

Virginia Watson Rouslin

The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Pioneering in Canada *

On the eve of the 1967 Canadian Centennial, Kildare Dobbs asked the question, "why do we have so few heroes?"¹ Those he mentioned from the past were the "wild colonial boys ... fierce-whiskered militia majors and ramrod Orange drill sergeants, fire-breathing teetotal rebels, mad half-breed horsemen, dauntless editors, builders of railroads and provinces."² This is the usual colourful representation of a hero, particularly a pioneering one, that by definition leaves out the grey little woman back home, standing over the coal stove.

In seeking a new twentieth-century hero, Dobbs opts for men like Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye; they are the breed of men who are "champions of reality in a world of illusion".³ In 1976, it seems fit to reconsider whom we should include in our list of past heroes; heroes *and* heroines who have gone before us into the wilderness, prepared the way for others to follow, and who have left us, as Frye believes, a "legacy of dignity and high courage".⁴

Dobbs's twentieth-century hero already existed in the nineteenth. Pioneer women who wrote then usually had the express purpose in mind of giving voice to reality over the bland and untrue sales pitch of Crown emigration agents. If one studies the non-fictional writings of these women, one senses tremendous energy and strength and notes that they were writing of their experience as women; sometimes unknowingly and out of the obscurity of their own family circle, they wrote of something larger, more enduring than an ordinary daily journal, and something that was part of a common feminist experience. In their journals, letters, and diaries emerge recurring themes – and they are important – of what it was like to be a "pioneer"; not the kind that we have come to associate with the strictly masculine

interpretation of that word, but rather what the experience felt like for a woman of intelligence. This female pioneer experience, like so much of female experience in any era or any society, was different from that of the male's, and it offered her different challenges. It is not within the scope of this paper to evaluate how much outside the mainstream of literary activity and response they might have been. But it is certain that their reading public was identified in their minds as strictly female, and, as Dobbs would prefer, these writers were determined to tell the truth about Canada in preference to the illusion of the official picture.

Susanna Strickland Moodie (1804-1885) felt that most of the "romantic" reading she had done, preparatory to coming, had little in common with her own real life. Her sister, Catherine Parr Traill (1802-1899) in her *Backwoods of Canada*, reiterated the same thing. After observing that a currently popular book on pioneering by a Dr. Dunlop was a bit thin on material for women (who made up a large percentage of the immigrants), Traill states: "'Forewarned, forearmed' is a maxim of our forefathers, containing much matter in its pithy brevity; and following its spirit, the writer of the following papers has endeavoured to afford every possible information to the wives and daughters of emigrants.... Truth has been conscientiously her object in the work, for it were cruel to write in flattering terms calculated to deceive emigrants."⁵

Anna Brownell Jameson (1794-1860) addressed her two-volume *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles* of 1839 "to my own sex" in order to suggest what Canada is really like, especially for women, and in hopes that the truth "like a mustard seed ... will suggest matter for enquiry and reflection."⁶ Like Moodie's and Traill's, hers was an attempt to correct the impression of female pioneers and their daily life which had been "distorted" by travel writers. Similarly, Mary Gapper O'Brien (1798-1876) had read Basil Hall's then popular *Travels in North America for the Years 1827-28*, but felt that her letters home to family and friends (which were circulated like a newspaper) were necessary to supplement this.

The Canadian emigrant women of the 1820's had similar backgrounds which influenced what they wrote about. They were probably unique in the annals of pioneer stock, particularly with reference to the United States, for the following reason: after the Napoleonic Wars England suffered a serious depression which made living on a retired

officer's half-pay extremely difficult. These gentlemen and their wives were usually well-educated and cultured, but they realized that in England they would be unable to give their children similar advantages. The British legal custom of primogeniture, whereby the eldest son inherited the whole estate, also worked to the economic disadvantage of any other siblings. When the British government offered free bush land in Upper Canada on the conditions that a certain number of acres be cleared and a dwelling be erected, a large number of these intellectual "farmers" and their families decided to make a new life in Upper Canada, or "Canada West". In addition to the lure of free land, they could retain their pensions which they hoped might go farther in their adopted country. Thus, in her introduction to the *Journal of Mary O'Brien*, Audrey Miller notes that after the wars, "of the 50,000, it was chiefly reading families who emigrated."⁷

