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Picking Up New Threads for Kathleen Mavourneen: the Irish Female Presence in Nineteenth-century Ontario

A Thesis Submitted to the Committee on Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts

in the Faculty of Arts and Science

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Abstract

Picking up New Threads for Kathleen Mavourneen: The Irish Female Presence in nineteenth-century Ontario.

Elizabeth Jane Birch

My thesis attempts to find a voice for the marginalised, mainly lower-class Irish immigrant women in nineteenth-century Upper Canada (hereafter referred to as Ontario). Few records exist although women formed half the Diaspora; thus, the thesis is based on the "quilting motif" in that women's history exists in scraps which must be pieced together.

Literary and historical perspectives reflect the Irish female presence in nineteenth-century Ontario. Kathleen Mavourneen, whose "sad voice is calling," is the central figure in a traditional Irish song and thus serves to symbolise both the immigrant's lament for her homeland and Ireland's sad plight as a colonised nation. As a domestic servant or lower-class Irish woman, Kathleen was often seen but seldom heard. Lost mythologies equal silence and although emigration offered new opportunities, the Irish were a marginalised people as perceived by nineteenth-century writers from or identifying with Ontario's Anglo-Canadian ruling class.

The thesis seeks to prove that the harbinger of change was the Celtic Irish Revival. Thus, Ireland retrieved her mythological voice and Kathleen assumes a new role in twentieth-century Canadian writings: the nineteenth-century lower-class Irish immigrant woman now becomes a complex protagonist characterised by a strong and distinctive voice.

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For their love and encouragement, my love and gratitude to my husband Win and our children, Lois, Bob, Michael, Elizabeth and Jo-Ann and their respective partners, Darryl, Pauline, Wendy, Hilary and Kath. Thanks to my sister Anita and friends Pat Carson, Dianne Ward, Grace Skinner, Ruth Ritchie and Lynn Oliver for their patience as they "heard all about it." Ruth and Lynn also contributed their proof-reading and typing skills.

Last but not least, I dedicate this thesis to the nursemaids who presided over my Irish childhood. These were the *Kathleens* whose songs and stories helped feed my fantasies and thus kept the hidden myths of Ireland alive for me.

Introduction

> The single most severe limitation on our knowledge of the Irish Diaspora is that we know surprisingly little about Irish women in the nineteenth and early twentieth century either in the homeland or their new worlds. With any ethnic group, this sort of deficit would be a problem, but with the Irish, it is especially dehabilitating, since females were half the Diaspora.[1]

As Akenson suggests, nineteenth-century Irish women immigrants have been underrepresented both in historical records and in the literature of British North America. In spite of their numerical and social significance as a group of immigrants, a curious "silence" surrounds them. In part, a frequent lack of literacy denied such women access to the written word and thus contributed to this "silence." In the light of such obscurity, I decided to employ two motifs. Firstly, the quilting motif in that the history of Irish immigrant women exists in small scraps which must be collected and pieced together. Secondly, the motif of a "mute woman" as being representative of the death throes of the indigenous Irish-Gaelic culture, an event which was to cast its shadow on British North America. My thesis rests on the fact that emigration itself was a movement for change, a step towards independence and a chance for Irish women to imagine themselves differently and to find their own voices. One way into the history of lower-class women who could not "voice" their experiences is to note how better-positioned writers such as Frances Stewart, Susanna Moodie, Catharine Parr Traill and Isabella Valancy Crawford observe them and on occasion, allow them to narrate their own stories. Therefore, variations in

1 Donald Harman Akenson, "Women the Great Unknown" in *The Irish Diaspora -- A Primer* (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen's University. Toronto: P.D. Meaney, 1993) 157. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title (abbrev. *TID*) and page number.

attitude by more fortunate immigrant writers towards their Irish servants will be examined and prove that, for the most part, their Irish helpers were "often seen but seldom heard."

In a sense Irish immigrant women were moving from one colony to another. The Celtic literary revival partially inspired by Lady Gregory, W.B. Yeats and others would not have any major impact on others on literary representations of nineteenth-century Irish-Canadian immigrant women until well into the twentieth century. As part of this approach to the writings of nineteenth-century and twentieth century Canadian authors, my introduction summarizes the Irish mythological and historical background and the Celtic revival to explain how Ireland is represented as a muted woman and how this works within the framework of the thesis. Following this treatment of the muted woman theme, the introduction discusses the quilting motif in application to nineteenth-century writings but with a stronger focus on the revitalisation of the quilting metaphor in relation to contemporary literature.

Chapter 1
Stewart

Anglo-Irish Frances Stewart, who emigrated to Canada in 1822, will be discussed in the light of the contributions which she made to the history of pioneering women. Stewart's letters and journals, published after her death, provide much insight into the life of an Anglo-Irish family whose members were early emigrants to the Ontario scene (1822). Stewart's perception of her daughters and her domestic servants are of special interest. As the central focus is working-class views, for this reason, Stewart's link with her kinswoman,

Irish writer Maria Edgeworth, will be examined. Edgeworth's*Castle Rackrent* is of special interest (although she herself never left Ireland) as a portrait of Ireland at the time. Edgeworth's contribution to the thesis is two-fold: in one sense, she breaks the silence of the working class "Irish" and reveals their plight while the fact that she does not use a female narrator but rather one who is a manservant is in keeping with the "muted woman" motif, the symbol of a nineteenth-century Ireland dominated by English rule. However, Edgeworth's use of a working class narrator does foreshadow the work of some twentieth-century Canadian writers who permit working class Irish women to narrate their own stories.

Moodie--Traill

Some ten years after the Stewart emigration, the genteel Anglo-Canadian writer-sisters, Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill, settled in Canada. They were both prolific writers who have left invaluable records. In my first chapter, their contributions will be examined mainly through the vision of Carl Ballstadt, Michael Peterman and Elizabeth Hopkins whose scholarship has further strengthened the writings of these pioneering women. Traill and Moodie's commentary on their Irish servants provide insights into the pioneering experiences of both mistress and servant.

Moodie's attitudes will be examined in the light of how Moodie herself went through a remarkable transformation from her unfavourable early impressions of "the Irish" in Canada to a much more positive relationship with a hard-working Irish maidservant. Traill's cameo of *her* Irish maid is also of interest because this particular woman is the child of a Protestant father and a Catholic mother, thus proving that the religious conflict which unfortunately

seems to be so much a part of Ireland's history was sometimes resolved at a personal level by intermarriage. Contrary to popular belief, "the Irish" appear to have practiced some religious tolerance.

Crawford

Isabella Valancy Crawford is interesting because for the most part, she seems to reject her "Irishness." Although Irish-born, Crawford has been seen primarily as a Canadian poet in love with the Canadian wilderness. James Reaney who edits Crawford's poems discusses what he calls "the magic of collision" as part of the emigrant experience and so takes up the quilting concept when he refers to what is known in quilting circles as the Jane Reazon quilt. Reazon was an Irish girl who emigrated to Pickering, Ontario, in 1827:

> ... part of her qulit shows castle fireplaces, young lovers under a flower arbour with nearby chaperon, riding to hounds, [riding to and attending] balls, suddenly turning to: rough benches, pot-bellied stoves, hunters seriously hunting ducks for food and so on.[2]

Such cultural differences are reflected in Crawford's poetry and although she shows a knowledge of many mythologies, as an educated woman in genteel poverty, Celtic mythology simply is not part of her cosmic imagination. Her views are essentially those of nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish ascendancy though Crawford does show empathy with lower-class Irish emigrants to Canada in some few poems.

Chapter II

Urquhart:

Celtic motifs in Canada were used by lesser known writers in the early

2 James Reaney in *Introduction* to Isabella Valancy Crawford, *Collected Poems, Literature of Canada, Poetry and Prose in Reprint*, ed. Douglas Lockhead (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972. xii.

twentieth century. For example, the poetry of Majorie Pickthall (1833-1922) often relfected the Celtic realm of haunting dreams and a certain loneliness and longing for what had been lost for "most like a dove,whose breast/Across a thousand wastes of sky/ Is constant to her nest." [3] Other examples of turn-of-the-century-Canadian women writers such as is the Irish-born Kathleen "Kit" Coleman (1856-1915), have been explored by Sandra Campbell and Lorraine McMullan.[4] However, one must await the emergence of Jane Urquhart for this contemporary mystical renewal to have its full impact.

The renewal finds its roots in late nineteenth-century Ireland and Urquhart's link with Celtic revivalist Lady Gregory is explored in the second chapter of the thesis through the protagonist of *Away,* Mary O"Malley.[5] Mary/Moira becomes a voice for the doubly-marginalised, an Irish immigrant woman who, after emigrating, exists outside conventional Ontario nineteenth-society. Current themes of the immigrant's sense of disassociation run as common threads through the creative material of at least five Candian women writers whose work will be examined in due course. Of these writers, Urquhart claims the central panel of the thesis as a result of her sensitive treatment of one nineteenth-century Irish immigrant woman's Celtic soul. The symbiotic relationship which Mary forms with native Canadian Exodus Crow will be discussed in that it suggests that pre-Christian and/or pre-colonial people

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3 Marjorie Pickthall, "How Looked She?" in *Selected Poems of Marjorie Pickthall* edited and with an introduction by Lorne Pierce (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart,1957)98.

4 Sandra Campbell and Lorraine McMullan, eds. *New Women: Short Fiction by Canadian Women 1900-1920* (Ottawa: University Press,1991) includes Coleman's story "A Pair of Gray Gloves."

5 Jane Urquhart, *Away* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart,1996). All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title and page number.

share a common belief system which culminates in a reference for a balance in nature.

Finally, the work of contemporary Irish playwright Brian Friel, who also makes use of the mystical revival, is also explored in relation to Urquhart's concern for transition in language and culture. Where, in my view, Urquhart sees the possibility of perserving a culture, Friel's vision is infinitely more tragic in that the language seems to be vanishing forever. Yet Friel is seen as a latter-day revivalist since he confronts the problem and in a sense, through Friel, language itself is reborn.

Chapter III

Akenson-Atwood

Whereas Urquhart and Friel are influenced by a revived and contemporary interest in Irish myth, Akenson and Atwood offer different approaches to the problem of the invisibility of women in history in their novels *At Face Value and Alias Grace.* Furthermore, Akenson has written scholarly history and fictional biography over a long academic career, more specifically as a historian on the world-wide Irish Diaspora, with a concentration on the nineteenth century.

In *The Irish Diaspora,* Akenson divides Irish immigrant women into six groups, the first group being widows with dependent children, followed by married women accompanied by husbands and children. The third group were married women with no children who enjoyed the best job mobility for couples were sought by farm managers, hotel keepers and employers who needed male and female skills in their businesses; in terms of earning power, these were the most advantaged of Irish female women immigrants. The fourth group

consisted of dependent unmarried girls and women who were daughters or young sisters emigrating with their families; also inciuded in this group were older dependent females, who were hardly free spirits since they were dependent on family members.

In Akenson's estimation, the fifth group is the most interesting in that this group consisted of non-dependent females who were of marriagable age but who emigrated as unmarried women. Here was their chance to shake off the archaism of Ireland and have a family under different rules. Akenson recognises the vast "empty spaces" in the history of women immigrants and suggests that fictional biography, based on some historical facts, might help fill such gaps. Akenson's novel thus offers up the intriguing protagonist Eliza McCormack, a transvestite Irish-Canadian prostitute, who sees the immigrant experience as a chance to reinvent herself.[6] Akenson's nineteenth-century formerly muted woman gains an unusually strong voice as a member of the Canadian parliament when she assumes the identity of a man.

Margaret Atwood is by no means the first Canadian twentieth-century women writer to examine the life of the Irish working class. For example, in *Our Little Life* (1921), English-born novelist and short-fiction writer J.G. Syme introduces Katie McGee, an Irish-born earthy, practical life-affirming working class woman.[7] Katie in fact bears some resemblance to Moodie's Jenny Buchanan. However, in terms of the main motifs of the thesis, Atwood's work seems more significant than does that of either Akenson or Syme. Firstly, her Irish-servant protagonist narrates much of her own story thereby " breaking the

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6 Don Akenson, *At Face Value -- the Life and Times of John White/Eliza McCormack* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990). All references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title (abbrev. *AFV*) and page number.

7 J.G. Syme, *Our Little Life* (1821). (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1994).

silence" of the muted woman and secondly, because of Atwood's particularly ingenious use of the quilting metaphor.

Like Akenson, Margaret Atwood bases her novel *Alias Grace* on a historical figure; indeed, comparisons between Akenson and Atwood seem valid since Atwood's Grace Marks, like Eliza McCormack, is involved in a power struggle in nineteenth-century Canada.[8] Atwood's format is interesting because she also chooses to pattern her book on the quilting motif which supports the premise that women's history/stories, both the dark and the light, exist in scraps and must be painstakingly pieced together. In fact, Atwood currently has revitalised the quilting motif and has given it new presence in the Canadian literary scene by using it as the pattern for her widely acclaimed novel.[9] Grace is the narrator telling her story to Dr. Simon Jordan as she sews with tiny stitches. "Quilting" masks the inner turbulence which remains a part of the immigrant experience as is the case with the often-untold story of the danger and terror suffered on the voyage:

> ... today I must go on with the story. Or the story must go on with me, carrying me inside it along the track ... when you are in the middle of a story it isn't a story at all, but a confusion; a dark roaring, a blindness, a wreckage of shattered glass and splintered wood; like a house in a whirlwind, or else a boat crushed by icebergs or swept over the rapids, and all on board powerless to stop it. It's only afterwards that it becomes anything like a story at all. When you are telling it, to yourself or to some-one else (*AG* 298).

Atwood equates "telling the story" and "women's writing" with "quilting" and "women's sewing" and thus reflects the concept of patterning women's history on the quilting motif. The turbulence suggested by the immigrant's voyage

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8 See Writers' Map, Appendix iii.

9 Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1996). All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title (abbrev. *AG*) and page number.

reminds one that emigration and dislocation can be a traumatic experience. The crazy-quilt design with its irregular patterns may be an excellent representation of some aspects of settlement in the new land.

Earlier in the introduction, I comment on Edgeworth's servant narrator (see page 3). Almost one hundred years later, Atwood employs the same literary convention thus giving a strong voice and an aura of self-determination to a nineteenth-century Irish maidservant. Joseph Pivato has commented on the use of the first person narrative in autobiographical fiction and fictional autobiography:

> One of the attractive aspects of speaking in the first person, in one's own voice, is that it gives the illusion of power and control over one's life, a sense of self-determination that never existed in the real experience of dislocation [immigration]. In a sense the agency of the main character in the narrative parallels that of the author with the freedom to tell his or her story.[10]

The reader's experience is that a hitherto ignored group are now given the opportunity to "articulate an experience, develop an identity and find a place in society," (Pivato 55).

Irish history and mythologyand the Celtic Revival

Whereas mounful Kathleens are apt historical repreentations of the powerlessness of Ireland and/or Irish women in the nineteenth century, the turn-of-the-century Celtic revival looks back at a mythic age where Irish women are linked to representations of wholeness and fertility, embodied in female goddesses, against a rich tapestry of legend and folklore. Where it is appropriate to associate the muted woman with nineteenth-century Ireland, it should be noted in Irish mythology and early history, "Woman" was far from

10 Joseph Pivato, "Representations of Ethnicity as Problem: Essence or Construction" in Journal of Canadian Studies/ Revue d'études Canadiennes, 31. (Fall 1996) 55. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by author and page number.

being a muted figure. In fact, she was a strong figure in pre-Christian mythology as exemplified by a female divinity, known by many names; as Dana, Danu, Briget, Bridget, Aine or Ana, she was credited with founding the Neolithic and Bronze Age pantheon of gods, the *Tuatha De Dannan* . Briget, wedded to Mannan the sea god and to Achae the sea horse, was thought to have joined land, sea and sky together and thus, the values of the goddess symbolised a vital relationship, "the cohesion of Culture-in-nature and the source of the sacred whole."[11] The fairies of rural Ireland are still known as "the Good People," thought to be the reduced pantheon of the hidden goddess who had been obliterated by Iron Age patriarchy, Christianity and modern materialism. The ancient poets of Ireland, collectively known as *aes dana*, were "men of arts, servants of the goddess" (Dames, 69).

For a brief time, the values of pagan Ireland and the new Christianity enjoyed a productive union under the auspices of St. Bridget, the foster daughter of a Druid priest who was attracted to the gentleness of Christianity and was eventually ordained Bishop of Kildare. Her monastery offered an alternative to marriage and women there became scribes, healers and poets. Bridget was said to have wielded "the right kind of power" in that her female followers had equality with learned men.[12] Nor was the cult of Briget unknown in Great Britain for her name in Roman Britain was Brigantia while her Gaulish name was thought to be Brigando. In the Irish language, the word *brig* is both" the feminine subjunctive" meaning 'superiority, power or Authority' and the Irish

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11 Michael Dames, *Mythic Ireland* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 62. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by author and page number.

12 *Behind the Veil* written and narrated by Gloria Demers. Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1984.

adjective meaning "strong,powerful.[13] "

As Ireland became increasingly anglicised, the old Ireland lived on for a while in poetic form; Gaelic poets often symbolised their unfortunate country in the person of a defeated woman and one of the earliest of such poems dates back to the 1500's, a time of Tudor expansion in Ireland.[14] The poem was translated by James Clarence Mangan in the late nineteenth century, a time of stirring for Irish independence:

> O, my dark Rosaleen
> My dark Rosaleen !
> --------------
> O! the Erne shall run red
> With redundance of blood,
> The earth shall rock beneath our tread,
> And flames wrap hill and wood.
> And gun peal, and slogan cry,
> Wake many a glen serene.
> Ere you shall fade, ere you shall die.
> My dark Rosaleen ! (qtd. by Dumbleton 15-16).

The poem suggests the "hidden Ireland" symbolised by the silenced woman who inspired men to fight for Ireland's freedom.

The Penal Laws, enacted in 1695, assured English dominance and Protestant control of Ireland. All measures were used to ensure that land remained under Protestant control for no Catholic could buy land from Protestants. If Catholics owned land, on their death, it was to be divided among their sons, thus ensuring that no Catholic could inherit large parcels of land. The military, the legal profession, Parliament, municipal corporations and the civil

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13 H. Arbois d'Jubainville, *The Irish Mythological cycle and Celtic Mythology*, trans. Richard E. Best (Dublin: O'Donaghue,1903) 83. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title (Abbrev. *ICCMC*) and page number.

14 William A. Dumbleton, *Ireland -- Life and Land in Literature* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press,1984) 15. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by author and page number.

service closed their doors to Catholics and the Protestant Church controlled all education (Dumbleton 17-18). Under these laws Irish Catholics had little chance to improve themselves. For most of the nineteenth century, Gaelic Ireland barely survived and any past glory seemed lost forever, although she remained England's most restive colony. Ireland now could be symbolised by a silenced peasant girl, a *dark Rosaleen* who existed in Father England's shadow.

The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 (see Appendix i) started to open new opportunities for Irish Catholics and served to promote an interest in the Celtic past. In time, this interest was embraced by Anglo-Irish Protestant scholars such as the young lawyer Standish O'Gady, who published a work of Irish history in 1880. Ulick O'Connor points out that O'Grady's study is not "history in the real sense of the word but ... the record of a high culture, dating from about 500 B.C. and handed down in oral form through the Bardic Sagas... which were not transcribed until the eleventh century."[15] Thomas Cahill in his book *How the Irish Saved Civilisation* observes that the chief text which inspired late nineteenth-century Irish scholars was the "Tain," a twelfth-century manuscript; interest in the mythological past brought back to life powerful and positive images of pre-Christian females as exemplified by Medb (also called Maeve), Queen of Connaught,who was a dominant figure in this particular manuscript.[16]

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15 Ulick O'Connor, *Celtic Dawn -- A Portrait of the Irish Literary Renaissance* (London: Black Swan Books, Transworld Publishers, 1984) 25. All further references are noted parenthetically within the text by author's name and page number.

16 Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilisation -- the Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday,1995) 101. All further references are noted parenthetically within the text by title (abbrev. ISC) and page number.

O'Grady felt that this heroic period had been lost to the Irish imagination and must be restored; he made a considerable impression on the writers who followed in his wake and W.B. Yeats wrote that every imaginative Irish writer owed a debt to O'Grady. George Russell (AE) concluded that the figures created by O'Grady far surpassed Tennyson's Knights of the Round Table for, "it was the memory of a race which rose within me as I read, I felt exalted as one who learns he is among kings," (O'Connor 25). It was extraordinary that members of the Anglicised Protestant community should feel so strongly about Irish myth and legend. One is left with the impression that they had a crying need to rediscover the past in order to come to terms with both sides of their Irish identity. Such men spurred a tide of Irish nationalism, thus giving Ireland its own particular literature which retained many aspects of "a paganism which the Irish never totally relinquished" (*ISC* 149).

Irish women writers have had their own say on reclaiming their heritage through Celtic mythology and one example is Lorna Reynolds who, in my opinion, best exemplifies the modern view in Ireland as Urquhart does in Canada although Reynolds writes biography and Urquhart fiction. Here is the rediscovered ancient world which had remained hidden from some nineteenth-century women writers. Reynolds relates an Irish childhood memory: a young Lorna picks a branch of hawthorn and brings it indoors to be told by her aunt that hawthorn, if brought indoors, will bring bad luck to the household; years later, when Reynolds reads Robert Graves' *White Goddess,* she remembers her aunt's words and recalled that the hawthorn had been sacred to the Bronze-age deity and presumably should be left to flourish outdoors. The fact that it was forbidden to remove the flower from its natural surroundings could still hold sway over women's feelings after a period of about twelve hundred years is a

tribute to the survival of a belief in :

> .... the White Goddess... great Mother Goddess, lady of the harvest, Goddess of germination and growth, love and battle ...
> Ceridwen to the Welsh, Cardea to the Romans, Isis to the Egyptians, great Dana of the Tuatha De Dannans to the Irish...
> something to remember if we are properly to consider Irish women in Life, Legend and Literature.[17]

Under harsh English dominance, the mythological voice of the archetypal Dana/Bridget/Aine has ironically been replaced by the defeated or lost woman who was often used to symbolise the unfortunate country as exemplied by Kathleen or Mangan's *Dark Rosaleen* . Yet the Celtic Revival, as spearheaded by Yeats and Lady Gregory, calls up an image of female strength (that of pre-Christian female goddesses) is ultimately reflected in the writings of contemporary Canadian writer, Jane Urquhart, almost one hundred years later.

Quilting Motif

In accordance with such Irish traditions, one is apt to connect Irish women with crafts such as weaving linen, spinning wool, weaving hand-loomed tweeds or knitting Aran sweaters. The focus of the thesis is to see Irish women in a Canadian context. Thus, "quilting," a North American craft is used as one metaphor for the thesis although Elaine Showalter warns that the incorporation of the quilting method has always been risky because of the devaluation of the domestic, the femine and craft within the value system of cultural history. Yet, within the context of nineteenth-century women writers, the quilting motif seems irresistible when one views the opportunity for writing as existing only as small patches of time. As Showalter observes, " while the sustained effort of a novel might be impossible for a woman whose day was shattered by interuption, the

[17] Lorna Reynolds, "Irish Women in Legend, Literature and Life" in *Woman in Irish Legend, Life and Literature* , ed. S.F. Gallagher (Gerrard Cross, Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 1983) 11-12.

short narrative piece, quickly imagined and written, could be more easily completed."[18]

There are examples of the quilting motif used in the work of contemporary Canadian literature and art. Donna Smyth bases her novel *Quilt* on a group of women who collect scraps of varying material. "Together they collected enough scraps and they started work. Thousands of stitches. Intricate work."[19] Carol Shields also uses the motif in her novel *A Fairly Conventional Woman*.[20] Each piece is identifiable with the owner but then all the pieces become part of the pattern. Not only does the motif represent Canada's multi-culturism but it is the metaphor for the common threads which run between contemporary Canadian writers. As a North American feminist critic, Showalter propounds that a web of networking exists between today's writers, thus replacing "Woolf's image of a room of one's own, so enabling for women modernists in England seeking privacy and autonomy." (Showalter 175). The power of creating also belongs to women like Alice Olsen Williams, an Anishinaabe artist and quilter. Williams tells how her interest evolved out of a few quilting lessons into an art form which expresses both her cultural duality and the Anishinaabe reverence for nature. Williams' essay is is useful in that a linkage can be made and thus connect the reader to Urquhart's Mary O"Malley and Exodus Crow. Williams describes how she designs her quilts:

> In the centre, I have a traditional art form,such as those done by Anishinaabe artists like Norval Morisseau ... or birds or animals of Beings

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18 Elaine Showalter, *Sister's Choice-- Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing-- the Clarendon Lectures,1989.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991)147-153. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by author and page number.

19 Donna Smyth, *Quilt* (Toronto: Women's Educational Press,1982) 4.

20 Carol Shields, *A Fairly Conventional Woman* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada,1982).

which that figure significantly in Anishinaabe Life. That is how I show my mother's heritage. To show the heritage my father gave me [European] I put in those blocks which were invented by those women and their desendants which came from across the ocean. This is how I acknowledge and honour my father in my work.[21]

Connections between motifs

The intertwining of the "muted woman" motif as symbolising submerged Celtic myths and the quilting motif occur throughout the thesis. Sean Kane exemplifies this concept; in his book *Wisdom of Mythtellers*, Kane describes that in certain myths, the worlds are divided by gender, colour and location.[22] For example, "Navajo myths... ascribe femaleness to points of the compass (south and west) and to the colours blue and yellow while maleness is invested in a different set of complements." (*WM* 173). Thus William's "patterning" calls such myths to mind as does the idea of materials placed one on top of the other which is the very essence of myth. Kane sees this layering in Celtic stories which resemble " a narrative archaelogical site with stories layered one on top of the other with myth as foundation." (*WM* 172). Semi-historical stories of human warriors are retold again and again but always remain representations of relationships between the humans and the gods. The Otherworld still exists beneath the physical world or across the sea to the west and to the matriarchal Celts, the Otherworld is decidedly feminine while the world of power (logical linear progress) is masculine (*WM* 172-173). There is an analogy here with pioneering women who moved across the sea to the west and various voyages will be examined within the thesis. However, it is important to note that the

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21 Alice Olsen Williams, "Piecing Together: No Stranger in the House" Journal of Canadian Studies/revue d'études canadiennes 31. 4 (Winter 1996-97)144.

22 Sean Kane, *Wisdom of Mythtellers* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1994) All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title (abbrev. *WM*) and page number.

Celtic Otherworld (the archetypal feminine) thinks through interwoven patterns. Thus this thesis linksCeltic mythology with quilting but also with the thesis's own search for a pattern:

> ... always it [the Celtic Otherworld] thinks through subtle indirection. "This is similar to that in the same way that some one other is similar." It seems quite capable of reasoning along algorithmic lines which in the male human world runs straight to goals and objects. For the other Otherworld to bring a Dream to fruition, it must lay down complicated, playful, semi-random streams of consciousness (*WM* 173).

In the context of the thesis, the concept of "bringing a Dream to fruition" is appealing because such a concept seems to reject regimentation. Yet, as in quilting, a solid framework must be provided in order to bring the project to completion.

In keeping with the analogy, the introduction concludes by reiterating that the over-all theme of the thesis (the recovery of the "voices" of "silenced" nineteenth-century Irish working-class women immigrants) primarily will be examined on the premise that women's history exists in small scraps which have to be pieced together. The scrap collection resembles a pioneer- quilter's rag bag from which one may select or discard material. It is my hope that the thesis will emerge as a patchwork which reflects "women in motley," the Irish immigrant women of nineteenth-century Ontario.

Chapter 1

Shifting Landscapes: Women Writers in Transit/ion: Variations on "the Irish." Stewart, Moodie, Traill and Crawford.

In her book *Strange Things*, based on a series of witty lectures delivered at Oxford University on the Canadian North, Margaret Atwood claims that if one is going to consider writers in Canada, one cannot simply footnote the women. She suggests that Canadian women's writing grew not only out of quilting but other female pursuits such as embroidering cushions, flower-painting and poetry-writing. Canadian pioneer men were too busy chopping down trees and clearing the land to bother themselves with "sissy stuff."[23] In a practical sense, however, before women could devote themselves to such "frivolous" pursuits, they "ran farms, chased off bears, delivered their own babies in remote locations and bit off the umbilical cord" (*ST* 90). Thus, Canadian women have inherited a sense of themselves as being strong women. Atwood claims that this may be one reason that Canada has produced many women writers, both in the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century.

Nineteenth-century immigrant women's writings, however, also evolved out of a sense of isolation and letters and journals provided the lifeline for some women as they sought escape from loneliness in the Canadian wilderness; immigrant men saw Canada as the land of opportunity and my focus is on the settlers who sought to transform the terrain into fertile fields. Thus, the men came to forgive the wilderness for the sense of desolation which it originally inspired, but for women, especially those who came from large extended

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23 Margaret Atwood, *Strange Things -- The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature -- Clarendon Lectures in English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 90. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title (abbrev. *ST*) and page number.

families, the loneliness persisted.

Nineteenth-century Irish women immigrants brought to Canada their particular cultural baggage which included class and religous differences. One problem in defining who was "Irish" is that the Anglo-Irish in Canada tended to be members of the established Church of Ireland (Anglican) and so identified with English immigrants of the same ilk with whom they shared a perception of themselves as British subjects. All of Ireland, from the Act of Union in 1801 until the formation of the Irish Free State in 1920-22, was part of Great Britain; hence, all emigrants from the British Isles were British. But generally the term "the Irish" came to be identified with peasant Catholics from the south of Ireland, particularly after the Famine years of the 1840's and 1850's.

How does one track down the nineteenth-century immigrant Irish girls, survivors of the voyage, who disembarked in Montreal, Quebec or in Toronto? How many became domestic servants or factory workers, or were forced into prostitution or died of cholera? Or what of the women who drifted south to the cities of the United States? How many ventured out to the Canadian prairies to become farm wives in those communities? How many strong young Irish women mothered the sons and daughters of North America? In an attempt to answer such questions, "we must turn to historical areas which are anything but clear" (*TID* 154). In the absence of studies by other Canadian historians, I have turned to literary sources such as works of fiction and collections of letters and journals of women who left a record of their pioneering experiences.

One Irish emigrant woman writer is a valuable source in that she gives representations of Irishwomen in both the United States and Canada. Mary Anne Sadlier (1820-1913) emigrated to Montreal from Cootehill, County Cavan in 1843 and then moved with her husband to New York in 1860. Sadlier

herself gives us some idea of the frequency of "border-crossing" and the upward social mobility which was possible for some Irish immigrant women. Mary Anne Sadlier gives us representations of Irish emigrant women, one being Bessy Conway, a Tipperary girl who is a servant in New York and the other is Elinor Preston, a gentlewoman in a small village in Quebec. Lacombe comments that:

> *Bessy Conway; or the Irish Girl in America* (1861) ... [is the story of a girl who emigrates and] seeks employment as a servant in New York where she proves to be an exception to the rule by thriftily accumulating a tidy sum and avoiding the pitfalls of alcohol, sex and Protestantism.[24]

Mrs. Sadlier shows concern for the *souls* of Irish servant girls who might turn their backs on their religion and lose their self-respect in the process (*FPDW* 108). It is ironic that Sadlier, in her struggle between the desire to write and the conscientious attempt to fulfil her domestic duties, was freed from such ambivalence by an advantageous marriage to James Sadlier whose publishing company for her books help build up further successes for Mary Ann Sadlier (*FPDW* 99). Sadlier herself hailed from a comfortable Irish Catholic middle-class background in contrast to the lower-class "Irish" so prevalent in the work of many nineteenth-century novelists. Her own maidservants may very well have been as Irish as their mistress. Akenson states that "in the USA, the predilection of Irish immigrant women for domestic service... meant for a time they dominated that field (*TID* 181). This also holds for other countries involved in the Irish Diaspora (1815-1920) including Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand where the main occupation for the Irish single female emigrant was domestic service (*TID* 180).

