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## Haunted: The Journals of Susanna Moodie<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Using an interpretive, hermeneutical approach, this article explores the work of Susanna Moodie, Margaret Atwood, and Charles Pachter. The intertextual resonances that connect these works are examined, as well as the link between text, image, and visibility. Susanna Moodie was a nineteenth century British immigrant to the backwoods of Canada, and her autobiographical text provides a narrative context from which both Margaret Atwood and Charles Pachter respectively grapple with and negotiate the complex, polyglossic nature of Canadian culture, identity, and art. The interface between Atwood's poetic explication of cultural, linguistic, and literary identity and Pachter's illustrative visual representations reveals the powerful synergy that is born when text and image collide.

We are all immigrants to this place even if we were born here: the country is too big for anyone to inhabit completely, and in the parts unknown to us we move in fear, exiles and invaders. This country is something that must be chosen—it is so easy to leave—and if we do choose it we are still choosing a violent duality.

Atwood, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*

Despite my intentions of discussing Charles Pachter's visual rendition of Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), I found it impossible to extricate this marriage of interpretive artwork and poetry from its long lineage of intertexts. I was reminded, yet again, that as readers, viewers, and interpreters, we loop and spiral our way towards what we think is the coherent, textured "ending"—the "final word" in an ancestry of narratives—only to find that intertextuality has indeed unsettled discursive chronology, and middles and endings have blurred into polyglossic beginnings. Pachter's visual version of Moodie's wilderness plight and search for self is simply one voice within a family of stories—one fold within a complex and clever layering of texts, genres, voices, and histories.<sup>2</sup>

The precise beginnings of this ancestry are difficult to pinpoint, as even Moodie's (1803-1885) original account of her family's arrival and survival in the backwoods of Canada in the 1830s carries with it the texts and tropes of her own historical and geographical context.<sup>3</sup> But Moodie's chronicle, with its maternal whispers of advice, warning, hope and promise, is our point of departure, as it is from this nebulous ground of narrative instability that the complex amalgam of textured histories grows. Captivated by the specter

of Moodie's early immigrant account, Margaret Atwood's cycle of poems entitled *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) fleshes out Moodie's bare-boned backwoods chronicles. And, born from Atwood's poetical "turning of Moodie on her head," Pachter's evocative graphic art further deepens and extends the branches of this towering and tangled family tree. The immigrant experience, as articulated and rearticulated by Moodie, Atwood, and Pachter for particular historical contexts and audiences, becomes a powerful metaphor for the Canadian artist's tenuous endeavour of writing, creating, mapping, and navigating his/her way through the harsh narrative and imaginative landscape. Rather than providing us with any sort of assuring closure, Pachter's visual text opens the very earth in which Moodie was laid to rest, leaving us, once again, haunted.

This clamour of familial voices begins with Moodie's ambivalent, muffled, "roughing it in the bush" cries that echo across the harsh and vacant Canadian wilderness, carrying with them resonances and traces of the world from which she came. Leaving Scotland on July 1, 1832, with her husband and first child, Moodie made her way across the ocean to the "promised land." Two months and ten days after their departure, they arrived—disenchanted and dislocated—in Cobourg, Ontario. Moodie's *Roughing It in The Bush* chronicles the trials and triumphs faced by her and her family as they confronted the harsh Canadian landscape and struggled to orient themselves in what seemed a menacing and unfamiliar environment. Moodie's relentless struggle to carve out a home for herself and her family within this physical topography is paralleled by her search for the words, the diction, and the language with which to explicate her perceptions of this foreign place.

Moodie occupies a unique narrative space, as she teeters tentatively on the brink between traditional European rhetoric and a distinctly Canadian discourse. Being of a particular social class, she was afforded an education rich in literature, theatre, and history. Moodie was steeped in a highly educated, literary milieu from an early age, and her own career as a writer, beginning at the age of nineteen with the publishing of her first story, grew as she wrote and published in a variety of genres, from historical portraits to morally instructive tales for children, to sketches, stories, and poems for fashionable literary magazines and annuals.

Moodie's early poetry, in particular, was influenced by the Romantic movement. It is not surprising, then, that she draws on a romantic vision of the world in articulating her initial responses to the New-World frontier; she helplessly reiterates conventional European landscape language, commenting on the "sublime view," "the surpassing grandeur," and the "picturesque effect of the land scene." She relies on traditional, Old-World mythology as she describes the mountains as "mighty giants—Titans of the earth" (Moodie 1989, 26). In Wordsworthian rhetoric, she observes "the romantic features of the enchanting scene" (36) and "the romantic beauty of the situation." And, as she is confronted with a particularly breathtaking natural scene, she insists that her "soul at that moment was alone with God" (37), echoing the Romantic conception of nature as a manifestation of the divine. Upon first encountering the Canadian wilderness, Moodie is not equipped with a language that allows her to articulate the landscape that she beholds outside of her own historical and cultural understandings; the Wordsworthian conception of the natural world does not entirely correspond with the harsh and disenchanting reality of the Canadian wilderness, nor does it accommodate her gendered experience. Hence, Moodie constructs an alternative voice, engendering a new mythology to describe her relationship to the rugged Canadian terrain.