The Strickland sisters, Susanna and Catherine, had come from a writing family which sounds very much like the Brontë home. All sisters (and their one brother who also emigrated), were raised on a diet of Shakespeare, Descartes, and Newton (a relative). Before embarking for Canada, the women had published children's stories and had written for women's magazines. Their father had educated them at home because he felt that "girls [as well as boys] should develop their brains to the best of their ability."⁸ After the depression struck, the Stricklands suffered financial ruin, and all the children determined to support themselves. The women did it by writing. Eliza, the eldest, became a reporter for London's *Court Journal*, and Agnes and she authored the *Lives of the Queens of England*. As for Susanna and Catherine, the necessity to support themselves by their pen did not cease once they reached Canada. For example, when Mr. Moodie was away on military assignment during the Mackenzie Rebellion, Susanna and an old nurse, Jenny, were left alone to cope with the children and the farm. With a heavy debt hanging over their heads, Susanna attempted to write in the evenings in order to bring in additional money for essentials. Upon receiving her first twenty-dollar bill from the editor of the *North American Review*, she exclaimed: "It was my own; I had earned it with my own hand; and it seemed to my delighted fancy to form the nucleus out of which a future independence for my family might arise."⁹

Catherine Traill's literary talents were called to the rescue more often than this, however. In her biography of Traill, Sara Eaton notes the

number of times Traill had to write in order that her family might eat. At the age of 47, for example, after numerous financial setbacks, the loss of their farm, and just after her husband collapsed, Traill “wrote as she had never written before, to keep her family alive.”¹⁰ Her published works in Canada included *The Backwoods of Canada*, a *Settler’s Guide*, and her pride and joy *Canadian Wildflowers* and *Studies of Plant Life in Canada*. Her botanical discoveries were completely new, and she often sent her findings to the Department of Botany at the University of Edinburgh. In addition to this, she wrote a story for children – of both sexes – describing pioneering. It was appropriately entitled *The Canadian Crusoes – A Tale of the Rice Lake Plains*.

Anna Jameson arrived in Canada with the express purpose of writing something on Canadian women and on her own experiences in the new country. The “sisterhood” (a term which she uses) of women in the new land would provide the material for her new book. Jameson lived in the growing town of Toronto for a time, as her husband was the Attorney General of Upper Canada; however, their careers conflicted, and a separation was in the making during most of the writing of *Winter Studies*. She too had financial pressures since she alone was responsible for the support of her sisters and mother back in England. Jameson’s route took her overland through Ontario to Detroit, then up the lakes by steamer to Michilimackinac and on by *bateau* to Sault Ste. Marie, and finally through the northern Great Lakes route, back to Toronto.

Mary O’Brien’s letters to her relatives and friends back in England were never published in her lifetime; however, she did write on current events for newspapers, translated German books for herself and the community, and at both Richmond and later at Lake Simcoe, she was responsible to her community for bringing lending libraries in touch with the people, and for setting up a school and a tutoring service in her home. Her educational background included an unusual (for that day) period of study in a private school in England, as well as a rigorous education at home. One of her brothers became a doctor, and she herself was proficient in Italian, German and French – so much so that shortly after arriving in Canada, she applied for the position of Classics Master at the new Upper Canada College. (Several prospective suitors, it appears, avoided her since she was regarded as a Blue-stocking.) Like Traill, she helped collect artifacts of the new land which were later used in her brother’s *Quadrupeds found in the District of Upper Canada ...*

describing some species hitherto unnoticed. Her husband (one of the more persistent of her suitors), was an Irish officer in the British army, also on half-pay, and owner of a government grant of bush land near Richmond, Ontario.

Because of the use of this education, intelligence, perseverance, and literary ability, we have been left a record of how bright women responded to the unusual. For them it was a land of snow, heat, mosquitoes, and the unknown – the antithesis of the gentle, cultivated areas like Sussex they had left behind. But Canada was a kind of laboratory which provided them with materials for a unique experiment in independence and self-development which they would have missed, had they remained in England. Most of them recognized this, and commented on Canada as a training ground for their mettle, a testing place where they could fight with “whatever strength their Maker has seen fit to give them”¹, as Jameson put it. For Moodie, this is ultimately a struggle with herself. She is doing battle not only with the harsh environment and the Yankee settlers who threaten to borrow all her belongings and who scoff at her high-brow ways. More importantly, she is fighting her own pride which, at first, tells her she should not have to stoop to lowly farm work. For, when young, the Strickland sisters were forbidden to play with the children of servants and labourers. In the new country, upon reflection and cogitation, Moodie sees the error of her ways: “I had a hard struggle with my pride before I would consent to render the least assistance on the farm, but reflection convinced me that I was wrong... Ah, poverty! Thou art a hard task-master, but in thy soul-ennobling school I have received more god-like lessons, have learned more sublime truths, than ever I acquired in the smooth highways of the world! The independent in soul can rise above the seeming disgrace of poverty, and hold fast their integrity.”^{1 2}