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24 Lacombe, Michèle,"Frying Pans and Deadlier Weapons: the Immigrant Novels of mary Ann Sadlier" in Essays in Canadian Writing, 29.107 (Summer,1984) 96. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title (abbrev. *FPDW*) and page number.

Lacombe sees Sadlier's *Elinor Preston; or, Scenes at Home and Abroad,* as being of special interest to the student of Canadian culture. Here, the fact that Elinor Preston is a Irish immigrant gentlewoman serves to bring her close in circumstances to the young Frances Stewart who will be discussed in the following section of the thesis.

Edgeworth-Stewart

Frances Stewart, an early nineteenth-century emigrant to Ontario, never returned to Ireland; nevertheless, she kept up connections with her Irish kinswomen, one of whom was the Anglo-Irish author, Maria Edgeworth. Edgeworth was the third daughter of a well-to-do Anglo-Irish landowner, Richard Lovell Edgeworth; although English-born, she lived in Ireland from the age of thirteen and spent the last fifty-six years of her life on her father's estate, Edgeworthstown, in County Longford. It comes as a pleasant surprise to find that Maria's work is currently in print for Irish writer Ailbhe Smyth comments that:

> ... their work [Irish women] has suffered the fate of women in so many other cultures: lost, abandoned allowed to fall out of print and out of mind. Barely and grudgingly acknowleged in Ireland, Irish women's writing is almost totally unknown abroad. [25]

Castle Rackrent (1800) was Edgeworth's first novel and can be seen as "experimental fiction" for a number of reasons. First, her use of dialect was unusual for the times since non-standard dialogue was usually only given to minor characters; Edgeworth "provides a space in which native Irish voices can appear to speak uncensored" (Butler 16).

In Edgeworth's novel, the narrative voice is that of an Irish manservant

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25 Ailbhe Smyth in "Ireland," *Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature--From Sappho to Atwood, women's writing through the ages and throughout the world.* Ed. Claire Buck (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Company Limited, 1992) 36. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by author's name and page number.

and, through the persona of Thady, the indigenous Irish are permitted to criticise their masters. Paradoxically, Edgeworth belonged to the Anglo-Irish ruling class, whose position in the British hierarchy is worth noting; for where the indigenous Irish saw her kind as being English, the English-born saw them as being Irish. Nevertheless, until Ireland achieved her independence in the 1920s, the Anglo-Irish were a powerful group. Such confusion continues to haunt us as we strive to define "Irish" identity, both in Ireland itself and in countries such as Canada, which offered fresh hope to Irish emigrants of all classes and religions, particularly in the nineteenth century.

Edgeworth is invaluable as an agent of insight into Ireland's social structure: the Penal Laws proved to be a disaster for the Irish peasantry who were forced to live on small, ever-decreasing parcels of land (see Appendix i). Meanwhile, the landed gentry had access to cheap labour and built large homes so that "the spectre of the Big House" loomed over their impoverished tenants; Ireland thus became a two-tier society in which the native Irish were reduced to paupers in their own land (Dumbleton 19).

Further proof that Edgeworth has survived as an Irish author is reinforced by the current scholarship of Catherine Gallagher who observes that although the Edgeworths themselves personified "the Big House," Richard Lovell Edgeworth seemed to question his moral rights as landlord, for he wrote in 1792, "I am now [possessed] of ... landed property by the right of Conquest ... that right has hitherto been sufficient for the common purposes and common sense of mankind...upon what foundation is another question."[26] Richard Lovell gave evidence of recognizing some of the social ills of his Irish tenants and this

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[26] Catherine Gallagher, "Maria Edgeworth's Productive Fictions" in *Nobody's Story--the Vanishing Act of Women Writers in the Market Place, 1670-1820* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994) 288. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by author and page number.

banner was taken up by his daughter Maria.

On the surface, Edgeworth's narrator Thady praises his masters, but gradually the reader realizes that Edgeworth's protagonist is conveying a sense of the worthlessness of uncaring Anglo-Irish landlords:

> ... for in all our leases there were strict clauses which Sir Murtagh knew how to enforce; so many days' duty work of man and horse, from every tenant he was to have, and had, every year; and when a man vexed him, why the finest day he could pitch on, when the cratur was getting in his own harvest, Sir Murtagh made it a principle to call upon him and his horse; so he taught them all, as he said, to know the law of the landlord and tenant (Edgeworth 70).

Edgeworth's ironic style is evident when Thady comments on the widow Skinflint, Sir Murtagh's wife:

> ... she made him the best of wives. I always suspected that she had Scotch blood in her veins. She was a strict observer for self and servants at Lent ... one of the maids having fainted three times in the last day of Lent, to keep body and soul together we put a morsel of roast beef in her mouth, which came from Sir Murtagh's dinner, who never fasted not he; this reached my lady's ears and the priest of the parish had a complaint made of it next day and the poor girl was forced as soon as she could walk to do penance... (Edgeworth 69).

Edgeworth's irony is directed at the church's compliance with the wishes and outrage of "my lady" rather than at a hungry servant girl for whom she feels sympathy. Edgeworth saw clearly the realities of that era's two-class society and her narrator gives no overt hint that Thady is doing anything but praising his master and mistress.

Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* earned a tribute from Sir Walter Scott; writing a postscript to *Waverly* (1814) he credits Edgeworth's Irish tales, "as the model for his own portrayal of Scotland on the big historical stage" (Butler 3). Scott saw his female contemporaries as having excelled at "small work":

He spoke with praise ... of Miss Austen ... " There's a finishing-off in some

> of her scenes that is really quite above everybody else. And then there is that Irish lady, too... Ay, Miss Edgeworth ... she's *very* clever, and best at the little touches too" (Butler 3).

In fact, Edgeworth first featured social change, national identity and English hegemony in *Castle Rackrent* which Scott later treated as 'big' topics in his novels. Ireland was more a colony of England's than was Scotland, the setting for Scott's novels and, in her own way, Edgeworth wrestled with the politics and ethics of her country's colonial status.

Despite her empathy with the Irish peasant, it should be noted that like most Protestant interpreters, Edgeworth begins Irish history with the time of the arrival of the English in Ireland; in fact, she challenges any notions that suggest that genuine *Irishness* is to be sought in the history of the Dark Ages. Her reaction to nationalist historian, Sylvester O'Halloran [27] suggested that it mattered little [to the Anglo-Irish] whether the Irish derived their origin from the Spaniards, the Milesians or the Welsh (Butler 344). Anglo-Irish literary interpretations of Ireland, throughout most of the nineteenth century, generally did not reflect upon or admit to the residue of ancient Irish culture. Edgeworth found her inspiration in her immediate world but possibly, her interest in the Irish peasant class reflected her unconscious interest in the past for the downtrodden peasant was the very embodiment of the residue of ancient Irish culture.

Ailbhe Smyth argues that Irish women need to recover their literary foremothers:

> ... to understand why the story has not been told or told only in fragments. They need to see the connections between 18th and 19th century

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27 Sylvester O'Halloran, *An Introduction to the Studies of the History and Antiquities of Ireland* (1772).
---------*A General History of Ireland from the Earliest Accounts until to the Close of the Twelfth Century* (1778) Both books are cited by Marilyn Butler (editor) in notes to *Castle Rackrent and Ennui,* 344. Publisher not noted.

novelists such as Maria Edgeworth ... and Emily Lawless. Irish women's writing is not a *terra incognito* (Smyth 36).

Smyth's phrase: "only in fragments" can be linked in a positive sense to Scott's comments on "the little touches" as the source of strength of women writers but we can also extract fragments of information on the nineteenth-century settlement of Irish women in Canada from the writings of the Anglo-Irish Frances Stewart. It is fortunate that her daughter Ellen Dunlop managed to publish privately a collection of eighty-three of her mother's letters in 1889 after her mother's death.[28] The letters provide an interesting account of Anglo-Irish settlement in Douro Township, Ontario.

Frances Stewart, like Edgeworth, belonged to the comfortable Anglo-Irish minority. Richard Lovell Edgeworth's fourth wife was Honora Beaufort, sister to Harriet Beaufort, Frances's cousin-governess. Frances eventually married Thomas Stewart and emigrated to Canada with him in 1822.[29]

Two letters (see Appendix ii) written by Edgeworth to Beaufort discuss the possibility of publishing Frances's interesting letters about her Canadian experiences. In a letter to Harriet Beaufort, Maria Edgeworth writes:

March 8th 1824
... Now as to Dear F Stewart's letters I rejoice that we may proceed

28 *Our Forest Home, being extracts from the correspondence of the late Frances Stewart, compiled and edited by her daughter, E.S. Dunlop* (Toronto: Presbyterian Publishing Company, 1889). Second edition (Montreal: The Gazette Printing and Publishing Co.,1902) edited by Frances Browne. All further references are to the second edition and will be noted parenthetically within the text by Stewart or Dunlop and title (abbrev. *OFH*) and page number.

29 Joyce C.Lewis, *From Dublin to Douro: the letters of Frances Stewart.* Occasional paper (Peterborough: Peterborough,Ontario: Peterborough Historical Society, February 1994) 1-22. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by author and page number. Copies of Edgeworth's correspondence by courtesy of Lewis. Original letters (see Appendix ii) are the property of Lady Colvin, Oxford, England. Permission to quote from the letters has been kindly granted by Lady Colvin.

> conscience free... I differ from you my dear as to the *mode* of publication ... Independently of the *needful* ... I *think* that it would be more advantageous to the letters and the writer that they should appear one by one in a separate publication... I honestly tell you that I don't think they have body enough to stand in a book by themselves ... as she herself observes the actual information has been given in other circumstances... their value is in the *picture of minuter circumstances* [therefore] *they should not be read de suite ... they should be read as they are written at intervals so as to give the idea of progress between each* [italics mine]. (see Appendix ii).

Edgeworth's suggestion that the letters should appear "piece by piece" or "one by one" seems to echo the quilting motif. Subsequently, she decides against publication on a moral premise which indicates that she considers the publication of personal letters to be an invasion of privacy which could reflect on the character of an individual. Her second letter to Beaufort conveys her feelings on such matters:

> April 14 1825
>
> ... that notwithstanding Fanny [Frances] had consented and that I had obtained the consent of her friends still for her sake in the first place I should wish that her letters not be published ... it would only lessen their value both with her friends but would alter the idea of the simplicity of her character (see Appendix ii).

Edgeworth sought to preserve Frances Stewart's *quietness* but there are other possibilites to consider concerning her unwillingness to publish the letters from Canada. She seems to have recognised the difference between writing fiction, where the author may speak through a persona, and the costs and implications of revealing the personal and private details of one's real life. One could surmise that Edgeworth, as a member of the Anglo-Irish gentry, would hardly have been seen as credible for criticizing her own kind and therefore chose to channel her social commentary through the voice of an Irish servant. Stewart continued to correspond with Harriet Beaufort who did use

pieces of Frances' writing in her book, *Bertha's Journals* (1829) (Lewis 21). There was no indication that Frances harboured any ill feelings towards Edgeworth concerning her advice and when Stewart's letters were published after her death, they were meant for friends and family only and were not intended for the public at large. Frances, towards the end of her life, began to edit letters which presumably later were published as *Our Forest Home* (Lewis 21-22).

Frances Stewart's early letters have particular historical interest because the Stewarts emigrated early in the nineteenth century and the revelations of her alone-ness are fascinating. The contemporary student interested in the isolation endured by women settlers must be content with whatever early letters are available. There is also the consideration that, had Stewart written for publication, she would have been guarded in her comments, for the writings of nineteenth-century women, who were shaped by their Victorian sensibilities, made a crucial distinction between public and private matters.

Letters from immigrants to their relatives at home probably would have been carefully worded through a desire to present the new life in a positive manner, for presumably one did not want to admit defeat. Revelations of real intimacy were precious and rare, and it is fortunate that such letters are being recovered by current Canadian scholars. For sharp insight into the woman immigrant's experience, one should consider Moodie's letter to her husband where she speaks of her suffering from an abscessed breast due to breast-feeding; such letters have received considerable response from students of nineteenth-century pioneering life. In a sense, scholars of Canadian literature and history have turned pioneer themselves as they explore the lives of women who were their foremothers.

Moodie's allusion to private pain and suffering illuminates the harshness of pioneer life where medical help was not easily available; one can identify with the duality of the mothering/ parenting aspect which embodies both pain and joy:

> Susanna Moodie to John Moodie | Melsetter,Douro
> Jan.11, 1839...
>
> ... [The Dr.] put the lancet immediately into my breast, and I was able to move for the first time in ten days ... you may imagine what I suffered when I tell you that more than half a pint of matter must have followed the cut of the lancet, and the wound has continued to discharge ever since. I was often quite out of my senses, and only recovered to weep over the probability that I might never see my beloved husband again.[30]

Catharine Parr Traill presents a more pleasurable aspect of 'mothering' when she writes tenderly to another woman on the subject of breast-feeding her son:

> Catharine Parr Traill to Frances Stewart | Sunday night
> November 17 1844
>
> My dear big boy has just awakened and is now at the breast looking upon my face with his clear blue eyes so earnest and loving with his arm extended over his *Treasure* as if to guard it from any invasion of his rights--he hears the blustering wind which is shaking the old house--looks up and pauses and goes on sucking--sweet baby he fears no evil whilst in my arms.[31]

The recipient of this particular letter, Frances Stewart, a nineteenth-century Irish-Canadian gentlewoman, was part of a society of educated gentlewomen who typically wrote letters and journals rather than books. It is

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30 Carl Ballstadt, Elizabeth Hopkins and Michael Peterman, *Letters of Love and Duty* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) 141. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title (abbrev. *LLD*) and page number.

31 Carl Ballstadt, Elizabeth Hopkins and Michael Peterman, eds. *I Bless you in my Heart -- Selected Correspondence of Catharine Parr Traill* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 50. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title (abbrev. *BYMH*) and page number.

fortunate that some records do exist so that Frances has not disappeared into the silence of the wilderness for Stewart's writings do shed light on the emigrant experience. Perhaps it is not important that she was not a published author in her lifetime. It may be enough to view her writing as one of a range of creative activities in the face of isolation which was so much a part of her life in her early years as an immigrant. In the context of women who nurture each other, it is our good fortune that Ellen Dunlop, encouraged in part by Catharine Parr Traill, saw to it that Stewart's letters were published.

As previously mentioned, the Stewarts were part of the Anglo-Irish minority who aligned themselves with Upper Canada. Thomas Stewart could have been considered upper-class as the second son of a family who held considerable land holdings in the north of Ireland; he enjoyed some income from property he held under a lengthy lease and his wife had a modest income of her own. Stewart and his brother-in-law Robert Reid were involved in Ulster's linen and cotton industry. After suffering some financial set-backs, the two men brought their families to Canada in 1822 (Lewis, 5-6). It is clear that Frances enjoyed a certain degree of comfort on the voyage in that she shared the state cabin with her three daughters and her Irish maid Betty (Stewart, July 1, 1822, *OFH* 4).

From their arrival in Canada, the Stewarts showed every sign of having useful connections: they carried letters of introduction to the Bishop of Quebec, the only Protestant bishop in Canada, and the two emigrant families enjoyed his hospitality en route to Kingston where they were warmly greeted by Colonel Foster, a distant relative of Frances Stewart. The Governor, Sir Peregrine Maitland, granted permission for the two families to be housed in military quarters while Robert Reid and Thomas Stewart awaited their land-grant

settlement which amounted to twelve hundred acres for each family; they were advised to take, as an unbroken place, the Township of Douro (Stewart, *OFH* 14-16).

Frances gave every evidence of enjoying Cobourg social life while their house in Douro was being built; her winter dresses and furs had been sent ahead to Douro but she took pride in managing to look fashionable:

> ... and neither Thomas or I feel the cold much. Sleighing is very enjoyable in the clear frosty nights ... the Cobourg ladies dress in a very smart suitable style. They think nothing of giving fifty to a hundred guineas for a fur muff or tippet. Indeed, fur is much used. The sleighs are delightfully lined with it and so comfortable (Stewart , Winter, 1822, *OFH* 24).

Frances presents a scene much like a Victorian Christmas card and we get an impression of a socially poised young woman, enjoying her new-found friends in Cobourg.

It is not always clear if specific writings are part of her journals or if they are letters written to a friend or relative; however, in July, 1823, she writes:

> This place [Douro] is so lonely that in spite of all my efforts to keep them off, clouds of dismal thoughts fly and lower over me. I have not seen another woman except those in our party for over five months, and only three times any one in the shape of a companion ... every hour of the day. I feel gratitude to my dear Harriet who gave me tastes which in a great measure make me independent of society (Stewart, *OFH* 39).

Frances's thoughts bring to mind Lacombe's comments on Sadlier's protagonist *Elinor Preston* (see 19). Elinor, the product of a finishing school was,like Sadlier herself (whose father, a sucessful merchant, died young) is impoverished by the death of her father (in this case, a lawyer). She emigrates to Canada as a single woman and teaches school in a Quebec village. In herself, Elinor represents a break with the stereotypical impoverished lower-

class Catholic Irish as portrayed by some Anglo-Canadian writers, for Elinor is both a respectable and educated middle-class "lady" *and* Catholic. father had While the fictional Elinor's circumstances bear little resemblance to those of Frances Stewart, already a wife and mother when she arrives in Douro, both feel that they are isolated from genteel society and Elinor's state of mind could be compared to Frances in solitude:

> As for society I might as well be in the centre of the Great African Desert ... I felt very lonely in my new position, utterly isolated as I was amongst a people with whom I had little in common; but gradually that feeling wore away and I began to relish the soothing stillness all around. The very trees were strange to me, and it was not until my second summer... that I could feel satisfied to have my home shaded with the tamarac, the maple, and the dark Canadian pine, instead of the familiar oak and ash and the broad-leaved, graceful sycamore (*Elinor Preston* 258-259. Qtd. by Lacombe, *FPDW* 111).

Frances is even more isolated in her forest home:

> There is a charming Mrs Rubidge, wife of a lieutenant in the Navy, who lives six miles from us, but there is a swamp two miles broad between, across which there is no road, and by water it is eighteen miles to go and call upon her (Stewart *OFH* 139).

There have been some suggestions that Frances may have been responsible for renaming Scott's Landing as the town of Peterborough after Peter Robinson, the Canadian merchant who was responsible for overseeing the emigration of some two thousand Irish emigrants who began to arrive in Upper Canada in 1825.[32] Robinson found his first five hundred emigrants in Cork and the South of Ireland; according to Ellen Dunlop, her father regretted that the choice had been made at that place, "the people being well-known as very poor and thriftless. Had a better class come it would have been an

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32 Amos, Mrs D, " The Stewarts and the Reids settle in the backwoods" in *Through the years in Douro -- Peterborough County, Canada 1822-1967.* Ed. J. Alex. Edmison, Q.C. Special Assistant Howard Pammett M.A. (Peterborough, Ontario: A.D. Newson 1967) 15.

advantage to the settlement " (Dunlop *OFH* 79).

Since Ellen alludes to "servant problems" endured by her mother, it is unfortunate that we do not get the stories in Frances's own words for it is sometimes difficult to draw conclusions concerning the Stewarts' relationship with their servants. One incident occurred when Thomas Stewart became ill while in Douro and returned to his family in Cobourg. Betty, the maid who had come with the family from Ireland, slipped on some ice and broke her ribs; thus, for the first time in her life, Frances had to cook the family meals. Dunlop focuses on her mother's "misfortune" but little was said of Betty, except that she is laid up for some time (Dunlop *OFH* 19). Here is one example of how an Irish servant is marginalized on the fringe of a story and the reader never hears her voice or her impression of this unfortunate experience. Frances's own account of the incident might have revealed some sympathetic exchange between Betty and her employers.

In a letter, which is not specifically dated, but written to Harriet Beaufort some time in the winter of 1823, Frances described the condition of the roads and how Thomas was almost lost in a winter storm (*OFH* 52-52). Ellen then relates that :

> In the midst of my mother's troubles her servants (Betty, a young girl whose mother gave her into their charge before leaving Ireland, and a boy named John Delaney) left her. Betty became discontented, got it into her head to return to Ireland and so went away leaving my mother without assistance in her solitude (Dunlop *OFH* 53).

The focus again is on Frances's troubles with little concern about Betty, about whom subsequently there is silence. When John Delaney returned in a few weeks, the Stewarts were pleased when he settles down and works with a cheerful attitude (Dunlop *OFH* 54), but Betty's fate remains an untold story.

Perhaps there are missing letters which do reflect the Stewarts' concern or perhaps Betty herself may have chosen not to keep them informed if she could write at all.

There was yet another "maid" incident when Frances gave birth to the first male white child in the township on July 31, 1825. For some unknown reason, the Irish nurse who had previously attended Frances, stayed only one day with the mother and new-born infant, William Stewart (Dunlop, *OFH* 79). A letter from Frances's aunt Mrs. Sutton extols Frances's fortitude:

> We are all angry with the old nurse tender for leaving you so soon after your baby was born, but thanks be to God who preserved you to be the pride and delight of all who know you, and who holds you up in the difficult and trying situation in which He Himself has placed you (letter from Mrs Sutton to Frances Stewart,1825, *OFH* 79).

Although it is possible that the nurse had other commitments, it is also possible that she was one of many servants who could not tolerate the isolation of the backwoods. Stewart continually escaped into her letter-writing but her servants may not have been literate or otherwise able to keep in contact with family and friends in Ireland. Also, capable servants may have had some options as to location since they were much in demand in nineteenth-century Ontario. In any case, as Frances's daughters grew older, they took over some of the household duties:

> September 2 1834
>
> I now have a fifteen-year old girl who does the rough work of the house. A woman comes to wash every fortnight. The two girls manage the ironing between them, as also the care of little Henry, who is a fine, good-natured little fellow (Stewart *OFH* 139).

In the early years of settlement, Frances Stewart worried about her own lack of intellectual stimulation. As a pioneer wife and mother, the demands on

her time were numerous and she saw the act of reading a book or writing letters as an indulgence. Deprived of adult company, for Thomas spent most of his time outdoors and her neighbours were not easily accessible, Frances would turn her thoughts to her homeland and memories of the past. Gifts from home afforded her much comfort and Ellen wrote fondly of the boxes which were sent annually from Ireland. Miss Edgeworth included her latest novels and through Edgeworth's connection, Lord Bathurst, the Colonial Secretary, the Stewarts received a steady stream of letters and newspapers free of charge (*OFH* 54). Writing in 1824, Frances related that she was without a maid and had single-handedly managed to do all the housework. There is some indication that she now saw herself as the dull over-worked wife and mother for she thinks back to her youth and recalls:

> July 24 1824
>
> I have often thought in my days of affluence when I said I disliked housekeeping mistresses and mammas who could think of nothing but the care of their children; but I have found it necessary of late to become both ... I must turn to a subject which constantly occupies our thoughts and conversations: Maria Edgeworth's great kindness. It is so good of her when she is in constant intercourse with remarkable people, brilliant from talent, or fashionable, or rank, to think of me living in the backwoods of Canada in the most remote place. I can never express how T. and I feel about her (*OFH* 59-60).

Frances truly appreciated her Irish connections. By 1828, she had become the mother of six children and she agonised over the prospects of her two older daughters, Anna and Ellen, who were growing up with few advantages. In 1834, in a letter to Fanny Beaufort, she deplored the fact that life in the backwoods was not conducive to proper education and that her children lacked general knowledge and were backward in literature (*OFH* 117).

Writing in 1842, Frances observed that her daughters were expert

needlewomen but that such activities stood in the way of intellectual pursuits (*OFH* 185). A year later, Frances was observing that her family sadly lacked social activities and that "Papa" had become quite strict about allowing the family to go anywhere. By now, the Stewarts were comfortably established; Anna was a devoted daughter and a caring sister who was worn-out after Ellen's latest illness. Ellen is described as "a drooping flower" (*OFH* 192-193) and Frances felt that home had become a dull place:

> Mr Stewart sits reading when indoors; he cannot bear any noise or be disturbed. I go on as quietly as I can, trying to keep up my heart and those of all the rest. A. and her father, who are as like as two peas in their ways, keep us young ones in order. I sometimes strum over my old tunes on the piano. Mr Stewart cares little for music now although he still likes to hear B. singing as she goes through the house. Edward's violin remains silent on the piano. He seldom comes except late on Saturday nights ... (*OFH* 193).

Frances was obviously an enlightened woman in that she wished that her daughters had more education and could lead a more stimulating social life. However, given the isolation/distances of pioneer life, the duties of daughters came before pleasure. In 1834, Frances' account of her three daughters, who were all under the age of sixteen, was typical of the times: [33]

> Anna Maria is the general overseer of the household concerns, who makes all the preserves and pickles, cakes etc. She also has the care of Johnny, the third boy, who is now five years old ... Ellen mends all the stockings for the little boys and repairs their clothes. She has the care of George in particular who is three; besides this she is manager and caretaker of the poultry. In spring she attends to the sowing and raising of plants and nurseries of apple trees. Bessie is in charge of Charlie, the infant, she is always busy and can make most of her own underwear and knits (*OFH* 133-134).

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33 Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson and Naomi Black, *Canadian Women--A History* (Toronto: Harbour Brace Jovanich, 1988) 76. All further references to be noted parenthetically within the text by title (abbrev. *CWH*) and page number.

Her daughters finally take over the running of the household and their mother explains how they alternate their duties:

> (Frances Stewart to Miss L. Beaufort) June 5 1843
>
> It is now time to dress for dinner; you will be surprised to hear of dressing for dinner in the middle of the day, I will explain it to you. As there is so much for the girls to do in the forenoon, most of which falls on the housekeeper [the duties of one daughter] *she* looks after the kitchen for a week; the other [daughter] is housemaid. Before dinner, they [her daughters, Anna and Ellen] change all, laying aside their morning costumes etc. (Stewart, *OFH* 191).

It is not clear whether the Stewarts continued to employ servants as their daughters grew up but they were by no means the only immigrant family who had diverse experiences with servants. Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill also recorded their own particular dealings with servants, many of whom seem to have been Irish.

Moodie-Traill

My exploration of these English women writers, both of whom married Scottish husbands, is largely to determine their attitudes to lower-class Irish-Canadians. Traill initially seemed to show more tolerance but Moodie went through a transformation over the course of her years in Canada and eventually formed a particularly close bond with one Irish maidservant.

Moodie left an invaluable record of an Anglo-Canadian woman's settlement experience and her reaction to the Irish lower class is well documented in her work. Her English sensibilities were often offended by the sights and sounds of the emerging Canadian nation. Her sentiments signified nineteenth-century British supremacy in Canada but a veritable hodgepodge of emigrants were arriving, including some "Irish" who had no great reverence for the British flag. Susanna had a rude awakening when she viewed Grosse Isle

in the St. Lawrence river; reality suddenly presented itself in the form of a crude roistering crowd of Irish emigrants on shore:

> Never will I forget the extraordinary spectacle ... a crowd of Irish immigrants ... this motley crew... were washing clothes, the women with their scanty garments tucked above their knees, were trampling their bedding in tubs, or in holes in the rocks.... The confusion of Babel was amongst them. All talkers and no hearers ... each shouting and yelling in his or her uncouth dialect and all accompanying their vociferations with violent and extraordinary gestures, quite incomprehensible to the uninitiated.[34]

Moodie's shock is the result of both her class and ethnicity, different from those of most of the Irish whom she would encounter in Canada. The Irish peasant class, having been reduced to servitude by their British overlords, emigrated in large numbers to the British colonies during the early nineteenth century. Grosse Isle was the checkpoint for emigrants who may have become victims of cholera. In spite of the gravity of this situation, a boisterous air of freedom surrounded the "rowdy" Irish, perhaps the result of having at last escaped the confinement of the steerage decks. Susanna was further offended when she noticed how the Irish influenced the mood of more "respectable" passengers:

> ... our passengers, who were chiefly honest Scotch labourers and mechanics, from the vicinity of Edinburgh, and while on board ship, conducted themselves with the greatest propriety and who appeared to be the most quiet and orderly people in the world, no sooner set foot on the island than they became infected with the same spirit of subordination and misrule and were as insolent and noisy as the rest (*RIB* 21).

Moodie may have characterised the Scottish as being steady and reliable and even dour, but they were as capable of showing a spontaneous

34 Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush or Life in Canada*, ed. Carl Ballstadt (Ottawa: Carleton University Press 1988) 20. (London: Bentley, 1852). All further references will be noted within the text by title (abbrev. *RIB*) and page number.

reaction to the end of a long uncomfortable voyage, as were the Irish. For many, emigration signified an act of freedom and so, in spite of the ensuing hardships, arrival became a time of temporary jubilation. Susanna's day, however, ends in fresh despair for, as she boards ship, she spies yet another boat, "just landing with a fresh cargo of lively savages from the Emerald Isle," (*RIB* 23). There is yet another incident to be encountered on the voyage from Prescott to Kingston when a wild Irish emigrant keeps the passengers awake all night with his drunken singing:

> ... he sang, he shouted and harangued his countrymen on the political state of the Emerald Isle, in a style which was loud if not eloquent. Sleep was impossible, while his stentorian lungs continued to pour forth torrents of unmeaning sound (*RIB* 52).

In a practical sense, Moodie's reaction to a drunkard who was disturbing her rest is understandable. Nevertheless, one can argue that Moodie, in her reaction to the Irish she first encountered in Canada, was simply reflecting the spirit of her age. England had borne witness to the French Revolution, to say nothing of the American War of Independence, and the Irish had staged their own abortive revolutionary attempt in 1798. Revolution was in the air and this fact must have shaken English faith in their own stability as a nation. L. Perry Curtis in his book *Apes and Angels--the Irishman in Victorian Caricature* alludes to the fact that political cartoons often relected these fears from the eighteenth century onwards. James Gillray, the acknowleged father of political cartoon, depicted radicals and rebels with ape-like features. Moodie, as an intelligent young woman, would have been familiar with the milder caricatures of the "monkey-Irish" which were evident in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Curtis propounds that :

> Gillray's images of French and Irish Jacobins ... thus serves as a point of physiognomical departure for Victorian cartoonists, who chose a ferocious and powerful ape over an obnoxious but frail monkey as the governing metaphor for Irish republican revolutionaries in their own time (see Figs. 1&2).

Furthermore, Curtis claims that "the respectable nineteenth-century English middle-class believed in a natural opposition between an Anglo-Saxon "Us" and a Celtic or Gaelic "Them" which was reinforced by the great religious divide between Protestantism and (Roman) Catholicism." Therefore Moodie was merely mirroring her times.

Twenty years later, Moodie did receive some negative reviews concerning what was seen as her anti-Irish prejudice. One British review appeared in the London *Observer* and was reprinted in the Montreal *Pilot* of 27 March 1852 (*LOL* 108). The reviewer calls *Roughing it in the Bush*, "one of the most valuable books hitherto published on that ever-novel, and always interesting subject, the customs and manners of large classes of people" (qtd. by Ballstadt in introduction to *RIB* xxxi). He, however, holds some serious reservations in regard to Moodie in that he claims that she "describes the Irish emigrants in terms which a reflective writer would scarcely apply to a pack of hounds" (Ballstadt xxxi).

Moodie was deeply hurt by what she considered to be an unwarranted attack on her first impressions of Canada:

> It was ... very cruelly and falsely asserted, [by literary reviewers] that I had spoken ill of the Irish people because I described the revolting scene we witnessed at Grosse Isle, the actors of which were principally Irish emigrants of the very *lowest* class. Had I been able to give the whole detail of what we saw on that island, the terms applied to the people who furnished such disgusting pictures would have echoed with their countrymen. This was one of those cases in which it was impossible to

reveal the whole truth.[35]

Robert McDougall, in his introduction to Moodie's book *Life in the Clearings*, comments on how Moodie undergoes a transformation during her twenty years in Canada. Initially, she is shocked by the democratic behaviour displayed by the pauper emigrant who has barely set foot on Canadian soil. The democratization, which is the very essence of frontier life, appears to threaten Moodie who is about to become part of the dominant group in Ontario's nineteenth-century colonial society; some twenty years later, when Moodie recalls the scene at Grosse Isle, she has been so democratized by her new society that her emphasis now is on behaviour which offends her sense of morality and thus she claims that most "decent" Irish people would have reacted in the same way to the behaviour of their riotous compatriots (McDougall, *LIC* xvi).