Moodie embodies the divisions within a notion of Canadian consciousness as we might understand it today—literally and metaphorically—as she rocks hesitantly aboard the immigrant ship, caught between two countries and two cultures. She is at once attracted to, and simultaneously alienated from, the unforgiving terrain. Moodie's narrative maps her dualistic relationship with the harsh land. Initially, Moodie is situated as an outsider as she views the landscape from the immigrant ship. She is frequently overcome with feelings of alienation and dislocation, and her "heart yearn[s] intensely for [her] absent home" (Moodie 1989, 48). Intermingled with such moments of displacement, however, she reveals an instinctive affinity for the Canadian terrain; she expresses "an intense desire to climb to the crown of the rock, and survey the whole noble landscape at [her] feet" (39).

Moodie experiences moments of profound reconciliation with the harsh wilderness; she admits that, at times, the landscape “won [her] from [her] melancholy” (Moodie 1989, 90), and recalls a moving moment of oneness with the land, in which “a portion of [her] own spirit seemed to pass into . . . a little stream” (134). During this moment, she is firmly rooted within the landscape, and she celebrates nature’s ability to “shoot marvelous strength into [her] heart” (135). By the time that Moodie bids “Adieu to the woods” (478), she embraces the harsh landscape that she was initially alienated from; she confesses she “loved the lonely lake . . . the cedar swamps . . . [her] own dear little garden . . . Even the cows” (482–483).

Moodie embodies the fragile divisions that are at the heart of Canadian identity. Her relationship with the land is tentative; moments of resignation are poignantly intermingled with fleeting moments of triumph and exaltation, and she oscillates between a vehement nostalgia for her native shores and a joyous acceptance and celebration of the natural world that she encounters. This vacillation between complete connection to and utter estrangement from the land underlies her intense narrative of the Canadian wilderness. And this tenuous and ambivalent geographical stance coincides with the awkward, but increasingly adamant voice that Moodie eventually locates within this severe physical, imaginative, and discursive terrain; at the same time that Moodie negotiates and resolves her dichotomous relationship with the physical space, she is simultaneously struggling to locate a raw and interpretive language with which to name her experiences and apprehensions. She gives voice to the domestic sphere through which they are framed, drawing strength and inspiration from the narrative voice of an elderly woman. Moodie (1989) finds herself captivated by the old woman’s “rude and uneducated” (140) recounting of her experiences as a female settler. In contrast to the exclusive, class-based, and traditional notions of high literary “Art” pervading Moodie’s European social and cultural context, the old woman’s speech and imagery is cast as coarse and unrefined. The old woman’s “primitive” storytelling voice speaks to alternate representations of gendered meanings, outside the dominant, traditional art and narrative styles Moodie would have been accustomed to. The elderly storyteller speaks from a distinctly *maternal* place of concern and interest, as her tale revolves around her “fear [that her] babes would be frozen” due to the bitter weather and harsh terrain” (Moodie 1989, 140).

Moodie is deeply familiar with—and is herself steeped in—this “maternal idiom” (Freiwald 1989, 163), as she, too, is consumed with the needs of her children. Moodie emphasizes the maternal impetus that fuelled her decision to emigrate, explicating that it was at least partly done out of concern for “the infant, whose little bosom heaved against [her] swelling breast.” Throughout her narrative, Moodie is constantly surrounded by children, and her sketches are dominated by trials and exploits carried out solely to serve and nurture her dependents. Moodie also utilizes a maternal language to articulate her developing relationship with the landscape; she figures her emigrant experience as a daughter caught between her mother land, Britain, and her adopted mother, Canada. Moodie (1989) laments her separation from her native “mother country” and refers to Canada as the new “land of [her] adoption . . . the great fostering mother of the orphans of civilization” (12). Moodie’s writing resonates with references to the maternal, both in terms of her role as mother and in the mother-daughter relationship that she asserts with the landscape. The traditional rhetoric that Moodie initially reiterates is eventually abandoned for a “mother’s tongue” (Freiwald 1989, 165)—a “maternal idiom” (163) that draws from her experiences.

As Moodie articulates her settler experience through an interpretive mode and idiom, she disrupts established discursive traditions and relies upon fragmented, autobiographical sketches to chronicle her sojourn in the Canadian backwoods. Her episodic text resists structure and lacks textual and generic stability. Frequently addressing “the reader” (Moodie 1989, 89) directly, and adamantly inserting her subjective “I” presence, Moodie’s self-reflexive narrative voice reveals her text as an artistic and poetic artifact, subverting the notion that texts are coherent, absolute entities. Moodie’s bold and unconventional narrative structure seeks to construct a unique, feminine literary space and voice.

The proclaimed purpose of Moodie’s writing (1989) is worthy of mention; she writes to “reveal the secrets of the prison-house” (428) and articulate the suffering and oppression inherent in the female pioneer expe-

