Introduction

Susanna Moodie (née Strickland) is well known for Roughing It in the Bush and, to a lesser extent, Life in the Clearings, accounts of her New World experience. However, little attention has been paid to the remainder of her extensive output. She began publishing in the 1820s alongside the popular women writers who broke the ground in which the more durable works of the Brontës and Elizabeth Gaskell grew. Similarly, the seeds of Roughing It may be found in Susanna Strickland's writing for the new fashionable magazines in England. As with the earlier popular writers, much of her work for both British and colonial magazines is conventional, romantic and predictable, while her best-known book is exploratory, realistic and open-ended. She earned her popularity through her skill in satisfying the expectations of her audience. But some of her short prose shares those features of Roughing It that are now more valued. Her more interesting sketches and stories vacillate between demonstrating comforting clichés and grappling with difficult lived particulars. Tentative acts of discovery, they produce the disjunction between literary and social conventions and the individual experience with which those conventions fail to deal. Gaps and contradictions are never more apparent than when she uses her life for material. And much of her short fiction is autobiographical, generically less like the fashionable romances it appeared alongside than like Roughing It. While her short narratives illuminate her canonical text, they also stand as examples of the craft of fiction in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Susanna Strickland was born on 6 December 1803 in the county of Suffolk, England. Her father had attempted to elevate himself and his family to gentry status but he suffered a financial loss early in 1818 and died that spring. His wife and their eight children were left in reduced circumstances. In the late 1820s Susanna and four of her sisters began to supplement the family income with earnings from their publications. At the end of the decade she experienced an emotional and religious crisis which she eventually resolved in the spring of 1830 by leaving the Church of
England and converting to a Dissenting sect. That summer she met Lieutenant John Wedderburn Dunbar Moodie, a half-pay officer from the British army whose Scots family had lost its land. Having obtained Susanna's consent to emigrate — one of the few ways for fallen gentry to improve their circumstances — Moodie married her in April 1831. (I have chosen the convention of referring to her as Susanna Strickland until her marriage, and as Mrs. Moodie thereafter.) On 1 July 1832 they set sail from Edinburgh for Upper Canada.

That fall the Moodies and their eight-month-old daughter settled on the Lake Ontario front, near Port Hope. After eighteen months, dissatisfied with the neighbourhood, they took up land north of Peterborough among a more congenial society of middle-class immigrants, including Mrs. Moodie's brother, Samuel, and her sister, Catharine Parr Traill. Backwoods farming was not to their liking either, however, and within four years they were seeking a way out. Following the Upper Canadian Rebellion of 1837, Moodie served as a captain in the militia at Toronto. On the basis of this and subsequent service, and on her own contribution of loyal poems to the turmoil, Mrs. Moodie petitioned the Lieutenant-Governor for a permanent position for her husband. In the fall of 1839 J.W.D. Moodie was appointed Sheriff of Hastings County and was stationed in Belleville. In January 1840 Mrs. Moodie, now with five children, rejoined her husband, from whom she had been separated for most of the previous two years. This move did not, however, usher in the season of comfort and content for which she longed. Moodie's tenure as sheriff was plagued by the unceasing machinations of a local elite, until his resignation in January 1863. The Moodies never achieved financial stability or social rapprochement, and when J.W.D. Moodie died on 22 October 1869 his wife was left to the care of her children and sister. Mrs. Moodie relied mainly on two daughters who had married well, since her three surviving sons lacked economic security themselves. She died at a daughter's home in Toronto on 8 April 1885.
The Writing of a Life

The varying economic circumstances of Mrs. Moodie's life largely determined her writing. A more detailed consideration of significant events in her life will serve to show how consistently they are involved in her narratives, especially those in this collection. The Stricklands came from the yeomanry of the British north counties. Susanna's grandfather, bereft of hereditary lands by the return of a relative with prior claims, moved to London. Born in 1758, her father, Thomas Strickland, became a dock manager for a London shipowner, but was advised to retire to the eastern counties for his health. Susanna, the last of six daughters born to Strickland's second wife, Elizabeth (née Homer, 1772–1864), and their first Suffolk child, was followed by two brothers. She spent her first five years in a rented house, at which point her father bought Reydon Hall, outside Southwold on the Suffolk coast. The Hall is described in "Rachel Wilde" and "Trifles from the Burthen of a Life," and it, the town and the county appear throughout her writing with their initials and a dash. Her stories and sketches, apart from her historical sketches and a very few others, are set in this locale.

With his London capital Thomas Strickland established business connections in Norwich, Norfolk, with a near relation of his wife. Initially his investments thrived and Reydon Hall, a country estate with tenant farms, marked his ascent into the gentry. But Norwich was especially affected by the post-Napoleonic Wars depression and Strickland was forced to spend more time there than anticipated to oversee his investments. Early in 1818 the business with which he was involved failed and on 18 May he died, leaving his family the Hall, worthless stock and no liquid assets. Several sources attest to the difficult financial circumstances in which he left his wife and children. These events, determining Susanna's future, haunt her writing. She depicts a fall from economic grace in more than a dozen stories. Sometimes she combines loss of caste with a father's death; more importantly, this loss is the cause of emigration in "The Vanquished Lion," "The Broken Mirror," "The
Sailor’s Return,” “The Well in the Wilderness” and “Trifles from the Burthen of a Life.”