Moodie continued to resent unfavourable reviews discussing her class-consciousness and attitudes towards Irish immigrants, in spite of the favourable reviews which commended her writing skills:

> Reviews in the *Globe* (7 August 1852), the *British Colonist* (9 July), and the *Anglo-American Magazine* in August, all of Toronto, commended the writing as well as the character of the author, although the *Colonist* observed that she conveyed an unfavourable impression of Canada which was 'to be much regretted.' The reviewer for the *Commercial Advertiser* of Montreal showed no such reservations, but saw her as one who wrote truthfully and skillfully of her life in Canada:
>
> > She possesses the the three great qualifications necessary to be a successful novelist ...the power to analyse [sic] a lively descriptive style, and the faculty to construct a plot ... [she is] a good woman ... you [the reader] will resign yourself ... to the charms of her narrative ... her comic powers are very remarkable for a woman,

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35 Susanna Moodie, Conclusion to *Life in the Clearings which is added to this author's introduction to Mark Hurdlestone*, ed. Robert McDougall (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada,1959) 177. First edition published in England in 1853. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by author and editor and title (abbrev. *LIC*) and page number.

> and her humourous characters are delightfully drawn.[36]

Moodie was disturbed by a review of her sketch of 'Michael MacBride' (*Literary Garland,* February 1851) and decided not to include the sketch in*Roughing It in the Bush* ; 'Michael MacBride' does, however, make an appearence in *Life in the Clearings* (*LOL* 109). At least one reviewer "sharply rebuked Moodie for a Protestant bias against Catholicism and for a lack of knowlege of both Irish and Catholic character " (*LOL* 109).

She recounts the tale in retrospect, as she travels through Cobourg on her way to Niagara Falls, recalling the events of some twenty years ago; her husband had been looking at various farms in the area while Moodie and her baby daughter spend their days in the local hotel. There she encounters Michael MacBride (not his real name) who has run away from his home in Peterborough. Michael is a lapsed Catholic who has developed leanings towards the Protestant faith. Sadly, the young man is dying of consumption and asked Moodie to read him verses from the Bible. Moodie complies but is disrupted by the arrival of Michael's mother who, as an Irish Catholic, is appalled with the scene:

> "Och! what do you mane by disthurbing him in his dying moments wid your thrash? It is not the likes of yo' that shall trouble his soul! The praste will come and administher consolation to him in his last exthremity (*LIC* 178).

The Irish-Canadian reaction was exemplied by the following review which appeared in the Montreal *True Witness and Chronicle*, February 21, 1851:

> The lady is evidently ignorant of all the genuine characteristics of that fine people--their depth of feeling, their eccentric modes of thought, their shrewd and ready wit, their gratitude, their faithfulness: she draws them, it is plain from the exaggerated account of those who love them not, and

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36 Carl Ballstadt, Elizabeth Hopkins and Michael Peterman, *Susanna Moodie --Letters of a Lifetime* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) 108. All further references will be noted parentheticaly within the text by title (abbrev. *LOL*) and page number.

> the consequence is they come from her hands distorted and unnatural ... No doubt Mrs Moodie is a good Bible Christian ... but we tell her that if it were read end to end to a dying Catholic ... it would afford him small comfort unless he could at the same time confess his sins to Christ's minister... For shame! Bible-reading authoress! ... how could you get an unfortunate scapegoat who had been a Catholic, to believe your reading of some select chapters could supply to his soul these tremendous wants? (qtd. by Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman, *LOL* 109).

Moodie's relationship with " the Irish" was not always negative for in nineteenth-century Ontario, the supply of Irish immigrant women helped to fill the need for domestic servants and Moodie was more than humane in her attitude towards Jenny Buchanan who did much to help Moodie through some of her worst backwoods experiences. Carl Ballstadt provides insight as to how Moodie wrote*Roughing it in the Bush*. Some of the material had formerly been published as sketches which she wrote to "amuse the Canadian people." For example, Moodie introduced "The Walk to Dummer" with "a slight sketch of my old favourite [Jenny Buchanan] ... and as it is drawn from life I shall not hesitate in presenting it to my readers" (*Literary Garland,* NS 5 (1847)101, qtd. by Ballstadt in introduction to *RIB* , xxiii). Moodie later incorporated such sketches, which included colourful characters from her real-life experience, into what was intended as a handbook for emigrants warning them to think twice about coming to the Canadian bush. Thus, when she describes Captain N., once a dashing officer (an Anglo-Irishman) but now degraded by dissolute habits and a man who abuses his wife and maidservant (the faithful Jenny), she is quick to follow with words of warning for potential emigrants:

> And here I would remark that it is always a rash and hazardous step for any officer to part with his half-pay... a certain income, however small, ... is invaluable to a gentleman unaccustomed to agricultural labour... These government grants of land, to half pay officers, have induced numbers of this class to emigrate to the backwoods of Canada who are totally unfit for pioneers (*RIB* 467).

Moodie's depiction of Jenny is in sharp contrast to her account of the Irish immigrants whom Moodie first beheld at Grosse Isle. Now the Irish immigrant is described as, "a generous, warm-hearted daughter of the Green Isle--the Emerald Gem set in the silver of the ocean," (*RIB* 440). It is important to note, however, that Moodie felt that Jenny owed her industry to the fact that she was of Scottish extraction born near Inniskillen in the province of Ulster. Jenny, although nominally a Protestant, paid little attention to the formalities of religion. In fact, she stoutly resisted the idea of herself as a sinner and in need of redemption for her belief was simple: "God would never throuble himself about a poor, hardworking cratur like me, who never did any harm to the manest of His making" (*RIB* 464- 465). Jenny was an outdoorswoman, close to the earth and more at home in the harvest fields and with rearing livestock than she was with housekeeping duties. Moodie and Jenny formed a supportive relationship which would endure until Jenny's death; moreover, Jenny inspired some of Moodie's liveliest writing.

Moodie's sympathy obviously was aroused since she rescued Jenny when Captain N. turned her out of his house. Jenny was a strong woman who could yoke the oxen, fell timber and provide Moodie with support while John Moodie played his part in putting down the Rebellion of 1837 and later served in the militia (*RIB* 472).

Jenny seems like a bear of a woman both in her harmony with the outdoors and in her exuberant physical demonstrations towards those for whom she cares. In the letter where Susanna relates her suffering from mastitis, she also tells John of Jenny's well- meaning but somewhat rough attentions, "poor Jenny nursed me somewhat like a she bear, her tenderest mercies were neglect" (*LLD* 114). Moodie's rare reference to bodily pain seems to release a

torrent of feelings and, although she assures her husband of her love, she also gloomily relates Dr. H.'s concern for, "when he looked around the forlorn, cold, dirty room feebly lighted by the wretched lamp, he said with great emphasis "In the name of God! Mrs Moodie get out of this" (*LLD* 114). Although she cannot leave, she counts on Jenny to provide the light by which she works long into the night:

> ... the light of the sort of candles which Jenny called 'sluts', and which the old woman manufactured out of pieces of old rags, twisted together and dipped in pork lard, and stuck in a bottle. They did not give a bad light but it took many of them to last me a few hours (*R IB* 417).

Without her man around, Susanna gratefully bonded with Jenny and issues of class and ethnicity are reduced as the two women work side by side for daily survival. On the one hand, Jenny is the disadvantaged, self-sacrificing, old Irish servant who puts the needs of others before her own, but on the other hand, she is a strong woman whose strength seems to flow in all directions. Jenny is a hardy soul, close to the earth and conscious of the realities of life; she assumes the role of surrogate mother to Moodie and is ambivalent towards Moodie's writing for, although she provides the crude candles, she declares that

> ... thank goodness the lard will soon be all done, an' thin' we shall hear you spakin' again, instead of sittin' there doubled up all night, desthroying your eyes wid pouring over the dirty writing ... (*RIB* 441).

Jenny's talents are of a practical nature as is exemplied, "in her bold thought of making a good *lump* of sugar that the "childher" might have something to "ate" with their bread during the summer" (*RIB* 441). Jenny sees life in the backwoods through the realistic eyes of a peasant woman; she represents the heroism of her kind who realises that survival is necessary and that there must be bread on the table, love in the heart and that life must go on, on a simple

every-day basis.

In her wonderful description of Jenny's efforts, Moodie succeeds in suggesting an earthy woman who is in her element living in the sugar bush. Helen Buss comments that Moodie saw the mythic journey as a suitable narrative form and thus, "she has tried to adopt the voice of the intrepid but humourously ironic traveller in a strange land, a voice her English readers would be used to, would trust." [37] Since the women form a strong supportive relationship, it is possible to view Jenny as a partner in Moodie's heroic journey.

By relating to Jenny, Susanna can illuminate her own maternal feelings for, "While Jennie boiled and gathered the sap, I sugared off the syrup in the house; an operation watched by the children with intense interest" (*RIB* 442). But then Moodie's powers of observation always reached beyond her domestic circle. Looking out at Jenny in the woods, Moodie admires the courage of the Irish servant :

> After standing all day over the hot stove-fire, it was quite a refreshment to breathe the pure air at night. Every evening I ran up to see Jenny in the bush, singing and boiling down the sap in front of her little shanty. The old woman was in her element, and afraid of nothing under the stars; she slept beside her kettles at night, and snapped her fingers at the least idea of danger (*RIB* 442).

There is a sequel to the story for Jenny goes with the Moodies to Belleville where she remains in their service for some time; she retires but later comes back to Moodie's Belleville home where she dies. Moodie and Jenny are now in more comfortable circumstances and there is no longer the heroic drama which was played out for survival in the bush. The sugar-bear lady is now an old woman in need of care and Moodie does not fail her. There is a

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37 Helen M. Buss, *Mapping Our Selves* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993) 93. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by author and page number.

gentle irony in Moodie's letter to her sister when she describes Jenny's final stay; Moodie shows warmth and affection but far from being a heroic figure, Jenny now is simply an old woman nearing the end of her life:

> [Susanna Moodie to Catharine Parr Traill]   Dec. 28,1862
>
> My dearly beloved Sister,
>
> ... you have doubtless heard of poor old Jenny's death ... the other servants would not sleep with her, and she occupied a room which I could ill spare... She was however in excellent health, with a ravenous appetite... She talked of going home but then, she told the maids, that she meant to stay all winter... She had to be petted to keep her in good humour, and always expected a glass of whiskey before she went to bed. [Jenny suffered a stroke and Moodie nursed her through her final illness] I had to feed her with a spoon like a baby, and as she had grown very fat, I found turning and helping her in and out of bed, a great trial. Bridget [Moodie's servant girl] had left me, about a fortnight before, and Margaret, though a good servant, is a selfish woman and did very little for me. She could not stand the odour from Jenny ... It was not of disease but of concentrated dirt. The unwashed secretions of the body, accumulated for years. Well, I did all I could for the poor old ...
>
> (Letter 73 *LOL* 192).

In spite of poor Jenny's 'bad smell,' Moodie, with apparently little help from anyone, nursed the old woman through her final illness. Jenny seemed to be in no better condition than the Irish immigrants who had so repulsed Moodie some thirty years before. Moodie's kindness and humanity now shine forth for she is no longer a raw emigrant facing an unknown land. In any case, Moodie had been intent in faithfully reporting her first impressions of Canada and given the fact of proper Victorian propriety, the sight of "half-naked" Irish immigrants would have been shocking to an English gentlewoman.

Where Moodie's fiction is notable for both for her ironic humour and her vivid character sketches, as she makes what is indeed a heroic journey through the years of settlement, her letters manage to convey private feelings which reveal both her kindness and fortitude in her dealings with many difficult

situations. Michael Peterman has suggested that there is an analogy here with Robert Frost's poem *Death of the Hired Man.* Here, a husband and wife are in dispute over the return of a hired man who walked out on them some years before:

> Mary sat musing on the lamp-flame by the table
> Waiting for Warren. When she heard his step,
> She ran tip-toe down the darkened passage
> To meet him in the doorway with the news
> And put him on his guard "Silas is back."
> She pushed him outward with her through the door
> And shut it after her. "Be kind," she said. [38]

The hired man has come home to die in what he considers to be his "home". Perhaps the most moving lines in the poem are when the married couple exchange definitions of "home" for when Warren offers his definition, "Home is the place, when you go there, They have to take you in," Mary quietly replies "I should have called it / Something you somehow haven't to deserve." (Frost 165-166). Moodie's administrations to Jenny are as " freely given."

Margaret Atwood, in one of her mediations through Moodie's persona, refers to Moodie's "double-voice" where her lady-like gentility existed side by side with the facts of harsh reality:

> Two voices
> took turns using my eyes
> One had manners
> painted in watercolours,
> used hushed tones when speaking
> of mountains or Niagara Falls
> composed uplifting verse
> and expended sentiment on the poor.
>
> That other voice
> had other knowledge:
> that men sweat and drink often,
> ----------------

38 Robert Frost, "The Death of the Hired man" in *Robert Frost's Poems* ,ed. Louis Untermeyer (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1971) 160.

One saw through my
bleared and gradually
bleaching eyes, red leaves
the ritual of seasons and rivers

The other found a dead dog
jubliant with maggots
half-buried among the sweet peas.[39]

Atwood's graphic reference to the dead dog could be interpreted as the death throes of the immigrants' dream as they struggled with the hardships of settlement in the bush while "sweet peas" suggest the flowers of England, transplanted in Canada, as indeed were English gentlewomen.

Nineteenth-century woman authors often presented a somewhat negative image of Irish women emigrants. Therefore, it comes as a welcome relief to stumble across a more benign representation of an Irish emigrant in a book entitled *Authentic Letters.*[40] Reference to the correspondence of Bridget Lacy seems valid although there is a difficulty in defining these letters as fact or fiction for the editior notes that, although the facts are correct, the name of the correspondent is fictitous. The letters are of interest because Bridget, as a youthful Irish emigrant girl, has a positive attitude towards both the experience of the voyage and to the new land. Also, she appears to have received some education and seems a welcome contrast to the "uncouth Irish" which often surface in nineteenth-century Ontario writings. In a letter to her schoolmate in Ireland, Bridget expresses gratitude for both her teachers and the mistress who

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39 Margaret Atwood, "The Double Voice" in *The Journals of Susana Moodie* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970) 42. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title (abbrev. *JSM*) and page number.

40 Thomas William McGrath, *Authentic Letters from Upper Canada -- including an account of Canadian field sports by Thomas William McGrath.* Illustrated by Samuel Lover and introduced by James John Talman (1833.) (Toronto: Macmillian of Canada, 1967). All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title (abbrev. ALUC) and page number.

trained her in domestic service:

> [Bridget Lacy to Mary Thompson]
>
> York, Upper Canada August, 1832
>
> Dear fellow servant and fellow school fellow,
> For we were edicated [sic] together, and pricticed [sic] out together ... and my blessing on them that taught us to read and write and spell, that you may know all about me, and I about you, though there are rivers, and seas, and woods, and lakes between us-- and my blessing on the mistress that taught us to work, and wash, and make ourselves useful, so that while stands by us, we make honest bread in any country. And sure enough, dear Mary, you shall hear all the good and bad that happens to me and I hope to have the same of you (Letter X *ALUC* 98).

Bella Stewart's letter (see Appendix iv) is undoubtedly a better example of authenticity since it is an original letter written by a young Irishwoman after a visit to her father and grandfather in Canada. The letter suggests a quiet respectability which is interesting in that, like Bridget's literacy, it seems to be at odds with the stereotypical Irish imagery which Curtis claims was prevalent in the nineteenth century:

> Carlow June 26th 1872
>
> Dear friends you will think that I have forgotten you altogether I have been very busy since spring since I got home it does not do very well for me to be so long away everything is out of order but I have managed to get along so far very well myself it takes a time in the spring to get around all the corners when their is only one but I would much rather work away myself than be bothered with most of the girls in Carlow I have three cows this summer our strawberries are doing very well we are going to have quite a crop of them the rest of my garden things the grub is eating everything up our crop looks very well so far we have had some very warm weather and frequent showers You will be wanting to know how we got along coming home we happened on very cold weather but baby and I stood it wonderful well for the length of our journey we were not much the worse for it I was glad to get home to my little shanty again... my best to Grandma and all the rest of the rest of the family. Alex joins in sending his best respects to you and

Mother and all inquiring friends ... your loving daughter Bella Stewart. [41]

Although not a gentlewoman, for she seems to have lived on a small holding with her husband and child, obviously Bella could afford to pay a visit to Canada. This fact throws into question the stereotypical Irish two-tier society consisting of a landed gentry and a poverty-stricken peasant class. Neither was Bella an Irish immigrant in poor circumstances in Canada. One poem, entitled *No Irish Need Apply,* describes the discrimination against many immigrant Irish:

Shame on the lips that utter i t-- shame on
  the hands that write,
Shame on the page that publisheth such
  slander to the light;
I feel my blood with lightening speed through
  all my veins fly fast
At that all taunt for ever new --
    No Irish need apply!

Wherever woman's love is pure as un-
  sullied snow --
Wherever woman's cheek at tales of injuries
  will glow--
Wherever pitying tears are shed, and breathed
  is feeling's sigh --
Wherever kindliness is sough t--
    The Irish need apply!

Till on Killarney's waters blue the soft stars
  cease to shine
Till round the parent oak no more the ivy
  loves to twine--
Till Nephin topples from his place and
Shannon's streams run dry
For all that's great, and good, and pure
    The Irish need apply! [42]

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41 Letter (found in an old house in Lanark, Ontario) by permission of Delmar Dunlop, Ottawa. see Appendix iv.

42 A.L.H., "No Irish Need Apply" in *The Harp or A Selection of Irish Tales, Biographies and Poems* (Montreal: D.J. Sadlier, 1877), 119.

It can be noted that the author included a tearful woman who, although injured, was still kind and pure, the symbol of a despairing Ireland who had not given up hope for a kinder future.

In a search for further emigrant experiences, letters play their part in revealing a relationship between servant and mistress. For example, a seasick Bridget Lacy writing to Mary, back in Ireland, also seems to have been treated kindly by her mistress on the voyage from Ireland to Canada in 1832:

> ... my mistress was very good and I got along bearably, barring the shocking sickness, such as no one in the cholic, or the breeding way, or the bilious fever ... ever felt before or since (*ALUC* 99).

On the voyage, they were all fellow travellers and Bridget also showed little sign of animosity towards the Protestants whom she saw on board, for the immediate need was to survive seasickness and to make the best of the voyage. Bridget, however, seemed somewhat skeptical of the hymn-singing but then remarks:

> ... when the singing is over, they're all very merry and there are some gay lads, and great fun, and a little courting, but all in a civil way; and I sometimes make one; but between you and me, Mary, and don't say a word at all, at all, I think there is a servant boy of a Mr. Jackson's, that's thrown a sheep's eye at me -- but nothing *certain*, barring a sly pinch here and there, and other tinder tokens that may end up in smoak [sic] after all (*ALUC* 100).

Bridget's discourse suggests "normalcy" which includes a young girl's natural interest in the opposite sex. One could surmise that Irish peasants were accustomed to deprivation and so emigration held the hope for a better life and they were well prepared for the ensuing hardships. Bridget's letters reflect not only her literacy but also points to the fact that she had a singularly sprightly

disposition and an idea of social mobility whereas Jenny was a tough old girl who could handle the rigours of pioneer life. For gentlewomen such as Stewart, Moodie and Traill, the adjustment was much more difficult and it was small wonder that Moodie appreciated Jenny's help. Although Jenny is a minor character in Moodie's book, she does emerge as a strong presence in Moodie's backwoods experience.

Lacombe discusses "the genre of travel writing ... especially valuable as documentary prose" and comments on the shipboard scene in *Elinor Preston.* Here Sadlier's contrasting views of Irish women immigrants are particularly interesting: the first view suggests girls who resemble Bridget Lacy for they are "young girls, many of whom were there wholly unprotected, some of them very pretty, and many the picture of guileless innocence." Then there is the second view, surely reminiscent of Jenny:

> ... the great majority were both stout and sturdy, well fitted for battling with the world, judging, at least, by the courage and resolution which they displayed in fighting for their turn at the common fire on deck. It was really amusing to get within sight and hearing of what went on there during the process of cooking meals .... Happily the parties never came to blows, or I know not what might have been the consequence, the belligerents being armed with such missiles as saucepans, frying pans, and gridirons, not to speak of other more deadly weapons (*Elinor Preston* 188-189 qtd. by Lacombe, *FPDW* 113).

Moodie's sister, Catharine Parr Traill, appeared to take a calm practical approach to life in her new adopted country. She was noted for her kindness to her servants and one example is singled out by her daughter, Annie Atwood:

> ... she was always able to get servants, & generally good ones, from among the settlers families, and then $3 a month was all they asked, and did a good deal more than those who now get over $20. And I remember many of her old servants coming back to see her at different times, & saying how good she had been to them. [43]

[43] Quote from a letter in the Traill Family Collection, National Archives of Canada 6: 960 3-4. *BYMH*, 17.

Catharine expressed concern for an Irish servant, who is forced to leave her employment because of bad health, in a letter to Fances Stewart:

> Catharine Parr Traill to Frances Stewart — Sunday September 4 1853 and Monday morning
>
> ... Her asthma [Mrs Butler, Catharine's Irish servant] is much worse and the cough I fear shows something decidedly wrong with the lungs -- Poor woman I am very concerned because she is very helpless -- I wish I knew what to do with her -- She has promise of a bit of ground to put a shanty up on ... thinks she can support herself by Washing and occasional labour-- better than by service in which she is bound to work constantly (Letter 25 *BYMH* 87).

This was by no means the first time that Traill had employed an Irish servant, and Traill's cameo of a maidservant was recently published in full for the first time in 1994.[44] The latter is interesting for a number of reasons; firstly, because the Irish woman was nurse to Traill's first child in 1834-35, Traill could have conceivably included this particular literary gem in her book *The Backwoods of Canada* which deals with her early emigrant experiences; secondly, because it deals with both religious and political conflict, Traill may have deliberately distanced herself from somewhat controversial material. Traill finally allows her daughter Mrs. M.E. Muchall (Mary, born in 1841) to "borrow " from her work and a shortened version appears in the *Canadian Monthly and National Review* (February 1872 138-141). Mary omitted Traill's insightful description of her maid Isabella Gordon's "Irishness" and Isabella's interaction with the Traills' Irish croppers (*Gleanings* 99).

To one who has an interest in the history of Irish-Canadian women

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44 Carl Ballstadt, Michael Peterman, "My Irish Maid -- A Night of Peril" in *Forest Gleanings -- the Fugitive Writings of Catharine Parr Traill*. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press,1994) 99. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title (abbrev. *Gleanings*) and page number.

emigrants, Traill's story is of value for as previously noted, the existence of such records is rare; moreover Isabella, as the child of a Catholic-Protestant marriage, is a microcosm of the complexities of Irish history. Traill presents a picture of an attractive, lively woman who, with her youthful figure and healthy complexion, looks young for her age; Traill's remark that Isabella is in her mid-thirties indicates that, by nineteenth-century standards, Isabella is well into middle age. Born in Belfast she seems, in appearance, to resemble her olive-skinned mother from the south-west county of Connemara more than her northern-born travelling schoolmaster father, who may have been fair-skinned as are many Irish Northerners; Traill particularly noticed Isabella's resemblance to the Irish Catholic croppers who were in the process of clearing the Traills' land. Traill is eloquent, as is Isabella herself, on the subject of Isabella's countrymen, which suggests that Isabella has had some education. She has all the ambivalence of so many of the Irish in that, on the one hand, she criticizes the faults of her countrymen and on the other hand, becomes angry when Traill offers her own opinion on the state of affairs. Indeed, Isabella makes it clear that a mere Englishwoman is not conversant enough in her knowledge of the Irish to make any valid comment. It is small wonder that Traill is so fascinated with her subject, for Isabella has difficulty establishing an identity with either of her Irish "races." When we combine these factors with the act of emigration, we begin to get some idea of the Irish emigrant frame of mind, particularly for a female servant who seems to exist at the fringe of the household. Surrogate mother to Traill's child, she competes with his mother for his affection; conscious always of her fellow countrymen, the Catholic croppers, she seeks to annoy them by singing Protestant ditties, while her own Irish lullabies are wild and mournful, a reflection of her feelings for the sad state of her troubled

country. When the cropper Mick, feeling his whiskey and knowing that Thomas Traill will be gone overnight, visits Traill and her child's nurse, Isabella adroitly tricks him into leaving the house and bars the door against his re-entry. Recognising that Mick is the bad apple, she nonetheless declares that her countrymen are fundamentally kind and good-hearted (except when their blood is up) and that the other croppers will keep Mick under control (*Gleanings* 100-108). Traill has truly captured the contradictions which exist within the Irish psyche but we tend to get little of Isabella's own " voice." Traill may have been less willing to attempt dialect "voice" than was Moodie. It is also possible that Isabella, having had a schoolmaster father, did not speak with a broad dialect and that Traill, who saw Isabella as a "respectable" employee, connected "respectability" with proper "English" speech.

Isabella eventually did return to Ireland in charge of an invalid child: clearly and paradoxically, her single status and "nanny-governess" occupation gave her a certain mobility that middle-class women emigrants did not seem to enjoy. But there is yet another nineteenth-century "Isabella," who needs further mention here, also a single woman who toiled hard for her bread-and-butter but in a different capacity.

Crawford

> Let us to the work of this divinely dowered Isabella -- this angelic mendicant, craving nothing of life but its finer gifts -- *this blessed gypsy of Canadian woods and streams* [italics mine] (Reaney 17).

Although Isabella Valancy Crawford was Irish-born and did write some "Irish" poems, in her mature work she seems more in tune with the Canadian landscape than with her childhood homeland.

Dr. and Mrs. Stephen Crawford, an Anglo-Irish couple, first settled in Paisley, Ontario in 1857. Their Irish-born daughter Isabella Valancy Crawford

became a poet and writer of fiction who, in her short lifetime, did not receive the recognition which she undoubtedly deserved. Interestingly, Crawford's autobiographical statement barely touches on her "Irishness":

> I am of mingl [e]d Scotch, French and English descent, born in Dublin, Ireland. My father was Stephen Dennis Crawford, M.D., M.R.C.S. England, and L.M.B.U. Canada. I am his sixth child and only surviving daughter. I was brought to Canada by my parents in my earliest childhood ... I was educated at home... my father settled in Peterborough, Ontario, where he passed out [died]. My mother and I came to Toronto where we have since resided. I have written largely for the American Press but only published one volume of my own account "*Old Spookses Pass, Malcolm's Katie and Other Poems*" which appeared in 1884, in Toronto and is as decorated by press errors as a Zulu chief is laden with beads. Voila tout! [45]

According to Dorothy Farmiloe, who uses as one of her sources material collected by Isabella Valancy Crawford's great-niece, Catherine Crawford Humphrey of Grand Prairie, Alberta, the Crawford date of settlement in Ireland is 1575.[46] Once again, we face the problem of how the Irish perceive themselves. Isabella, being Anglo-Irish, does not identify with the Gaelic natives who form the lower tier in a two-class society. Yet, Anglo-Canadian society probably would regard the Crawford family as being "Irish" even as they would recognise that a doctor's daughter has little in common with the Irish working class. In Ireland, however, the Catholic Irish would see the Crawfords as being part of a group of colonisers who rob them of their land and

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45 Note from Lorne Pierce Collection, Douglas Library, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. Qtd. by Elizabeth McNeill Galvin in *Isabella Valancy Crawford -- we scarcely knew her.* (Toronto: Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc.,1994) 5. All further references to Galvin's work will be noted parenthetically within the text by author and page number.

46 Catherine Crawford Humphrey, *The Crawford Saga,* unpublished, 1. In this manuscript, Mrs Humphrey notes that the Crawford pedigree in Dublin Castle traces Isabella's paternal ancestry back to 1575 when one William Crawford, son of Andrew Crawford of Cunningburne in the Highlands of Scotland migrated to Ulster. Qtd. by Dorothy Farmiloe, *Isabella Valancy Crawford - - the Life and the Legends* (Ottawa : The Tecumseh Press, 1983) 78. All further references to Farmiloe's work will be noted parenthetically within the text by author and page number.

forbid them the practice of their Catholic religion and ancestral language.

While the family lived in Paisley, in spite a growing problem with alcohol, Dr. Crawford presented a good appearance and entertained such distinguished guests as the Bishop of Huron; all appears rosy from the accounts of the doctor's family as they attend church:

> [with her parents]... the little Isabella in hoop skirt and tartan plaid with dainty frilled pantalets, beaver cloth coat and blue satin hat; the trio were followed at a respectable distance by Maggie, the faithful nurse who is thought to have traveled with Mrs Crawford from Ireland with frail little Naomi by the hand.[47]

The fact that Maggie keeps her distance from the doctor and his wife reflects the social distinctions preserved by the Anglo-Irish in Canada. Maggie, as a humble servant, knows her place; as such, she represents Ireland's inferior political and economic position in relation to British rule in the nineteenth century.

In Crawford's *Collected Poems* , of which there are eighty-six poems, only four pertain to the "Irish" and one of these, *A Hungry Day,* is in dialect:

> I mind him well, he was a quare old chap,
> Come like myself from swate old Erin's sod;
> He hired me wanst to help his harvest- -
> The crops were fine that summer, praised be to God!
>
> He found us, Rosie, Mickie and myself,
> Just landed in the emigration shed;
> Meself was tyin' on their bits of clothes;
> Their mother -- rest her tender sowl! was dead.
> -----------------------------
> And whin they spread the daisies thick an' white
> Above her head that wanst lay on me breast,
> I had no tears, but took the childher's hands,

47 "Antrim" (Mrs Annie Sunderland, granddaughter of Samuel Rowe). "Old Paisley Landmark Once Writer's Home,"*The Free Press*, London, Ontario (July 2, 1927) qtd. by Galvin, 17.

An' says, "We'll lave the mother to her rest."[48]

Crawford shows sensitivity to the victims of the Famine and she speaks optimistically of their changed fortune in the new land, Canada. Crawford shows an ironic touch when she talks about the fact that green nineteenth-century Ireland has barely been touched by industry; where an agricultural lifestyle may seem idyllic, it has no advantage for a peasant population forced to contend with crop failure:

> No facthory chimblys shmoked agin the sky
> No mines yawned on the hills so full and rich;
> A man whose praties failed had nought to do
> But fold his hands an' die down in a ditch
> (*A Hungry Day* 307).

In the new land an impoverished Irish widower can raise his two children on his own land:

> 'Twould make yer heart lape just to take a look
> At the green fields upon me own big farm;
> An' God be praised! all men may have the same
> That owns an axe an' has a strong right arm!
> (*A Hungry Day* 309).

Margo Dunn comments " that the main thrust of Crawford's literary vision grows out of her desire to see Canada created as a new Eden apart from Britain but built in Britain's image." [49] Yet the Irish peasant has largely been the victim of British colonisation and ultimately, the victim of the Famine. In yet another poem, "Erin's Warning,"Isabella deals with victimisation and we get an inkling of

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48 Isabella Valancy Crawford, "A Hungry Day" in *Collected Poems -- Isabella Valancy Crawford*, ed. James Reaney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972) 306. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title of poem and page number.

49 Margo Dunn, " Crawford's Early Work" in *The Isabella Valancy Crawford Symposium. Reappraisals: Canadian Writers*, ed. Frank M.Tierney (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979) 80. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by author, name of chapter, title (abbrev. *Symposium*) and page number.