rience. In the egalitarian New-World, Moodie finds herself occupying a disorienting domestic space. She is thrust into “awkward house-wiferies,” and describes how she tried her “unskilled hand” at domestic chores such as washing, confessing that she “knew nothing about the task [she] had imposed on [her]self, and in a few minutes rubbed the skin off her wrists without getting the clothes clean” (136). Initially, Moodie’s artistic energies are entirely consumed by her menial duties; she “had never been able to turn [her] thoughts towards literature during [her] sojourn in the bush. When the body is fatigued with labour, unwonted and beyond its strength the mind is in no condition for mental occupation” (416-417). Eventually, however, as she comes to terms with her environment and her creativity flourishes. Moodie’s stifling, unfulfilling domestic space is transformed into an autonomous, authorized realm as she embraces her literary proclivity; the prospect of writing for the *Literary Garland* magazine “was like a gleam of light springing up in the darkness; it seemed to promise the dawning of a brighter day” (416), and “besides gaining a little money with [her] pen, [she] practiced a method of painting birds and butterflies” (420).<sup>4</sup> The reconciliation of the seemingly opposing artistic and menial facets of her existence allows her to experience moments of personal and domestic triumph, in which a “spirit of peace and harmony pervades [her] little dwelling” (425). Her literary accomplishments secure her self-sufficient homestead in the absence of her husband, and her earnings “form the nucleus out of which a future independence for [her] family might arise” (417). Moodie claims this domestic space as a powerful, competent, aesthetically propitious sphere. Thus, Moodie’s episodic and incomplicant journal not only maps her eventual acceptance of the land, but also allows her to carve a distinctly feminine niche amid an unforgiving literary and geographical backdrop.

### “Reconstructing the Wilderness”: Margaret Atwood’s *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*

Atwood’s cycle of poems entitled *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) resurrects Moodie’s haunting voice from the anachronistic space in which it is laid to rest—where the distant moors of the Old World meet the twisted wilderness of the new. Atwood’s poems tease out the intonations, the silent echoes, the discreet resonances of Moodie’s narrative; it is a re-sounding of sorts, in which Atwood gives voice to the spaces that lie between Moodie’s words and descriptions, imaginatively charting Moodie’s journey from the backwoods of 1830s Canada to the concrete expanse of 1970s Toronto’s St. Clair Street. The impetus for Atwood’s cycle of poems came from a haunting and unshakable dream in which she found herself “watching an opera [she] had written about Susanna Moodie”; Atwood recalls being “alone in the theatre” and, “on the empty white stage, a single figure was singing” (Atwood 1970, 62).

Moved by this portent to revisit Moodie’s memoirs, Atwood (1970) was initially disappointed by the “discursive and ornamental prose” of the “disconnected anecdotes,” held together solely by the personality of Moodie herself. The most intriguing aspect of this paradoxically cohesive, yet scattered persona “was the way in which it reflects many of the obsessions still within us” (62). Atwood was captivated by Moodie as an embodiment of Canada’s chronic “paranoid schizophrenia”; she observes that

Mrs. Moodie is divided down the middle: she praises the Canadian landscape but accuses it of destroying her; she dislikes the people already in Canada but finds in people her only refuge from the land itself; she preaches progress and the march of civilization while brooding elegiacally upon the destruction of the wilderness. . . . She claims to be an ardent Canadian patriot while all the time she is standing back from the country and criticizing it as through she were a detached observer, a stranger. (62)

For Atwood, Moodie was a dislocated, deeply divided individual, and she suggests “Moodie’s personality . . . reflects obsessions still haunting Canada” (Staines 1997)—that this glaring and paradoxical division “is the

way we still live” (Atwood 1970, 62). Atwood claims to have been haunted not so much by Moodie’s story, but by “the hints, the gaps between what was said and what hovered, just unsaid, between the lines, and the conflict between what Mrs. Moodie felt she ought to think and feel versus what she actually did think and feel.” Speaking beyond the confines of propriety and convention, Atwood’s re-sounding of Moodie’s melodramatic, schizophrenic account is not so much a recreation of the specifics of Moodie’s wilderness struggles, but the creation of a powerful and compelling “cycle of meditations . . . on human dislocation” (Staines 1997, x).

Atwood’s (1970) cycle of poems, beyond simply fleshing out the bare and wanting bones of Moodie’s spectre-like struggle amid the grisly New-World wilderness, widens to include a powerful probing of contemporary Canadian culture; her poetic endeavour goes beyond the narrow confines of Moodie’s backwoods to comment on a broader struggle for cultural “self” going on in Canada at the time that Atwood is writing. Writing in Canada during the 1960s and early 1970s informs Atwood’s charged and challenging authorial voice; in a time of artistic and literary vivification within a country still struggling to define itself, Atwood writes with a deep cognizance of the multivoiced, multitextured nature of Canadian culture, art, identity, and evolving notions of “self.” Borrowing from and reworking Old-World conventions and voices, Atwood’s writing marks a powerful and profound elucidation of the cacophonous tensions at work within contemporary Canadian culture, art, literature, gender, and identity. She teases out the hopelessly modernist dualities inherent within textured presentations and re-presentations of Canadian identity, and in doing so, provides poignant commentary concerning constructions and formulations of cultural identity. The lonely and arduous pioneer experience that Atwood narrates becomes a metaphor for the inevitable and perpetual alienation, struggle, and disorientation that plagues the contemporary Canadian search for a tangible conception of artistic, cultural, and national “selfhood.”

### **“A Blizzard in My Eyes”: Charles Pachter and Margaret Atwood’s The Journals of Susanna Moodie**

The grueling pioneer experience, with its many physical, psychological, and spiritual trials, is further connected to the experience of the Canadian writer and artist as Atwood’s text is layered by Charles Pachter’s rich and provocative illustrations. Having “serendipitously” (Pachter 1997, xvii) met at summer camp in 1959 in the early beginnings of their respective artistic careers, Pachter asked Atwood if she had a group of poems that he could hand-print in the *livre d’artiste* tradition. Atwood recalls sending Pachter “a suite of seven poems called ‘The Circle Game,’ and he went to town on it, grinding up his blue jeans for the endpapers in the process.” Pachter recalls knowing “instinctively that the medium of lithography, whose psychological nuances [he] was just discovering, was tailor-made for the. . . poems” (Pachter 1997, xviii).