Susanna Moodie’s account of the lives of the Wilde children in “Rachel Wilde” accords with accounts of the early lives of the Stricklands. All the daughters except Jane are represented: Susanna as the eponymous heroine, Catharine as Dorothea, Sarah as Selina, Agnes as Ann and Elizabeth as Lilla; the sons Samuel and Thomas appear without being named. The Stricklands had a good library and before his death their father, assisted by Elizabeth, took an active role in educating his younger daughters. He so controlled their reading, however, that when Mrs. Moodie has Rachel familiar at seven with Shakespeare and Homer (in Pope’s translation), she names two of the few poets he allowed his girls to read. They were encouraged to study history, particularly English history of the Civil War and Restoration. The account of the Wildes’ reading reveals how the Strickland girls compensated for their father’s ban on merely ornamental or entertaining literature. History became romance. Susanna was later enthralled with “the romance of history.”

Rachel Wilde’s story spans the years 1808–1815, from her sixth to her twelfth year. Mr. Wilde’s loss of “a large fortune” through “commercial speculations” (Chapter I) is described more fully in Chapter VIII, set in 1814. Here are details about the father’s business venture with an in-law, his “failing constitution” and the reduction of “his comfortable establishment”; but he is still alive at the end of the story. A sketch of the girlhood of another Rachel in “Matrimonial Speculations” parallels the girlhoods of both Rachel Wilde and Susanna Strickland. In this version the father dies and the mother, seeking to improve her family’s economic status by repairing the breach with her well-to-do blood relations, sends Rachel to an aunt in London. Susanna made her first trip to London at the age of sixteen. The visit in “Matrimonial Speculations” occurs in early 1820; this and Rachel Wilde’s first trip away from home are probably based on Susanna Strickland’s experiences. In the course of these journeys, both heroines come up against wealthy tradespeople, whom they have been taught to despise; these confrontations dramatize the extent to which they have been set
adrift in the British class structure. Rachel Wilde, "the daughter of a poor gentleman," asserts that "Papa never visits with tradespeople." The older, more circumspect Rachel of "Matrimonial Speculations," another daughter of "a poor, proud gentleman," does not verbally express her repugnance; she simply retreats from her new-found relations the day they meet. Mrs. Moodie not only emphasizes the vulgarity of these tradespeople compared to her heroines' gentility, but through their wealth she highlights the two Rachels' poverty. Throughout her writing these two contrasts are deployed together. Her uneasiness about class arises from loss of gentility status before she could ever become accustomed to it, and this also accounts for the obsession with wealth and caste in her work and the shrillness of some of her opinions.

Mrs. Moodie does not represent her life between 1820 and 1832 in her autobiographical fiction. The subtitle of "Rachel Wilde," "Trifles from the Burthen of a Life," becomes the main title for the continuation of Rachel's narrative after her marriage to Lieutenant John M — and the birth of her first child. Writing was one of Susanna's main pastimes between her father's death and her marriage. In a memoir, Catharine provides an account of the early writing ventures of herself and Susanna that is similar to the concluding chapter of "Rachel Wilde." Both narratives tell of the discovery of the blue paper, the oral readings of the manuscripts and the reaction of the oldest sister. Sparteus, a children's book which Susanna said she wrote when she was thirteen, was her first publication, achieved with the aid of her father's friend in 1822. After an hiatus of a few years, she published a series of five children's books in the second half of the decade. By 1828 all of the sisters, except Sarah, had published one or more children's books, and Catharine, Jane and Susanna all connect writing with their economic dilemma. Susanna went from children's stories to verse and prose publication in a series of magazines and annuals. Her first book for adults and only collection of poetry, Enthusiasm, and Other Poems, appeared in 1831. During her last years in England she never lacked a publisher and could justifiably say of herself, as she says of Rachel Wilde, that "the world . . . gave the meed of praise."
Mrs. Moodie’s last words about Rachel Wilde, pointing ahead to her transformation in “Trifles from the Burthen of a Life,” tell how she abandoned fame for love, marriage and emigration; but in Susanna Strickland’s case, a religious crisis caused her to question her literary ambitions much earlier, before she met J.W.D. Moodie. This crisis, too, had social and economic implications. The Dissenting sects drew their parishioners from the middle class, but businessmen who could aspire to gentry status often belonged to the Church of England to avoid limits on the rights of Dissenters. Thomas Strickland was a member of the Established Church. While his older girls became High Church, from the mid-1820s Sarah, Susanna and Catharine had various involvements with Dissenters, involvements that disturbed their older sisters’ sense of propriety. Only when Susanna joined a Congregationalist chapel in April 1830 did she solve a religious dilemma which had begun over a year before (letter 22). Late in 1828 she had broken off an engagement to be married; early in 1829 she had given up writing; in the summer she had written of becoming a missionary and was called “a mad woman and a fanatic” by a close friend; she had destroyed her plays under the pressure of “fanatics,” as she later termed them, who told her it was “unworthy of a christian to write for the stage”; she had rejected all aspirations to fame and devoted her “talents to the service of God”; by the fall of 1829 she was suffering from some obscure illness and frightening her sisters by “fainting away.” The evidence of religious disturbance (and associated social and psychological trauma) combines with the concept of “enthusiasm” developed in her writing to situate a period of Low Church Evangelism in Susanna Strickland’s life. Her older sisters, their High Church affiliations reinforcing their social pretensions, were scandalized. Her Evangelical moment precipitated her fall from the Established Church altogether into Congregationalism, one of the original Dissenting sects. While the outcome of this storm would have been accepted by her friends among the Dissenters, it would have made overt her rejection of her sisters’ pretensions. In Congregationalism she found a religious body more suited to her economic status, and recovered
both her mental equilibrium and her literary aspirations. Her collection of poetry was now in the hands of a Dissenting printer.