Ireland (Erin) as the conquered queen/goddess:

> At my knee my starvelings lay,
> Jewels crowned my captive head --
> Hearken, God, I might not sell
> One to buy my children bread
> Beauty, fresh, immortal dwelt
> On my bent and hapless brow;
> Conquered but unashamed I sat --
> Sons why would you shame me now? (*Erin's Warning* 80).

In many ways this symbolising of Ireland as the silenced woman who had little power is echoed by the Irish lower-class women who were often servant girls and appeared on the periphery of some nineteenth-century writings.

The "voice" of the emigrant, heard in Crawford's "A Hungry Day," is echoed in "Mavourneen;" the title is a word meaning a term of endearment, as in the song "Kathleen Mavourneen" (darling Kathleen). Crawford may have associated *mavourneen* with *Ireland* and thus, the poem can be read as the emigrant's lament for the lost "dear country":

> Cheerless the songs of the thrushes, Mavourneen
> Scentless the blossom of each hawthorn tree;
> Salt is the hot tear that bitterly rushes
> Kneeling by green altar sacred to thee.
> --------------------------
> Waters of sorrow are soundless, Mavourneen,
> Black as the depths of the deeply hewn grave;
> Heaven above me, so blue, bright and boundless,
> Smiles from the breast of the motionless wave.
> --------------------------
> And from its black, sullen bosom, Mavourneen,
> Slips up a lily, all snowy to see;
> On sorrow's dark waters lies star-like the blossom
> Of hope and memr'y, my Moyna, of thee
> (*Mavourneen* 78).

Crawford was no stranger to sorrow for her whole family life was permeated with mourning for her many siblings. Clara Thomas likens Crawford

to the Brontë sisters in that Patrick Brontë their father is not unlike Dr. Crawford for they are both Irishmen who lived in genteel poverty yet they fostered learning in their children (Clara Thomas, "Crawford's Achievement" *Symposium* 133). As modern readers, we tend to miss out on an essential "Irishness" which may, either directly or indirectly, helps shape the talents of some nineteenth-century women writers. Where the Brontës all too often have been defined as English women writers, it may not be stretching the truth too far to say in their family they may have been exposed to a submerged Celtic imagination:

> [Crawford] loved literature and learning and among his children, certainly Isabella, from a very early age was always aware of the imagination beyond the stolid little town of Paisley, or the small provincial city of Peterborough, or her later home above a grocery store in Toronto. Like Charlotte, Emily, Anne and Branwell, Isabella Crawford lived her childhood with death a constant appalling fact in the family... a gay and blithe spirit she may have had ... but underneath that there had to be the terrible scars ... such a painful awareness of loss and mortality showed itself in the force and depth of her best work
> (Thomas, "Crawford's Achievement" *Symposium* 133).

The grieving emigrant of "Mavourneen" could well be Isabella's mother. While still living in Ireland, Sydney Scott Crawford suffered over the course of one week the loss of seven children (Farmiloe 4). Five surviving children were thought to accompany their parents to Canada but only three, Isabella, Naomi and Stephen lived to adulthood (Galvin 18). Dr. Crawford died in1875 followed by the death of Isabella's beloved younger sister, Naomi, in 1876 (Galvin, 56).

It is significant that Isabella makes little reference to Celtic culture in her work, for by the nineteenth century, Ireland in so far as the current record shows was almost totally Anglicised. Although her poetry is interlaced with varied mythologies, the Celtic ancient world does not really surface in Crawford's creative vision which is initially rooted in a nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish

perspective.

In keeping with nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish sensibilities, Isabella's work most reflects a knowledge of the classics, Shakespeare and contemporary Victorian poetry and where she eventually evolves into a passionate rapport with the Canadian landscape, Celtic mythology and folklore do not feature strongly in her work. If Celtic fairy folklore were to surface at all, one would expect to find it in Crawford's fairy tales. Margo Dunn, however, sees Crawford's early work as Anglo-Canadian folklore but particularly associates one tale, "The Waterlily" with traditional English fairy tales; Dunn claims that the oak tree is part and parcel of English fairy tale (Dunn, "Crawford's Early Works" *Symposium* 22) and furthermore, Crawford names her fairy king and queen after Shakespeare's Titania and Oberon.[50]

Because Crawford's short life ends in 1887, she is unlikely to have been influenced by Ireland's late-nineteenth century Celtic literary revival. Irish poet, W.B. Yeats, writing in 1885, newly observes:

> Ireland having a rich body of tradition behind her in the depths of time, will probably draw her deepest literary inspiration from this double fountainhead if she, as is the hope of all her children, makes for herself a great distinctive poetic literature. [This] is an attempt to feel not less national [but] Celtic and distinctive.[51]

One could surmise that an ancient goddess like Dana/Aine would have been fertile ground for Crawford's poetic vision. But such legends were not part of her "cosmic consciousness." It is only later that writers like Jane Urquhart allude to the submerged Celtic Otherworld in their work, for Urquhart inherits the

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50 Isabella Valancy Crawford, "The Waterlily" in *Fairy Tales of Isabella Valancy Crawford*, ed. Penny Petrone (Ottawa: Borealis Press,1977)1-2.

51 W.B. Yeats. Notes to *Yeats's Poems,* ed. A. Norman Jeffares with an appendix by Warwick Gould (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1989) 483. All further references will be footnoted or noted parenthetically within the text (abbrev. *Yeats notes*) and page number.

fruits of the Celtic literary revival. Dunn, however, recognises that Crawford may draw on an underlying Celtic heritage when Dunn draws a comparison to the Irish-born Oscar Wilde:

> Crawford writes fairy stories in the same enigmatic way that fairy stories always have been written, from Beowulf to Oscar Wilde...Crawford's fairy stories stand alone as genuine Canadian folklore, representing the cosmological vision of more than just one Celtic immigrant who had imaginative flair and a facility with language
> (Dunn, "Crawford's Early Works," *Symposium* 31-32).

Dunn,however, seems to affirm that "Canadian folklore" tales precedence over "Celtic folklore" in Crawford's fairy tales.

Ironically, in her poem "My Irish Love" Crawford presents an illusion that Ireland and England exist in perfect harmony:

> She sat, my Irish love, slim, light and tall ...
> Then up sprang the flame
> Mad for her eyes;
> ------------------------
> O worlds, those eyes! there laughter tossed
> His gleaming cymbals; large and most divine,
> ... in her pure depths
> Moved Modesty, chaste goddess, snow-white of brow
> And shining vestal limbs; rose-fronted stood
> Blushing yet strong, young Courage, knightly in
> His virgin arms
> ---------------------------
>
> "True knight," said she,
> "Your English heart with Irish shamrocks bound!"
>
> "A golden prophet of eternal truth,"
> (*My Irish Love* 261).

In the light of the relationship between England and Ireland, which went from bad to worse during the nineteenth century, the way in which Crawford romanticises the relationship is optimistic in the extreme; one assumes that the

virgin knight England woos a chaste young woman Ireland, thus suggesting a spiritual relationship of pristine purity. Possibly Crawford reflects the hope that the Act of Union of 1801 (between England and Ireland) might end the animosity which existed between the two countries or she may be aware of the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829. Crawford's troubling relationship to imperialism and social purity, in her poem "Hugh and Ion, is discussed at some length by Cecily Devereaux.[52] Elizabeth Waterson applauds the buoyancy of Isabella's spirit despite the dreadful losses in her family life and suggests that her penchant for happy endings is part of a ploy to gain popular appeal with her perceived reading public. Still, if the saccharine qualities of a "virgin knight" and "chaste-limbed goddess" strike the contemporary reader as being somewhat mawkish, it should be remembered that such poetry was considered "charming" in the England and Canada of the nineteenth-century (Elizabeth Waterson, "Crawford, Tennyson and the Domestic Idyll" *Symposium* 70-71).

There are, however, other aspects to this poem and comparisons with nineteenth-century Irish-Canadian poets may prove to be of value. No account of nineteenth-century Irish Canada would be complete without mention of Thomas D'Arcy McGee.[53] McGee (1825-1867) is considered one of Canada's most outstanding political figures. It is not within the scope of the thesis to examine McGee's life in full, interesting as it undoubtedly was; the following summary is taken from John Henderson's chapter on McGee in *Great Men of*

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52 Cecily Devereaux, "And let them wash me from this clanging world": Hugh and Ion "The last Best West" and "Purity Discourse in 1885. Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadienne 32,2 (Summer 1997) 100.

53 Robin Burns, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, 1861-1870,ed. Francess Halpenny, 489-494.*

Canada.[54]

> Thomas D'Arcy McGee(1825-1867) was born in Irleland. He emigrated to the United States where he worked as a journalist. Politically active on behalf of Irish immigrants, his hero was Daniel O'Connor, the great Irish liberator who was largely responsible for the Catholic Emancipation Act (1829). He returned to Ireland in 1845 to work for a newsheet, *The Freeman's Journal.* Witness to the Great Famine (1845-1848) he was exiled for his part in the Irish Rebellion (1848). He resumed his political activities in the United States, advocating night school for immigrants and making speeches on their behalf. In 1852, he came to Montreal where his friends ultimately persuaded him to temper his views. His eloquence soon earned him a Liberal seat in the Canadian House of Assembley. His position as one of the leaders of Confederation (1867) is unassailable. Before he could take his seat in the first cabinet of the Dominion, he was assassinated in a quiet Ottawa street. The Fenian brotherhood, advocates of Home Rule for Ireland, were thought to have seen McGee as betraying their cause. A Fenian member Patrick Whelan was arrested,tried and found quilty of McGee's murder. Shortly thereafter, he was hanged.

John Henderson stresses the influence of McGee's mother on her son for it was she who taught him the old minstrels' songs and Irish ballads. His maternal grandfather was killed in the rebellion of 1798 in which all the men in McGee's family had fought with the exception of his father, a Dublin bookseller (Henderson 109). Where McGee's passionate patriotism was fostered by the Irish oral tradition, his literary abilities probably resulted from early exposure to his father's books and later were encouraged by his bosom friend Mary Anne Sadlier in both Montreal and New York.

It is interesting to note that McGee had a long-standing association with Mary Anne Sadlier who became one of his biographers (*FPDW*). She also wrote the introduction to his book of poems. As Irish-Catholic matriarch, Sadlier

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54 John Henderson, *Great Men in Canada -- Life Stories of a few of Canada's Great Men told in a narrative form*. Introduction by the Hon. G. Howard Ferguson (Toronto: Southam Press,1928) 209-218. All further references will be noted within the text by author and page number.

may have inspired McGee and doubtless, his mother's influence remained strong; in any case, in his poem *Home Sonnets -- Address to Ireland,* his country is personified as being a martyred Irish mother:

> Mother of exiles! from your soil today
> New Myriads are destroy'd or swept away;
> The crowded graveyards are no longer green,
> The daily dead have scanty space I ween;
> The groaning ships, freighted with want and grief,
> Entomb in every way a fugitive;
> The sword no more an Irish weapon is- -
> The spirit of the land no longer lives;
> Mother! twas kill'd before the famine came- -
> The stubble was prepared to meet the flame;
> All manly souls were from their bodies torn,
> Mother of soldiers! may we hope to be
> Yet fit to strike for vengeance and for thee! [55]

McGee projects the Irish Nationalistic view in contrast with Crawford's representation of Irish and English Unionist views. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, "Home Rule" had become a major political issuse in England. British Prime Minister William Gladstone was involved in the Irish Question and was seen by many as Ireland's true saviour who sought Home Rule through approved political channels, whereas the militant Fenians were seen as evil because they advocated violent means to achieve Ireland's freedom. Curtis discusses the issue as reflected through the lenses of some political cartoonists. For example, English cartoonist John Tenniel used Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to depict this problem: Erin or Hibernia is represented as Miranda, gentle daughter to Prospero (Gladstone) who protects her from a Fenian-like Caliban. Erin has a beautiful face which bears a terrified expression as she clings to Father England in face of the Fenian threat

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55 Thomas D'Arcy McGee, *The Poems of Thomas D'Arcy McGee -- with copious notes and Also an Introduction and Biographical Sketch by Mrs J. Sadlier.* (New York: D. J. Sadlier,1869) 126.

(see Fig. 3). Jane Urquhart would later grapple with admittedly mixed results with prevailing views of Fenians in the second half of her novel *Away*. However, it is not within the scope of the thesis to discuss the Fenian movement in any great detail.

In the context of Irish-Canadian representations, one other perspective is offered by the Irish-born James McCarroll (1814/1815-1892), a Peterborough native, in the 1830 and 1840s. McCarroll's career, as poet, musician, story writer, editor and journalist has recently captured the interest of Michael Peterman. McCarroll, in fact, had a major connection with McGee and his reputation as humourist and satirist largely rests on his popular Toronto magazine columns "Letters of Terry Finnegan to the Hon. D'Arcy McGee" (Toronto 1864). McCarroll was another border-crosser although not of his own choice. He lost his position as Customs Surveyor at the Port of Toronto in 1863, a victim of his own feisty literary-political views. Angry with John A. Macdonald and the Conservative party who did not give him the patronage appointment that he expected, he went to the United States. In New York, where he lived for the rest of his life, he aligned himself with the Fenians, thus making himself a traitor in the eyes of many Canadians including Nicholas Flood Davin. An Irish-Canadian writer of some note, Davin was fervently anti- Fenian and significantly, omitted McCarroll from his book *The Irishman in Canada* (1878).[56]

McCarroll's collection of poetry *Madeline and Other Poems* [57] contains a number of poems on the subject on Irish women. One poem, in which McCarroll romanticises "Irish poverty," exemplies the "worthiness" of an Irish

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56 Michael Peterman, *James McCarroll, alias Terry Finnegan: newspapers, controversy and literature in Victorian Canada* (Peterborough: Peterborough Historical Society, November 1996) 4-5.

57 James McCarroll, *Madeline, and Other Poems* (Chicago: Belford, Clark, 1889). All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title of poem and page number.

peasant girl as opposed to the values of "pomp and circumstance." "Kitty Lynch" is presented as being more alluring than "high-born" individuals and one wonders if McCarroll's Kitty is yet another example of poor but noble Ireland personified as a woman:

> Oh! then, cushla machree, I'm sthruck in a hape
> At the thoughts of goold you might put in one's purse;
> For it's only yourself that can dhress half so chape
> Without lookin', mavourneen, a thrawnien the worse.
>
> Though I'm often beside - whatever the cause -
> Till this minute I never persaved you were dhrest
> In that coorse woollen gown, and that it of plain gawze
> That was white' till you gave it the lie on your breast.
>
> They may talk of their coortiers that make people stare
> Wid their fine silks and satins so squeezinly laced,
> But you'd see how they look'd, in the homespun you wear,
> Wid no more than that runnin-sthring circlin' their waist.
>
> ("Kitty Lynch" 306).

McCarroll's representation of an Irish woman reflects other images as projected by late-nineteenth century cartoonists. Ireland is personified as a woman and if cartoonists presented crude images of "Paddy the Irishman," they were much kinder in their depiction of "Erin or Hibernia in distress." If McGee awaits the day when the sons of Mother Ireland would regain their ancient heritage, McCarroll sees a peasant girl who is beautiful in herself and has no need for power or riches while Crawford seems to subscribe to the Act of Union and expresses the sentiment that Ireland should remain bonded to England.

Crawford's poetry is stronger than that of McGee or Carroll but not because she (any more than they) benefitted from the Anglo-Irish political climate of the late nineteenth century or from Celtic mythology.or from Celtic mythology. Her more lyrical vision instead springs from other sources and particularly from native Canadian myths; where recent critics have begun to

challenge her use of native imagery, there is no doubt that it was central to her artistic vision. Northrop Frye considers her "South Wind" passage from *Malcolm's Katie* to be "only the most famous example of the most remarkable mythopoeic imagination in Canadian poetry" [58]

> The South Wind crept on moccasins of flame,
> And the red fingers of th' impatient Sun
> Pluck'd at its outmost fringes -- its dim veins
> Beat with no life -- its deep and dusky heart,
> In a deep trance of shadow, felt no throb
> To such wooing answer: thro' its dream
> Brown rivers of deep waters sunless stole;
> Small creeks sprang from its mosses, and amazed,
> Like children in a wigwam curtain'd close
> Above the great, dead heart of some red chief,
> Slipp'd on soft feet, swift stealing through the gloom,
> Eager for light and for the frolic winds.
> (*Malcolm's Katie* 199).

Where it is difficult to find literary criticism of Crawford's specifically Irish poems, much of her poetry inspires a plethora of literary criticism. At the Crawford Symposium (1977) one particular poem, "Malcolm's Katie"

> ... was given a nationalistic reading by Robin Matthews, a feminist reading by Clara Thomas, a biographical reading by Dorothy Farmiloe, and a Marxist reading by Kenneth Hughes, as well as various literary-historical readings by Dorothy Livesay, Elizabeth Waterston, John Ower, Robert Alan and Kenneth Burns and others. As even this partial catalogue of Crawford criticism indicates, *Malcolm's Katie* ... has achieved through the praise, blame and scrutiny of scholars, a central place in the canon of nineteenth-century Canadian poetry.[59]

D.M.R. Bentley provides explanatory notes (49-73) which reveal few if

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58 Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden -- Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1971) 148. All further references to be noted parenthetically within the text by author and page number.

59 D. M. R. Bentley, Introduction to *Malcolm's Katie -- a love story by Isabella Valancy Crawford* (London:Canadian Poetry Press,1987) Introduction xi. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by editor and page number.

any references to Celtic mythology in what may be Crawford's best known poem: "Malcolm" may derive from Sir Walter Scott's "Lady of the Lake" or from Maol-Columb (which means "disciple of Columb" or Saint Columba who, though born in Ireland, became Scotland's most famous saint). There are many references to the poems of Tennyson which include his *The Gardener's Daughter, The Princess, Enoch Arden, In Memoriam, The Lover's Tale, Aylmer's Field, The Passing of Arthur, Guenevere, The Brook* and *The Lady of Shalott.* Crawford's "Katie," for example, has the same name as Katie Willows, the only child of a farmer, Philip, in *The Brook*; the figure of Crawford's "Katie" as "the perfect rose" may derive from *In Memoriam* :

> But where is she, the bridal flower
> That must be made a bride ere noon
> She enters, glowing like the moon
> Of Eden on its bridal bower
> -------------------
> Oh when her life is yet in bud
> He too foretold the perfect rose.
> For thee she grew, for thee she grows
> For ever, and as fair as good.[60]

D. M. R. Bentley includes Crawford's allusions to Longfellow, Shakespeare, Rossetti, Milton, the Bible, Islamic myth and Dante, all literature on which the Anglo-Irish Crawford cut her literary teeth. But figures like Medb, the goddess Aine and the Irish poet Oisin, all part of the bardic Irish literary tradition, never appear in Crawford's works because such mythology had been driven underground long before Crawford's all-too-brief lifetime. Douglas Hyde (more of which later) did not found the Gaelic League until 1893, six years after Crawford's death at the age of thirty-seven.

Her few Irish poems emerge as a lament for a troubled homeland with

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60 Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *The Poems of Tennyson* (London: Longman,1969) 25-28. 33-36. Qtd. by Bentley 51.

the exception of *My Irish Love* which does suggest an idealistic age of Irish-English chivalry. This could be set in the twelfth century when the English Normans invaded and then became "Hibernis Hiberniores" which means "more Irish than the Irish themselves." Subsequent invaders, however, from the Elizabethans to the Calvinist Cromwellians, followed by the spirit-crushing effects of the Penal Laws, served to bring the indigenous Irish to their knees; but it was the Great Famine of the nineteenth century which almost destroyed the Irish (*ISC* 213).

> ... That such a fertile land should have become incapable of nourishing its beloved children is indication of the economic rape which had suffered for so many centuries. For by this time, Ireland had long been England's first colony, a Third World country on the edge of Europe. It would take the Irish cultural and political movements of the twentieth century to give back to this devastated population a semblance of its self-respect (*ISC* 214).

The Great Famine prompted much Irish emigration to Canada and the "Irish" who brought their cultural baggage with them, became part of the social, religious and political fabric of nineteenth-century Ontario. Nineteenth-century writings sometimes indicated that the Irish lower-class emigrant was not always "respected" in Ontario and had little "voice" and this "silencing" was best exemplified by the Irish servant girl as symbol of her sad country. Yet, the resilience of Irish women is reflected in some of the writings, the primary example being Moodie's servant, Jenny Buchanan. In subsequent chapters, twentieth-century Canadian authors offer a new perspective and permit Irish-Canadian women an opportunity to tell their own stories. Such new "voices" may reflect Ireland's own recovery of a national identity of which *Woman* has ever been the symbol.

Chapter II

Collisions: Celtic Dawn and Western World. Urquhart's Poetic Vision.

The host is riding from Knocknarea
And over the grave of Clooth-na-Bare;
Caoilte tossing his burning hair,
And Niamh calling *Away, come away*
Empty your heart of its mortal dream.
The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round.
Our cheeks are pale, our hair unbound,
Our breasts are heaving, our lips are apart
And if any gaze on our rushing band,
We come between him and the deed of his hand.
We come between him and the hope of his heart.
The host is rushing 'twixt night and day,
And where is there hope or deed so fair ?
Caoilte tossing his burning hair,
And Niamh calling *Away, come away*.
(Yeats, *The Hosting of the Sidhe* 89).

Dark houses will never swallow you
Nor graves, nor any other thing that is closed.
It is you who will always have bright skies above you,
The ceiling of water through which you moved.

My heart is made of the soft wings of moths,
Or the silver threads that spiders make in the night.
You who swam easily into my hands,
Carrying with you the Otherworld's light.
(Mary mourning her faery lover -- *Away*, 17).

By the mid-nineteenth century, Ireland reached its lowest ebb, both economically and in terms of its vanishing endemic culture. The Great Famine took its toll on the lives of millions and the remnants of the Celtic heritage were further threatened by the coming of the National school, an Anglo-oriented school system where the language of instruction was to be in English only, thus

wiping out Gaelic, the national language of the indigenous Irish. These facts are the bare bones of historical and fictional accounts, too numerous to mention here. My focus in this chapter will centre on twentieth-century Canadian author Jane Urquhart who steps outside the conventional boundaries of writing nineteenth-century historical fiction in that she interweaves strands of Celtic mythology throughout her novel *Away*; thus Urquhart illustrates that she has been influenced by the Celtic literary revival which began to emerge in Ireland in the late nineteenth century. In contrast to Crawford, Urquhart provides an interesting and more sensitive linkage with people of Canadian First Nations so that the several Irelands and several Canadas become mythically linked. In a recent critique of a current television series (*Women: A True Story* CTV, starting Jan. 20, 10 p.m.), Ginette Paris, a Montreal classics professor, claimed:

> A people that loses its mythology dies, and a people that fails to pass on its history is alienated and becomes a stranger to itself. This also applies to women: we cannot afford not to know our own history.[61]

If we interpret language as inextricable from culture and mythology, Brian Friel, a contemporary Irish playwright, focuses the action of his play *Translations* on what appears to be the death throes of the Gaelic culture. Where Urquhart makes Mary O'Malley the symbol of a recurring cycle of birth, death and rebirth, Friel's vision is more tragic: Sarah, a young girl with a severe language problem, is struggling to find her tongue when English soldiers descend on her village to carry out the final steps in Anglicising Celtic Ireland. Sarah loses the power of speech completely, symbolising the obliteration of a language. This chapter will attempt to compare the separate visions of the Celtic revivalists, Friel and Urquhart as to death and rebirth in Irish culture. The

61 Diane Turbide, "All about Eve: a series takes females from the margins," *Maclean's*, Jan 20, 1997.

relationship between Irish myth and nineteenth-century migration to Canada is central to my argument. Urquhart sees her book *Away* as a work of fiction which she partly based on historical research, part of which she carried out at the University of Waterloo and at Memorial University in Newfoundland; Urquhart lists a number of scholarly works of which Lady Gregory's *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* seems most pertinent to my thesis.[62]

Born Augusta Persse to strict evangelical Protestant Anglo-Irish landowner parents, her marriage (1880) at the age of twenty-seven to Sir William Gregory dramatically changed Lady Gregory's life and widened her intellectual and social horizons. Rather than being doomed to a dull life of local philanthropy in and around her family's estate, Roxborough in County Galway, she became mistress of Coole Hall. Sir William Gregory, thirty-five years her senior, retired in 1877 as Governor of Ceylon (Sri Lanka).[63] He previously served several terms in Parliament but now spent most of his time in London, regarded by politicans and intellectuals alike as a man of cultivated tastes; as Trustee of the National Gallery, he counted such writers and intellectuals as Robert Browning, Henry James, Bright, Froude and Tennyson among his friends. Lady Gregory was grateful for the intellectual social milieu to which her husband introduced her but during the twelve years of their marriage, she was

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62 Lady Gregory, *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland collected and arranged by Lady Gregory:* With two Essays and Notes by W.B. Yeats. "There's no doubt at all that there's the same sort of thing in other countries; but you hear more about them in these parts because the Irish do be more familiar in talking of them." With a foreward by Elizabeth Coxhead (New York University Press, 1970). First edition (London and New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1920). All further references will be to the 1970 edition and will be noted parenthetically within the text by author or essayist (Yeats) title (abbrev. *Visions*) and page number.

63 Anne Winton and Catherine Kennedy, *Lady Gregory's Diaries 1892-1902*, ed. James Pethica (Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire: Colin Smyhe Ltd, 1996) Introduction xi. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title (abbrev. *Diaries*) and page number.

expected to fill the dutiful role of wife which included enduring many separations from their one child Robert, born in 1881; Sir William had a penchant for travel and she complied with his wishes. Her privileged if hardly romantic marriage ultimately laid the groundwork for her subsquent achievement as writer and patron, while her widowhood at the age of thirty-nine provided her with the necessary leisure for observation and freedom of expression. By her fiftieth year, she had become an ardent Nationalist and hostess at Coole to the major figures in the Irish Literary movement. By such time, she had long deserted the social milieu of her early widowhood when she still held with the political views of her husband's elderly London friends, who were broadly Unionist in their political views in that they believed in adhering to the Act of Union between England and Ireland (1801) (Intro. *Diaries xiii*).

Among the intellectuals who frequented Lady Gregory's estate at Coole was Douglas Hyde (1860-1949) who had acquired some proficiency in the Irish language as a child; there is some suggestion that he picked up the language from Irish farm labourers on his parent's estate in Roscommon. He became known for his strong Nationalist views and his Irish language writings. His energies were devoted to promoting the Irish language in both schools and universities and in 1938, he became Ireland's first president. Lady Gregory benefited from the relationship in that he encouraged her to learn the Irish language; in conjunction with Yeats, Augusta provided Hyde with scenarios for several one-act plays with Hyde playing the lead. Eventually, Hyde followed his own intellectual pursuits after it became clear that Gaelic dramatic dialogue would not be a major feature in plays produced at the *Abbey Theatre* (founded in 1904, mainly by Gregory and Yeats). Lady Gregory however remained Hyde's ally in matters pertaining to the Gaelic League (Biographical Appendix

Diaries 320).

Hyde's background provides some sense of the Irish literary revival in which Gregory and W.B.Yeats were leading participants. If Celtic mythology had retreated into the distant past, now the floodgates opened and the legendary past came rushing forth. Thus, Yeats, Gregory and company were largely responsible for the rebirth of Irish nationalism which eventually cast its long shadow on writers in twentieth-century Ontario, Canada. Yeats and Gregory helped to rediscover this silenced culture by their joint interest in folklore. Although Gregory's *Visions and Beliefs* was not published until 1920, her interest stemmed from her early childhood, "when, as the youngest girl in a vast, extrovert, hard-riding family of Anglo-Irish squires, she alone cared for the fairy stories told by Mary Sheridan, their Irish-speaking nurse," (Cox Intro. *Visions* 5).

Th effects of such lasting influences on the minds of young children is examined by Irish-Australian writer P.D. Travers who sees some close connections with mythology:

> In those lucky days there was always help to be had in the house. Such people are wonderful meat for children. The life they live,from the child's point of view--because to him [her] is strange and unknown--seems to be filled with glamour that [the everyday life of the child] lacks.[64]

Travers recalls her fascination with Bella (or was it Bertha for Travers cannot quite remember) who habitually sported a parrot-headed umbrella on her days off. On her return, she told fascinating stories of what she did or saw, or merely hinted, suggesting that such tales were not fit for young ears. Travers was left to ponder the fate of Bella/Bertha's brother-in-law who was in dire straits; as

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64 P.D. Travers, "Only Connect" in *Only Connect -- Readings on children's literature.* Eds. Sheila Egoff, G.T. Stubbs and L.F.Ashley (Canada: Oxford University Press,1980) 187. All further references will be noted within the text by author and page number.

Travers puts it, the children were left up in the air, "to wonder, always mythologically [if] he has been chained to the mast because of some siren's voice? Is his liver slowly being eaten out by a bald headed eagle?" (Travers 188). Bella makes a great impression on her young charge when she relates of how she had seen Paddy Liston "in the gutter ... and him drunk as an English lord!" (Travers 188). As Travers puts it:

> Well, what a sight for the inward eye! It filled out imagination to such an extent that now I can never think of our poor, probably sober, dukes without seeing them en masse under tables, robed and crowned and in the last stages of alcoholic dissolution (Travers 188).

Bella/ Bertha may well have been the model for Travers' enchanting children's book *Mary Poppins*.[65]

Gregory's own version of Travers' nusemaid is Mary Sheridan and she also empowered a young Augusta through the medium of fantasy and fairy story. However, it is important to remember that Sheridan does not write her own story but is respectfully if romantically appropriated by Gregory as the keeper of the mythological flame. As a result, Gregory eventually sought out the folklore of Co. Galway. Jane Urquhart, fascinated by her own Irish roots, makes the connection with Gregory's folklore and ultimately connects it to Irish emigration to Canada. Urquhart admits to being inspired by one particular chapter, entitled "Away" in which Gregory recounts numerous strange events related to her by various Irish country folk.[66] One such event is related by a woman from Slieve Echtge:

> I knew another was away for seven years ... Bridget Clonkelly was her name... a very fine-looking fair haired girl she was. I knew her well, she was the one age with myself. It was in the night that she used to go to them [the fairies] and if the door was shut, she would come through the

65 P.D. Travers, *Mary Poppins* (London: Collins, 1934).

66 Jane Urquhart, Interview, January 9, 1997

> keyhole. The first time they came for her she was in bed with her two sisters, and she didn't want to go. And they beat her and pinched her, until her brother called out to see what was the matter. She often told me about them and how she was badly treated because she wouldn't eat their food ... all the old people used to put food out every night before they had tasted any of it themselves. And she said there was a red-haired girl among them, that would throw her into the river she got so mad at her. But if she had their food ate, she'd never have gotten away from them. She married a serving man after and they went to Sydney [Australia?] and if nothing happened in the last two years they are doing well there now (Gregory *Visions* 116).

Gregory's collection of folklore also includes a mysterious tale told by a Mrs Casey:

> Near my own home by the sea there was a girl went out one day to get nuts near the wood, and she heard music inside the wood. And when she went home she told her mother. But the next day she went again and the next, she stopped so long that the mother sent the other little girl to look for her, but she could see no one [when the first girl returned] she went inside the room and while she was there the mother could hear music from the room ... the next day the girl died ... the neighbours all came to the wake, and there was tobacco and snuff there but not much, for it is the custom not to have too much when a young person dies ... the body was not that of a young person ... they saw an old woman with long teeth that you'd be frightened of ... she was buried the next day and in the night the mother would hear music all over the house, and lights of all colours flashing about the windows. She was never seen again except by a boy who was working about the place. He met her one evening and did not question her... for it is only when you meet them by a bush you can question them there (Gregory, *Visions* 118).