This initial collaborative endeavour prefaced several mutual projects. According to Atwood, “this crap[—]both poems and book—later became thought of as Art, but at the time it was just a couple of kids experimenting.” She concedes that

there are many laudable things about being “famous,” but at that age it’s much better not to be. You can do what you like, and be less nervous about it. Nobody’s looking. Not that we didn’t take ourselves seriously. Or not ourselves—what we were doing. There is a difference. (Atwood n.d.)

After extensive correspondence and several collective artistic and literary endeavours, Atwood sent Pachter her newly completed poetic sequence, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, an event which Pachter describes as a “fateful moment”; he “read it and was so stunned by its beauty and power that [he] realized that everything [he] had done up until that moment must be a rehearsal for this” (Pachter 1997, xx).

Pachter's intensity and fervent enthusiasm are evident in his description of his methodology; he "couldn't wait to get started" and "began to work immediately on a maquette, or prototype, setting type for the poems in different styles and sizes, cutting up and collaging proofs of earlier lithographs and silkscreens, then drawing on top of them to amplify the thematic imagery of the poems" (Pachter 1997, xx). Atwood recalls Pachter being "ignited by" the poems—"the mockup he produced was a many-colored thing of splendor" (Atwood n.d.)—but Atwood goes on to explain the publishing difficulties that their joint, multi-genred endeavour encountered. By early 1969, Pachter had completed the typesetting and draft images for the entire suite of twenty-seven poems. This immense endeavour "was much beyond [Pachter's] financial capabilities to print himself, and beyond everyone else's too, as it turned out. [Atwood's] by-the-most-of-the-time poetry publisher, Oxford, couldn't afford it. Neither could [her] other poetry publisher, House of Anansi, and neither could Coach House press" (Atwood n.d.). Atwood and Pachter then approached the Canada Council with their printing project but were turned down for a publishing grant. Atwood was not entirely surprised by the Council's refusal, as they had turned down several other proposals made to them by Pachter; she speculates that Pachter "was too mouthy. . . . Artists were supposed to be mute." And, because she'd won the Governor General's "at too early an age," she was convinced that the Council intended to "squash them like bugs" (Atwood n.d.).

Atwood forged ahead and signed with Oxford University Press, and a standard version of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, accompanied by some of Atwood's own illustrations, was published in 1970. Atwood insisted that a clause be added to her contract giving Pachter the right to produce his own version at any time, inscribing a copy of her sequence, "To Charlie, with Regret, but hope for the future." It is precisely this unwavering hope and unshakeable commitment which saw Pachter's and Atwood's mutual vision through its numerous incarnations. Atwood was adamant that Pachter honour the spirit and integrity of his artistic vision, maintaining that he "hold on to [his visual representations] until the time was right for [him] to do the project [his] own way" (Pachter 1997, xx)—a time which did not arrive for nearly a decade.

Having opened an artist's studio in Toronto, Pachter learned that two Spanish silk-screening artists, Abel and Manuel Bello-Sanchez, were living and working nearby, and this marked the beginning of their inspired printmaking partnership. Pachter fondly recalls "trudging through the snow from [his] studio to their loft." The three of them "spoke only when necessary, attending to the tasks at hand with gravity and conviction." Working hesitantly at first, Pachter recalls soon becoming entirely immersed in the intense and all-consuming project; he "went onto automatic pilot. While [Abel and Manuel] . . . dragged ink across the screens with a squeegee, printing words and images separately or together," Pachter "continued drawing directly on the silkscreens with grease crayons and tusche ink, a solution of minute grease globules suspended in water." Once the drawing was dry, Abel and Manuel then covered it and the remaining open areas of the silkscreen with a glue blockout solution and, when this was dry, they then dissolved the grease-filled portions of the screen with mineral spirits so that ink could infiltrate the area where Pachter had drawn. The intensity and deep, creative synergy of this endeavour is captured in Pachter's recollection of the "adrenaline rush" they had "each time a completed multicolored print was added to the growing ensemble" (Pachter 1997, xxi-xxii).

As the book began to spontaneously take form, "Words and images began to complement one another sequentially. The poetry, set in handsome fonts of different sizes and styles, and printed in a variety of colours, seemed to jump off the page, acquiring a dimension only hinted at in the original typed manuscript." It was a grueling and heartfelt enterprise, as the artists worked almost daily through spring, summer, and fall. "Manuel and Abel often printed into the late hours of the night. And with the change of the seasons, the pages of the document began to accumulate. By the fall of 1980, over 14,000 impressions had been printed by hand (Pachter 1997, xxiii). And, in October of that year, the book was launched, setting "a new standard for the handmade *livre d'artiste* in Canada." Pachter deemed Atwood's "poetic evocation of the travails expe-

rienced by a nineteenth century genteel immigrant in her new Canadian homeland . . . a landmark literary work,” dedicating this “marriage of creative efforts of two fellow voyagers [his] homage to the writer, poet, and friend whose genius has been a sustained source of inspiration for [his] imagination” (xxiii).