In applying her motto of “never yield”, Susanna is aided in coping with this environment by establishing a relationship between her scholarly learning and her daily life. As skilfully as the deductive academics reasoned from general premises to particular cases, Susanna and the other women writers utilize their knowledge of Shakespeare, Swift or Newton (as the occasion demanded), and working from these premises or general truths to particular cases, they arrive at reasonable conclusions. Book-learning also smoothes over the rough surfaces of diurnal life and enables Susanna to see beauty, and sometimes even the

comic, in what otherwise would simply be alien. On one occasion, Jenny the old nurse is given a garish bonnet by one of their neighbours as a going-away present: "Jenny had placed over the coarse calico cap, with its full furbelow of the same yellow, ill-washed, homely material, next to her head; ... to crown all, a grey-beaver bonnet, once mine, towered up as high as the celebrated crown in which brother Peter figures in Swift's *Tale of a Tub*."¹³ Jenny is seen as a "garish" kind of person, an individual too, but one who also has similarities to archetypes created by Susanna's literary predecessors.

The harder the struggle for Moodie, the more meaningful the rewards. Back home in England, there would have been too little of the former in occupations reserved for women: "I have contemplated a well-hoed ridge of potatoes on that bush farm with as much delight as in years long past I had experienced in examining a fine painting in some well-appointed drawing-room."¹⁴ The values Susanna holds become revaluated, readjusted, and more realistic. Too often, one senses, they had been simply accepted as given. Now, in the testing-ground of the pioneer settlement, they must pass the test of usefulness. This does not mean that all aesthetic considerations are devalued; but such things as pieces of finery that were once treasured in England are seen to be just that — "useless finery."¹⁵ All these little victories for Susanna, like learning how to bake bread (despite the ridicule of her "low-class" neighbours), finding her own natural substitute for coffee in the dandelion, making meals from Nature's cupboard of nuts and seeds, and obtaining meat from the squirrels and deer in their ken, are part of her "coming of age" in Canada. Now she really knows the meaning of the old proverb and reasserts that "necessity is the mother of invention."¹⁶ All of this increases her natural appreciation of her surroundings — her awareness has become keener because her appetite is sharper and simpler now.

Moodie becomes most independent when she struggles with what are apparently her own devils. And in that process of ridding herself of many of her prejudices about her fellow human beings and her set ideas of herself as the proper, well-brought up English lady, she achieves much in the way of self-esteem, insight, enlightenment, and self-reliance. The proof occurs when it counts the most. One day when her husband is away, "no man in the house, and a mile and a quarter from any other habitation", a fire from the wood stove ignites the cedar roof and then the whole house. While her young servant girl wails, and her

four children cry in terror, she manages to save them all, drag out the important belongings into the 30-below cold, and summon help with a calm mastery she never believed she possessed. "I was left quite alone, with the house burning over my head, [and] I paused one moment to reflect what had best be done.... without another moment's pause, I set to work with a right good will to drag all that I could from my burning home."¹⁷

When Mr. Moodie is appointed sheriff of their district, through her intervention, and they are leaving their forest home, Susanna notes that "it was the birthplace of my three boys, the school of high resolve and energetic action in which we had learned to meet calmly, and successfully to battle with the ills of life."¹⁸ As Clara Thomas remarks in her article, "Journeys to Freedom", this kind of life for Moodie and the other pioneer women was a "liberating experience."¹⁹

Catherine Parr Traill believed that for pioneering the best kind of women were not those who could haul the greatest number of logs, but rather, the women who were well-educated and willing to test their independence and fortitude in the new land. This mind's education was the best kind of basic training one could possibly have, and by cultivating mental resources and utilizing the "higher truths" a woman had learned, she could apply them readily to a new environment, such as Upper Canada. Traill suggested that brushing up on natural history and botany elevates the mind and "serve[s] to fill up the void left by the absence of those lighter feminine accomplishments, the practice of which are necessarily superseded by the imperative domestic duties."²⁰ The unknown, which otherwise becomes the irrational because it is feared, ultimately will overwhelm — witness the large number of lower-class and ill-educated women emigrants whose dumb response to the land was one of grief and of giving up.²¹