It is interesting to note Gregory's use of language and her attempts to maintain some sense of oral communication for she retells the stories in the original "rambling form" so that she does not lose touch with the "voices" of Irish peasant women; this particular writing-style could be an attempt to bequeath Irish peasant women with "dignity" and to honour their Celtic heritage. Weary of depictions of "the stage-Irish Paddy" with his thick brogue, Gregory was part of a Celtic revival which credited the "Irish" with deeper thoughts and emotions for

Ireland was no longer to be seen as the home of buffoonery but rather, as the home of an ancient idealistation. Gregory recognised the rhythms of Irish speech because, unlike the majority of ninteenth-century novelists, she had studied the original "Irish" from which it was derived (O'Connor 53). Urquhart and Friel, as twentieth-century writers, choose to address their concerns about the power of language in the nineteenth century as practised by the dominant group by refraining from the use of "Irish" dialect. The use of almost incomprehensible "Irish" speech may represent an image which the Celtic literary revival sought to banish and Urquhart and Friel seem to share this vision.

Gregory's folklore is the basis for the fear which Mary, Urquhart's enigmatic Irish peasant girl, inspires among the Irish villagers after her encounter with her demon lover from the sea:

> Mary, they believed, was lying in the arms of her faery-daemon lover; or what is more likely, what was left of Mary was lying in the arms of what was left of her faery-daemon lover, he having returned -- with her -- to the sea from which he had undeniably emerged (*Away* 13).

The sailor from the sea echoes the Fomoroh as noted by Yeats :

> ... from under the sea and is the name of the gods of night and death and cold. The Fomoroh were misshapen and now had the heads of goats or bulls, and now but one leg, and one arm that came out of the middle of their breast. They were the ancestors of the evil faeries ... misshapen persons, the giants and the leprechauns are expressly mentioned as the Fomoroh (Yeats-notes-485).

The Fomorians had several forms. First, they were to be thought to pirates who attacked early settlers in Ireland; second, they were the gods of the Fir-Bolg, the Fir-Domnann and the Galion, peoples of ancient Ireland, who were overcome by the Tuatha De Dannan (Yeats-notes-485).

By the mid-nineteenth century, such beliefs were threatened with

extinction and only lived on as superstition and folklore in the minds and imagination of the Irish Catholic peasantry. W.B. Yeats, profoundly inspired by Gregory's less well-remembered work and example, wrote of Clooth-na-Beare (also known as Cailleac Beare, Beare, Bere, Vera, Dera or Dhera) who went all over the world, "seeking a lake deep enough to drown her fairy life, of which she had grown weary until she found the deepest water in the world in little Lough Ia on the top of bird mountain" (Yeats-notes-507); the Catholic clergy in part foster the idea of the older culture for Yeats recalled that a *priest* told him the legend of Clooth-na-Bare (Yeats-notes-507).

> Mary recognises, immediately, that he came from an otherworld island, assumed that he had emerged from the water to look for her, and knew that her name had changed, in an instant, from Mary to Moira
> (*Away* 8).

Moira, as an older form of *Mary*, derives from the Trinitarian form taken by the Goddess Aphrodite as "the Great Moira" said to be older than Time. Greek funerary hymns consigning the dead to her care were known as Moirologhia, invocation of the Greek Fates who were versions of the Oriental Triple Goddess as Creator, Preserver and Destroyer.[67]

> All the nations of the ancient world knew the theory that life was a mystical thread spun by the Virgin, measured and sustained by the Mother, and cut by the Crone. The Three Fates of Greek myth were Clotha the Spinner, Lachesis the Measurer and Atropos the Cutter
> (Walker 666).

Urquhart is fascinated when her readers point out the origins of the name *Moira* because she did not pick this particular name with ancient goddesses in mind.[68]

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67 Barbara G. Walker, *The Women's Encylopedia of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983) 666. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by author and page number.

68 Jane Urquhart, Writer's Series, Trent University, March 19, 1997.

However, since the main thrust of the thesis is to seek out revelant details which pertain to women's history, the classical references seem appropriate.

Mary is convinced that she has been renamed by some strange male-spirit creature who has arisen from the sea. As she keeps her solitary vigil over his dead body prior to his burial, "hearth fires burned bright all over the island [and] tales of the Sidhe were told" (*Away* 17).

Sean Kane, in his exploration of such traditions, hearkens back to the Celtic Goddess, Aine/Dana/Danu, who gave her name to European rivers from the Danube to the Don whom he sees as being central to the water imagery which permeates Celtic mythology:

> In ancient Irish mythtelling, where a Stone age sensibility lies beneath an agricultural frame of mind like volcanic rock below peat, one encounters all the intelligent energies of animism -- that is, nature seen as having mentality (animus). Neither genetically benevolent or malevolent, these spirits are at best ambiguous. For example, in one eighteenth-century text,[69] where they are first mentioned, a swarm of 'small bodies' (luchoirp or luchorpain) comes out of the sea. Water spirits, they grant the hero the power to travel under water like a shaman and the power is his until they break the taboo they have warned against. In the predictable world of swirling energies that the mythtellers inhabit, there is no place for the 'gods' in the sense that we inherit the term from literature (Kane 35).

Father Quinn makes the final decision in that only Mary should have contact with the young sailor's dead body and that only she can prepare him for burial, for the people of Rathlin Island (situated off the coast of County Antrim) are in fear of being "touched" or "taken," as Mary seems to have been; the priest himself is not above a belief in supernatural happenings that have little to do with orthodox Christianity.

Mary, formerly known for her eloquence in both English and Gaelic, now

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[69] Kane is probably referring to *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, i., 71-72. This legendary tale of Irish dwarfs teaching an Irish king how to dive and go under the water with them found its way into the gloss of a lawbook. (*IMCCM*, 53).

reverts to her native Gaelic; the implication here is that language lost is also language rediscovered, as Urquhart seeks to consolidate and reaffirm the language of the Celtic twilight through Mary's songs and verses which relate to a more heroic past and Mary seems haunted by some magic from an earlier time.

Where Urquhart includes the threat of the modern Anglicised world to an ancestral community as one of the major themes in her novel *Away,* Brian Friel goes further by making this threat the central theme of his play, *Translations.* [70] Friel locates the moment of the final decline of the Irish language in the Donegal of the 1830s, the years in which the British Army Engineer Corps carried out its famous ordnance survey of Ireland, mapping and renaming the whole county to accord with its recent (Act of Union 1801) integration into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

The opening scene is in the hedge-row school and Manus, the schoolmaster's oldest son, is working with Sarah, a girl with a speech defect. The antithesis of Sarah is Jimmy Cassie known as the Infant prodigy:

> [He] sits contentedly reading Homer in Greek and smiling to himself. He is a bachelor in his sixties, living alone and comes to these evening classes partly for the company and partly for the intellectual stimulation. He is fluent in Latin and Greek but is in no way pedantic- -to him it is perfectly normal to speak these tongues- -for the world of the gods is as real as everyday life in the town of Baile-Beag (*Act 1*, 383-384).

As Sarah desperately struggles to speak her name, Jimmy rattles off allusions to the classics:

> Jimmy: "Hos ara min phamene rabdo epemassat Athene"... "after Athene had said this she touched Ulysses with her wand. She withered

70 Brian Friel, *Translations* in *Selected Plays -- Brian Friel*, ed. Seamus Deane. Irish Drama Selections 6. (London: Faber and Faber Ltd.,1984). All further references will be noted in the text by editor and page number or by Act and page number.

the fair skin of his supple limbs and destroyed the flaxen hair from off his head and about his limbs she put the skin of an old man...The divil! The divil!
... Ha-ha-ha! Athene did that to Ulysses! Made him into a tramp! Isn't she the tight one? The flashing eyed Athene! By God, Manus, sir, if you had a woman like that about the house, it's not stripping a turf bank you'd be thinking about?

Manus : She was a goddess, Jimmy.

Jimmy : Better still. Sure isn't our own Grania a class of goddess?

Manus : Who?

Jimmy : Grania--Grania--Diarmuid's Grania.[71]

Manus: Ah! (*Act 1,* 386).

Jimmy, speaking Latin and Greek through the Irish language, shows that he has a knowledge of ancient myth and legend and can equate Celtic mythology and Greek mythology with great facility; he also has a irreverent appreciation for a ribald goddess. Unfortunately, Irish mythology is about to be submerged by the political power of the English language which is being forced on the Irish people.

Sarah has but few lines in the play:

Sarah: My... My...my...my name is Sarah. Wait till you hear this, Manus. Flowers. (*Act 1,*- 384-386).

Sarah : Manus, Manus, I ... My name is Sarah ... Sarah Johnny Sarah ... I live in BunnahSAbhann (crying quietly) I'm sorry... I'm sorry... I'm so sorry, Manus, Manus (*Act 3,* 433-434).

Her vanishing power of speech signifies the loss of the Irish language which is being taken away from the Irish villagers; with Manus's help, she had been

71 Grania [who] fled with Diarmuid to escape the love of Finn (Finn MacCumhail, leader of the Fenians, killed on the Boyne A.D.283). Appendix iv, *Yeats's Poems*, 687-688.

starting to find her voice but after the English soldiers arrive, Sarah becomes mute.

Sarah is yet another lower-class girl who appears as a shadowy waif of few words in a work of literature: as such, she is an evocative symbol both for the death of language and the powerlessness of the indigeous Irish in the nineteenth century. Sarah can also be seen as the quintessential muted female for whom Edward Ardener developed his dominant/muted model, a model which can also apply to the muted role played by lower-class Irish women emigrants in nineteenth-century Ontario:

> Ardener is extremely critical of anthropologists who claimed 'to have cracked the code' of a community, without references to at least half the population ... in other words, Ardener had come across the silence of women ... Ardener has labelled men the dominant group. Women are the *muted* group because they were excluded from the formulation and validation of meaning and therefore denied the means to express themselves. Women were locked out, and to Ardener, the problem was to find some access for them.[72]

Sarah, a linquistically-challenged person, is traumatised by translation and thus escapes into muteness. Seamus Deane has this to say on Friel's treatment of the death of language:

> Friel's play is tragic in that it portrays 'the final coherence' which has always existed between the two countries; where the theme for the Irish is failure, both linguistic and political, the fact that the play was written at all is a tribute to the imagination in dealing with everything that was opposed to its survival -- language lost in this fashion is also language rediscovered in a way that the sense of loss is overcome (Deane 22).

Urquhart's Moira/Mary's also suffers a loss of language which contributes to a form of mythological awakening as she escapes from current social reality into a faery world, a world depicted by Yeats in his poem, *The Stolen Child* :

> ... Where the wandering water gushes
> In pools among the rushes of Glen-Car

72 Dale Spender, "The Dominant and the Muted" in *Man-Made Language* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 198) 76-77.

That scarce could bathe a star
We seek for slumbering trout

Away from us [she's] going,
The solemn eyed :
[She'll] hear no more the lowing
Of the calves on the warm hillside
Or the kettle on the hob

Come away O human child
To the waters and the wild
With a faery hand in hand
From a world more full of weeping than she can understand
(Yeats *A Stolen Child* 53-54).

The water imagery in Urquhart's prose seems to echo the Yeatsian poem:

> Now the water of Lough Crannog licked the rushes near the shore. Mary waited as she had learned to wait, calmly...Bright glimmers of life darted near the water on blurred wings and occasionally a trout leapt, then plummeted, a flailing blade into the lake (*Away* 126).

Jane Urquhart has come to realise:

> ... that on the whole, I was inspired and fed by sources similiar to those Yeats was inspired and fed by (this is by no means a suggestion on my part that I have placed myself in the same league). It was the translations of the original Gaelic poem concerning Oisin and St Patrick that "consciously" caught my attention though at some time I must have read the Yeats poem and of course, *The Stolen Child* has been with me since I was about eight or nine.[73]

Yeats and Urquhart are Celtic revivalists in that they both deal with a mythological world, which may seem to be more desirable than the world of reality; one mythic symbol is the *trout* to which both authors refer for it was believed that tribes of the goddess Danu/Aine (the Tuatha De Dannan) can take all shapes and those in the water often take on the shape of fish (Yeats- notes-

73 Jane Urquhart. Letter, January 29,1997. Urquhart may be referring to Trans. *Ossianic Society* ,ed. Brian O'Looney, vol. iv. (1856 --1859) (IMCCM 205).

511). Where Yeats has a longing for the mythological world where his stolen child will escape human sorrow, he also knows that the child will escape the ordinary pleasures of human life: familiar every-day things: the sound of the kettle whistling on the fire.

Urquhart marks Mary's return to ordinary human life with her marriage to the schoolmaster Brian O' Malley when "she fell weeping on the schoolmaster's shoulder. Unbuckling. Beginning to enter the world again" (*Away* 59). Father Quinn encourages the teaching of English on the island because he believes it is necessary for any kind of advancement and although he teaches the language to a handful of boys, it never occurs to him that a girl might need this skill. Mary is encouraged in her studies by her schoolmaster husband and has a gift for eloquence, but the transition from Gaelic to English results in mixed messages that seemed to be aimed at no one in particular and so get little attention from anyone on the island (59-60).

Urquhart suggests that the transition from one language to another can result in a confusion about one's own identity and that one's communication skills can become so impaired that there is a difficulty in making oneself understood. Combine this with the act of emigration and we can see why Mary clings to her mythological world as the only world in which she can truly find herself. This is still a consideration today for certain emigrants, forced to integrate into a Canadian culture which still is primarily based on British middle-class values.

Mary has internalized the Celtic myths through a psychic enounter with a mythic lover. Timothy Findley writes, "Jane Urquhart has done what no one else has thought to do: she has brought the great myths from "away " and bestowed them on this culture. It is a great romantic tale, rich in imagery and

worthy of Emily Brontë or Thomas Hardy."[74] Findley's passing comparison of Urquhart to Emily Brontë warrants some comment. It is true that Brontë makes no distinction between the natural and the supernatural when she speaks of the energy which flows between Catherine and Heathcliffe and this continues to happen even after Catherine dies. We might say that the same kind of natural energy runs wild and free between Mary and her mythological lover. Mary's lover comes from the wild free world to Mary, as a psychic supernatural experience, yet the experience still has some discernible grounding in desire or need. Mary's need may be to transcend the hardships of her life which do little to fulfill her dreamy romantic nature. The subsistence of the Irish peasant is sustained by a culture which is fast vanishing and the Great Famine with its twin ogres of starvation and fever becomes the final horror. In many ways, Mary is a disturbed, divided spirit who is shattered, the fragments everywhere and so is blocked from fully entering a conventional social world. While Catherine haunts the Yorkshire moor even after her death,[75] the Brontës also continue to haunt Ontario's nineteenth-century culture (see Clara Thomas in reference to Crawford (55-56), and Jane Urquhart's *Changing Heaven*). [76] Urquhart and Brontë offer no easy answers for Mary, like Catherine, seems to be at one with some elemental force, a great turbulent energy of which we have little understanding and can only attempt to define as the life force. Houses, domesticity and maternal duties cannot hold Mary and so she roams the Canadian forest, searching for some link with a culture which is disappearing in

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74 Timothy Findley, review of *Away*, back cover of 1993 edition. Publication containing review not listed.

75 Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (London: The New English Library Ltd. 1959) overview.

76 Jane Urquhart, *Changing Heaven* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993).

her own homeland.

Urquhart claims that she is fascinated by the idea of a person who is considered to be "away" and that she sees the concept as being part of an emigrant's frame of mind in that the emigrant's spirit never totally leaves her homeland; thus she sends only a replica of herself to Canada.[77] This is a concept also explored by Icelandic-Canadian writer Kristjana Gunnars; Gunnars illuminates the emigration experience by rewriting Anderson's story of the Ugly Duckling; in her version, however, there are two ducklings in place of Anderson's lone duckling. Two ducklings (who are sisters) are tempted to fly away with the swans:

> The younger one knows that time is passing, the swans are beginning to take off one by one and it is necessary to make a decision. In the end, the younger one flies off with the pack of swans, looking back in a perturbed manner. The older one remains on a mound of earth and continues to get smaller.[78]

One could interpret the image of the *shrinking* older sister as being the personification of Iceland, Gunnars' homeland, which is gradually becoming merely a memory but the older sister is also the non-emigrant, the self who stays behind. By focusing on this figure, one becomes aware of the schizophrenic elements of the emigrant frame of mind.

Gunnars' literary contemporary Aritha van Herk argues that there are three stories contained in the pysche of the emigrant. The primary one is the overt story in which emigration takes place because a family or individual seeks a new life with the promise of better economic opportunities or a chance for new personal and political freedom. This is the story which the emigrant tells the

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77 Jane Urquhart, *Writer's Series,* September 8, 1996. Tom Patterson Theatre, Stratford, Ontario. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by author and *Writer's Series* (abbrev. WS).

78 Kristjana Gunnars, *The Prowler* (Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer Press, 1989) 151.

best because the emigrant is granted the opportunity to reinvent him or herself. The second story is the covert story, the one which remains hidden usually for reasons which best suit the emigrant. Perhaps there is an incident in the old country which the emigrant is trying to escape. Finally there is the third story, the one which never gets told but lies hushed somewhere in the consciousness of the emigrant. What if one had not emigrated at all? What turn would one's life have taken? According to van Herk:

> This is the most elusive of all immigrant fiction; it is the most tempting and the most tyrannical *mise en abyme* because it does not happen. It offers itself as a possibility by its absence, and its philosophical demand towards the overt story because it is factually provable as never having occurred but emotionally unprovable by its suggestion.[79]

Mary O'Malley's emigration is not voluntary but is brought about by the forces of poverty, famine and cultural change and is financed by two eccentric Irish lairds. This "odd couple" are atypical Anglo-Irish men in that they have an empathy with all things Irish as had all their family from the date of settlement in Ireland. In a way, they emulate Edgeworth who had an empathy with Irish peasants. Osbert Sedgewick recognises that Mary seems to be different yet he cannot define this difference:

> There is this light in her you see ... and it must not be put out. I can't explain it but I know that it must not go out, must be kept somehow though I'm not certain at all that it will shine as well across the ocean as it does here. Nevertheless ... I will not stand by and see it fade (*Away* 122).

It is true that Canada provides a new start; yet Mary is no ordinary immigrant and never makes the leap to being a typical hard-working pioneer woman and thus seems to reflect van Herk's *covert* story. I see Urquhart's book as an

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79 Aritha van Herk, *In Visible Ink -- crypto- frictions -- the writer as critic : III* (Edmonton: NeWest Press,1991)186.

allegory in which the pre-Christian values and beliefs of the Celtic goddess and her pantheon of Gods, survive in hidden secret places: in the psyche and imagination of an emigrant Irish woman who is in transition between the nineteeth-century cultures of Ireland and Canada. By becoming Moira, Mary reclaims her ancient heritage for the faery lover from the sea " touches" Mary in a way which transcends physical contact. At their final meeting in Ireland, prior to her departure for Canada, she questions him thus:

> "And you," she asked, " will I take you with me?"
> "Yes and no,' he said. She saw that he was clothed in the feathered coat of a poet, that clots of birds' nests rested in his hands, and that small fires guttered at his feet (*Away* 128).

Sean Kane writes that, "the early Irish poets, who were priestly visionaries as well as experts on the law of kingship, wore cloaks of birdfeathers, like shamans of the Paleolithic (Stoneage)" (*Mythtellers* 23). Kane emphasizes the crucial role that mythtelling plays in our "modern" lives for modernity is the vantage from which we view antiquity. He observes that :

> Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze. These terms do not presume to be categorical. They serve to affirm the distinctiveness of the mythtelling traditions they frame, reminding that human dialogues with the earth and sky vary with the relationship humanity has with its environment. We cannot ignore our own context in relation to past peoples (*Mythtellers* 23-24).

Mary's meeting with Exodus Crow in Canada is also interesting because of the bird imagery and the fact that metamorphosis is very much a part of Irish legend: Tuan, keeper of the ancient Irish legends, is thought to have lived for two thousand years and towards the end of his life, conversed with St. Patrick (who converted him to Christianity). After he assumed human shape for the second time, he lived three hundred and twenty years: as a man for the first

hundred, then as a stag, a boar, a vulture or an eagle and finally as a fish who is eaten by a queen. The creation of Tuan serves one purpose in Irish mythology: to relate the history of three Irish races, those of Partholon, Nemed and the Tuatha De Dannan. This wonderful pagan legend was placed by Christian scholars under the protection of the venerated St. Patrick in order to secure its acceptance by Irish Christendom. A new element was introduced, in that, after Tuan assumed human form for the second time, he lived for many hundred years. The belief in metamorphosis which serves to explain the wonderful knowledge possessed by certain individuals and the legend of Tuan finds its roots in one of the fundamental principles of Celtic mythology: the belief that the soul survived and might afterwards return to this world and assume a new body (*IMCCM* 32-35). This interesting use of metamorphosis also shows up in the work of Atwood, more of which later.

Exodus Crow provides a link between Celtic and Canadian First Nations people in that firstly, he is Mary's willing listener and secondly, he connects her country's history with his own threatened culture. There is an interesting link between Christianity and the old Irish mythology which equates with the dominant culture in Ontario in that the ways of the indigeous people are threatened. Water imagery and bird life again surface in Mary's accounts of life on Rathlin Island off the coast of the north of Ireland across the waters of the Moyle where the Children of Lir live for three hundred years disguised as

swans.[80] She tells Exodus of Finn MacCumhail and the Fianna.[81] Mary also speaks of the poet Oisin, who returns from the land of the young (known as Tir-na-nOg), to argue for the old ways and beliefs (*Away* 179-180). The meeting between St. Patrick and Oisin is the subject of one of Yeats's earlier poems *The Wanderings of Oisin.* In it, Patrick accuses Oisin of three hundred years of 'dalliance with a demon thing,' to which Oisin replies:

> Sad to remember, sick, with years,
> The swift innumerable spears,
> The horsemen with their floating hair --
> Those merry couples dancing in tune
> And the white body that lay by mine:
> But the tale, though words be lighter than air
> Must live to be old like the wandering moon.
> --------------------------
> And passing the Firbolg's burial mounds,
> Came to the cairn-heaped grassy hill
> Where passionate Maeve is stony still [82]
>
> S. Patrick :
> You are still wrecked among heathen dreams (5-6).

Oisin defends the old Fenian ways against the new austere religion while "passionate Maeve" symbolises the old Irish culture and language which started to erode with the coming of Christianity. Echoes of lost Irish mythology surface

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80 According to d'Jubainville:

> Manannan mac Lir, as his name indicates, is the son of Ler, that is to say, of the Sea. Between him and the other gods of the Tuatha De Dannan ... there is this important difference: the mysterious palace he inhabits is not situated in Ireland but on an isle across the sea, out of reach of ordinary navigators. In this sense, Manannan and some of the other Tuatha De Dannan gods present a certain analogy with the Fomorians. Their residence lies overseas, like the great land where the dead, under the sway of the Fomorians, experience the joys of a new life, and immortality (*IMCCM*, 182).

81 Finn was a great warrior of the Fenian circle and the Fianna were thought to be a body of infantry - Yeats-notes-484.

82 When old country people see the leaves whirling upon the road they bless themselves for they believe that the Sidhe is passing by. Knocknarea [see *The Hosting of the Sidhe* - 64] is in Sligo and the country people say that Maeve, still a great queen of the western Sidhe, is buried in the cairn of stones upon it (Yeats- notes- 507).

in Urquhart's work for Oisin's lament for the past can be likened to Mary's longing for the mysterious Others:

> ... those who live under the ground and those who had lived under the water, and how they were around always and in everything and how they made the most beautiful music ... so sweet and sad ... once it was heard it was never forgotten ... [on her island all are haunted by it and Mary, lost in her story, suddenly looks in surprise at Exodus as if she had forgotten he was there) " Do you believe me?" (*Away* 180).

Exodus' mother was taught to read by a churchman and loved the Book of Genesis with its stories of "the man with the boat full of apples, the woman whom Snake made bite the apple, and many dreams and vision quests." But in the Book of Exodus, the Great Spirit is no longer involved with a perfect balance of Nature, for now, humankind's concern is for conquest and for the taking and exploitation of lands which perplexes Exodus' mother (*Away* 175).

> S. Patrick:
>
> Be still: the skies
> Are choked with thunder, lightning, and fierce wind,
> For God has heard and speaks his angry mind;
> Go cast your body on the stones and pray,
>
> For He has wrought midnight and dawn and day (*The Wanderings of Oisin* 22).

Exodus Crow tells Mary that her stories remind him of his mother with her tales of the manitou, the spirit which is everywhere. For the first time, he can see some wisdom in the white people beyond the land conquest promoted by the Book of Exodus. He dreams of a golden fish (the Celtic goddess) and senses that Mary, in order to exist with her unique pre-Christian spirituality, must learn concealment and endurance in order to keep the old legends alive (*Away* 180-83).

Mary can be seen as a torch for the Irish people, for she carries the

histories, the legends and songs of ancient Ireland which precede even the coming of the Celts; she could be likened to the spirit-guide Crow sitting on the tallest tree in the forest so that he can see many things at once and has a strong voice which insists on being heard. This wise bird survives hardships and loves that which shines (the Celtic goddess whose presence glimmers through the hardships of a colonized people in nineteeth-century Ireland and still shines in Britain's Canadian colony). Mary also has far-seeing powers for she sees:

> ... the world's great leavetakings, invasions and migrations, landscapes torn from under the feet of tribes, the Danae pushed out by the Celts, the Celts eventually smothered by the English, warriors in the night depopulating villages, boatloads of groaning African slaves. Lost forests. The children of the mountains on the plain, the children of the plain adrift on the sea. All and all the mourning for abandoned geographies (*Away* 128).

Urquhart conveys a sense of the disruption of humankind now adrift on an unknown path of destruction. This is familiar to us in Judeo-Christian terms as the fall of our earliest forebearers, who were cast out of Eden; in a Christianised Ireland, disunity was caused by the loss of a belief in an earth goddess who symbolised a balance in nature.

There could be several interpretations of Mary's death. Northrop Frye would see Mary's full embrace of the Canadian wilderness as an indication that she lacks the deep terror of the soul which nature manifests to the small and isolated communities where cohesion, law and order meant safety; Frye propounds that emigrants in North American communities respect such protection in the face of the vast unconsciousness of a huge, menacing and formidable physical setting.[83] One may ponder why Mary, by the grace of a supernatural power bestowed on her, does not have the fear of the wilderness,

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83 Alfred G. Bailey and Carl F. Klinck, eds. *A Lliterary History of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972) 101.

as exhibited by *"normal"* more socially controlled emigrants who had a respect for conventional communities. Yet, given the experience of Friel's Irish Catholics whose language, culture, sense of place and identity were largely destroyed by Englishmen who renamed all their towns and villages, it follows that the nineteenth-century "Irish" did not have a hearty respect for Anglo-Canadian law. Mary rejects such laws by embracing the Canadian wilderness and so transcends what for her was the spirit of oppression.

Urquhart draws on themes of muted cultures that can know a rebirth; she thus emulates Yeats and others who, in effecting the Celtic revival at the turn of the nineteenth century, drew on the then-almost- forgotten legends of Ireland's bardic heroic past.

Mary is frozen into death and silence :

> The burden of boughs was lowered to the ground and there lay the beautiful, pale, frozen woman. Like the tall man she was dressed entirely in buckskin, though her jacket was lacking the ornamental beadwork, and her hair was loose, framing her white face in with a cloud of fire. Frost had collected on the edges of this cloud, in the wisps of curls that adorned her forehead, and on her eyebrows and eyelashes, this had the effect of making her almost transculent beside the dark branches of the czar boughs which supported her. The skin on her face and neck and her bare hands were so perfect, so unblemished, it might have been created more recently than Eileen's (Mary's baby daughter). Her lips were frozen into the shape of a faint smile (*Away* 173).

What are we, the readers, to make of this frozen woman? Is she the sleeping-beauty goddess awaiting her faery-demon lover or does the smile denote that this union has finally taken place? In Yeatsian terms, by her early death, she will always be his stolen child, beyond the pale of the normal Christian community. As Moira, she moves away from the image of the virgin mother Mary, the ultimate icon of unselfish motherhood in that she bore a son whom she knew would be offered in sacrifice for the *sins* of the world. In his younger

romantic years, Yeats showed a concern with a death-centred Christian religion which is focused on the hanged god on the cross. *The Wanderings of Oisin*, in which the Irish poet argues for a life felt through the senses against the aridity of Christianity, best exemplifies this concern. The exodus out of Eden left behind the green natural world while the spiritual quest turned to conquest and to an exploitation of lands, often in the name of Christianity.

Urquhart succeeds in illuminating Mary O'Malley's immigrant *frame of mind* in an attempt to resolve the reaction of an Irish lower-class woman to the Canadian wilderness and to draw comparisons with the marginalisation she shares with First Nations people. Urquhart's Irish woman immigrant who sees spirits in trees, earth and water raises our consciousness to the fears we hold for the natural environment which we are in danger of losing. As an archetypalist, Urquhart unearths lost mythologies and in particular, the Celtic matriarchal society which may have been as intelligent as any. Moira, in her association with Exodus Crow, makes us aware of the lessons which such cultures had to teach. Perhaps the most important was a reverence for the planet itself for the salvation of our natural world is a growing concern of today. In death, Moira reverts to Mary, the frozen goddess, who may yet again be transformed into a living vibrant being. Where the need for the recreation or recovery of the goddess symbolises our need for reciprocity with the earth itself, the discovery of a specifically Irish goddess may empower Irish women and enable them on their journey towards self-knowledge and serve to renew their pride in their Celtic heritage.

Urquhart has woven strands from the Celtic past throughout the fabric of her representation of Irish migration. In terms of the quilting motif, she has provided the central panel in this study of nineteenth-century Irish-Canadian

immigrant women.

Where Atwood structures each chapter of her novel on the basis of a specific quilting pattern, there are also mythical underpinnings in her work. My final chapter will also explore specific cultural clashes which the dominant Anglo-Canadian society tended to group under one heading: "The Irish Question." I will endeavour to determine how such problems impacted on the Irish female presence in nineteenth-century Ontario *vis-à-vis* Akenson and Atwood.

Chapter III
Sorting Through the Piecework.
Akenson/Atwood: The Female(s) of the (Irish) species...

As previously mentioned, Donald Akenson expounds on the difficulty which historians encounter when they attempt a study of Irish women who formed hal fof the Irish Diaspora(see page1) A major problem exists in that women have not left the kind of records left by more priviledged males who were apt to have been better educated. Although some personal letters survive, saved by families who handed them down from generation to generation, women themselves placed a value on privacy and thus records are limited. Akenson freely admits to that:

> ... in a culture where most historical records have been made and preserved by males, it is very difficult to get at the true stories about women's lives. Heuristic biography can correct in part this historical imbalance. We know with certainty that although the details of all but a very few female lives in the past are lacking, woman played major roles in the history of Western society. As historians, we can either go back to fact-grinding biographies (which in their selection and arrangements of facts are fictive, but in an unconscious and unexamined manner), or we can get inside our subject's mind and in doing so accept the fact that biography, like many forms of historical investigation, demands an energetic, self-conscious exercise of imagination-stories of individual human lives might be better called speculative history or historian's fiction. In any case, they should be accepted for what they are (*AFV* 74).

Before exploring Akenson's historical research and fictionalising about the life of John White/Eliza McCormack, it is interesting to observe what one other Canadian historian, Arthur Lower, has to say about the Irish Question in Canada:

> Before the Irish immigration, religious strife had been uncommon ...The Irish, Catholic and Protestant, introduced into Canada memories of persecution, bigotry and contention treasured up in their native land ...

> this continuous squabble, which penetrated every nook and cranny of Canadian life ... did not rest primarily on the antithesis between the French and the English, since after the Conquest the country was free of it for some seventy years; it is in large part the ancient Irish quarrel transferred to Canadian soil and flourishing here because of the antithesis. Irishmen did not limit their activities to religion. Elections became occasions for a fight and a spree. That Donnybrook atmosphere still not entirely dissipated in the public life of Ontario is attributable to the Orangeman... the coming of the Irish completed the great Trinity of Protestant Upper Canadian hates: hatred of the "Yankees," hatred of the French, hatred of the Pope of Rome.[84]

Upward mobility for Protestant Irishmen meant affiliation with the Orange Lodge and one particular female, the fictional Eliza McCormack, appears to have capitalised on this situation. In Akenson's novel, the reader comes face to face with an Irish emigrant's realisation that opportunity, power and adventure do not lie within the possibilities open to the conventional nineteenth-century Irish female. It is necessary to assume at least one other role and Eliza reinvented herself several times on her course to becoming the (male?) M. P. for East Hastings, Ontario.