At this point, of course, it becomes impossible to talk about this family of texts in a linear or isolated way: instead, it is a perpetual spiraling, a hopeless weaving of inseparable voices, informing and in constant dialogue with one another. The symbiotic relationship between Pachter’s visuals and Atwood’s words has been described by Kertzer (1993) as “a mutual invasion.” Pachter “arranges off-balanced patterns, transposed colours, positives and negatives, mirror images.” Kertzer, in his review of Pachter’s and Atwood’s joint endeavour, comments on this jarring effect of Pachter’s illustrations; he observes that “a stylised photograph of Moodie’s face, when detached from its familiar background, looks strained. The twisting line of a human shape, seemingly drawn in a single convulsive stroke, looks anxious. . . . Wide-eyed faces are concealed in branches.” He emphasizes that while Pachter’s carefully composed visuals have immediate emotional impact, each picture “also invites inspection, as if some secret might be discovered in its detail or texture.” Kertzer points to the “uncanny” congruence between the effect of Pachter’s visually perplexing illustrations, which bid the eye to “move restlessly back over the design,” and Atwood’s disoriented and disorienting text, in which she claims: “I see now I see now I cannot see earth is a blizzard in my eyes.” Pachter’s visual overlays imbue Moodie’s original apprehensions and Atwood’s later adoption of Moodie’s words with startling echoes and insights.

From the opening pages of Atwood’s and Pachter’s work (1997), text and visual, word and image are entangled—foggy vellum carrying Atwood’s original inscription overlies Pachter’s portraiture of Moodie—rendering the interpretive positions of “reader” and “viewer” inextricable and deeply dependent on one another. Interestingly, Atwood opens her cycle of poems by evoking distinct conditions for “sight”; it is only once she is blinded—once her eyes are cut away by sewing scissors—that she begins to see, and “where [her] eyes were, everything appears” (Atwood and Pachter 1997, [1]).<sup>5</sup> This is a profound and startling statement in terms of visibility, and the notion that appearance is contingent upon the removal of the physiological conduit of sight—one’s eyes. This bloody, unmediated “sight” carries with it a sense of unfettered rawness. This prefatory conjunction of text and visual sets the stage for the poems and prints that follow, which speak powerfully and poignantly about the elusiveness of appearances, the tricksterish quality of the wilderness, and the search for and reflection of notions of “self,” all of which can only be accomplished by a careful, sewing-scissored tailoring.

The first journal (1832-1840), which fleshes out and chronicles Moodie’s arrival in Canada and her experience in the rustic backwoods of Ontario, resonates with themes of dislocation, disorientation, and the awkwardness of language. Atwood’s account of Moodie’s “disembarking in Quebec” renders the experience as far more than a simple exiting of the emigrant ship; the speaker, intensely aware of “the incongruous pink of [her] shawl,” finds herself on the threshold between old and new. She contemplates the lenses of disillusionment and disenchantment through which she perceives (and creates) the New World, aware that the overwhelming alienation and estrangement may not be because “this space cannot hear,” but rather because of her “own lack of conviction which makes these vistas of desolation.” As the poetic persona acknowledges her own subjective position in the enunciative experience, the landscape comes to function as a text to be read. She looks to the foreign land as a mirror, but cannot locate herself there: “the moving water will not show me my reflection, the rocks ignore.” This loss of geographic identity translates into a loss of linguistic identity, as the forlorn speaker laments that, in this moment, she becomes “a word in a foreign language.” Because she cannot locate herself in the land, she is rendered a meaningless word in a foreign context, lacking all referents (Atwood and Pachter 1997, [12]).

Pachter’s accompanying visual elusively imbues Atwood’s haunting words with deeper significance; in a complex and transformative dance, the words are brought to life by the vivid graphic renderings. There is a

sense of motion and obscurity in the visual. The background of the lithograph is blue, perhaps drawing on Atwood's reference to the "moving water" that denies Moodie's reflection. One can decipher the outline of the poetic "self," but the viscera of this form is blurred and distorted—it is almost as if within the carefully contained outer shell, the inner self is scribbling itself out in frustration and confusion. The inner-scrrawlings of the figure are jagged and haphazard, depicting the jutting rocks and the tangled tree branches that haunt the poetic Moodie inside and out. On the opposite page, situated with the text itself, there is a portion of the same figure, its lithographic imprint reversed. There is an unsettling sense of being able to see through the skin of the figure, into her gnarled skeleton and twisted veins, as she is divided by the text into the positive and negative imprint of the same lithographic image.



Disembarking in Quebec

In the poem "Further Arrivals," Atwood poignantly describes the experience of having traveled across "the long illness that was the ocean" to arrive at the quarantine station at Grosse Isle—it is an arrival that ironically forces the immigrants to enter the "large" metaphorical "darkness of [their] own ignorance." Atwood suggests that neither she nor her poetic persona have "come out yet" (Atwood and Pachter 1997, [15]). The landscape, in its darkness, its elusiveness, and its stubborn refusal to reflect light and provide the travelers with an identity, becomes an enactment of our own inner darkness and benightedness as explorers and viewers. There is a deep irony within this elusive search for self—the speaker is unable to see or locate



herself in the watery surface's reflection—and it is precisely this lack of recognizable self that actually reflects her fractured consciousness. The landscape, in its distorted, monstrous fragmentation and its demonic inhabitation, is actually a powerful representation of the deeply fissured Canadian psyche. Pachter's visual functions as a portrait of the dark and demonic internal and external landscape. The lithograph depicts both a person and a land possessed and inhabited by the same beasts. The groping demons of the dark forest and of the dark imagination are one and the same; the totem art and ghostly spectres encapsulate haunting depictions of mother and child, handlike tentacles merge with hairlike branches and embodied tree trunks, and the mind and the land become one dark and unchartable terrain.