Soon after her conversion, Susanna Strickland and J.W.D. Moodie met at the London home of an anti-slavery activist with whom she had become friends. Moodie knew this man from South Africa, where they had both been colonists. In London to seek a wife and a publisher for a book on the colony, Moodie planned to return to his thriving South African farm. He was successful in both quests, except that his fiancée dreaded Africa. She vacillated between what were for her two mutually exclusive options: marriage and emigration or spinsterhood and England (letters 29, 31). When Moodie agreed to change their destination from the Cape to Canada and she chose the first option — marriage and emigration — Susanna Strickland believed, like Rachel Wilde, that she was also rejecting her literary career. The methods Lieutenant M —— uses in “Trifles” to force his wife to accept emigration with him seem to be the same methods that Lieutenant Moodie used on Susanna. In the expansion of “Trifles” into the novel, Flora Lyndsay, however, Mrs. Moodie’s autobiographical heroine resumes writing during the trans-Atlantic voyage, and her author, of course, did not abandon writing when she emigrated. Perhaps it was her only means of resistance.

Mrs. Moodie’s fictional self-representation ends at the colony’s threshold. She resumes the story of her life in the openly autobiographical prose that culminates in Roughing It and Life in the Clearings.

A Life of Writing

Susanna Strickland Moodie had two main periods of literary productivity: the first, begun in 1827, ended with her emigration; the second, begun with the move to Belleville, ended with her consolidation of periodical work into a series of six books, starting with Roughing It in 1852. Her attempts to resuscitate her literary career in the 1860s failed. At each stage, her career was directly and indirectly connected with her social and economic position: it provided the possibility
of improving that position through material return and
social recognition; it constituted the site of her struggle to
reconcile herself to that position. The tension between the
desire for independence and the reality of constraint in
_Spartacus_ is resolved by romanticizing the slave-hero. The
hero of _Hugh Latimer_, another children’s book, shares with
Susanna Strickland a grandfather who lost the family farm
and yeoman rank, a father who died penniless and a mother
struggling to support her family. The recognition of Hugh’s
worth by wealthy patrons leads to his social elevation,
demonstrating not only that the true basis of gentility is
morality but also that the good ultimately gain the material
confirmation of their inner worth. The contrived plot is jus-
tified, here and elsewhere in Mrs. Moodie’s fiction, as proof
of God’s control over the seemingly random operations of
contingency: romance becomes realism when Providence is
actively believed in. None of her separately published chil-
dren’s books is short enough for inclusion here, but most of
them show their heroes curbing their revolt against circum-
stance by succumbing to the middle-class concept of duty,
again demonstrating lessons that she herself was trying to
learn. But her compulsion to write was also an investment
in the power of writing to lift her out of the social position
humility dictated she should accept, and to that extent was
itself a prolonged revolt against that position.

The professionalization of writing and the demand
for women authors for the new fashionable magazines and
annuals of the 1820s and 1830s added substance to this
investment. Susanna Strickland’s first signed publication for
adults was a sketch published in _La Belle Assemblee_, whose
alternate title, _Court and Fashionable Magazine_, and self-
description as “Containing Interesting and Original
Literature, and Records of the Beau Monde” succinctly
locate it in the social and literary world of its time. In the
spring of 1827 she mentions having sent a sketch to _La Belle
Assemblee_ and thinks of “becoming a regular contributor to
the Mag” (letter 2). “Sketches from the Country. No. 1. —
The Witch of the East Cliff” is in the July issue. This piece
and three of the four that follow it are melodramatic stories
which old, county characters narrate. Only the fifth, “Old
“Hannah; or, The Charm,” comes close to the conventions of the sketch as they were being established, most popularly, by Mary Russell Mitford, whom Susanna Strickland admired and with whom she corresponded. “Old Hannah,” included in the present selection, is the only one of these sketches not based on local legend. It also contains the greatest amount of autobiographical information. As the conventions of the sketch dictate, it lacks the developed plot which constrains the previous stories in the series.