Akenson's research for his book *At Face Value --the Life and Times of John White/Eliza McCormack* was piqued by the account of John White's funeral in 1894: the former member for East Hastings was known for being sympathetic to women; since women did not vote in dominion elections until after World War I, Akenson finds White's oft-stated dictum, "Give me the ladies on my side and I don't care much for the men," to be unusual. White's birthplace is documented as County Donegal, Ireland; he emigrated to Canada having survived the Famine of the 1840's; his early years in Canada remain a mystery but in the mid-1850's, he turns up north of Belleville, Ontario, as a

84 A.R.M.Lower, *From Colony to Nation*, 5th edition (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977) 189. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by author and page number.

happily married man who operates a cheese factory, is a local politician and an Orange Lodge official. Subsequently elected to Parliament, he served as Tory backbencher (1871-1887). Akenson eventually connects White with Eliza McCormack, an Irish transvestite prostitute who had an encounter with Ogle Gowan, founder of the Orange Order in Ontario. *White* and *McCormack* were common names among Protestant small farmers and artisans in overwhelmingly Catholic Donegal, an area hard hit by famine and disease in the nineteenth century; although death records were unusual in those times, an attendant in the fever hospital did record the death of a young man: John White, aged about fifteen or sixteen (*ATV* ix- x). Akenson recognises that it is impossible to prove that John and Eliza are one and same but he does pose the question, "How would my view of my subject change if, in an effort to escape an unthinking gender bias, I assumed that he was actually a woman?" (*AFV* xi).

From the moment of Eliza's birth, the disadvantages of being a lower-class Irish female are stressed; the blacksmith's daughter, born with a caul (a sign that she will not only never drown but also that she will have the gift of persuasive speech) disappoints her father who wants a second son to assist him in his trade; his wife eventually presents him with two more sons but she does not live to see her family grow up. Eliza becomes increasingly close to her oldest brother John Oge and persuades her father to instruct her in the blacksmith's trade.

Eliza loves to play a male role, persuading her teacher to give her a acting part in the school play although roles are usually reserved for boys; Eliza finds the women pirates in Defoe's book *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates* to be attractive and she is intrigued with Traill's *The Backwoods of Canada:* thus, for her, Canada becomes the

promised land. When the family finally does emigrate, Eliza travels under the name of John Oge: a slip on her father's part when he fills out the necessary papers. Her father dies during the voyage and armed with the scroll from the Orange Order, an organisation then outlawed by the British Government and the money gained from work at the foundry back in Donegal, Eliza lands in the New World. Arrangements are made for her brothers' education and John/Eliza starts life in Canada. There is work for blacksmiths in Kingston and theatre becomes a major attraction; fascinated by make-up and costumes, John acquires an extensive wardrobe and takes to courting young women. This results in discovery when there is a scuffle with a rival and John is revealed as a maiden (*ATV* 7-127).

Akenson takes us on a romp through nineteenth-century history; his androgynous protagonist starts life as a tomboy who adores her older brother and wants to emulate him in many ways; she projects the same feelings towards her father. Left to her own devices, she survives by her wits. Adept at role-playing, she uses this talent to great advantage; after her disturbing encounter with the law, she dons skirts and on the advice of the Irish barman at the Classon Hotel in Toronto, she has a successful career as a prostitute:

> He led me down to the bar, where as he talked, he began polishing a little circle on the walnut bar as if trying to wear a hole in it. "The way I see it someone like you has to go carefully over the bricks. I mean, it wouldn't do for you, would it, to be falling in with utter prowlers and jack-bungers?"
>
> I conceded his point.
>
> "So, it seems to me that the best way for you to floor the odds is to think of yourself for the nonce as a prospector [gold-digger!] I mean, opportunity walks in here like flies to a horse's bottom. And the Classon is as safe as Balmoral Castle. Maybe more so." [He concluded] "You take your walk now and think about that (*AFV* 103).

Akenson places some rare birds amongst Eliza's clientele, one being the Reverend Mr Ryerson, superintendent of education for Ontario and a great admirer of the Irish National school system. Akenson may introduce the Ryerson-Eliza relationship for comic effect in that we have a staid Methodist minister consorting with a Irish prostitute; nevertheless, the reader makes the connection that the Irish Eliza may have had a good basic education. Akenson has commented elsewhere on this subject :

> This may come as a surprise because our view has been tinctured by the anti-Irish prejudice of many nineteenth and early twentieth-century observers. In fact, the one area which pre-Famine Irish society invested in was "social overhead capital," particularly in schools. A national system was begun in 1831, but even before that, investment was substantial by European standards. The proportion of children receiving basic education on the eve of the Famine was well ahead of comparable countries, such as Italy or Spain, and on a level closer to that of France (*TID* 40).

Eliza granted sexual favours to another important client, Orangeman Ogle Gowan. The Orange Party was a semi-secret society which, nevertheless, managed to wield a lot of power in nineteenth-century Ontario. Gowan hailed from County Wexford where his father was a prominent landowner; Ogle as the younger (and possibly illegitimate son) became a "squireen":

> ... one of the caste most despised in Ireland, the "half-mounted gentry." Many of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy were content to remain in the countryside, acting as part-time agents for various landlords and as attenuated dependents on their own families, lording it over the Catholic peasantry but never being fully accepted by the real gentry.[85]

In her encounter with this flamboyant Irishman, Eliza had resumed wearing male attire; much to her surprise, Ogle Gowan advises Eliza:

"You won't get any place in this world unless you act, dress and think

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85 Donald Harman Akenson, *The Irish in Ontario -- a study in Rural History* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984) 169.

> like a man." Ogle's advice, like his opinions, was part insight, part self-interest and probably part prejudice. That did not mean that his advice was wrong. A year before, for example, he had warned me against my fellow Irish emigrants. "Stay away from the famine Irish. They give us Irish a bad name. We give the honest Protestant help through the order [a reference to the Orange Order, outlawed but effectively operating in a subversive fashion] but the mass of helots are beyond redemption. Let them seep into the United States where the damned Republicans can take care of them !" It was harsh advice but not unrealistic. "I have a plan," he continued. "It all hinges on whether you can convince everyone, not [just] harebrained shop Janes, that you are a sturdy young man."
> I knew that I could convince anyone (*AFV* 109).

Thus, under the auspices of the Orange Order and Ogle Gowan, Eliza becomes John White to the public at large and finds her/his way into political life. Akenson appears to be fascinated with the Gowan-MCCormack relationship for this is the second time Eliza makes an appearance in Akenson's work. The reader first meets her in Akenson's biographical fiction *The Orangeman -- the Life and Times of Ogle Gowan.* [86]

Akenson's account of Ryerson's and Gowan's encounters with Eliza make us aware that the Irish, as the largest ethnic group in nineteenth-century Ontario, had a direct impact in forming the structure of the province. There is a strong sense of religious participation by both Protestants and Catholics and sectarian bickering between the two groups is a dubious gift which the Irish bequeath to Canada; Akenson, however, is more positive towards the Irish Question than is Arthur Lower for he maintains that the Irish adapted well to Ontario society which had:

> ... a tight sense of law and order, an excellent system of public education, governmental financial support for Catholic schools, an efficient agricultural economy and a rapidly modernising urban sector, and a sense of most persons of Irish ethnicity that it was a good thing that they (or their parents or grandparents) had taken the heroic decision to leave

86 Don Akenson, *The Orangeman -- the Life and Times of Ogle Gowan* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company,1986) 265-268.

Ireland and to create something new, half a world away (*TID* 269).

Critical responses to *At Face Value* include that of S.R. Mealing who contends that, although Akenson uses extensive notes, he remains unspecific as to the details critical to his hypotheses, a departure from his solid work done on Irish immigration and as the editor of *Canadian Papers in Rural History.* Mealing makes reference to novelists like Steinbeck (*The Grapes of Wrath*) who succeed in giving "voice" to those who are neither articulate nor powerful because they show a special sympathy for the characters; in this respect, novelists have more success than do historians. For Mealing, Eliza remains a curiously male, robust, self-confident figure with an ironic sense of amusement towards her contemporaries more credible in twentieth-century observors; hence he asks the question: did Eliza assume John White's identity or has Akenson borrowed hers? Akenson has used the historical form to disguise contemporary concerns such as the subordination of women and the sleaziness of politicans; Mealing concludes that the book is entertaining but that any claims that it is a new form of historical investigation "should not be taken, and are unlikely to be advanced at face value."[87]

Allison MacDuffee is more generous in her evaluation and concentrates on the fact that Akenson does not set out to prove that John White is a woman; rather, he wants his readers to consider questions about gender. Eliza is a blend of so-called *masculine* qualities (political shrewdness and business acumen) and *feminine* qualities (modesty and gentleness). MacDuffee faults the book for typographical errors but concludes that Akenson does demonstrate that, "for a woman to take on a male identity in the nineteenth-century might have been a very sane and sensible way for a woman to achieve

87 S. R. Mealing, *Queen's Quarterly,* 99. 3 (Fall,1991) 687-9.

power in a male-dominated society."[88]

James M.Clemens claims that the clues to Akenson's speculative history do not lie in the notes but in the preface where Akenson writes, "the historical methods that have been used in male history are inadequate for the task of recovering female history ... good biography always has simultaneously deconstructed and reconstructed perceived historical reality" (*AFV* xi-xii). Clemens also notes Akenson's call for an active imagination. Thus, the human interaction in *At Face Value* is only possible by "speculative entries into the subject's heart, mind and soul" and the "energetic, self-conscious exercise of imagination" (*ATV,* xi-xii). Akenson's historical knowledge of rural Ireland in the Famine and of central Canada around the time of Confederation provides the authentic backdrop for human interaction. "Was John White Eliza McCormack? Akenson provides one answer and while doing so suggests a new and intriguing way of looking at individuals from the past."[89]

Such critical responses point to the fact that, while the book is somewhat flawed, there is considerable merit in Akenson's attempt to address the problem of women's invisibility in history, particularly lower-class women. Little mention is made of such women in the writings of historians like Bruce Elliott; in his interesting study of nineteenth-century, Irish immigration, *Irish Migrants in the Canadas, a New Approach*, his information on Irish women immigrants is somewhat condensed:

> ... not all women emigrated with families. Some single women were sent out to Australia and Canada from workhouses. Three parties of paupers from Nenagh Workhouse were assisted to emigrate during the Famine years ... In April 1852 387 inmates, mostly female, were embarked at Limerick for Quebec. The agent forwarded 110 of the women to Bytown,

88 Allison MacDuffee, *Canadian Women's Studies* 2. 4 (Summer 1991)92.

89 James M.Clemens, *Ontario History.* 83. 2 (June 1991)159.

> and James Henry Burke, the agent in Bytown, himself of Tipperary descent, reported that all had been engaged as servants in the town or vicinity within two days of arriving.[90]

Consequently, research into Akenson's work has proved profitable for this study of Irish women immigrants. Where his "solid work" (see Mealing) on Irish immigration provides a framework for this study, he makes a further contribution in that he explores beyond mere facts and figures. In addition, he advocates that biography may to be one way to avoid Carlyle's trap of seeing history in terms of being "the collective biography of great men" (*AFV* xi). He states that Samuel Johnson is right when he says that "the business of biography... is to lead the thoughts into domestic privacies and display the minute details of daily life" (*AFV* xi). Johnson's words could well apply to the editors of the correspondence of nineteenth-century Canadian women; as more and more "private" letters come to light, the reader is drawn more and more into the hearts and minds of such women and Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman have even entitled their recent collection of Traill's letters *I Bless You In My Heart*. Letters and journals are a valuable source of information for the student of women's history but since letters of lower-class Irish emigrant women are not readily available, research often must follow other paths and biography in this case must give way to biographical fiction.

Where Akenson's fictional biography shows sensitivity to the deprivation of an Irish childhood in County Donegal, he is less sensitive to Eliza's Canadian experience; for instance, her antics with well-known historical figures descend into the realm of ribald entertainment. However, his "speculative history" makes a serious contribution to my study for the following reasons: Akenson is

90 Bruce S. Elliott, *Irish Migrants in the Canadas -- New Approach* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, The Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen's University, Belfast,1988) 112.

singularly interested (among historians noted) in the dearth of knowledge on nineteenth-century Irish lower-class women emigrants, most of whom ended up in domestic service. He also seems to acknowledge the fact that a woman, given the necessary resources and position, has the ability to reinvent herself several times over. This is particularly true of the immigrant who is given a fresh start in the new land and has the choice of which story should be told. The fictional Eliza's many roles are but a succession of self-portraits brought to life by her own ingenuity and she chose to assume the role of a man (John White) thus achieving some visibility.

Such visibility is usually not the lot of the lower-class Irish immigrant woman, for it often seems that only infamy can bring them to public attention; such is the case of Grace Marks, an Irish maidservant who received extensive newspaper coverage for the part that she played in two murders. A real-life historical figure, Grace Marks captures the attention of both Susanna Moodie and Margaret Atwood:

> Attitudes towards her reflected contemporary ambiguity about the nature of women: was Grace a female fiend and temptress, the instigator of a crime and the real murderer of Nancy Montgomery, or was she an unwilling victim, forced to keep silent by fear of her own life?
> (*AG* 463).

Atwood describes her ninth novel as "a mystery about a murder."[91] Two nineteenth-century Irish emigrants, Grace Marks [sixteen-year-old housemaid] and manservant James McDermott, are convicted of murdering their employer, Mr. Kinnear and his mistress, Nancy Montgomery. McDermott was hanged for his crime on November 23rd, 1843 while Grace was sentenced to life imprisonment in Kingston Penitentiary, Ontario. Atwood began her fascination

91 Diane Turbide, *Amazing Atwood* in *Maclean's*, September 23, 1996, 42. All further references will be noted within the text by title (abbrev. *AA*) and page number.

with Susanna Moodie after reading Moodie's representation of Grace Marks in *Life in the Clearings* (1853). Atwood was thus inspired to fictionalise the story which ultimately was presented as a CBC television play in 1974, entitled *The Servant Girl* and directed by George Jonas. The play was based on the Moodie version which, in the light of recent research, Atwood no longer considers to be definitive (*AG* 469).

Susanna Moodie's account shows that her impression of Kingston Penitentiary was generally favourable; she approved of the rule of silence and was in wonderment in face of the fact that one overseer, small in stature, could control forty or fifty strong, healthy convicts whom Susanna sees as being well treated; Moodie reacts with some indignation:

> I could not help thinking, while watching these men in their comfortable dresses, taking their wholesome well cooked meal, how much better they were fed and lodged than thousands of honest industrious men, who had to maintain large families upon a crust of bread in the great manufacturing cities at home (*LIC* 157).

Moodie was relieved to find only forty female inmates, which "speaks much for the superior moral training of the feebler sex," but her particular interest was in Grace Marks, "the celebrated murderess ... and remarkable criminal of whom my English readers may never have heard" (*LIC* 157-158). Atwood claims that Moodie's retelling of the Kinnear-Montgomery murders was a third-hand account since Moodie got most of her information from Mr. McKenzie, the defendants' lawyer (*AG* 464).

Moodie does seem uncertain of dates and location concerning the murders and where they took place; Mr Kinnear is misnamed as Captain Kinnaird, an officer on half pay (*LIC* 158-159). In Atwood's research, he shows up as the younger half-brother to the heir of a estate in Fife in the Scottish

lowlands and *Burke's Peerage* lists him as having died about the same time as he made his appearance in Canada West (*AG* 465). Atwood questions Moodie's assumption that English readers were unaware; the1843 murders proved to be sensational fodder for journalists in Canada, the United States and Britain. Grace was an unusually pretty sixteen-year-old who escaped with James across the border to the United States and it is assumed that the pair were lovers; Nancy, Kinnear's mistress, had given birth to a child out of wedlock and the autopsy, after her murder, revealed that she was pregnant for the second time (*AG* 464).

Atwood's major theme is ambiguity about the nature of women, a theme which is at least as old as Eve. Contemporary women writers have conversely begun to view Eve as an imaginative leader who finds her path through a garden, already doomed to strangle in its own convoluted weeds. Atwood uses "quilting" an essentially feminine craft as metaphor for the fragmented documentation of her/story while the novel culminates in a quilting project which depicts Grace's quilt/life story. In relation to Eden, the traditonal quilting block "The Tree of Paradise" is used; Grace observes that, "the Fruit of Life and the Fruit of Good and Evil are the same ... but if you did eat of it, you would be less bone-ignorant by the time you got around to your death ... I am telling this to no one but you, as I am aware it is not the approved reading " (*AG* 459). Presumably, Atwood infers that "the approved reading" is that Eve, in her curiosity for more knowledge, caused the exodus from the Garden of Eden.

My own view of Atwood's power of double vision was strengthened by a recent visit to Washington, D.C. I saw the 1996 version of the "Quilt," which commemorates the deaths of 70,000 predominantly male AIDS victims, an increase of some 60,000 since 1987; it is now so large that it filled the Mall,

from George Washington's monument to Lincoln's memorial. I was struck by how a traditionally feminine craft is now being used to convey the deaths of these victims; the panels, many of which are crafted by gay men, are varied and range all the way from a copy of a medieval tapestry to the simplicity of well-worn jeans and a plaid shirt, appliqued on a panel, which measures three by six feet, exactly the size of a coffin. Simple clothing, once worn by AIDS victims, was more moving than had I visited a graveyard where names were carved in hard rock. The "Quilt" is a visual "voice," not only for the plight of gay men but for many others including women and small children. Many countries, including Ireland, with their own panels. Here "quilting" becomes a universal symbol for the war against AIDS.

Another current health concern is breast cancer in women and the war against this disease has recently made headlines. In Kingston, Ontario, Bella Abzug, breast cancer survivor, environmental activist and former U.S. congresswoman, addressed a gathering of cancer survivors, scientists and environmentalists:

> "I find it shocking we can put men on the moon, and machines on Mars, and not understand the assault on our mammaries. Our job is do for breast cancer what happened to AIDS in the "80s" she told delegates. A highlight of the opening ceremonies was the unveiling of a new quilt by Judy Reimer of Vancouver [herself a cancer survivor] dedicated to the struggle against breast cancer...The quilt consists of a large central panel framed by 136 squares. More than 7,000 people contributed to it by doing some stitches, or an entire square, in memory of loved ones lost to breast cancer.[92]

It is interesting how revival of a traditional women's craft is currently be used to convey many concerns, including life-threatening health problems which confront us on a universal scale. Reimer's quilt exemplifies yet another

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92 Leslie Papp (medical reporter), " World plans war on breast cancer-- Experts from 50 nations gather in Kingston to draft strategy" Toronto Star, July 14, 1997.

struggle: the war against breast cancer.

Atwood also makes a connection between quilts, wars and injustice for she depicts Grace, as a young servant girl, hanging quilts on a clothesline to air, "like flags hung out by an army as it goes to war." (*AG* 161). Grace then says to Simon:

> ... why is it that women have chosen to sew such flags, and then lay them on the tops of beds? For they make the bed the most noticable thing in the room. And then I thought, it's for a warning. For maybe you think that a bed is a peaceful thing, Sir, and to you it may mean rest and comfort and a good night's sleep. But it isn't so for everyone; and there are many dangerous things that take place in a bed. It is where we are born, and that is our first peril in life; and it is where the women give birth, which is often their last [act?]. And it is where the act takes place between men and women that I will not mention to you, Sir, but I suppose you know what it is; some call it love, and others despair, or else merely an indignity which they must suffer through. And finally beds are what we sleep in, and where we dream, and often where we die.But I did not have these fancies about the quilts until after I was already in prison. It is a place where you have a lot of time to think, and no one to tell your thoughts to; and so you tell them to yourself (*AG* 161).

Not only does Atwood employ the "quilting motif," she also seems to realise how the reader will identify with humanity's "smells." Atwood here may reflect some of Moodie's "realities" about pioneer life as best exemplified by the account of Jenny Buchanan in her last months on earth. The reader becomes aware that the nineteenth-century world was not as "sanitized" as the world of today's advertising media. Atwood writes of odours from bodies rarely bathed, from hair infrequently shampooed and from an outhouse where flies buzzed above human waste; the "smell of blood" is evoked by descriptions of the blood of abortion and of death spilling out on white sheets; the colour red becomes visible in the prison governor's sitting room, "petals like the shape of diamonds on a playing card ... like the cards ... on the table at Mr. Kinnear's ...

hard and angular... but red, a deep thick red like strangled tongues." (*AG* 27). And then there are the peonies, "huge dark-red flowers all shining and glossy like satin ... like the peonies in the front garden... only those were white... Nancy was cutting them" (*AG* 5). Fresh flowers always seem to turn into some kind of fabric like satin, wool or cotton; thus, "fabric" becomes linked with "fabrication." The theme of the quilting motif is a compelling force throughout the novel where empty spaces are patched with often colourful, imaginative fragments; this method reflects the record of women's history where huge empty gaps yawn between meagre scraps of reliable documentation. *Alias Grace* is Atwood's fictionalised version of historical events but she does not change *known facts* although her research unearths records, particularly contradictory newspaper accounts:

> When in doubt, I have tried to choose the most likely possibility, while accommodating all possibilities wherever feasible. Where mere hints and outright gaps exist in the records, I have felt free to invent (*AG* 466-9).

One could surmise that this particular strategy embodies Atwood's "tongue-in-cheek" commentary on Moodie's vivid representations of nineteenth-century "colourful characters." To all intents and purposes, Atwood is retelling Moodie's original account of the story of Grace Marks and furthermore, she now is doing it for the second time (see *The Servant Girl* 100). One of the major themes in *Alias Grace* is that the human memory is not infallible and often distorts the past. Perhaps Atwood's continuing dialogue with Moodie's writer-spirit reflects the oral tradition where stories are passed down from one generation to another and there were often missing spaces which the storyteller had to fill with her own "patch" of narrative.

Atwood's narrative voice is often the voice of Grace; Grace's lapses of memory seem natural as she wryly relates the story of her impoverished Irish

childhood to Dr. Simon Jordan:

> What I remember is a small rocky harbour by the sea ... I don't remember the place very well ... only in scraps like a plate that's been broken. There are always some pieces that would seem to belong to another plate altogether; and then there are the empty spaces, where you cannot fit anything in (*AG* 103).

Grace's later memory lapses are crucial to her story when her "guilt " is called into question. Grace's interaction with Simon Jordan, a young nineteenth-century American doctor with a budding interest in the field of psychoanalysis, conveys the ambiguity of the human condition, a two-sided coin, where Good and Evil exist side by side or where there is a constant interaction between the conscious and unconscious elements of the human mind.

By conveying a sense of humanity's "smells," Atwood succeeds in making her historical fiction seem more realistic than did many nineteenth-century women writers who so often "sanitized " their work. Compare Isabella Valancy Crawford's Katie with Grace; one would surmise that Katie's feet would have become toughened and darkened from her practice of log-leaping, yet Crawford's description of them suggests the unsullied purity of rose petals:

> Katie bared her little feet, and pois'd herself
> On the first log close rating on the shore
> And with bright eyes of laughter,and wild hair-
> A flying wind of gold - from log to log
> Sped, laughing as they wallowed in her track,
> Like brown-scal'd monsters rolling, as her foot
> Spurned each in turn with its rose-white sole
> (*Malcolm's Katie* 157).

In contrast, Atwood's Grace reeks of "smoke and laundry soap ... salt from her skin ... ferns and mushrooms ... flowers fermenting ... her hair gives ... a strong musky odour of scalp." Simon is aware that he "is in the presence of a female animal; something foxlike and alert ... sometimes he feels like he is walking on

quicksand" (*AG* 90).

"Walking on quicksand" where one can sink beneath the surface at any moment is a phrase that captures the sense of a novel which operates on several levels: on one level, we get the daily reality of Grace's life as a nineteenth-century Irish servant girl. Through Atwood's eyes, the reader sees Grace as a cheerful, capable maidservant who particularly likes doing laundry work:

> I stood for a moment admiring my handiwork; for there is a great deal of pleasure to be had in a wash all clean, and blowing in the wind, like pennants at a race, or the sails of a ship; and the sound of it is like the hands of the Heavenly Hosts applauding... sometimes, when I have seen the pure white clouds billowing in the sky after a rain, I used to think that it was the angels themselves hanging out the washing... but these are childish fancies, as children like to tell themselves stories about things that are not visible (*AG* 125).

Atwood links a billowing white wash to the Heavenly Host and a child's imagination, but " a white sheet," in the saga of Grace Marks, also symbolizes death. Grace's voyage from Ireland to Canada is marked by the trauma of her mother's death; Grace uses a old worn sheet as her mother's shroud rather than the "almost new" sheet, Aunt Pauline's farewell gift to the family. It is interesting to speculate if Grace, raised in poverty, sees the newer sheet as having more value for the living rather than for the dead. Her reaction also seems to foreshadow her future preoccupation with fabrics and perhaps with fabrication. Years later, Grace recollects that, "there was something dreadful about it ... floating in a white sheet among the staring fish ... it was worse than being put in the earth, because if a person is in the earth at least you know where they are" (*AG* 121). One other possibility is that being in prison being stared at by doctors and other observers in positions of authority could be worse than being executed. As a prisoner, Grace is often under intense scrutiny.

The imagery of the body/spirit drifting beneath the sea also relates to the Celtic belief system as noted by Urquhart and Yeats (see Chapter II). Grace, as an Irish immigrant living in Canada, is continually haunted by a dream which further reflects the Celtic belief in metamorphosis:

> ... in her winding sheet, drifting down through the cold water... the sheet [came] undone at the top, and it waved as if in the wind, and her hair floated out drifting like seaweed; but the hair was over her face so I could not see it, it was darker than my mother's had been; then I knew that this was not my mother at all, but some other woman, and she was not dead inside the sheet at all, but still alive (*AG* 167).

This could be of Grace's premonition of her own extraordinary survival.

Atwood's vision is usually double-edged: if she presents us with a pleasurable fantasy, she is quick to follow with an image which suggests the dark belly of life's underside which wallows half-submerged in the unconscious. First, the reader is made aware of Grace's growing pleasure in Simon's company:

> When he writes, I feel he is drawing on me ... not with the pencil he is using but with an old-fashioned quill pen ... with the feather end ... as if a hundred butterflies have settled all over my face and are opening and closing their wings.
>
> > But underneath that, there is another feeling ... it's like being wakened suddenly in the middle of the night, by a hand over your face, and you sit up with your heart going fast, and no one is there. And underneath that is another feeling still, a feeling of being torn open; not like a body of flesh, it is not painful as such, but like a peach; and not even torn open but too ripe and splitting of its own accord. And inside the peach there's a stone (*AG* 69).

Atwood's historical research proved that prison records show that there was some suspicion that Grace became pregnant in the asylum where all wards are segregated; only the doctors had access to female inmates (*AG* 464). Does this account for the fictional Grace's memory (in Atwood's version) of being

stifled by a hand in the dark? A doctor's visit to her in the prison reduces her to hysterics:

> ... And then I see his hand, a hand like a glove, a glove stuffed with raw meat, his hand plunging into the open mouth of his leather bag ... I know that I have seen a hand like that before ... I begin to scream ... because it is the same doctor... with his bag of shiny knives (*AG* 29).

Again, Atwood raises the question of Grace's identity -- is she reliving Mary's own experience with abortion? Atwood also raises the question of women prisoners/inmates of mental asylums who may be easy prey for unscrupulous men. Yet, there is a certain ambiguity in that a peach that "splits of its own accord" suggests a maturation process of which sex should be a natural component.

Mary Whitney was the only truly loving person in Grace's life and Nancy originally seemed to have offered the same kind of warmth and support but then Nancy suddenly turns and subjects Grace to cruel rejection. Grace has many faces for Moodie also saw "an air of hopeless melancholy in her face which is very painful to contemplate ... her face would be rather handsome were it not for the long curved chin which gives ... a cunning cruel expression" (*L/C* 170).

Grace may have been the victim of sexual abuse as well as the physical abuse suffered at the hands of her father. Father Marks is Atwood's caricature of a particularly unsavoury Englishman who marries a passive young Irish woman, whom he impregnates many times. She bears the full burden of blame for giving birth to many children, for Marks acts as he has had no part in the matter to the point where one might deduce that he believes all of the births to having been Immaculate Conceptions, conceived while he slept in innocent slumber. Atwood thus perpetuates the theme of Ireland, the helpless woman

who is exploited by Father England. On viewing his ninth living child (three infants lie buried in the graveyard) Marks said "that it made him hungry just to look at it, that it would look very nice on a platter with roast potatoes all around and an apple in its mouth." Atwood seems to be alluding to Johnathan Swift's satirical essay "A Modest Proposal" (1729) in which Swift assumed the persona of an English businessman who treated Irish children as commodities, suggesting that all "yearlings" would be better off being slaughtered for food rather than grow up in abject poverty.[93] Grace was urged into domestic service by a father who, "was drinking the bread out of his own children's mouths" (*AG* 129). As a youthful Irish immigrant, Grace survived many traumatic experiences which included the death of her mother and physical abuse at the hands of her father:

> Also his rages had returned, stronger than before my mother died. Already my arms were black and blue, and then one night he threw me against the wall, as he'd sometimes done with my mother, shouting that I was a slut and a whore, and I fainted; and after that I feared that he might someday break my spine, and make a cripple out of me. But after these rages he would wake up in the morning and say he couldn't remember a thing about it and that he hadn't been himself, and he didn't know what got into him (*AG* 129).

The suggestion of a memory lapse seems significant here for Atwood may be foreshadowing Grace's own loss of memory in connection with the murders of which she was accused.

Grace suffered further trauma when her dearest friend Mary died of a botched abortion; yet, Atwood is ever ambiguous, for she never really portrays Grace as being an innocent victim of life's circumstances; rather, through the prism of Grace's experiences, Atwood continually questions what determines

93 Johnathan Swift, " A Modest Proposal" in *Eighteenth-century Literature* , ed. Geoffrey Tillotson (New York:Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969) 447.

human behaviour. Atwood's Irish immigrant servant girl may have been part of nineteenth-century Ontario but issues of child abuse and abortion remain universal problems.

Prior to being in Kinnear's employ, Grace claims to have had an extraordinary experience after Mary Whitney, her fellow servant, bleeds to death as the result of having an abortion. Grace tells Simon that she heard Mary's voice say *Let me in* although Mary is dead, lying with her eyes wide open, staring at the ceiling. Grace decides that Mary instead had said *Let me out* and Grace opens the window, hoping that Mary's soul will fly out; there is indication that it is already too late since Mary's spirit may taken over Grace's body. Later, Grace collapses into a state of unconsciousness and on awakening:

> I cried and ran out of the house, because I said that Grace was lost and gone in the lake and I needed to search for her... they feared for my reason which must have been unsettled by the shock of it all ... after, I fell into a deep sleep ... when I woke I knew I was Grace and that Mary was dead ... I had no memory of anything I said or did between the two long sleeps and this worried me. And so the happiest time of my life was over and gone (*AG* 180).