Atwood once again evokes the harsh, ravaging landscape in the poem "The Planters." The workers "move between the jagged edge of the forest and the jagged river on a stumpy patch of cleared land." The speaker watches the "ignorant planters" as they "deny the ground they stand on, pretend[ing] this dirt is the future." They are unable to let go of "that illusion," that construction of the Promised Land, that is as "solid to them as a shovel" because without these illusions and constructions, the landscape stifles, inhabits, and possesses. She fears that "they would be surrounded, stormed, broken in upon by branches, roots, tendrils, the dark side of light as [she is]" (Atwood and Pachter 1997, [19]). Pachter's visual mirrors this sense of subsumption of self by the land, as a shape-shifting, seed-strewn face lies enigmatically beneath the tendrils of the trees and the glaring glance of the sun.

#### Path and Thingspace



In "Path and Thingscape," this sense of being overrun by the wild, uncontrollable, and relentless land pervades both the text and the visual; in searching (both literally and metaphorically) for a clear and concrete path, the speaker observes that "the trail was not among the trees, but the trees." The pioneers' deluded endeavour of seeking out the "signals," "letters," "codes," and "numbers," is in fact, a misguided search for home—it is a desperate struggle to impose order, structure and sense on this wild terrain, as though a retrieval of Old World signs, symbols, and markers will somehow allow for the gleaning of some coherent and



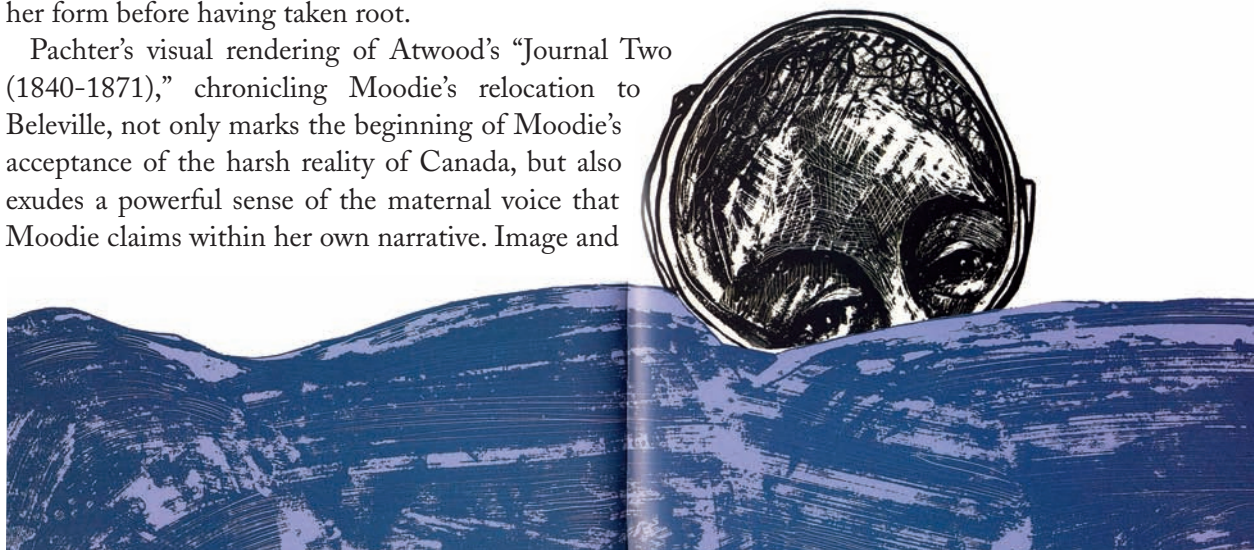
tangible meaning. But, this wilderness resists order and asserts its untamable autonomy, as there are "no trails," and "the petals fall where they fall." The landscape itself becomes a sort of hostile predator watching the poetic Moodie "like an invader," threatening to consume her; she anticipates "that union where

each thing (bits of surface broken by [her] footstep) will without moving move around [her] into its place” (Atwood and Pachter 1997, [23]). Pachter’s visual depicts the misplacement of nostalgia and the threat of subsumption; in the bottom corner of the chaotic and consuming forest lithograph, a sickly purple, grossly incongruent porcelain figurine hovers. Pachter’s startling graphic metonym representing the values, class structures, and ornate affluence of the Old World, points to the futility of looking to antiquated icons, symbols, codes, signs, rules, and stories for meaning and direction, because like the subject herself, the fragile, almost luminescent figurine is conspicuously out of place in this unruly and indomitable forest.