Coping involves the muscles of the mind as well as those of the back, and Traill gives copious indication of this throughout her book. For example, she is always reasoning from the generalized knowledge she has gleaned from *Robinson Crusoe*, or Shakespeare or Goldsmith, and applying it to the problem at hand: "I am always inclined to subscribe to that sentiment of my favourite poet, Goldsmith, — 'Still to ourselves in every place consign'd./ Our own felicity we make or find.'"²² Traill chides her fellow explorers for lack of thought: "A little reflection would have shown them that every rood of land must be cleared of the

thick forest of timber that encumbers it before an ear of wheat can be grown; that, after the trees have been chopped, cut into lengths, drawn together, or logged, as we call it, and burned, the field must be fenced, the seed sown, harvested, and threshed before any returns can be obtained; that this requires time and much labour, considerable outlay of ready money; and in the mean time a family must eat."^{2 3} Note the tutored line of reasoning she uses: one thing logically leads to the next.

Catherine Traill is always the curious scientist, the alert botanist who wants to take things apart to understand what makes them work. Like Susanna, she engages in occupations that she never dreamed she would put her hand to back in England — but she undertakes them here with relish. When assuming the management of the cattle, Catherine not only milks the cows, she notes the causes and the cures of their various diseases. In a similar manner, she seeks to understand the causes of Canadian-style smut which destroys their crop, and the reason why her family is afflicted with the ague. In the latter case, it turns out to be caused by a “mass of putrifying water”^{2 4} under the cabin’s foundations. It is drained forthwith.

Canada was a land where she and others like her could exercise their individuality. We have come to accept the freedom of expression and self-development theory as a fact of life for the American immigrant, and to some extent for the Canadian male pioneers. But this was true, as well, for many women who pioneered in Canada. The “King’s Daughters” who came to New France left behind them a life of restriction in workhouses, orphanages or convents. And the English-women like Traill often left restrictive and stultifying lives as poor spinsters eking out a living by writing (not considered a woman’s place), or desperately trying to make ends meet in the English rigid class structure. Canada offered liberating opportunities — hard work, yes, but more room to grow in a natural direction. Catherine states: “I was too much inclined to spurn with impatience, the fetters that etiquette and fashion are wont to impose on society, till they rob its followers of all freedom and independence of will: and they soon are obliged to live for a world that in secret they despise and loathe, for a world, too, that usually regards them with contempt, because they dare not act with an independence, which would be crushed directly it was displayed.”^{2 5} This is her *sui generis* “Declaration of Independence”.

Mary O’Brien also uses her sharp mind as her guidebook to intelligent

living in Upper Canada. Her intellect, independence, and strength of character are what attracts her equally educated husband when they meet. References to Cowper, Don Quixote, *Guy Mannering*, the *Quarterly Review*, and the *Edinburgh Review* are not mentioned in her letters to flaunt her education. She really adapts their truths to her own particular situation. Hers is a keen mind, operating analytically in the very centre of daily life. One night Mary turns off her lamp when undressing, so that she might observe the Canadian phenomenon of electric sparks being emitted from clothing. She had heard this was so, but wanted to test it out for herself.

Even though most of the fictional characters whose independence Mary (along with Susanna and Catherine) admires are male, the fact that they are male and she is not does not disturb Mary. Not having very many fictional female models to look to probably had something to do with this. The important thing was that quality of independence which she sought to emulate. When Edward leaves the farm for periods of time to work for the Governor General or to attend to business, she runs everything on her own, including the family store and saw mill. In the beginning, she tackles "female" jobs. Noting that most Canadian women shear the sheep, O'Brien tries her hand at that. Even though "domestic arrangements [i.e., kitchen work], I must confess, are not much to my fancy, either in theory or practice,"²⁶ she copes admirably with them. Churning butter, she tells us, is easier if one has a copy of Milton in one hand.

