Early women who make their permanent home in Canada find that the conjunction of their lives with the opening up of the country creates an opportunity for autobiographical expression. Quite naturally they choose memoir in which their connection with place, the activities of that place and with beloved others, can express itself in the "historicity" of the form. But as well, even the earliest writers, such as Elizabeth Johnston, find it necessary to bridge forms, in Johnston's case to interweave the confession form with the memoir form, in order fully to express the female life. We see this early desire--to write memoir, but to include the personal confession--become a characteristic mode, as women as far apart as Nellie McClung, Maria Campbell and Laura Salverson create autobiography which is in Salverson's words an attempt "to make of a personal chronicle a more subjective therefore more

sensitive record of the age."

In their efforts to find forms that offer them suitably artful disguises under which to confess the personal life, we find some Canadian women using travel accounts as the vehicle of their personal story. Women from Anna Jameson to Joyce Meyer make use of the form to present parts of the personal life that are not normally open to public view. As well, like Susanna Moodie and Margaret Laurence, these travelers find that in discovering the stranger they find the self.

When attention is given to the many autobiographies of Canadian women of exceptional achievement, the importance of Canada as the significant "other" that aids identity formation comes once more to the fore. Women from Georgina Binnie-Clark, through Martha Black to Florence Bird find in Canada an opportunity for personal growth unparalleled in their former homes. In fact, it is important to note how many Canadian autobiographers are immigrants to Canada. All of the early diarists and memoir writers, the early travelers, several of the "achievers," and both Kambourelli and Marlatt, all come to Canada from other birthplaces. Laura Salverson was born in Canada, but was taken as a child to the United States. As an adult she comes home to Canada in order to complete her identity and write her books. These women find here a challenge to their identity that demands the imaginative incorporation of the new land.

It is also in this regard that we see most clearly women's tendency, as Spacks puts it, to "complete the self in the imagination." We find women such as Binnie-Clark and Martha Black creating a personal mythology that incorporates Canada as part of the self-definition. As

well, we see women's preoccupation with a continuing self-completion rather than perfection, as women as far apart in social position as Martha Black and Ann Henry each try to create a self that holds together the selflessness of the traditional feminine qualities, and the self-assertion involved with being an achieving woman. It is also here that we see, for the first time, autobiographies by women not of the "privileged" class in terms of education and social position. Women such as Ann Henry and Maria Campbell not only write memoirs infused with a confessional element, but also add the public confrontation of apology to the bridging of forms, as they attempt to draw attention to the injustice suffered by others like themselves.

The autobiographies of these women represent a turning point in several important areas, most importantly in the person of Nellie McClung, where for the first time is seen a writer consciously struggling with the formal difficulties involved with presenting the "womanly" woman and the "new woman." McClung's relatively superior literariness makes her realize this dichotomy, at the same time that she does not have an autobiographical tradition available to her that would allow the full expression of her complex self.

Literary women struggle more self-consciously than other women with style and allow the reader to confront the problem of the language of personal expression, as writers from Livesay to Carr attempt to find formal expression of the ways in which the spirit of their lives is embodied in the material. This remains a primary consideration for even the most experimental of women writers working in autobiographical modes, since Daphne Marlatt also expresses the need to express all



life's "multiplicities," the ways in which life incorporates the spiritual in the material.

Thus the grounded life is what these women seek to express in their autobiographies, life grounded in place, others and activity, so that the effectiveness of their autobiographies must be sought not in the way in which they dramatize their paths to transcendence, but in the way they bind up the fragments of their lives into an incorporated whole.

Canadian women autobiographers share many characteristics with other women autobiographers. Most prominent among these characteristics is the desire to identify their self-development with a significant "other." Although this other is often a husband, child, parent or other beloved person, Canada itself or a person that represents access to the land often holds this position. In some ways this is similar to the "other" that Mary Mason designates as significant to Anne Bradstreet, who connected her own development with her New England Puritan community's development. But an important difference should be noted. Often, for the Canadian woman, it is the land itself that is to be incorporated into her identity. We see this in Simcoe's desire to gaze at the Canadian scene until familiarity makes it "pleasing," in Robert's poetic identification with the Alberta soil, in Black's finding of her "lodestar," in Binnie-Clark's description of her "virgin" mother, in Galloway's "Paradise" and in Marlatt's work when in the last poem of What Matters, she ends by saying "I am here, feel/ my weight on the wet/ ground (p. 168).