The pervasive sense of dislocation and search for “self” is further explored in “Looking in a Mirror.” The title reference is reminiscent of the first “disembarking” poem in the series, in which the speaker searches for a reflection of her self within the elusive, wavering water. In this poem, the “old,” enigmatic self has completely shattered, dissolved, and decomposed—the speaker has *become* the land that she once hoped would mirror her. The trappings and markers of her Old World self, the “stiff lace, religious . . . her heirloom face . . . the china plate . . . the shawl from India . . . the pieces of letters” have been “rotted . . . by earth and the strong waters . . . a crushed eggshell among other debris . . . shattered on the forest road . . . [and] decayed.” And the speaker herself has been absorbed by the earth, with her “skin thickened with bark and the white hairs of roots,” the sun having “stained [her] its barbarous color,” her hands having “grown stiff, the fingers brittle as twigs.” Her “bewildered” eyes, now “blind/buds,” “can see only the wind,” and her “mouth crack[s] open like a rock in fire” (Atwood and Pachter 1997, [27]). Pachter’s visual, which depicts this stonelike visage, features the chiseled, open-mouthed rock of the poetic Moodie, the craggy inside of which, with its creeping tree roots and its dark, eye-socket craters, mirrors the harsh and barren land itself.

Atwood’s “Departure from the Bush” marks Moodie’s exit from the backwoods that she has virtually become. She recalls her wilderness sojourn as though she had been possessed or haunted, describing the way in which “the animals arrived to inhabit [her], first one by one, stealthily; then having marked new boundaries returning, more confident, year by year, two by two.” But, she was not altogether invaded by these bestial spirits, she “was not completed; at night [she] could not see without lanterns.” And, when summoned to the city, she recalls being “(instantaneous) un-lived in,” her animal spectres had gone. There is a sense of elusive, fleeting meaning just beyond her grasp, as she concedes that “there was something they almost taught me I came away not having learned” (Atwood and Pachter 1997, [29]). The startling visual, again a scribbled and scrawled lithographic division of positive and negative images, depicts the crude, totem-like animals that have almost come to inhabit the haunted speaker—that have almost given her the truth of the wolf’s eyes, the gift of night vision, only to fade from her consciousness and her form before having taken root.

Pachter’s visual rendering of Atwood’s “Journal Two (1840-1871),” chronicling Moodie’s relocation to Beleville, not only marks the beginning of Moodie’s acceptance of the harsh reality of Canada, but also exudes a powerful sense of the maternal voice that Moodie claims within her own narrative. Image and



Death of a Son by Drowning

language both become twisted and metamorphosed as Atwood draws on her earlier language of the land to express the maternal (literal and metaphorical) undercurrents of her pioneer experience. The first poem, "Death of a Young Son by Drowning" uses the language of exploration to make sense of and articulate the death of her child; she recalls "plant[ing] him in this country in a flag" (Atwood and Pachter 1997, [32]), connecting the plight of a mother with that of the male pioneer.

In "Dream I: The Bush Garden," in which the pensive speaker stands "once more in that garden sold, deserted and gone to seed," the earth comes alive with "potatoes curled like pale grubs in the soil, the radishes thrusting down their fleshy snouts like slow amphibian hearts." The land becomes haunted by the dreaming Moodie's lifeblood, and "around [her] feet the strawberries were surging, huge and shining." And, in perhaps one of the most startling and poignant vignettes offered by Atwood, the speaker "bends to pick," and her "hands came away red and wet." With quiet resignation, she remarks that she "should have known anything planted here would surely come up blood" (Atwood and Pachter 1997, [37]).

In "The Deaths of the Other Children," Moodie's severed "arms, [her] eyes, [her] grieving words," and the corpses of her "disintegrated children" grow up out of the very land that previously throbbed with her own lifeblood; the land becomes infused not only with the speaker's own fractured, "edifice, [her] composite self," but with the children who haunt her. The lost and buried pieces of her "self" are fused with the spirits and the bodies of the children who have been lost; her identity is unshakably "maternal," as "everywhere [she] walk[s], along the overgrown paths, [her] skirt tugged at by the spreading briars they catch at [her] heals with their fingers" (Atwood and Pachter 1997, [47]).

In the final poem of the second journal, Atwood's Moodie accepts the inevitable doubleness and division of her vantage point, voice, and sight. She acknowledges the "two voices" which "took turns using [her] eyes." The native tongue of the Old World from which she came is a voice steeped in manners, postures, sentimental verse, "painted in watercolors," and Romantic rhetoric, "us[ing] hushed tones when speaking of mountains or Niagara Falls" (Atwood and Pachter 1997, [48]). Pachter's visual depiction of a one-dimensional, broad lined face accompanies this well-mannered voice; it is the surface of Moodie's mask—unfinished, uncontained, a dangling sketch of eyes, nose, expressionless mouth—while its spaces and silences speak volumes.

The opposite page reeks of death and resignation; the "other voice had other knowledge," from the simple and seemingly harmless knowledge that "men sweat always and drink often, that pigs are pigs but must be eaten anyways" to the more disturbing and difficult truth "that unborn babies fester like wounds in the body, that there is nothing to be done about the mosquitoes" (Atwood and Pachter 1997, [49]). Pachter's haunting, corpse-like visual, with its blackened, rotting teeth, gouged eye-sockets, weathered, stone-carved skin and crater-like skull, seems to be the mouthpiece for this disillusioned voice. By the end of this cycle of vivid, bloody dreams and maternal lamentations, Atwood's Moodie is hopelessly divided; one voice "saw through [her] bleared and gradually bleaching eyes, red leaves, the rituals of seasons and rivers," while the other, through blackened sockets, "found a dead dog jubilant with maggots half-buried among the sweet peas" (Atwood and Pachter 1997, [48]). This is the schizophrenic, deeply divided Moodie that has haunted Atwood—and in this double-voiced moment, as she accepts the unresolved, inescapable divisiveness of her sight, her speech, and her stance, she becomes a metonym of the fissured, fractured Canadian consciousness.