Next, she moves on to "male" tasks. Mrs. O'Brien was never afraid of competing with men, or of having to relinquish her femininity were she to compete. In Canada she is able to put this philosophy into practice: "I value myself on being able to put more into a barrel than any body else except Southby, though this part of the business [cutting up a pig for storage] is usually the province of the man."²⁷ With "*my help*", she tells us, she and her hired man collect 100 pails of maple syrup.²⁸ But all of this traditionally male kind of farm activity is not done to prove that she is a superwoman; since she has always been practical, it seemed rather silly to sit and watch men do her farm's work when she could just as easily be helping. One day she joins in the haying operations instead of just supervising. "It was not work for the sake of fancying myself like the princess in Arcady, but simply in the expectation of doing something to save the hay and so eventually making money."²⁹

This is an intelligent approach to the situation and profitable in many ways.

This strikes a common note, again, with the remarks of other female pioneers who had entered into a new land which had not yet had the time to make social proscriptions as to who should do what, and where the twain should not meet. On the borders of the frontier, no-one really had the time or the patience for insisting upon the correct jobs for women. Sexually differentiated occupations was a luxury they could not always afford. Adapting was, rather, the prerequisite in such harsh circumstances.³⁰ If it seemed just as easy for a woman to do a man's job, or a man to do a woman's (especially if she were ill and help was unavailable), then one did it. Tasks were undertaken regardless of conventional sexual prescriptions. In their social gatherings, Canadian women did not gracefully "retire" when men wanted to be alone to discuss important matters over a cigar and brandy. There might not always be a drawing room, and besides social functions were too precious to waste time on such unimportant considerations. One gets the impression that had the men decided to do this, Mary would have acquiesced reluctantly.

Like O'Brien, Traill and Moodie, Anna Jameson's road to "truth" also led her down the same path of deductive reasoning and independent judgement. "I know of no better way at coming to the truth than by observing and recording faithfully the impressions made by objects and characters on my own mind ... until they emerge into light, to be corrected, or at least modified, by observation and comparison.... Every where there is occupation for the rational and healthy intellect, every where good to be done, duties to be performed — every where the mind is."³¹ Her *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles*, which is a compilation of letters to friends in Europe, is particularly interesting since she not only uses the personal "I" in discussing reactions to Canada. Her main purpose also includes recording the experiences of all Canadian women — Indians, Blacks, women on the farms, and those in the new towns. Women's unique lives need to be chronicled and then communicated to their other "sisters".

While Jameson is critical of the provincialness of Toronto society and of some of its attempts to ape the mother country, in general she finds that town and the country are blessedly free from the more stultifying effects of "society". People are not "smoothed and polished down by

society.... there being in this new country far less of conventional manner, it was so much the easier to tell at once the brick from the granite and the marble."³² And, fortunately for the Canadian women and Jameson, at that precise moment in history (1839), they are being "thrown upon our own resources".³³ However much men might later demand that women be submissive and of a clinging disposition, women must reject that call.

Anna Jameson finds her primitive journey through Ontario, especially shooting the rapids at Sault Ste. Marie, exhilarating and character building. On her travels, she insists upon what Traill also considered the prime requisite for the pioneer woman: "I have observed that really accomplished women, accustomed to what is called the best society, have more resources here, and manage better, than some women who have no pretensions of any kind, and whose claims to social distinction could not have been great any where, but whom I found lamenting over themselves as if they had been so many exiled princesses. Can you imagine the position of a fretful, frivolous woman, strong neither in mind nor frame, abandoned to her own resources in the wilds of Upper Canada?"³⁴ What would rectify this situation for these unfortunate females (and would naturally increase the ability of their educated sisters to manage), would be a better system of education which emphasized self-dependence and stressed women's physical capacities rather than their physical delicacy. Jameson feels the problem is attributable to what men encourage in women, yet need in a bush wife. What this wife needs to know, she believes, is art, literature, and science — the rest will come naturally. And Canadian women, she feels have that ability to rise to the occasion.

Jameson's intelligence and analytical frame of mind are evident in these volumes, although she finds the need to discard some of her European Romantic notions of life in some instances. She uses her education and vast reading in a creative act of adaptation. Alone, sometimes lonely, but always pushing back some kind of mental frontier, she reaches out to past writers on women and extracts what useful words they contain about her sex. Madame de Stahl showed her the way; Shakespeare wrote of well-rounded and resourceful women; Goethe deprecated them on occasion, but Tasso created fine portraits of human nature in the female. On the one hand, Dr. Johnson knew "absolutely nothing about us", but Coleridge understood women well.