Canadian autobiographers share with other women the need to work towards completion of their personalities rather than towards

perfection. In this regard we see the development of a type of narrative strategy that places the narrator not at the center of action, or as an ironic voice outside the action, but as a perceiving consciousness which takes in the world around her and embodies it in the form of the autobiography. Marlatt's birth story is the most dramatic illustration of this stance, but other writers seek this narrative method as well. The importance of such a stance is that it eliminates the disadvantages of other commonly used narrative positions. The first-person narrator offers sufficient intimacy but is limited in point of view. Mary Hiemstra portrays herself not as a first-person narrator reporting the story of the man lost in the storm, but tells the story as if she were the man. Such a stance holds on to the advantage of intimacy that first-person narration allows while giving the narrative the expansiveness supplied by the omniscient narrator.

At the same time the female perceiving consciousness is not distanced from the action as is the omniscient narrator. This is not the isolated "standing back" of the Canadian narrative stance that Warren Tallman characterizes in "Wolf in the Snow."<sup>1</sup> The feminine consciousness is at all times involved and central, not in the sense of being the most prominent element in the action but in the sense that the mother is central in fertilization, pregnancy, birth and nurturing. Elements from outside and inside the autobiographer remain themselves, while at the same time they are combined in and by the perceiving consciousness to create the new embodiment, the autobiography.

These two characteristics, the way in which the concrete fact of the "home place" Canada, its actual soil, is necessary to the

personality development of many of these women, and the way in which a narrative stance of the "perceiving consciousness" or what may now be called the autobiographical narrator, is being developed by these women writers, raise important questions about the way we perceive our literary tradition. We are so often portrayed, by critics such as Tallman and Frye, as alienated from the land.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the native peoples, the European immigrant stock is seen as not knowing where "here" is because of a rationalistic mind set. Yet this fear of the environment, the feeling of being constantly in the position of outsider, of survivor, is not evident in Canadian women autobiographers. In fact for many of them, coming to Canada, living here, liberates the true personality. Viewing the tradition anew through the insights of these women, we may see another attitude toward the land begin to emerge. From the romantic poems of Bliss Carman who does achieve a "merging" with the Canadian environment, a merging he calls a "wonder-thing," through the strange walking activities of the narrator of As For Me and My House, in which she seeks some solace in wind and rain and prairie, to the desperate tearing at the dirt of the Canadian soil undertaken by the protagonist of Surfacing in search of her self-definition, in all of these and many other established works of Canadian literature, we can begin to see a Canadian psyche, not apart from the land but in intimate communion with a difficult but splendid other, an other that helps to create, in the perceiving consciousness, an acceptance of things as they stand while also accomplishing a fuller realization of self.

The typical Canadian narrative stance has been seen, as a result of

our "standing back" position, as an ironic one. Perhaps in the light of our knowledge of the kind of consciousness being developed by these autobiographers, we may see how often the Canadian narrative stance is actually autobiographical in nature. For example, texts from Grove's A Search For America, Buckler's The Mountain and the Valley, Laurence's The Diviners to Kroetsch's Alibi and Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale take the form of fictional autobiographies, while the contemporary Canadian long poem makes deliberate use of the actual life of the poet as the base material, while seeking a narrative voice that is at once intimate and a part of all that becomes the subject matter of the poem. In this way, these women autobiographers are not only the forerunners of these more "established" genres, but in many ways can be the models of Canadian literary endeavors. They represent not only a body of literature that we need to incorporate into the established tradition, but also their inclusion will allow for a fuller understanding of our tradition.

Finally, critics concerned with finding in Canadian literature evidence of the modern consciousness, one less rationally oriented, one less concerned with ego-self, and more concerned with its integrated place in the world of others and the physical environment, may find ample material for such a search in the work of Canadian women autobiographers. From the most literarily "naive," such as Marguerite Clement, to the most literarily "sophisticated," such as Daphne Marlatt, they represent a voice that verifies Carol Gilligan's conclusion on the nature of the female voice: "in the different voice of women lies the truth of an ethic of care, the tie between relationship and responsibility, and the origins of aggression in the failure of connection" (p. 173).

## NOTES - CONCLUSION

<sup>1</sup>Warren Tallman, "Wolf in the Snow," Canadian Literature, 5 (Summer 1960), 7.

<sup>2</sup>Northrop Frye, "Haunted by Lack of Ghosts: Some Patterns in the Imagery of Canadian Poetry," in The Canadian Imagination: Dimensions of a Literary Culture, ed. David Staines (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 27.

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