Susanna Strickland published some forty items in *La Belle Assemblée*, most of them verse. Of the prose pieces, two others are represented in this collection. “A Dream” demonstrates the importance she placed on experience beyond that of the rational waking mind, and also reveals her early preoccupation with fame. This sketch thus relates to her interest in the supernatural mentioned in “Old Hannah” and present in “The Witch of the East Cliff,” and to her belief in omens as exhibited in “Rachel Wilde” and “Trifles.” The other piece from *La Belle Assemblée*, “The Pope’s Promise,” is not as one-dimensionally didactic as most of her non-autobiographical fiction. Neither the Pope nor the shoemaker deserves his elevation in this story. When the shoemaker chastizes “a rich community of Franciscan monks,” his words are charged with the author’s displaced anger at the laxity of some Anglican priests. Counter-Reformation Catholics were legitimate targets for early nineteenth-century British Protestants, but the vehemence with which these monks are castigated suggests that her target was a professional clergy closer to home. An evil character in *Mark Hurdlestone* considers the “five rich livings” held by the local rector sufficient incentive for seeking a life of luxury in the Church of England, and the Reverend Dr. Beaumont in “The Doctor Distressed” is the object of a similar, although more muted, satiric intent. That Mrs. Moodie republished “The Pope’s Promise” as “A Historical Sketch” shows how casual were her conceptions of both history and the sketch.

Shortly after her first contribution to *La Belle Assemblée* Susanna Strickland began writing for the annuals or gift-books, one of the first triumphs of capitalist commodity publishing. She continued to submit her work to the
annuals until 1831, the year this phenomenon peaked with sixty-three different titles vying for the market; that December, she had at least seven pieces in four different annuals. Her five stories for the annuals in 1831 all deal with problems created by poverty. Her comic anecdote, "My Aunt Dorothy's Legacy," may relate to her own anticipation of an inheritance. There are also close parallels between the careers of Tom Singleton, a character in the story, and Thomas, the youngest Strickland. Legacies feature again in "Matrimonial Speculations" and Mark Hurdlestone, and in autobiographical guise in "Trifles" and Roughing It.

Ornate engravings were a main selling point of the annuals, and the fashionable writers who were sought in preference to more literary authors were sometimes commissioned to produce poems and stories illustrating already engraved illustrations. Mrs. Moodie wrote "The Vanquished Lion" and a poem to accompany illustrations in Ackermann's Juvenile Forget Me Not for 1832 (issued in 1831). The picture of a mother saving her infant from a lion, glossed only on the last page, provides a pretext for the rest of the story. In the opening paragraphs the mother's explanation to her son of the family's financial failure and necessary emigration produces what Mrs. Moodie knew of the economic and social causes of her own dilemma. She was married and pregnant when she submitted this story and in it she condenses her own experience and that of her mother by having the father of the story, instead of dying, decide to emigrate to the Cape colony. The attempts by this fictional mother to deal with the prospect of emigration anticipates Mrs. Moodie's own attempts, reiterated up to twenty years later in Roughing It. Reliance on God's inscrutable design ameliorates a fully determinist vision. Providence is the last resort for a woman who feels that control of her life is in the hands of others. The mother's grief is never resolved in the story. Her psychological distress at its opening is detoured into physical distress at its close. When next she occupies the foreground, she is before the lion, praying for the release of her child. The success of her prayers proves that God is listening. Mrs. Moodie must not have tested Him by praying against emigration.
Her religious crisis was probably the reason Susanna Strickland ceased to publish in the worldly La Belle Assemblée in 1829. The annuals were noted for their piety and many explicitly religious series offered her opportunities to publish; thus, writing for them would have fulfilled a moral, rather than a literary, ambition. During 1830 and early 1831 she gave expression to another commitment, writing poems and reviews for her friend in the Anti-Slavery Society who edited the Athenaeum. She transcribed for him The History of Mary Prince, and the exchange between Rachel and another character in “Trifles” concerning a book of the same title probably occurred in Mrs. Moodie’s own life. Late in 1830, her new religious identity intact, she re-entered the fashionable periodicals through the Lady’s Magazine, perhaps edited by her sister, Eliza. Her three stories in the Lady’s Magazine may have been published as a result of Eliza’s disposal of her papers after her emigration. The problem of the legacy in “The Doctor Distressed” is compounded for the Harfords by the son, Harry, being discharged from the army on half-pay. This was J.W.D. Moodie’s situation when he became a prospective son-in-law to the Stricklands. This story was incorporated in “Matrimonial Speculations” and the ending changed to extend its autobiographical significance. The Reverend is widowed in the second version, but does not die. The Harford son and heir does not wait for the disposal of the doctor’s fortune, but solves his financial problem by emigrating with a wife who accepts the move as a condition of marriage.