These are the kind of references she and her cohorts, in turn, should refer to in confronting the new and unique life in Canada. In fact, on Jameson's travels in wooden carts, canoes, by foot, or by steamer, she always carried her copy of Shakespeare, Schiller, Wordsworth and the Bible, though otherwise, she took very little luggage.

A feature of Canada which particularly interests Jameson is the Indians, particularly their women. Although Traill and O'Brien did visit their dwellings and noted in particular their beauty and dignity, Jameson lives with them for a time and it is here that she realizes what is in store for the brave pioneer woman. As long as the woman is useful and has an important function to perform for her community, she is a valued and a necessary member. Such, indeed, was the position of the Indian women of the Six Nations who, before the advent of trading for the white man's factory-made cloth, had hand-made the tribe's cloth. Whoever made this commodity was important in the community since it provided covering in the harsh weather. For this reason, among others, women had power in the tribe. (Heredity passed through the female line.) However, because of the new means of commerce, tribal women were slowly being reduced to figureheads, Jameson notes, and their power was waning. She warns against the same thing happening to the Canadian pioneer women who, for the moment, also occupy an important position in their society. As a general conclusion, therefore, all women need to be useful and productive in their lives: "We may assume, as a general principle, that the true importance and real dignity of woman is everywhere, in savage and civilized communities, regulated by her capacity of being useful; or, in other words, that her condition is decided by the share she takes in providing for her own subsistence and the well-being of society as a productive labourer. Where she is idle and useless by privilege of sex, a divinity and an idol, a victim or a toy, is not her position quite as lamentable, as false, as injurious to herself and all social progress, as where she is the drudge, slave, and possession of the man?"³⁵

In *Highways of Canadian Literature*, J.D. Logan maintains that, with the exception of Jameson, pioneer literature was incidental. The "only faculty these books satisfied or delighted was the faculty of curiosity; and the only delights they really gave readers were vicarious thrills of adventure and wonder. The Incidental Literature of Canada ... it must be merely noted as fact. In nowise whether it be literature or not, had it

any real influence in developing a Canadian sentiment or in awakening a Canadian literary spirit."³⁶ But one sees that these women writers were fighting to establish a new tradition in non-fiction for female readers, both in Europe and in Canada. It involved reflecting, as best they could, the actual environment in which they lived, from the distinctly female point of view – something that was not covered in male versions, which often idealized pioneering. It was an attempt to translate and transmit what might well be termed a minority point of view, in terms of its publication.³⁷ And it was innovative in the same way that the Canadian social custom of the barn-raising bee was, or the fact that social class was unimportant in a man's rise to fortune and status in the new land. Jameson (along with the other writers), recorded and gave to us a new role for the intelligent and well-educated woman. It was a celebration of another facet of women's lives – and not the dirge we might have believed was the only song written for our pioneer women.

Anna Jameson was also trying to put women on guard, since the freedom and structural fluidity for Canadian females was in danger of being undermined by Canada's fledgling parliaments and her lawmakers. Jameson had seen what emancipation from hard work had done for the lower- and middle-class woman in England – it had made her into an unvalued ornament. Anna wanted women everywhere to look at the new existence they might have in Canada, and to make sure what had happened in the mother country was not replayed in the daughter's.

If women could perform labour and be useful, they had a chance of self-fulfilment. But they needed much more control over their own lives, and Jameson and O'Brien voiced concern over this. They noted the discriminatory moral code, the unequal property laws and inheritance statutes that applied to Canadian women. (These laws were still quite new and the sooner they were changed, the better, said Jameson.) She also decried women's lack of voting power, needed so that they could change these laws and exert more control over their lives.

What finally impresses is a consistent theme in the works of Moodie, Traill, O'Brien, and Jameson. For theirs is the ability to understand their fellow females' peculiar struggle, the willingness to help, and the awareness of, and willingness to work within, the community of women. While pioneer females may have been more physically isolated than had been the case in England, they appear seldom to be

abandoned by other women. The letters they wrote are evidence of this reaching out, since they were usually addressed to other women. Traill shared her library, her time, and her concerns with her good friend, Frances Stewart (a cousin of Maria Edgeworth's). They became second mothers to each other's children; and Catherine found an intellectual soul-mate in Frances, since they both enjoyed writing and literary pursuits. Stewart aided the Traills financially in one of their many bouts with poverty, and was always there if she could possibly manage it when Catherine or her family were ill. Similarly, the Strickland sisters tried to help one another in many ways, particularly when they lived near one another in the Otanabee lakes region.