Atwood sustains the suspense of Grace's identity/state of mind to the end and we are left wondering what motive Grace could have had for committing murder. Perhaps, Grace's already frail sense of personal identity was totally shattered when she lost her friend Mary who is the one positive influence in her life: Mary, who "smells of nutmegs and carnations," suggests that she and Grace should run away to the woods (*AG* 149 -150). When the housekeeper speaks sharply to Grace, Mary offers comfort and explains that in Canada, it is *respectable* to be a maidservant, for young women to hire themselves out and work for a few years in order to earn their dowries; after marriage to a young farmer who prospers, Mary says that she will hire at least one servant girl and so the cycle

will continue (*AG* 150). Mary also has her own theory about the backstairs being designed to keep the servants away from the family rather than the other way around:

> ... the front stairs were there ... so that they [the family] could go traipsing up and down in their fancy clothes and trinkets ... they were feeble and ignorant creatures and most of them could not light a fire if their toes were freezing off ... [she told me] if ever I was a chambermaid, I would have to carry a bucket of filth as if it were a bowl of roses, for the one thing these people hated the most was to be reminded that they had bodies. Mary was an outspoken young woman ... she had very democratic ideas, which it took me some time getting used to ... (*AG* 158-159).

Grace possibly suffers real damage from the society into which she is born and Atwood throws out hints that, even as a child,her protagonist sometimes contemplates strange solutions to family problems:

> I will confess to having a wicked thought, when I had the young ones all lined up on the dock ... five little ragged children with hungry eyes... I thought that I might just push one or two of them over, and then there would not be so many to feed, nor so many clothes to wash. But it was only a thought put into my head by the Devil, no doubt. Or more likely by my father, for at that age I was still trying to please him (*AG* 108).

Atwood is at her most ironic when she describes how Grace's mother rarely goes to church because she has too much pride to parade her barefoot children in ragged clothes in front of the congregation. As a Protestant clergyman's daughter, she knows what is decent in church (*AG* 106). The suggestion here is that the Protestant church respects only a work ethic which leads to middle-class prosperity and underfed barefoot children are to be scorned. All this Grace confides to Simon but, probably, she most reveals her innermost being and her most lasting sense of shame when she tells him that "it is very hard, Sir, to be decent, without proper clothes" (*AG* 106).

Grace develops a fetish for clothes and good fabric which are related to class distinctions. In Ireland, Aunt Pauline and Uncle Roy represent modest

commercial success; their general store sells dress materials, lace and, most exotic of all, linens from Belfast (*AG* 104). As previously mentioned, Grace refused to wind her mother's dead body in Aunt Pauline's "almost new" sheet; somehow, a fine linen sheet could be an omen for a more prosperous future. Conversely, Grace harbours strong feelings of guilt for not honouring her mother's death by giving her a finer shroud for her journey into the depths.

Grace and Nancy's first encounter is in Toronto when Nancy comes to town on a shopping spree; Grace admires the crimson silk which Nancy buys to make a winter dress but secretly wonders, "what a housekeeper would be wanting with a dress like that" (*AG* 200). They take an instant liking to each other and, after some consideration, Grace decides to go to Richmond Hill since Nancy needs another servant to help her with the housework and also longs for some female company as Mr. Kinnear is often away. Grace admits that the main reason that she leaves her position in Toronto is because Nancy reminds her of her dear friend Mary (*AG* 200).

On her home ground, however, Nancy seems like another person, an aloof lady who barely acknowledges Grace's arrival:

> There were flowers planted in front of the verandah, white peonies and pink roses, and a gracefully dressed lady with a triple flounce was cutting them ... she straightened up and covered her eyes with her hand, and I saw that she was wearing gloves; and then I recognised that this lady was Nancy Montgomery. She was wearing a bonnet the same pale colour as her dress ... she waved a hand daintily in my direction, but she made no move to come over to me; and something squeezed tight about my heart (*AG* 208).

Again, there is the suggestion of a split personality which seems to mirror Grace's links with memories of Mary or an image of Grace's mother as a young woman. The friendly fun-loving girl, who had ardently persuaded Grace to move to Richmond Hill now seems cold and remote, a pale shadow of her

former self; like Grace's ghostly mother or like a fashion plate, right out of Godey's Ladies Book. Grace later discovers an old copy of this fashion book hanging in the outhouse; before using it as toilet paper, Grace takes a good hard look at the fashionable lady on each sheet, sometimes an English duchess and sometimes a high-society lady from New York. She later reflects that, once one's picture gets published, one can exercise no control over what ends it may serve: a fitting allusion to her own predicament as "celebrated murderess" (*AG* 216).

The predominant message of Atwood's ironic style is that women have many facets. It is true, however, that Atwood's minor characters can often seem to be peculiarly one-sided. Lydia, the governor's daughter, is a caricature of the Victorian maiden: her girlfriends write sentimental poetry in her Keepsake Album which contains snippets of ribbon and magazine pictures of faraway places like the Picturesque Monasteries of the French Alps and Niagara Falls in summer and winter (*AG* 25). Grace's father, the stereotype of the drunken Catholic Irishman, is another caricature although Atwood changes his typecasting somewhat by making him a Protestant Englishman thus suggesting that child abuse, drunkenness and poverty are not exclusively characteristics of Irish Catholic emigrants. Even Grace's mother is a caricature of an over-burdened Victorian mother whose childbearing undoubtedly served to shorten her life; Mr Kinnear and James McDermott himself are presented as stereotypical social misfits, from two different classes, who have few redeeming qualities. Atwood may caricature most of her minor characters in order to create a flat background for the multi-dimensional characters of the three maidservants Grace, Mary and Nancy, for this is essentially their story; they experience change and undergo development in their lifetimes and Mary and Nancy die

tragic deaths. As "Puss in the Corner" (quilting pattern and Atwood's title for Chapter III) Grace emerges as the cat-with-nine-lives; ironically, Mary and Nancy step out of their servant role in that they consort with "gentlemen" and thus seal their own fates.

Nancy's good fortune is exemplified by her fine bedroom and large bed covered with a pretty quilt in pastel colours. Atwood has chosen to inform her readers that the quilt's pattern is called "Broken Staircase," foreshadowing that Nancy's upwards mobility has peaked and that she will draw her final breath in the cellar, the lowest level in Kinnear's house (*AG* 248).

The ensuing trip to church, when Nancy lends Grace a dress and bonnet, invokes memories of Grace's childhood poverty. The farmers and their wives (and those who are hired out as servants) whisper among themselves as Nancy passes by and Grace observes that "they think that the church is a cage to keep God in, so that he will stay locked up and not go ... looking into the depths and darkness and *doubleness of their hearts*." Nancy shows her own *doubleness* when she thanks Grace for accompanying her to church but insists that Grace immediately return her borrowed finery (*AG* 254).

Doubling-of-personalities is first evident when Dr. Simon Jordan meets Grace: in the corner of the prison cell, he perceives an ethereal creature with thin hunched shoulders and bare feet, auburn tendrils of hair escaping from under what seems to be a wreath of white flowers (*AG* 59). Then, the vision changes, for, as Grace walks into the light, he perceives an entirely different woman:

> ... straighter, taller, more self-possessed, wearing the conventional [prison] dress with a striped blue and white skirt, beneath which were two feet, not naked at all but enclosed in ordinary prison shoes. There was even less escaped hair than he had thought ... most of it tucked was under a white cap (*AG* 59).

In other words, a haunting wraith-like creature merges into a respectable Irish servant girl. But which image best represents Grace Marks?

If Crawford and Urquhart make a connection with Emily Brontë (see Chapters I and II) then surely Atwood makes a similiar connection with Susanna Moodie. In her book *Strange Things,* Atwood pays tribute to first-wave nineteenth-century women writers who wrote about Canada. She includes Anna Jameson (*Winter Studies and Summer Rambles*) who comes to Canada in 1833 as the wife of the Attorney General. Atwood describes her as "the tourist" who makes a two-month "fully catered excursion [into the wilderness] complete with voyageur canoe crew, parasol and smelling salts." (*ST* 94). Catharine Parr Traill is "the coper" and much admired by second-wave writer, Margaret Laurence, whose protagonist Morag Gunn is awed by Catharine's "coping abilities" for "Catharine would not have been found one morning lingering over a fourth cup of coffee... no such sloth for Catharine P.T." (*The Diviners* [1974] 94-98). Qtd. by Atwood (*ST* 95-96).

> Scene at Traill House, circa 1840
>
> CPT out of bed, fully awake, bare feet on the sliver-hazardous floor-boards-- no, take that one again. Feet on the homemade hooked rug. Breakfast cooked for the multitude. Out to feed the chickens, stopping briefly on the way to pull fourteen armloads of weeds out of the vegetable garden and perhaps prune the odd apple tree in passing. The children's education hour, the umpteen little mites lisping enthusiastically over this enlightenment. Cleaning the house, baking two hundred loaves of delicious bread, preserving half a ton of plums, pears, cherries, etcetera. All before lunch.
> *Catharine Parr Traill, where are you now that we need you? Speak, O lady of blessed memory* (Ibid 98).

But it is Moodie who most intrigues Atwood, for, in Moodie's books, "people go mad, commit murder, get lynched; she leans more towards drama and Gothic

effects than she does food preparation (Atwood calls Susanna "the dismayed"). Susanna is always getting 'rough deals' like thieves in the house or 'the house going on fire in the middle of the night or people stuffing chipmunks up her chimney' (*ST* 96-97).

In a spirit of curiosity, Susanna visits the Toronto Lunatic Asylum where she observes Grace Marks.

> Among these raving maniacs, I beheld Grace Marks -- no longer sad and despairing [as she had to appeared to be at the penitentiary,] but lighted up with the fire of insanity and glowing with a hideous and fiend-like merriment ... she fled shrieking like a phantom into one of the side rooms (*LIC* 224).

Atwood's "shrieking phantom" is Mary, who hides behind the sheets in the drying room and moans like a ghost, thereby sending Grace into fits of uncontrollable laughter. The girls chase each other up and down the rows of washing; they parade around in their mistress's corsets with their noses in the air, in imitation of their employer and fall back on piles of linen, overcome by laughter. As Grace says to Simon, " these are just the high spirits of youth, which do not take always take a very dignified form, as I am sure you have had cause to observe, Sir " (*AG* 160). Young women, who indulge in boisterous high-spirited behaviour, are often called "madcaps."

Atwood states that "Moodie's first-hand observations are generally trustworthy, so if she reports a shrieking, capering Grace, that is no doubt what she saw " (*AG* 464). Atwood however ultimately does quarrel with Moodie's account of the aftermath of Nancy's murder in that Moodie narrates that McDermott cut her body into four pieces. This is McDermott's own story, related to the lawyer McKenzie who gave this information to Susanna Moodie. Atwood finds nothing in the press coverage to support this grisly fact and she surmises that the press were unlikely to miss such luridness. Atwood concludes that

Moodie had the "feel" for a good story and liked to add colourful embroidery. In her own version of Grace's story, one could observe that Atwood's version also "loses nothing in the [re]telling."

Atwood's research reveals that Grace goes back to the penitentiary, on the recommendation of the humane Joseph Workman, who takes over as Medical Superintendent, just after the publication of Moodie's book.

The fictional correspondence between Simon Jordan and Dr Samuel Bannerling, who had been a doctor at the asylum, reveals Bannerling's impression of Grace whom he had seen:

> ... as an accomplished actress ... nothing being lacking to the impersonation but Ophelia's wildflowers entwined in her hair... who managed to deceive not only the worthy Mrs Moodie ... but several of my colleagues as well ... being an example that when a handsome woman goes through the door, good judgement flies out the window (*AG* 71).

A later account by William Harrison credits Grace with "having had a lively disposition ... pleasant manners ... perhaps an object of jealousy to Nancy ... [Grace's] personality [did not suggest] an embodiment of concentrated iniquity" [McDermott's claim].[94]

Grace's lack of status, as an Irish emigrant, has some bearing on the case and her Protestant religion, plus the fact that she was a woman, may have saved her from the hangman's rope. Grace recalls that she had stated in her Confession that she did indeed come from the North of Ireland:

> ... but I thought it very unjust when they wrote down that *both the accused were from Ireland by their own admission* . This made it seem like a crime, and I don't know that being from Ireland is a crime; although I have often seen it treated as such. But of course, our family is Protestant and that is different (*AG* 103).

Mrs. Honey, the housekeeper at Grace's first place of employment, asked

94 William Harrison, "Recollections of the Kinnear Tragedy " written for the *Newmarket Era*, 1908. qtd by Atwood, foreword to Chapter V11 "Snakes" in *Alias Grace.*

questions of Grace which exemplified nineteenth-century Protestant Ontario towards Irish Catholics:

> ... [she asked] if I was a Catholic, as those from Ireland generally were; and if so, she would have nothing to do with me, as the Catholics were superstitious and rebellious Papists who were ruining the country; but she was relieved to hear that I was not (*AG* 128).

Simon sees nothing unusual in Grace's family situation as a child and her crossing of the Atlantic; he notes "only the usual poverty and hardships, etc." (*AG* 132). He confesses that it would afford him some satisfaction if Grace appeared to be just a little mad, but instead she manifests "a composure that a duchess might envy ... she sits on a cushion and sews a fine seam ... cool as a cucumber and with her mouth primmed up like a governess's" (*AG* 132-133). Simon finds her case to be fascinating as otherwise he would have been totally bored by the dullness of the society in which he finds himself. There is, however, one visitor to the area with whom he feels something in common, "one Dr. Du Pont ... but he is a devotee of the Scottish crackpot Braid, and a queer duck himself" (*AG* 133).

Grace and Jeremiah/Du Pont have a mesmerising association in that, when their paths cross, Grace is usually on the threshold of "new happenings." She settles into her first place of employment as Jeremiah comes up the drive with his entourage of singing urchins, for all the world like the Pied Piper. Jeremiah is a man in motley who crosses borders both in the sense of identity changes and geographical locations; he spreads his goods in front of Grace who is fascinated by his laces, buttons and bows. Jeremiah fills the kitchen with his presence, flattering the women and flashing his brilliant smile; Grace settles for four bone buttons to sew on her dress and Jeremiah presses an extra button into her hand, nodding sagely and saying that uneven numbers are luckier than

even ones. Fixing her with a look from his dark and intelligent eyes, he speaks in a low voice, "There's sharp rocks ahead ... then he said the strangest thing ... he said, you are one of us" (*AG* 155). Jeremiah Pontelli is Atwood's outsider, the man who hangs around on the fringes of "respectable" Anglo-Canadian society; he is the Other, a tanned black-haired gypsy and he is both Urquhart's Celtic poet-shaman from under the sea and her Exodus Crow in the Canadian wilderness.

Grace is adept at assuming what she calls her "stupid look" (*AG* 40) and she probably adopts this look as she tells Simon that she has no idea what Jeremiah was talking about. Surely, Grace had some idea of the gypsy tradition in Irish life and that gypsies were credited with an ability to see into the future. Atwood never attempts to come to any conclusions about Grace's guilt or innocence and the reader is left guessing even when the final chapter is closed. Atwood states that:

> ... she [Grace] was certainly literate, as the warden's journal depicts her writing letters. She so impressed so many respectable persons -- clergymen among them--that they worked tirelessly on her behalf and submitted many petitions aimed at securing her release, seeking medical opinion to bolster their case (*AG* 465).

Although he is a fictional character, Atwood has " attempted to ground Dr. Simon Jordan's speculations in contemporary ideas that would have been available to him" (*AG* 466). The mid-nineteenth century was noted for the creation of clinics and asylums and new theories in mental health were the order of the day. Writers and scientists alike were curious about :

> ... phenomena, such as memory and amnesia, somnambulism, hysteria, trance states ... and the import of dreams [where] the interest was so widespread that even a country doctor like Dr. James Langstaff recorded his patients' dreams. "Disassociation of personality," or *dedoublement* ... was being seriously debated in the 1840's [acquiring] much greater vogue in the last three decades of the century (*AG* 466).

Alternatives to traditional patriarchal religions were also beginning to find a voice in the mid-nineteenth century; the "rappings" of the Fox sisters, residents of New York State at the end of the 1840's, originated the spiritualist movement in North America. Belleville was formerly home to the sisters and the movement thrived in the Kingston-Belleville area. Moodie herself eventually became a convert (*AG* 466).

> Spiritualism was the one quasi-religious activity of the times in which women were allowed a position of power -- albeit a dubious one, as they themselves were assumed to be mere conduits of the spirit will (*AG* 466).

Our first impression is that Atwood herself seems dubious of an activity which includes summoning spirits from another world. As previously mentioned, however, Atwood long has been "haunted" by Moodie's story of Grace Marks:

> Then 20 years later (after writing *The Servant Girl* in 1974) while Atwood was in a Zurich hotel looking out the window, the author had a vision of Grace in the prison yard. "I sat down and wrote the opening scene [of the novel] on the hotel stationary," Atwood recalls (*AA* 45).

The Moodie/Grace "spirit will" has a powerful impact on Atwood which is not to suggest that Atwood is a "mere conduit" since she retells the story in such a way as to make it inimitably her own. Atwood is by no means the only Canadian author fascinated by Moodie for she also shows up as a ghost in Timothy Findley's *Headhunter*.[95]

Gunnars and van Herk argue that emigrants suffer some sense of dislocation/disassociation of personality/dedoublement and Atwood seems to support this argument. Her fictional account of Grace's *mesmerism* by Jeremiah/Du Pont reflects the temper of the times. As previously mentioned, Simon notes that Du Pont describes himself as being attracted to the work of

95 Timothy Findley, *Headhunter* (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd, 1993).

James Braid, who was noted for "neuro-hypnotism," a type of psychiatric technique which gave scientific respectability to mesmerism in the 1850's: *Mesmerism* attracts a number of charlatans and Du Pont was among their number; his knowledge of Braid's work therefore serves to put him in good standing with Grace's medical examiners.

Grace recalls that Jeremiah travels as a Mesmerist (*AG* 306) for she is well acquainted with him, having seen him on the eve of the Kinnear - Montgomery murders; he tried to persuade her to run away with him because he "smelt a rat":

> You could travel with me... you could be a medical clairvoyant; I could teach you how, and instruct you in what to say, and put you into the trances. I know by your hand that you have a talent for it and with your hair down you would have the right look (*AG* 268).

When Grace is introduced to Dr Du Pont in the governor's house, she smothers her recognition of Jeremiah; neither does Grace mention a "dress rehearsal" before the "big event " for neither Grace nor Atwood are about to reveal *all* their secrets. Hence, it is hard to know what fabrication Grace and Jeremiah stitch between them. Atwood manages to convey convincingly the factuality of Grace's social reality: she is a nineteenth-century woman prisoner who is being used as a guinea pig and the truth is that her examiners have no way of knowing if she will be driven across the border into insanity.

When Jeremiah succeeds in putting Grace into a trance, Mary Whitney's spirit comes through; Atwood based the fate of this character on a similar case, found in the records of Dr. Langstaff of Richmond Hill (*AG*, 466). The "voice" (Mary's) tells how she borrows Grace's "earthly shell. Her fleshly garment " and urges her paramour McDermott to kill Nancy; Mary liked the asylum where she could laugh and talk and tell her story. "But nobody listened to me ... I was not

heard." (*AG* 403). When Jeremiah brings Grace out of her trance, she calmly announces that she was dreaming of her mother, drifting in the sea and that her mother was now at peace (*AG* 403).

Grace, now in a reflective mood, muses about what she would put in her Keepsake Album if she had one:

> A bit of fringe, from my mother's shawl. A raveling of red wool from the flowered mittens Mary Whitney had made for me. A scrap of silk, from Nancy's good shawl. A bone button, from Jeremiah. A daisy, from the daisy chain made for me by Jamie Walsh [a young hired hand who worked for Kinnear and testified at the trial. The fictional Jamie eventually marries the fictional Grace]. Should it be only the good things in your life, or should it be all the things? A piece of coarse cotton, from my Penitentiary night dress. A square of bloodstained petticoat [denoting puberty]. A strip of kerchief, white with blue flowers [Mary's kerchief which Grace used to strangle Nancy]. Love in the mist (*AG* 382).

Atwood's research showed that Grace Marks was released from prison in 1872 and that the Warden and his daughter accompanied her to an unknown destination in New York State. Some writers have claimed that she married but there is no real proof of this fact for after 1872, all trace of her vanishes (*AG* 465). Atwood concludes that there are some questions which have never been answered:

> Whether she was the indeed the co-murderer of Nancy Montgomery and the lover of James McDermott is far from clear; nor whether she was ever genuinely "insane," or only acting that way - as many did - to secure better conditions for herself. The true character of the fictional Grace remains an enigma (*AG* 465).

The fictional Grace settles down in a small town across the border and occupies her leisure time with quilting. In a letter to Simon Jordan, she tells how she intends to border her Tree of Paradise quilt with "snakes entwined; they will look like vines or just a cable pattern to others, as I will make the eyes very small but they will be snakes to me" (*AG* 460). The snake in Paradise can

be interpreted in two ways: either as the symbol of Truth and Knowledge or as the symbol of Evil. "Others" will not recognise her snakes for their vision is narrow and only Grace knows her own Truth. The fruit of the tree will be red triangles where Grace will use use feather stitching. Quilters and embroiderers know this stitch by another name: the herring-bone stitch. Grace may well have strewn her path to freedom with many "red herrings." But Nancy, Mary and Grace will all be together at last, imprisoned in a quilting pattern which symbolises Good and Evil or the knowledge that life itself is a two-sided coin and that nothing in life ever truly resolves itself: one white triangle from Mary's petticoat, one yellow triangle from Grace's prison night dress and one triangle of "pale cotton, a pink and white floral, cut from the dress of Nancy's that she had on the first day I was at Mr. Kinnear's and that I wore on the ferry to Lewiston, when I was running away. And so we shall all be together" (*AG* 460).

Conclusion

A superficial overview of Atwood's *Alias Grace* would suggest that her protagonist is atypical for surely it is not the "norm" for nineteenth-century Irish emigrant servant girls to be incarcerated for the crime of murder to say nothing of spending time in a lunatic asylum. Atwood has received at least one somewhat negative critical response from Elspeth Cameron who calls *Alias Grace* a work of non-fiction.[96] Similarly, Akenson has been accused of writing "non-history" in regard to *At Face Value.*

Cameron finds Atwood's book to be "as over-manicured as a British lawn" (Cameron 40) and claims that the historical research, which included visits to ten archives, forays into Upper Canada's history which include the city of Kingston, Canadian medicine and nineteenth-century psychological theories, women's fashion, the management of household servants, lunatic asylums and prison life only serve to interfere with "the quirky tense freshness of Atwood's other work," (Cameron 39-40). Where Cameron makes some good points, she does not give credit to Atwood for solid historical research. Grace's double personality, like that of Mrs. Moodie, is divided down the middle, echoing "an enduring and profound aspect of [Atwood's] work ... [that] has keenly shaped Canadians' sense of themselves as a people," (Cameron 40).

Cameron does not stress the fact that doubleness of personality is part of the immigrant psyche and that Atwood has made one more step forward in that she makes a contribution to an understanding of this particular state of mind. Long before writing *Alias Grace* , Margaret Atwood was fascinated by Susanna Moodie's revelations of immigrant life and she comments on the Canadian pysche as if Moodie embodied Atwood's theory of it:

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96 Elspeth Cameron, "Alias Fiction" in *The Canadian Forum,* January-Febuary, 1997, 39. All further references to be noted parenthetically within the text by author and page number.

> ... if the national mental illness of the United States is megalomania, that of Canada is paranoid schizophrenia. Mrs. Moodie is divided down the middle; she praises the Canadian landscape but accuses it of destroying her; she dislikes the people ... but finds in people her only refuge .... she preaches ... the march of civilisation while ... brooding about the destruction of the wilderness ... she claims to be an ardent Canadian patriot ... while standing back from the country and criticising as if she were a detached observor, a stranger ... perhaps this is the way we still live ... we are all immigrants to this place ... in the parts unknown to us we move in fear, exiles and invaders.[97]

Gunnars and van Herk, as twentieth-century immigrants to Canada, seem to be in agreement with Atwood in that doublement/disassociation of ideas is part and parcel of the immigrant frame of mind. Van Herk inspires many interpretations of the immigrant/emigrant experience on the basis of her *overt/covert story* concept, for Grace's revelation to Simon Jordan is surely the emigrant's *overt story*, Grace's best representation of herself. Van Herk expounds on what she calls "the subject divided, contesting herself and her own complicity in the disjunctive fractures ... of economies and cultures." [98] She remembers what she calls her own "ethnic shock" as a Dutch-Canadian child growing up in Alberta:

> ... what my now-colleagues disparagingly refer to as "poor white," well not quite "trash", but certainly dirt-on-the-hands working class" .. that instant of ethnic crisis has been burned into the back of my neck[and has] spiralled into a repudiated narrative that cannot be told without my becoming ludicrously sodden with its poverty and clumsiness, its distain and its dismissals (van Herk 101).

Although van Herk's ethnicity is Dutch rather than Irish, she speaks well for the perceptions of any economically disadvantaged emigrant child and Grace, little

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97 Margaret Atwood, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (Toronto: Toronto University Press 1970) 62.

98 Aritha van Herk, "The Ethnic Gasp/The Disenchanted Eye Unstoried" Journal of Canadian Studies/ revue d'études canadiennes 31. 3. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by title (abbrev. Ethnic Gasp) and page number.

more than a child herself, represented the Irish *Kathleen* who had little status in nineteenth-century Ontario, a reflection of Ireland's own desperate plight.

Presumably, many Irish women emigrants successfully integrated into their new societies. They had a family support system and a few years spent in domestic service was an excellent way to learn housekeeping skills. Armed with such a dowry, the *Kathleens* have a good chance for upwards mobility by marriage to an energetic young farmer or woodsman. This was the promise fulfilled, *Kathleen's* version of the Canadian Dream; unfortunately, the social reality was sometimes a different story, for migration in itself was an unsettling process. Akenson advocates the need for research, "in all societies that received single Irish women in significant numbers: what happened to those who neither married or found a decent job?" (*TID* 182).

Some Canadian women historians barely allude to the "Irish single-woman" issue. For example, in the work of Alison Prentice et al., (496 pages) there is but one brief mention: "for immigrant women, particularly the Irish of the nineteenth and the Eastern Europeans of the early twentieth centuries, domestic service was at least a paid job and could represent upward mobility" (Prentice et al 123-124); yet again, research results in finding but one small scrap of material. There is, however, considerable general information on the status of servant girls in Prentice's work; parents usually approved of their daughters being in domestic service on the grounds that the young woman was in a protected home environment; the girl, however, depended entirely on the goodwill of her employers and class and ethnic differences often resulted in the mistress of the house distancing herself from the servant girl. The most difficult problem, for a girl who no longer had contact with her own family, was sexual exploitation (Prentice et al., 123-124). One recorded incident is not grounded

in the nineteenth century, and there is nothing to indicate that the girl in question is Irish; nevertheless, it is interesting to note that one eighteen-year-old servant, Carrie Davies shot to death Charles Albert Massey, scion of the wealthy Toronto family (1915). Davies stood trial and was acquitted, for one thousand supporters contributed to her defence.[99] This specific reaction was a long way from practices which date from 1837 when the Upper Canada seduction law came into effect. Under common law, a girl's father or master had the right to bring charges against anyone involved in an illicit relationship with said daughter or employee, on the grounds that resulting pregnancy would deprive the father/master of the young woman's services. The issue of family repectability seems to have been the major concern, for the attorney-general of Canada put it thus: " pained feelings, the disgrace and injury inflicted on the family of the seduced," all matteredalthough injury to the young woman herself was ignored. In contrast to the punitive rape law (where the punishment, by the mid-nineteenth century, was death) the seduction law was frequently called up. As a result, lawyers and fathers alike made considerable amounts of money.[100]

More often than not, *Kathleen* responded by leaving and thus was in a extremely insecure position for she was no longer respectable marriage material; prostitution was one solution and "the low status accorded domestic servants probably [facilitated] the entry of former servants into prostitution" (Prentice et al., 125). Akenson does an adroit turnabout on this image of the vulnerability of prositutes by presenting *Kathleen alias Eliza McCormack* as a shrewd woman who used her trade and her ambivalence towards her sexuality

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99 Genevieve Leslie, " Domestic Service in Canada,1880-1920" in Janice Acton et al., *Women at Work 1850-1930* (Toronto: Women's Educational Press, 1974) 74. qtd. by Prentice et al., 124.

100 Lori Rotenberge, "The Wayward Worker: Toronto's Prostitute at the Turn of the Century" in Acton et al., *Women at work,* 33-69. Qtd. by Prentice et al., 124.

as an opportunity for upward mobility.

The fact is that Irish-Canadian immigrant women have rarely been major characters in works of Canadian fiction and in writings of settlement in nineteenth-century Ontario; they were but "a small voice." They have inspired little academic study, hence Akenson's suggestion that fictional biographies may help fill this void. Although they emigrated in large numbers, little is known of their lives.

Daphne Marlatt has a concern for the invisibility of women in history and urges that we should search for lost and obscure texts on the lives of women. In her novel *Ana Historic* her example is not an Irish gentlewoman or servant but an English schoolteacher who emigrated to British Columbia in the nineteenth century. Marlatt's vision nevertheless supports the quilting motif which promotes the search for scraps which can be pieced together to get some sense of women immigrants beyond brief facts and figures for it is not only the stories of Irish women which have gone untold. Thus, Annie, Marlatt's protagonist, becomes intrigued by a brief annotation in the Vancouver Archives:

> Mrs. Sweeny was succeeded by Mrs. Richards, who soon became Mrs. Ben Springer and cast her lot with the struggling little hamlet, giving place to Miss Redfern ... great difficulty in keeping a teacher longer than six months.[101]

We hear nothing of Ana after her marriage and Marlatt's main thrust is to construct a history or a life story for Ana who seems to fade into the West Coast bush. The fact that women's history is too trivial to warrant attention is supported by Mary Daly, who speaks of a female community which was muted, silenced and made invisible by the dominant patriarchal society; she reminds us the first trinity was female and that one of the names of the goddesses was

[101] Daphne Marlatt, *Ana Historic* (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1988) 39. All further references will be noted parenthetically within the text by author and page number.

Trivia; as the patriarchal god replaces her, the name takes on a negative connotation in association with women: they are *trivial*, they talk *trivia*, everything that is women-connected is trivialised.[102]

Marlatt's representation of a nineteenth-century immigrant woman's life, in many ways, reflects what Atwood called Moodie's "double voice." There is a contrast between the trivia of the tea party and the hostess giving birth to her first child amidst a circle of her women friends. Marlatt's point is that giving birth is linked both to women's history and to women's writing. She makes the connection between the female body, women's language and creativity and deplores the fact that historical records often only reflect the achievements of men. Marlatt comments on a photograph [dated 1890] of five men posing in various attitudes "for posterity (prosperity)" (Marlatt 120). The caption reads "First dwelling of R.H. Alexander, afterwards manager, later occupied by office men as bachelor hall ... followed by a list of their names, and where is Jeannie Alexander in all of this?" (Marlatt 120).

Jeannie Alexander is the tea party hostess who gives birth to the first white child in the area, but her husband's managerial skills are considered more newsworthy. Marlatt compensates for such an omission by her graphic account of a woman giving birth "a glimpse of dark, almost purple flesh...an angry powerful O, stretched, stretched, hair springing above... Jeannie [but] not Jeannie, not anyone, this was a mouth working its own particular urge (Marlatt 125).

Marlatt succeeds in giving voice to the experience of childbirth in a way that I cannot recall in any literature that I have ever read. She breaks that

102 Mary Daly, *Gyn/ocology -- the Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) 78.

silence with great effect. Nineteenth-century women's writings observed "modesty" in their work which was meant for publication, although private letters revealed more intimate details concerning women's bodies. Moodie possibly provides the best examples with her references both to her own mastitis and to Jenny's disinterest in soap and water.

Currently, our best knowledge of nineteenth-century women immigrants, Irish or otherwise, derives mainly from women's letters and journals; they provide excellent insight into the early immigrant experience since there is nothing like "being there." Bridget Lacy's letters come as a welcome relief to the images of *gloom and doom* as projected by studies of dysfunctional behaviour in Irish immigrant women. Bridget is refreshing in that she sees life through the eyes of one who still has the hopes and dreams of youth:

> [Letter to Mary Thompson, Ireland] Addalad, 1832
>
> ... for to go for to tell you all we had to bear since I wrote last, would take a choir, and in troth I've no great time on hand, for sure enough, dear Mary, I have *changed my sitiation* since I came here. Now, I know what you will be saying--aye do I--as well as if I was at the inside of you "Oh ho! I knew what the tinder whisper and the loving pinches aboard the ship would come to and I wish you joy, *Mrs Bridget Benson*" (*ALUC* 133).