All but one of the pieces Mrs. Moodie published in North American periodicals and newspapers prior to her work for the Literary Garland were poems, many of them reprints. She contributed one story to the short-lived Canadian Literary Magazine in 1833. Her first prose piece for the Garland, “The Royal Quixote,” a long and rather tedious story about King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, a favourite historical figure of hers and her guide in “A Dream,” was, she says in a note, written in 1824. She was always extremely frugal with her writing, seeking publishers for earlier work, published and unpublished, and forging periodical fragments into longer works, as she did for all her
books. Once she began to publish in the *Garland* she had no difficulty becoming one of its main contributors, supplying both new work and old. The *Garland* was written by and for a small group of recent middle-class immigrants who wanted to satisfy conceptions of their gentility which had been frustrated in England. In the wake of the rebellions this group believed in its destiny as a new elite, tempering the extremes of the fallen oligarchy without succumbing to the temptations of agrarian radicalism. The British political principles of hierarchy, a balanced constitution and responsibility were part of a continuum which easily measured literature according to its piety and gentility. These values, and her conventional expression of them, deaden Mrs. Moodie’s verse in the *Garland*. As her career with this periodical continued, however, she began to publish more prose than verse, and through her prose she eventually went beyond the limitations of the literary tradition the *Garland* attempted to transplant.

“The Sailor’s Return,” subtitled “Reminiscences of Our Parish” and labelled No. 1 as if to initiate a series, is the first of Mrs. Moodie’s *Garland* stories in this collection. She plays with a pose of parish chronicler long enough to introduce Amy Morris, who tells her own story. Amy’s is a conventional story of thwarted love, but in the thwarting her experience touches upon her author’s. The economic failure of Amy’s fiancé’s family is solved by the providential provision of the opportunity to emigrate. Amy’s expression of the fear that emigration permanently severs loved ones is only one of Mrs. Moodie’s voicings of the same fear throughout her writing. She frees Amy from what could have been a prolonged engagement to an absent lover by ending his emigration in shipwreck. Mrs. Moodie covers this lapse in the divine design and attempts to transcend sentimental conventions by having Amy disprove her own assertion that “the heart is incapable of feeling a second passion.” The mix of sketch and romance, of fiction and non-fiction, of various levels of first-person narration, while it makes the story somewhat disjointed, shows Mrs. Moodie experimenting with her form and exploring options that her own decisions had foreclosed.
In "The Broken Mirror," published two years later in the *Garland*, her own experiences are displaced into another exploration of the Cape colony option. This story demonstrates that "Providence is always true to those who remain true to themselves" and claims to be "A True Tale." The disposal of the mirror that makes the Harden family fortune in the colony and gives the story its title is asserted in a footnote by Mrs. Moodie to be based on fact. The temporal and spatial setting, and the nationality and religion of the Hardens, suggest that she got the anecdotal kernel of the story from her husband.

The Moodies began the *Victoria Magazine* in 1847, hoping to find a market among poorer settlers and thus avoid competition with the *Garland*. Overall, the material in their periodical, a large proportion supplied by them, does not distinguish it from its rival. An exception, "The Well in the Wilderness," Mrs. Moodie's first story in the *Victoria Magazine*, while another story of emigration under economic duress, is her only fiction set in North America. But as a result of bringing her fiction so close to home, the benevolent Providence, which has hitherto been behind the happy destinies of her emigrants, disappears. Wild animals never appear in her Old World fiction; her repeated expression of fear of them in her autobiographical work suggests that they are emblematic of her terror of the unsettled parts of the world. In 1831 Providence was a presence powerful enough to save the mother in "The Vanquished Lion" from the beast in the jungle; in 1847, fifteen years from England, the beast and its jungle devour Providence. The one time Mrs. Moodie tried to bring her fiction to North America she produced a shocking image of loss of faith in God's ability to engineer happy plots for immigrating heroines.

Mrs. Moodie devoted much of her creative energy in the years 1847–1851 to producing the series of sketches included in *Roughing It and Life in the Clearings*. Those that focus on characters other than herself have the unity of short stories, but they are unified by plots that destroy their protagonists. When she transformed the sketches into a continuous narrative of her life, she could not discern the larger plot which would link them and redeem that life. She was
too realistic to impose a romance plot and could not con-
front her life as a tragic plot.