Mary O'Brien maintained that the community of women was there to help one another: "Women can supply each others' places well in order to aid themselves."³⁸ She herself became a very competent midwife, and was regularly called upon to perform since the doctor rarely made it to the pioneer "delivery rooms" in time. And Mary maintained that she and her friends did just as competent a job as he could have done. When three months pregnant, she slogged through high snow drifts in order to aid a fellow pioneer through a difficult delivery. She also aided a local unfortunate woman whose husband regularly beat her. Defying the acceptance of "a man's home is his castle" and that whatever he did within its confines was his inalienable right, she appealed to the local magistrate to issue an order that would restrain the husband from further abusing his wife. Although O'Brien noted that women did not have the vote, she believed that women did have the ability to effect change and aid one another despite this fact.

The women in her community also evolved what we would now call day-care at the little settlement on the north shore of Lake Simcoe. Whenever anyone had to travel to visit family or attend to business in another area, some or all of the children would be taken care of by another mother. Mary herself took on the care of four young children whose own mother suffered a mental breakdown and wandered off into the forest one day. When the latter returned, Mary acted as her nurse and "psychiatrist" until the woman was able to function again.

Anna Jameson's travels were expressly directed towards this community of women. She endeavoured to seek out the womenfolk in whatever region she travelled to. Interestingly enough, the contacts she made and the major stopping points along her route, were at the homes

of women. And they all encouraged her on her unorthodox adventure. The following is typical of Jameson's love and concern for her own sex, and evidence of her keen appreciation of their inner and outer beauty: in the drawing rooms of Europe, comeliness of another woman was something other females distrusted since they were all in competition for the attention of men, and unfortunately outnumbered males heavily. In Canada, Jameson wanted to show the "sisterhood" of women as the natural way of relating to one another. At Sault Ste. Marie, she was introduced to Mrs. MacMurray, an Indian woman married to a British missionary: "I was introduced to Mrs. MacMurray, otherwise O-ge-ne-bu-go-quay, (i.e. the wild rose)... The first glance, the first sound of her voice, struck me with a pleased surprise. Her figure is tall — at least it is rather above than below the middle size, with that indescribable grace and undulation of movement which speaks the perfection of form.... Her dark eyes have a sort of fawn-like shyness in their glance, but her manner, though timid, was quite free from embarrassment or restraint.... In two minutes I was seated by her — my hand kindly folded in hers — and we were talking over the possibility of my plans.... yet the sight of Mrs. MacMurray seemed to give something definite to the vague hope which had been floating in my mind. Her sister, she said, was married to the Indian agent at Michillimackinac ... and from both she promised me a welcome, should I reach their island."³⁹ Contact with other women was important to Anna because she admits to needing the kind of emotional correspondence only her sisters can give her; and, of course, it is their story she is out to tell.

The numerous times Jameson comments on the particularity of the Canadian woman's situation, what is good about it, what should be changed, where a special home for indigent young women should be set up, what should be done about prostitution, the laws on women, and forthcoming parliamentary bills concerning their legal position — all give one a sense of solidity, concern, and truth, as near as Anna Jameson could come to it. The "truth", as seen through men's eyes, had never recorded what she, Susanna, Catherine and Mary had experienced. The privilege to create and organize words upon a page — words that would be read by other prospective pioneers, including women — carried with it responsibilities for rigorous standards of accuracy, and for looking at the total picture. Jameson sought to

adhere to these precepts.

These "champions of reality" wrote of truly heroic experiences — heroic in Kildare Dobbs's sense of the word — and left us a record of how intelligent women adapted to, and coped with, an entirely new kind of environment and life than they had ever dreamed of encountering. They did well because they reasoned; and they reasoned and coped because they were educated. And, finally, they were aided in their endeavours by the community of women, always there, and always willing to help.

* I wish to acknowledge the guidance, critical attention, enthusiasm, and many helpful suggestions given to this paper by Dr. Virginia Tiger of Rutgers University (Newark), Department of English.