"Journal Three," which spans from 1871-1970, carries the haunting and indomitable heroine through old age and beyond. Atwood gives Moodie the voice with which to ponder her own death, seeing it as inseparable from the life and the death of the land that she inhabits. "What will they do now that I, that all depending on me disappears? Where will be Belleville, Kingston?" (Atwood and Pachter 1997, [61]).



A Bus Along St.Clair: December

The final poem features Moodie aboard a bus along St. Clair Street, having been resurrected from nineteenth century Canada and ushered into the twentieth century metropolis with the same resilience and relentless strength that characterized her life. Atwood claims Moodie's place in the present with resolve, commenting that "it would take more than that to banish [her]," confidently asserting that "this is [her] kingdom still" and she "has her ways of getting through." As the haunting Moodie "look[s] up through the gritty window," observing "an unexplored wilderness of wires," she draws on the same disoriented explorer's dialect that pervaded her experience of the backwoods, suggesting that the modern inhabitants of this "silver paradise" built "with a bulldozer" are as dislocated as she was as a pioneering settler. Bridging the past and the present, she asserts that "the snow is no more familiar to you than it was to me. . . ." And with a paradoxical timelessness, she states that she is "the old woman sitting across from you on the bus." While there is a sense of timelessness to her presence, she is also very much an anachronism, sorely out of place in this unfamiliar world of "grey air, the roar going on behind it" (Atwood and Pachter 1997, [69]).

This final portrait of Moodie is, in fact, a perfect metaphor for Atwood's poetic endeavour and Pachter's visual interpretation—both artists, in resurrecting the jagged shards of a pioneer past, and carrying them into the present with powerful resolve and unsettling imagery, do precisely that which the indomitable Moodie does as she "sit[s] across from you on the bus, her shoulders drawn up like a shawl"; the paradoxically timeless and anachronistic Moodie, in her never-final adieu, shatters the false separation between past and present with the "secret hatpins" that dart "out of her eyes . . . destroying the walls, the ceiling." She

reasserts the impenetrable wilderness that, despite the careful concrete, remains untamed and omnipotent. “There is no city: this is the center of a forest . . . your place is empty” (Atwood and Pachter 1997, [69]).

Just as Atwood’s cycle of poems fleshes out, distorts, deepens, and unsettles Moodie’s original narrative, Pachter’s illustrations, while complementing Atwood’s poems, at the same time exist as separate and powerful works of art. There is an unusual dependence and simultaneous independence between this history and other histories. Needless to say, this is not a genealogy of texts that sits quietly around the dinner table, passively and patiently taking turns to share their tales; the univocal “truth” of each of these relations can never be divorced from the raucous conversation that ensues when they all collide. The visual, the narrative, the autobiographical, the sentimental, the poetic, the unstated and the overstated speak anxiously overtop of one another, never repeating, sometimes countering, and always deepening and extending their sibling’s rendering. In many ways, Moodie’s narrative is the first chiming of this grandmother clock, followed by Atwood’s and Pachter’s succeeding chimes—the resounding whole ringing far more richly than the sum of its parts. These resonant histories vibrate over and under one another, such that the strains of first can still be heard in the echoes of the last.

## Notes

1. The author would like to thank Charles Pachter for permission to reproduce images from Atwood and Pachter (1997).
2. For example, see Moodie’s 1852 version of *Roughing It in The Bush, or, Life in Canada*, with her own illustrations; and Moodie (1913) with colour illustrations by R. A. Stewart.
3. Moodie (then Susanna Strickland) published her first story, *Spartacus: A Roman Story* (1822), when she was 19. This heroic portrait of a historical figure was followed by a number of morally instructive stories for children, among them *The Little Quaker; or, The Triumph of Virtue and The Little Prisoner; or, Passion and Patience*. From 1827 to 1830, Susanna contributed poems and stories to *La Belle Assemblée*, a fashionable literary magazine, including a series of sketches of Suffolk life whose style prefigured her later work, *Roughing It in The Bush* (1852). She then wrote two antislavery tracts, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (1831) and *Negro Slavery Described by a Negro* (1831), for the Anti-Slavery society. In 1831, Susanna Strickland published a collection of her early poetry entitled *Enthusiasm, and Other Poems*. Susanna wrote a great deal of poetry in her literary career, and often embellished her prose works with poetic epigraphs and resolutions. National Library of Canada. “Canadian Poetry Archive: Susanna Moodie (1803-1885)” <http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/canvers/bios/emoodie.htm>.
4. Moodie’s literary pursuits while in Canada included submitting items, chiefly poems, to American and Canadian periodicals. She began to write for the *Literary Garland*, of Montreal, in 1838. During the life of the magazine (1838-1851) she was its most prolific contributor, submitting serialized novels based on English life, poems on English and Canadian subjects, and a series of six “Canadian Sketches” that formed the nucleus of *Roughing It in The Bush*. Also, in 1847-1848, Susanna and John Moodie jointly edited *The Victoria Magazine* in Belleville. They wrote much of the material themselves and Susanna submitted two more “Canadian Sketches” to this publication. National Library of Canada. “Canadian Poetry Archive: Susanna Moodie (1803-1885)” <http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/canvers/bios/emoodie.htm>.
5. The poems and corresponding images are not paginated in Atwood and Pachter (1997). The bracketed page numbers in the citations are hand counted.

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