Plot failure is also evident in the autobiographical
fictions about her life prior to immigration, which Mrs.
Moodie began publishing in 1848. “Rachel Wilde,” serial-
ized in the Victoria Magazine and diffuse and plotless
throughout, is brought to an arbitrary close. It is a recon-
struction of her girlhood as a young artist, and the artist,
worshipping Napoleon and Milton’s Satan, is an outcast and
a visionary. The isolation Rachel generates for herself at the
home of the tradesman and the isolation generated for her at
the home of the gentleman are both due to the uncertainty
of her class status. Mrs. Moodie juxtaposes the development
of the artist with an exposition of economic determinism.
While she does not connect the two, the first three para-
graphs of the story delineate a theory of environmental
determinism which asserts that character is conditioned by
circumstances. Missing is any plot that would recover deter-
minism by translating it as Providence. When free to invent
a plot, as in “The Broken Mirror” and others of her more
conventional stories, she could demonstrate the existence of
a benevolent God. When she was living the plot out, no such
easy solution was available. A “Domestic Sketch” in the last
number of the Victoria Magazine, “The Quiet Horse,” is
based on her experience, whether or not the event it depicts
actually occurred. The story provides an image of the expe-
dients to which the Stricklands were driven, and it demands
comparison with Susanna’s epistolary anecdote of using a
donkey to draw their chaise. The story’s moral that “No one
looks well or acts well out of his own sphere” applies to Mrs.
Moodie’s forced departure from the sphere within which she
was raised.

Mrs. Moodie published excerpts from her life text,
both documentary and fictive, in 1847 and 1848. She pub-
lished no new prose for the next two years, probably
because, as indicators in Roughing It suggest, she was
engaged in producing that book. In the spring of 1851 she
published the first instalment of “Trifles from the Burthen
of a Life” in the Garland. This story, like “Rachel Wilde”
loose and unplotted, lacks thematic wholeness and simply
ends, as arbitrarily as the other story, with the emigrants boarding ship. The penultimate paragraphs strain to discern God’s design in this story and in Mrs. Moodie’s own life. The first two ships on which the M — s almost embarked both meet disaster. As in “The Sailor’s Return,” Mrs. Moodie does not wonder why emigrants secondary to her plot are not guarded by Providence and, as in “The Vanquished Lion,” the providential rescue of her main character from physical disaster does not dissipate her fear of the social and psychological disaster of emigration. While her fabricated stories constitute successfully integrated redeemptions of determinism by attribution to God’s benevolent order, her autobiographical texts, rather than taking over pre-established designs, seek to establish a design which is never quite there in the record — hence her inability to achieve satisfactory closure in these texts, including Roughing It and Life in the Clearings. Loosed from the contrivances of plot, she demonstrates the very unprovidential nature of her life.

Mrs. Moodie revised “Trifles” to become Flora Lyndsay, published in 1854 by the same firm that published her two Canadian books in the two preceding years. She expanded the first version in three ways: she added a number of character sketches, the best known being that of “Miss Wilhelmina Carr” which takes up three chapters in the novel; she extended the narrative to encompass the transatlantic voyage, ending with the ship anchored in the St. Lawrence; she inserted the story of “Noah Cotton” — the last third of the novel — on the pretext that her heroine wrote it on the ship. She drops nothing from the first version and her revisions do not alter Rachel’s dramatic struggle to cope with emigration. Mrs. Moodie described Flora Lyndsay to her publisher, in terms which also apply to “Trifles,” as “a bundle of droll sketches of our adventures out to Canada and preparations for our emigration,” and also acknowledged its incompleteness: “This should have been the commencement of Roughing It, for it was written for it, and I took a freak of cutting it out of the MS” (letter 47). At the end of the novel she refers to her continuation of it in the documentary work. In Life in the Clearings she also refers to its more famous
predecessor and in a letter says that the two might have made up one book (letter 49).

As Mrs. Moodie was producing her life text in the late 1840s and early 1850s, her publishing relations were becoming unstable. After twelve issues the Moodies' trouble with the publisher of the Victoria Magazine made its future uncertain; plans for a second year were soon dropped. Their magazine would have been unprofitable because of many of the same factors that made the Garland's demise imminent. An indigenous business and professional class was re-establishing political stability without aid from the middle-class immigrants of the 1830s, most of whom would have become assimilated to North American ways by 1850. Interest in nurturing a genteel British literary tradition, outdated even in its homeland, was fading. The Garland failed in 1851 and by this point Mrs. Moodie had a British book publisher. She lost this publisher after the five books following Roughing It failed to attain a comparable modest success; by 1855 she was without a publisher. She published again in the early 1860s, but as a nationalist sense of Canadian writing was awakening she returned to her British youth for material. Two late sketches of men she knew in the 1820s conclude the present volume. Her output was slight in these years, and she placed her last piece in 1872.