Footnotes

- 1 Kildare Dobbs, "Canadian Heroes?" in *Canada: A Guide to the Peaceable Kingdom*, ed. William Kilbourn (Toronto: Macmillan, 1970), p. 23.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 4 This is Frye's opinion of Canadian literature in general. See his "Conclusion" to *Literary History of Canada*, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 849.
- 5 *The Backwoods of Canada* (London, Nattali, 1836), pp. 1-2. Forty years before she wrote these words, the Lieutenant Governor's wife, Elizabeth Simcoe, was complaining of the same thing. Her forte was cartography and sketching, and she revised many maps of the area her husband and his explorers were travelling. See *Mrs. Simcoe's Diary*, ed. Mary Quayle Innis (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965). One hundred years after Traill voiced this concern, Nellie McClung was also concerned about falsity in immigration literature: "As a Canadian I blush with shame when I think of the false flattery which has been given to our country by immigration agencies in Europe, anxious to bring out settlers for the profit of steamship and railway companies. It's all fantastic now [1943] and seems long ago and far away, but there was a dark tragedy in it for the deceived ones and Canada got a black eye...." That was why McClung had written *Painted Fires*: "I called the book by this name for I wanted to lay down a hard foundation of truth as to conditions in Canada." *The Stream Runs Fast* (Toronto: Thomas Allen & Sons, 1965), p. 241.
- 6 *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (New York: Putnam, 1839), I, iv, viii.
- 7 *The Journals of Mary O'Brien, 1828-1838*, ed. Audrey Saunders Miller (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968), p. xi. Northrop Frye in his *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto, Anansi, 1971), maintains that what Canadians resent about assimilation into American culture is the fact that they may not have had anything unique or distinctive to contribute to the world. I would plead guilty to this charge, since this paper endeavours to show that female pioneer writing in Canada may have done just that.
- 8 Sara Eaton, *Lady of the Backwoods: A Biography of Catherine Parr Traill* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969), p. 4.
- 9 *Roughing It in the Bush, or Forest Life in Canada [1832-1840]* (1852; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1962), p. 215.
- 10 Eaton, p. 139.

- 11 Jameson, 87.
- 12 Moodie, pp. 166-167. The fact that her writing shows contradictions does not negate the fact that she was trying to cope rationally, whenever she could muster forces. Clara Thomas in "Journeys to Freedom", *Canadian Literature* 51 (1974), 11-19, notes this tendency, but also believes that Susanna mellowed and that her perceptions deepened.
- 13 Moodie, pp. 130-231.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- 15 *Ibid.*,
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 169.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 196.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 229.
- 19 Thomas, p. 12.
- 20 Traill, p. 4.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 105. "the women are discontented and unhappy. Few enter with their whole heart into a settler's life. They miss the little domestic comforts they had been used to enjoy; they regret the friends and relations they left in the old country; and they cannot endure the loneliness of the backwoods." See also, O'Brien on the women who withdraw into their shells on p. 250. Also in Jameson, I, 307.
- 22 Traill, p. 105.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 300.
- 25 Traill, p. 269. Clara Thomas in "Happily Ever After: Canadian Women in Fiction and Fact," *Canadian Literature* 34 (1967), 43-53, quotes the same passage in defence of her thesis that Traill was one of three "types" in Canadian portrayals of women in literature. Thomas believes that Traill was the adapter who needed a "head and hand as strong as her husband's." The other two "types" are the model mother, such as Sara J. Duncan's in *The Imperialist*, and the "virtuous woman" who could not prevail, however, over circumstances and who did not have the attention of Providence.
- 26 O'Brien, p. 105.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 96. Italics in original.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 120.
- 30 Interestingly, Logan in his *Highways of Canadian Literature* (co-authored by Donald G. French), (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1924), p. 47, notes that the substance in Canadian pioneer writings counted for everything and that the authors left the form and movement "free and unhampered by the traditional laws of expression."
- 31 Jameson, I, 11.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 21.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 144.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 309.
- 35 *Ibid.*, II, 310.
- 36 Logan, p. 46.
- 37 "Telling it like it really was" from a woman's point of view is a theme one finds in Nellie McClung's *Clearing in the West: My Own Story* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1935), and in *The Stream Runs Fast*, *op. cit.* It is also found in other female writing, such as Laura Goodman Salverson's *Confessions of An Immigrant's Daughter* (London: Faber & Faber, 1939), which recounts her life in Manitoba and Alberta where she homesteaded in the 1920's, all from a feminist perspective.
- 38 O'Brien, p. 257.
- 39 Jameson, K, 241.