Bridget however is still single but has high hopes; her mistress has promoted her from nursemaid to cook, a "sitiation" which she thoroughly enjoys for Benson, when he drops over, is given many "a savoury toothful" (*ALUC* 134). Bridget, above all, is enthralled with the sugar tree:

> ... Mary--not a word of a lie do I tell you; you take a big gimlet and make a hole in the tree, (the maypole, I think they call it) and you boil it, and you--where's the use in my telling you anything about it, as you have no sugar trees at home (*ALUC* 137).

Lacy's delightful letters are a welcome addition to any study on Irish immigrant

women, both in terms of the music of her language and in the fact that she takes such delight in her new surroundings. Although there is no way of knowing what the future holds for her, we are at least assured that her "beginnings" in the new country seem fortunate in that she appears to have benign employers.

Jenny Buchanan, Moodie's servant, was also greatly taken with "the sugar tree" and seemed to have been in her element in her shack in the woods. Jenny is something of a mother figure to Moodie and in many ways, Jenny evokes the image of a mythological figure, the wise old woman of the woods and in spite of the fact that she is a minor character in the book, Moodie gives a vivid picture of an Irish servant.

Moodie and Atwood escape *trivia* (hopeful and nice-sounding) in their break with the Victorian essential character of women as the positive ideal, Patmore's *overt story*:

> Her disposition is devout ,
> Her countenance angelical;
> The best things that the best believe
> Are in her face so kindly writ
> The faithless, *seeing her,* conceive
> Not only heaven, but hope of it.[103]

Atwood and Moodie challenge women (our *covert story*?) to look inside themselves for Grace Marks holds the same fascination for women today as she did for nineteenth-century women: a sixteen-year old Irish emigrant servant girl, perhaps a murderess and for some time, an inmate in a lunatic asylum. As such, Grace remains a terrifying but attractive figure, full of darkness and mystery, the eternal feminine with all its question marks.

Traill's Isabella Gordon is interesting as the child of a Protestant-

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103 Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House,* bk. i. Canto III, 77. Qtd. by Walter E. Houghton in *The Victorian Frame of Mind,* 392.

Catholics marriage thus proving that some Irish couples transcended religous conflict; our attention is also drawn to the fact that servants recrossed the Atlantic at least once as did some lower-class Irish women of which Bella Stewart is one example.

FrancesStewart best exemplifies the Anglo-Irish who were part of the ruling class in nineteenth-century Ontario. Perhaps her overt story is that, in retrospect, she is seen as the nineteenth-century matriarch of what is now the city of Peterborough, but, surely, Stewart's covert story lies in her correspondence to Ireland with her stories of early isolation and later, her anxiety for her daughters whom she felt did not have the social and educational advantages which she would have wished for them.

The covert story, in terms of nineteenth-century Ireland, equates with lost mythologies waiting to be reborn and Urquhart says this best, for Mary O'Malley's eccentricities do not indicate mental illness in a "real" sense; rather, Mary is "taken" by the kind of poetic madness which we associate with a visionary, for she rises above her social reality as an Irish immigrant peasant girl. Canadian women authors have dealt with the immigrant experience in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but Urquhart and Atwood give a distinctive narrative*voice* to nineteenth-century Irish women immigrants. Urquhart, in particular, draws from her own Irish roots and is inspired by the work of Lady Gregory, a participant in the Celtic literary revival which took place towards the end of the nineteenth century; Irish-born women themselves have made little contribution to the literary world. One thought, which in itself could inspire a thesis, is that they had inherited an oral tradition whereas Irish men were more part of the public domain and thus "wrote" their experiences.

Smyth claims that Irish women have not yet recovered from the low self-

esteem suffered by an Ireland reduced to powerlessness, the image with which an Irish woman may still identify. Ireland is still the divided country of which Maria Edgeworth wrote, in 1817, "it is impossible to draw Ireland as she now is in a book of fiction -- realities are too strong, party passions too violent to bear or see or care to look at their faces in the looking glass" (J.M. Calahan, *The Irish Novel,* 1988, qtd. by Smyth 40). Yet Edgeworth had the courage to face Irish conflicts and through the persona of a servant, she examined the two-tier society which was Ireland in 1800.

More than anything, the *Kathleens* of nineteenth-century Ontario were representative of the trauma of their deeply divided history and perhaps, for this reason, were too controversial to have been featured as anything but minor characters in the writings of nineteenth-century Anglo-Canadian women writers:

> In Ireland, history is inescapable... Irishness remains an overwhelming question for both men and women, obsessively explored. What does it mean? What path will they negotiate between two cultures, two languages, two traditions? How are they marked by nationality? Are those marks the same for all of them, born on the same soil but of differing descent? Catholic and Protestant, North and South, "Gaelic Irish" or "Anglo-Irish": immeasurable complexities, unanswerable questions (Smyth 40).

Women's history does not consist of an account of momentous world events gleaned from history books; rather, it is gathered up from little stories, family chronicles, journals, letters, fictional tales of displaced people and can be both autobiographical or biographical. The history of women immigrants has been both lost and neglected and and it is only by searching for fragments that one can attempt to reconstruct such a history. The quilting motif is appropriate in the sense that one has created not a seamless work. Rather, one has pieced together many irregular pieces to form a patchwork which reflects the experience for Irish-Canadian women in nineteenth-century Ontario.

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65 **Protosimian Irish rebels with the same features as English and French Jacobins prepare for the coming conflict with the forces of law and order in Gillray's "*United Irishmen in Training*" (1798). (By permission of the Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)**

Fig. 1

64 The origins of Paddy the gorilla guerrilla. James Gillray's protosimian radicals or republican Jacobins in England conspire to subvert the government in "*The London Corresponding Society, Alarm'd*" (1798). (By permission of the Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)

Fig. 2

PUNCH, OR THE LONDON CHARIVARI.—MARCH 19, 1870

THE IRISH "TEMPEST."

"THIS ISLAND'S MINE, BY SYCORAX MY MOTHER, WHICH THOU TAK'ST FROM ME."

70 A Prospero-like Gladstone saves Hibernia from the fiendish clutches of Caliban in "*The Irish 'Tempest.'*" Here, Tenniel draws on Shakespeare's play to allegorize the "Irish Question," casting Caliban as the epitome of such evils as Fenianism and ultramontanism. (*Punch*, 1870)

Fig. 3

Appendix i

Chronology

*3000 B.C.	Stone Age settlers begin to construct elaborate Irish passage-graves such as Newgrange.
900s	In Greece, Homer composes *Iliad* and *Odyssey.*
753	Founding of the City of Rome.
400-300	Greece's Golden Age: the flowering of Anthenian democracy under Pericles; the time of Sophocles, Phidias, Socrates, Plato, et al.
390	Celts invade the City of Rome for the first and last time.
c. 350	Celtic tribes cross to Ireland and settle there displacing earlier inhabitants.
c. A.D. 100	Medb is queen of Connaught in Ireland.
401	The boy, Patricius, a Romanised Briton, is taken into slavery in Ireland. He is thought to have found his way back to Britain about 407.
410	Alaric the Goth sacks the City of Rome.
432	Bishop Patrick (the former slave, Patricius) arrives back in Ireland and is generally credited for converting the Irish Celts to Christianity.
475-476	Reign of Romulus Augustulus, last Roman emperor, deposed by the barbarian Odoacer; end of the Roman Empire in the west.
c. 500	Brigid founds Kildare.
557	Columcille (Saint Columba) leaves Ireland for Iona.
793-1014	Successive Viking raids on Irish monasteries. Vikings defeated decisively by Brian Boru at the Battle of Clontarf.
1170	Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland.
1556	Elizabethan plantation of Ireland begins.
1649	Cromwell arrives in Ireland and begins his massacre of Catholics.

1690	Battle of the Boyne: the Catholic (and Stuart) cause is decisively lost to the victorious William of Orange; the flight of the Wild Geese, the Irish nobility, begins soon after.
1695	Penal Laws are enacted, depriving Catholics of civil rights.
1801	Act of Union with England. Irish Parliament in Dublin dissolved.
1829	Daniel O'Connell, masterful Irish politician, forces Catholic Emancipation on the British Parliament.
1845	Famine. Massive emigration begins.
1893	Douglas Hyde founds the Gaelic League to revive Irish culture.
1904	William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory found the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.
1916	Easter Rising Irish Republic proclaimed.
1919-1921	Irish War of Independence.
1922	Britain and Ireland sign treaty establishing the Irish Free State, but excluding the six counties of Northern Ireland which, in 1996, still remain under British rule.

* Cahill 231-233.

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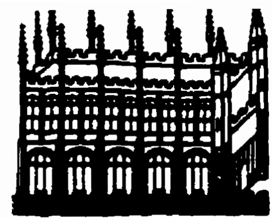

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Dear Ms Birch,

You will remember that you wrote enquiring about permission to quote in your thesis from two 1824 letters from Maria Edgeworth to Harriet Beaufort.

I have now received a letter from Lady Colvin confirming that you may indeed quote from the letters. Lady Colvin, of course, remembers Mrs Lewis, with whom she had a correspondence several years ago. She tells me that Frances Stuart was a protegee of Harriet Beaufort's, as I'm sure you knew.

Yours sincerely,

Judith Priestman

Judith Priestman (Dr)

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E Colvin [illegible] ... the Tower

April 14th 1825

Dear and very dear Harriet Beaufort — It was necessary to put me in fear for your life to make me feel how very dear you are to me hereditarily — both by father and [illegible] by your father, grandmother, sisters [illegible] considered that if one [illegible] of [illegible] the ties of affection [illegible] and hold me by ties that never [illegible] life and [illegible]

But I am sure I [illegible] my affection for you quite the contrary [illegible] mind [illegible] your enfeebled body [illegible] Be still my heart [illegible] sober plodding [illegible] my dear. I have [illegible] for you [illegible] and to [illegible] in myself [illegible] one evening future contemplation [illegible] only then and go on to [illegible] Constable's [illegible] which I enclose and I pray you to read now this minute before you go on with my letter and read slow and coolly.

Have you finished Constable's letter? — I have to say that I agree with you in thinking [illegible] that he has behaved very [illegible] — I trust yourself also [illegible]

Appendix ii

Maria Edgeworth to H.B., Edgeworths Town, March 8th, 1825

Edgeworths Town

March 8th 1825

My dear Harriet - In the first place I hope you have not sent one of your smooth notes to Mr Wilmot Horton because I and all friends here think on of mine lefs smooth might do the businefs better as the gentlemans memory wants rubbing up-

I enclose a note wh[h] I hope will not cost you double its worth - Put in cover - Direct & seal & sent it -

Now as to Dear F Stewarts letters I rejoice that we may proceed conscience-free-I differ from you my dear as to the mode of publication-Independantly of the needful - I think that it would be more advantageous to the letters and to the writer that they should appear one by one than in a separate publication-I honestly tell you that I dont think they have body enough to stand in a book by themselves-as she herself observes the actual information has been given in other publications-Their value is in the picture of minuter circumstances-they should not be read de suite-but to keep up their interest they sh[d] be read as they were written at intervals so as to give the idea of the progrefs between each-This / would keep up the sense of reality-

Besides I think appearing actually as an author of a regular book w[d] hurt Fanny Stewart in the eyes of those who like Lady N and other friends have been

[Property of Christine Colvin, Oxford-not to be published without permission J.C. Lewis]

trusted with the sight of the letters one by one-they might imagine it had been a preconcerted scheme of publication-one by one this wd not strike-& it would not appear to be a work published with malice prepense for money-

I sh[d] prefer a monthly to an annual publication if I c[d]-but I know of no Monthly Mag except one with which you and I can have nothing to do-which for FS's sake I much regret-

I think that as to the efsential my aboulcasem pocket-book man will give more than any one else because he wants the support of name at present & whatever I can give beg or borrow (from Scott) or others must be paid for in this bargain--It is better to tell you at once that I sh[d] ask-f50--I sh[d] desire to have the whole before me & then to write a preface or note to him for publication to prefix to the whole-I sh[d] they say purchase the copyright & pay us in 12 months from the publication / of the first letter-By that time you will be able to judge if it suits the public taste-If you find it does not pay us in ten guineas for the letter published & return the rest-By this arrangement he might suit his own convenience by publishing them in what portions he pleases which is an object to him-

I do not advise the consulting Captn B-upon the publication-

If you approve of my proposal answer me by return of post because I must write to my man as soon as I can-He is very urgent for something of my own before next July I will mention one of these letters & offer a sight of it if you please-

Farewell-Mr E wants the rest of my paper-Pray instigate the Black Castle people to say how they sent that first set of Inheritance-Dont send the Highlands till they do affec[y] y[s] ME

Dear Harriet will you have the goodnefs to enquire from your friend Mr Gibson Trolee? when a ship sails for New York in which some poor women who are going there may be staamped at a cheap rate-It is reported here that a very good vefsel is to sail in a fortnight-Adieu your ever M E

Edgeworths Town April 14th 1825

Dear and very dear Harriet Beaufort-It was not necefsary to put me in fear for your life to make me feel how very dear you are to me-hereditarily both by fathers and mothers and by grandfathers grandmothers, sisters & brothers so endeared that if one mesh of half a score in the net of affection broke still you must hold me by ties that never would give way while life and sense and heart-strings endure-But I am sure I am not at this instant proving my affection for you quite the contrary-Your tender mind in your enfeebled body ought not to moved-Be still my heart then & be still yours--poor beating thing be quiet & gon on to sober plodding businefs-Not commifsions my dear I have none for you thanks to Anne Nangle-and to some humanity in myself I have none even in future contemplation-Breathe freely then and go on to consider Constable's letter which I enclose and I pray you to read it now this minute before you go on with my letter and read slow and coolly.

Have you finished Constable's letter?-Then I have to say that I agree with you in thinking as I am sure you do that he has behaved very handsomely-I trust you will also agree with me that / I should behave very unhandsomely to him if I accepted of L2..17.6 beyond the usual price per sheet, without in some way or other giving him value received it from myself; and I should do very foolishly to enslave myself & in short sell myself to a printers devil for said sum-or for any sum-It often happens that generous booksellers expect to be paid generously-I do not mean to say that Constable is one of these or that he has developed this

that portion of self approbation which I own to yoû I have lost by my the rashnefs of my first offer and the shilly-shallinefs of my subsequent thoughts-Let me take my own course & it will make me happy-set me well with myself again without which I cannot be happy-I cannot keep my promise without inconsistency-I cannot break it without shabbinefs & remorse-I have excited expectations in Fanny Stewarts mind which it would be barbarous to disappoint-I have obtained her consent by using my influence-I have obtained an absolute offer for so much money from a responsible bookseller-On my own account I refuse that offer then you my dearest Harriet as my friend as I do firmly believe you are must let me make good the money-Do this for me in whatever way you think may be least disagreeable to Fanny Stewarts feelings but say the truth if you please that for my own sake I insist on its being so-and that I rely on her kindnefs for never never saying one word more to me or to any creature but you upon the subject-Let it be between us 3-

I do not know in what way, by which means you remit money to her-Fifty pounds English is now waiting your orders at Hoares-If you please I will write to Hoare to desire him to answer any draught draft from any person you name to that amount-or if my own draft on Hoare would answer your purpose better let me know & you shall have it by return of post-I have not time to say more Ever affec yr Maria E /

Give my kindest love & sympathy to your dear mother & Louisa-to whom I had intended writing but I literally cannot Send me Ralstones letter wh[h] Mr E left on

You see my dear Harriet I tell you without scruple all my feelings for my dear little self-

There came a letter from Mifs Aikin about Mrs. Barbaulds letters which she wanted me to give up to her for publication-I enclose Mifs A's epistle (which I think unfeeling a little-but however read it) before you go on with what further I have to say

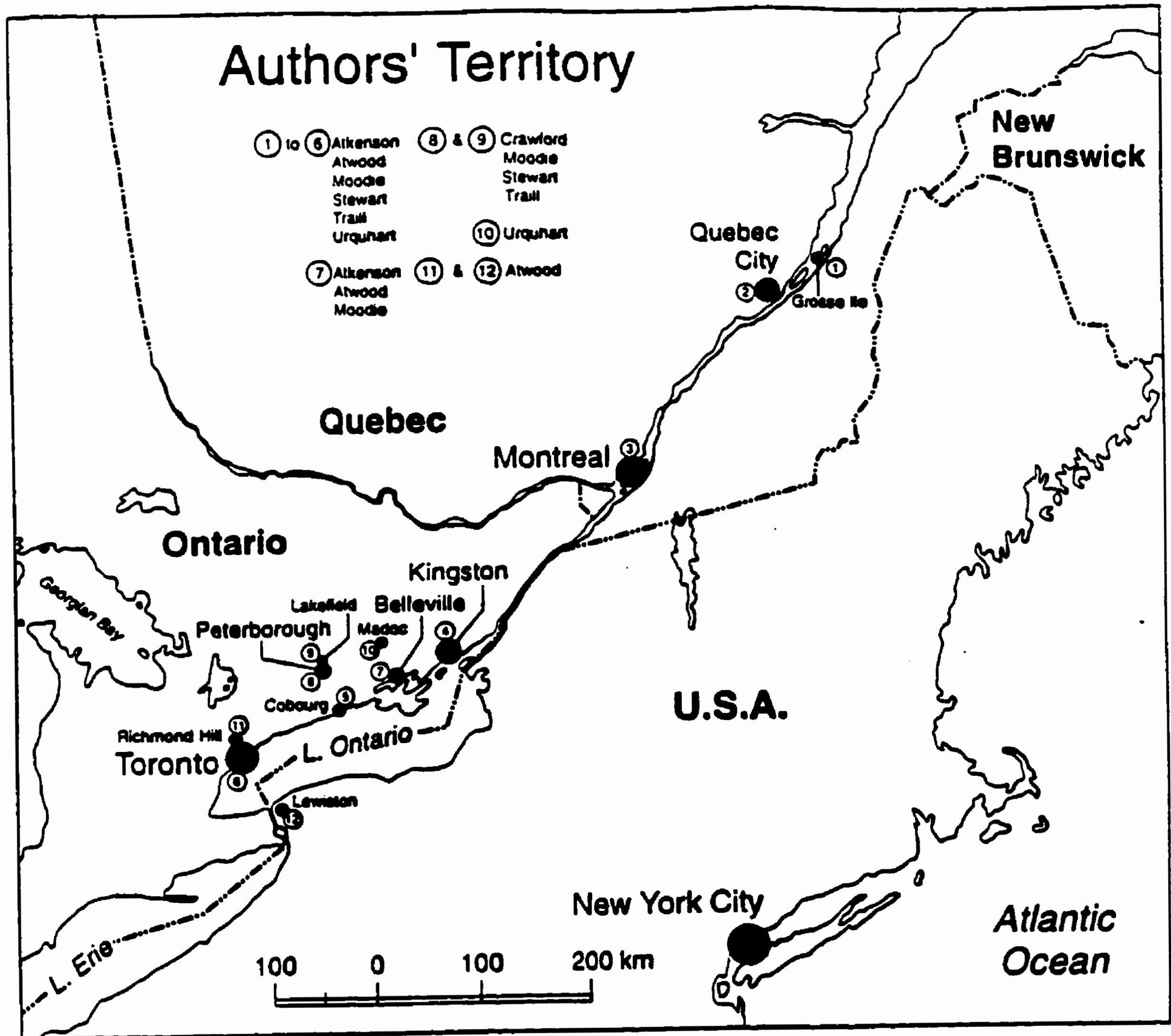
You have read it?-I refused to give her Mrs B's letters saying that it was my principle that private letters should not be made public without the special desire of the parties-both those who wrote & those who received the letters-that for my own part I should think it a great breach of confidence if anyone published or gave up for publication after my death any letter of min-Therefore I must do what I would be done by-That even if Mifs A could convince me that Mrs B would have had no objection or even that she wrote with the belief and intention that her letters sh[d] be published-still as I had not heart this from herself I w[d] not act upon it and besides all who now correspond with me-some celebrated people-many thank God many private friends would be startled by the idea that all their letters might come into print sometime or other, since I had given up Mrs Barbaulds-I recollect a similar application was made to me after Mrs E Hamiltons death & I refused to give her letters for publication-and I remember my father approved

When I was writing to Mifs Aikin the above sentiments which I have detailed to make your mind my dear Harriet follow the course of mine completely / it suddenly flashed upon me that it would be acting quite inconsistently to declare

expectancy in his own mind-But I forsee how it w^{d} end-and in short I could not accept from him of this surplus price-Even if my sentiments and opinion continued to be what they were when in the first enthusiasms of my project I first proposed it to you-But long before I read your last letter my dear Harriet my mind had changed and I had gone through all the a__bitations & misgivings which you describe & which E has further confided to me and I had come to the same conclusion that notwithstanding Fanny had consented & that I had obtained the consent of her friends still for her own sake in the first place I should wish that her letters should not be published-It would not only lefsen their value both with her friends but would alter the idea of the simplicity of her character-and in future give constraint &c-need not go over these thoughts & feelings-I am sure all agree in them-I was first brought to the sense of doing something that I did not thoroughly approve by perceiving that I was desirous the publication should be as little known or circulated in this country as pofsible-Why?-I desired that none of her own particular friends should ever see it as if that could have been prevented!-On reconsidering the letters themselves & comparing them with other publications I considered that much of their values depending on the personal interest & on details which we must supply / I could scarcely as a literary person feel sufficiently secure of their being worth the sum I required for them to entitle me to pledge my credit on the demand-supposing that they sh^{d} not answer to the publisher I could still as I said to myself make good the lofs-But why incur it-Why put myself at the mercy of a bookseller in such a precarious degrading situation-

the table my mistake-you may venture <u>one</u> packet per Earl of <u>Rofse</u> Parsons Town / Return Walter Scott & mifs Aikins per <u>Rofse</u> you may keep Constable

Address: Mifs Beaufort


Authors' Territory
1 to 6 Aitkenson
Atwood
Moodie
Stewart
Traill
Urquhart
8 & 9 Crawford
Moodie
Stewart
Traill
10 Urquhart
7 Aitkenson
Atwood
Moodie
11 & 12 Atwood
New Brunswick
Quebec City
Grosse Ile
Quebec
Montreal
Ontario
Georgian Bay
Kingston
Lakefield
Belleville
Peterborough
Madoc
Cobourg
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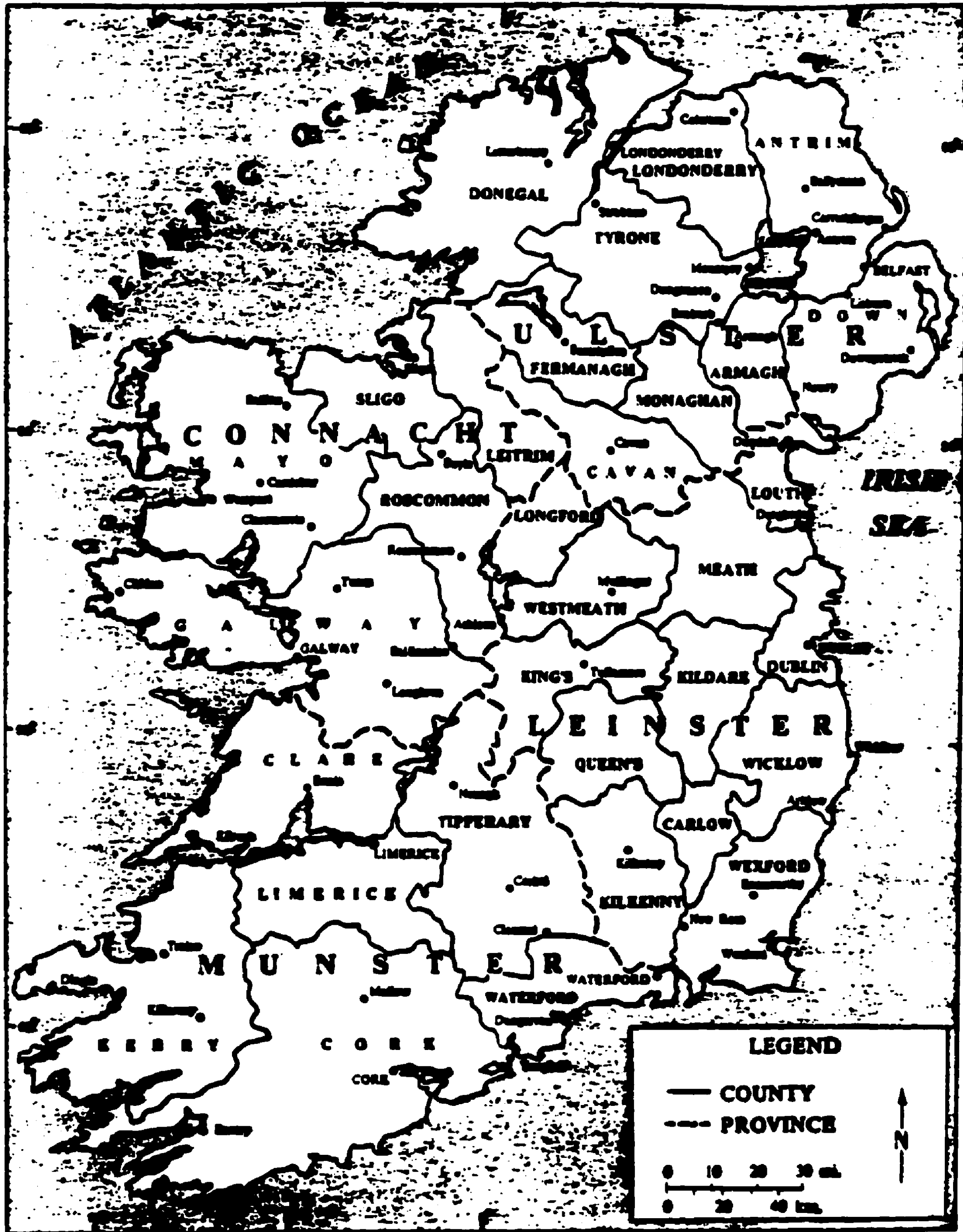


Ireland

 Carlow

5/9

Carlow June 26th 1872

Dear friends you will think that I have forgotten you altogether i have been very busy all spring since [illegible] it does not do very well for me to be so long away every thing was out of order but I have managed to get along so far very well myself [illegible] takes quite a time in the spring to get round all the corners when [illegible] is only one but i would rather [illegible] work away myself than be [illegible] with the most of the girls [illegible] I have three cows this summer my strawberries are doing very well [illegible] are going to have quite a crop of them the rest of my garden things the grub is eating everything up [illegible] looks very well so far we have had some very warm weather and I expect [illegible]

You were wanting to know how we got along coming home we happened on [illegible] cold weather but baby and I [illegible] it wonderful well for the [illegible] of our journey we was not much the worse of it I was glad to get home to my little shanty [illegible] it seems quite cheery this summer again [illegible] little daughter she is thriving very well with me she is growing to be a very pretty little child she is getting very like what little Minnie was she is a very good baby you will hardly ever hear her cry only when I neglect her to long I have only seen Janet and her baby once since I came home Alex was over lately and Janet was telling him that she had a letter from you and that Maggie had been very bad with the rheumatism I am very sorry to hear of all [illegible] troubles it seems to be a time of [illegible] amongst them all.

Dear Grandpa how i often do wish that we was near you all so as we could have you come and see us when you see my poor afflicted Father give him my kindest love and tell him to trust in Jesus who is able and willing to save i seen when i was down that his mind was troubling him a great deal he said he was grieving for the time that he had lost we have all spent our time to careless that is all I have to say at present only to let you know that we are all well and that I am enjoying very good health myself I feel strong and able to attend to my duties And i hope this will find you all enjoying the same blessing my best love to Grandma and all the rest of the family Alex joins in sending his best respects to you and Mother and all enquiring friends

no more but remains your

we called baby after Aunt Margaret and Maggie

and loving daughter

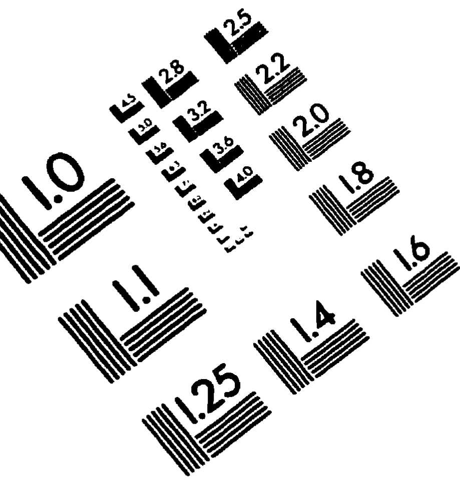
Bella [illegible]

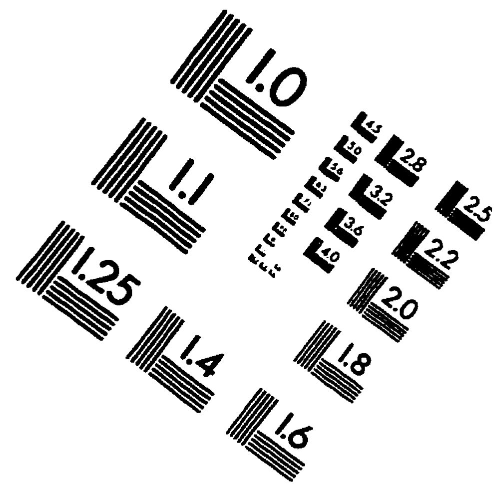
please [illegible] bad writing [illegible]

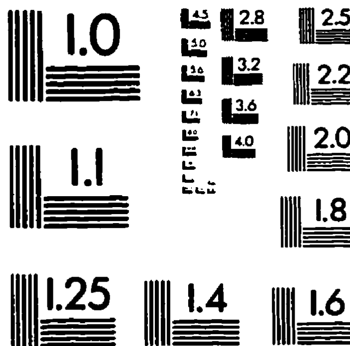
[illegible] the [illegible]

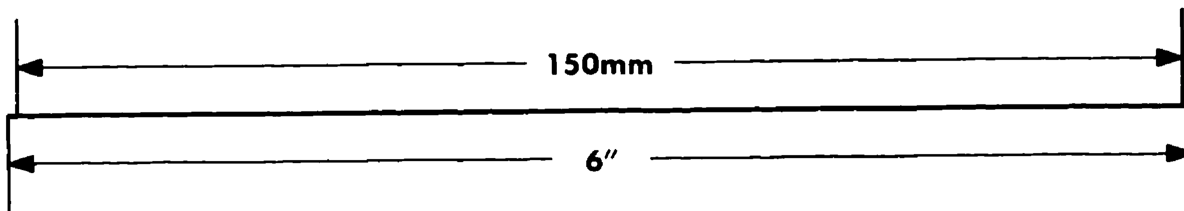
tell Maggie [illegible] i have
sent her two letters that if she
has not got them somebody must
be opening them please write
soon and let us know how
you all are.

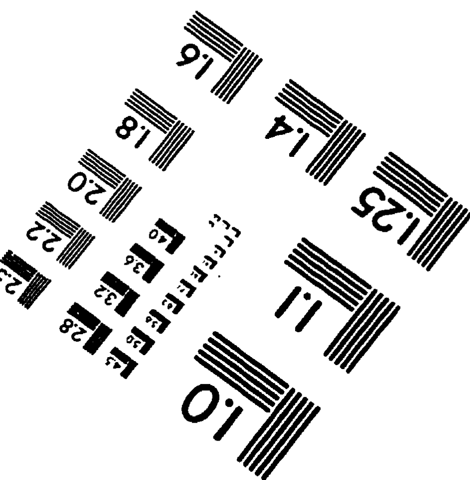
IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)











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