Rereading the Writing and the Life

Just as Mrs. Moodie developed Roughing It from a series of discrete sketches into a prolonged narrative, so too she began "Rachel Wilde" with self-sufficient "trifles" or sketches. She headed the first two chapters No. 1 and No. II, and they could stand on their own like the individual pieces in her many series of sketches. If she was beguiled into fully accounting for her early life only well after she began the accounting, this would explain the inconsistencies in narrative voice and the transparent device of the found manuscript. Perhaps she was unintentionally led into writing her life history, but once she began she produced a fairly complete account up to the late 1840s. Implicitly acknowledging the most important events in her life, she devotes the most pages
to her father's financial failure and death, and to her marriage and emigration. She develops more or less consistent personae in her autobiographical texts — a misunderstood artist for "Rachel Wilde," a submissive wife for "Trifles," an heroic backwoods woman for Roughing It, a detached observer for Life in the Clearings — and these personae are more or less convincing alibis for the separate existence of these texts. But none of her autobiographical texts is complete in itself, not even the three books of her Canadian trilogy. These texts are instalments in a serial writing project directed at aligning their author's perceptions of her life with the social and economic realities of that life. This life writing project includes sketches in which she is only an observer. The project is also deflected into some of the fictions in which she uses autobiographical details as a basis for exploring options she did not take. The project necessarily remains as unfinished and contingent as the life it shadows and the history it attempts to capture.

Fictional explorations of options not taken, the New World unravelling of romance plots and their replacement by tragedy, the discovery that Providence does not support and thus ratify all emigration schemes — writing was Mrs. Moodie's quiet way of resisting decisions about her life over which she felt she had no control. A striking number of her stories and sketches begin with questions asked by one character of another; the first half of Roughing It is structured on dialogue as interrogation. These seemingly formal features further manifest the power of words to probe the assumptions identity relies upon, and they also reveal that this probing is not always consolatory. Mrs. Moodie had reason to fear the exposure of self-doubt that writing risked. How could she acknowledge that the decisions she was forced to make in her late twenties may have been the wrong ones?

A closer consideration of the faith Mrs. Moodie placed in the supernatural and non-rational can disclose the subversion enacted in her writing. Catharine and Susanna in their youth were enthralled by astrology and by stories that Reydon Hall was haunted. Susanna opens "The Witch of the East Cliff" by noting her pleasure in ghost stories, and she later writes of Rachel Wilde's converse with ghosts, witches
and fairies. The sketch on witchcraft is matched by another about a successful summons of the living by the dead. Rachel Wilde vaguely believes in "second sight," and Mrs. Moodie wonders if a family of backwoods neighbours "were gifted with secondsight" (*Roughing It* 440). She deals with magic in two of her *Garland* serial novels. She gives premonitory weight to "A Dream," and in *Geoffrey Moncton*, after a long digression on dreams as "revelations from the spirit land," a character has a dream the exact prescience of which is confirmed (68). In the pseudo-scientific discourse of the period oneiromancy was linked with phrenology and Mrs. Moodie confirmed her belief in the latter in letters, *Roughing It*, *Life in the Clearings* and "Washing the Black-a-moor White." She based two early poems on a successful experiment in telepathy conducted with a friend, and expressed her happy belief in spiritual communion with the absent in a letter (letter 4). In *Roughing It* she confirms her ability to communicate spiritually with her husband in Belleville and devotes several pages to establishing the truth of "this mysterious intercourse between the spirits of those who are bound to each other" (493). She fulfils the conception of the artist as visionary, developed in "Rachel Wilde," most explicitly in her poetry, but she makes prophetic statements in her prose as well. She believed there were many "mysteries of the mind" (*Geoffrey Moncton* 322, 326), and these and "the mysterious nature of man" (*Roughing It* 494) could not be analysed rationally, but might one day be better understood. These uncontentious beliefs force us to take more seriously the statements she builds on their foundation.

Among the "mysteries" of Mrs. Moodie's mind the one that bears most closely on the question of her writing as resistance is her belief in premonitions and omens. Many characters in her conventional fiction have premonitions which, foreshadowing plot developments, turn out to be accurate. In this collection, the "something" that "whispers" to Mrs. Harden in "The Broken Mirror" predicts that the family "shall have luck" with the mirror. The disposal of the mirror in the Cape colony proves to the family that they are under "providential care." Mrs. Moodie's fiction contains no omens of disaster, but Amy Morris's "want of confidence in
the wise dispensations of an over-ruling Providence” is affirmed by the loss of her fiancé in a shipwreck en route to Upper Canada. The storm that rages the day the M——s try to depart in “Trifles” strikes Rachel as “a bad omen,” but her husband reacts angrily to her “childish” belief in such “an exploded superstition.” While Rachel grants that reason will not support “her favorite theory,” she nonetheless insists that “we are all more or less influenced by these mysterious presentiments.” When they miss their ship for Scotland a second time, Rachel has another premonition: “I should be quite disheartened if I did not believe that Providence directed these untoward events.” This time her husband inclines to her opinion despite his “disbelief in signs and omens.” In a brief exchange inserted at this point in Flora Lyndsay, Mrs. Moodie’s autobiographical heroine suggests an interpretation of this second omen: “Is it not a solemn warning to us, not to leave England?” (105). Here, and at all but one other point in “Trifles,” Lieutenant M—— overrides his wife’s wishes, whether they arise from premonitions or from more capricious foundations.

In Roughing It Mrs. Moodie begins her narration of the events leading up to emigration by insisting that everyone has “secretly acknowledged” the power of the “mysterious warnings” which “the human heart” receives (206). She declares her faith in these warnings and hints that she would have been “saved much after-sorrow” if she had paid “stricter heed” to “the voice of the soul.” Her digression prepares for the introduction of one such omen. On the last night in England her “inward monitor” warns her not to emigrate: “how gladly would I have obeyed the injunction had it still been in my power” (207). The only time in “Trifles” that Lieutenant M—— gives in to his wife is when “the dread of going in the Rachel, took a prophetic hold of the mind of her namesake.” In this story Mrs. Moodie can only credit Providence for having saved the M——s from death by cholera on the first ship they missed and from death by smallpox on the Rachel. She confirms the omen that saves them from these disasters. But what of the omens sent by Providence to Rachel and Mrs. Moodie telling them they should not emigrate at all? She never disputes them. In nei-
ther text does she ever claim that God watched over her own emigration. Was she, in 1851 when she was writing both of these passages on premonitions, secretly saying to herself and all who would read her that the omen she received on the eve of emigrating had been right? Was she afraid that by giving in to the demands of J.W.D. Moodie she had strayed from a romance plot authorized by Providence into a dangerously unplotted life?

Mrs. Moodie was no more than historically accurate in consistently connecting emigration with loss of caste. Nonetheless, her obsessive return to moments of fall and departure brings home what doubts and anxieties plagued that small, educated group of fallen gentry who settled among the mass of poorer immigrants in Upper Canada in the 1830s. Her sketches and stories show, among other things, that not all immigrants were willing to accept the inevitability of their exile from England, and they bring us to certain insights that bear directly on roughing it in Upper Canada.

Note on the Text

Besides her six books, Mrs. Moodie published five serialized novels and over seventy sketches and stories of various lengths. Another editor would make different choices for a collection of her short prose. I have chosen those pieces in which she is most engaged with her own experience, but other principles of selection have also come into play. No sketch that became a part of either Roughing It or Life in the Clearings has been included. Many stories have been excluded because they are either too long, too slight or too conventional to warrant attention. I have tried to provide examples from all of the various genres in which she wrote, and from all of the major periodicals in which she published prose. The selections are arranged in chronological order according to the first known publication date. This information and information on any subsequent appearances of the individual pieces are given in a note to each. The house styles of the periodicals that first published these texts have been retained. I have not attempted to improve, correct or modernize Mrs. Moodie’s prose and have made alterations only in clear cases of error, usually attributable to careless printing.

xvi

INTRODUCTION
Notes


2 *The Romance of History* is the title of a book Susanna Strickland reviewed in the *Athenaeum* in late 1830. Her defence of this book against "matter-of-fact people" who
object to the taking of “unwarrantable liberties with historical events” and to the mistaking of “fiction for fact” makes it clear that romance, not history, is the pertinent category in considering her own historical sketches and stories.

3 Catharine turned money earned on her first book over to her mother “to eke out the now reduced income of the home” (FitzGibbon xv). Jane believed that “poverty was the means of bringing forth” the sisters’ talents (quoted in Pope-Hennessy 18) and Susanna makes the same point in Roughing It (209).

4 The information and quotations are from letters 8, 10, 12, 17, 18, 61, 19, 20. Susanna Strickland develops her concept of religious enthusiasm in the title poem of Enthusiasma. She expresses a prose version of this concept through the voice of a heroine with autobiographical features in Mark Hurdlestone. The Dissenting sects were rationally inclined and only the Methodists and Anglican Evangelists were enthusiasts in her sense.

5 J.W.D. Moodie describes his South African settlement, his return to England and his decision to emigrate to Canada in his Scenes and Adventures, as a Soldier and Settler (Montreal: Lovell, 1866) viii–ix and in one of his chapters in Roughing It (232–34).

6 The only published discussion of her children’s books is by Peterman (68–69).


In an exchange about the Cape colony added to "Trifles" before it became *Flora Lyndsay*, Mrs. Moodie has her autobiographical heroine speak about her "terror of the wild beasts" (7–8). J.W.D. Moodie in *Roughing It* says that his wife was against emigration to South Africa because "wild animals were her terror" (233). The mother in "The Broken Mirror" cites "the wild beasts" as a reason not to emigrate to South Africa. In *Roughing It* Mrs. Moodie mentions a "dread of encountering wild beasts in the woods" which she "never could wholly shake off" (295) and describes her "cowardice" during a walk with her husband at night in the woods when a bear followed them (426–27).

Letters 3, 4, 47, 63, 69; the phrase "the truth of phrenology" appears in both *Roughing It* (335) and *Life in the Clearings* (193).
This page intentionally left blank