WOMEN WRITERS AND THE STUDY OF NATURAL HISTORY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY CANADA

by

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Abstract

During the nineteenth century, women in Britain and Canada read about natural history, wrote about it, drew it, and collected it alongside their male counterparts. Produced during a time when it was widely accepted that, as Charles Darwin succinctly stated in *The Descent of Man* (1871), “Man is more powerful in mind and body than woman” (597), women’s contributions to the natural sciences were often overshadowed or ignored. However, women in the nineteenth century in Canada contributed greatly to the development of knowledge of meteorology, botany, zoology, and ornithology. Indeed, their work sometimes anticipated the modern ecological critique of a preoccupation with cultivating and controlling nature in the names of science and capitalism.

This dissertation examines the intellectual, literary, and scientific experiences of nature for women in nineteenth-century Canada, namely the geographical region known as Upper Canada (1791-1841), Canada West (1841-1867), or Ontario (1867-present), and investigates the language and scientific systems that were available to women to describe those experiences. Instead of struggling amateurs restricted to domestic pursuits, nineteenth-century women writers were sometimes pioneering naturalists, popularizers of science, and innovators of a hybrid approach to the language of natural history. Naturalist observations and the negotiation of how to understand nature, seeing nature as hostile, neutral, or divine, were central elements in the creation of the nineteenth-century woman’s identity. The writers examined in this study—Anna Jameson, Anne Langton, Susanna Moodie, Mary Ann Shadd, Harriet Sheppard, Frances Stewart, and Catharine Parr Traill—read scientific and literary texts and used the information to shape
their understandings of the natural world, the weather, flora, and fauna. As educated, reflective thinkers, they use their letters, journals, emigration pamphlets, and autobiographical narratives to respond to systems of Linnaean classification as well as to participate in discussions which anticipated the shift later in the century to ecological perspectives inspired by Darwinism. This study examines the ways in which women writers were actively exploring shifting conceptions of the natural world as it developed alongside settlement and seeks to offer new ways of approaching the work of Jameson, Langton, Moodie, Shadd, Sheppard, Stewart, and Traill. In chapters devoted to meteorology, botany, zoology, and ornithology, this thesis rethinks both nature writing and women’s writing in Canada.
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[S]he keeps her ground from her utility; but when the state of semi-civilisation arrives, and the delicacies of her table, and the elegancies of her person become her chief concern and pride, then she must fall, and must be contented to be looked upon as belonging merely to the decorative department of the establishment and valued accordingly.

(Langton, A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada 289)

Art, literature and science remain to us …. [W]omen need in these times character beyond everything else; the qualities which will enable them to endure and to resist evil; the self-governed, the cultivated, active mind, to protect and to maintain ourselves.

(Jameson, Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada 118-19)

Rearing its noble dark-green fronds among the broken piled up branches of a brush-heap, I [sic] found the fine tall fronds of the dark-green fern to which Professor Lawson has given the name Traillae, in compliment to [me,] the finder .... This fern is so distinctive in its features that I think it may be considered a species rather than a variety.

(Traill, Studies of Plant Life in Canada 241)
During the long nineteenth century, women in Britain and Canada read about natural history, wrote about it, drew it, and collected it alongside their male counterparts. Women’s contributions to the natural sciences were often overshadowed or even ignored; they were produced during a time when it was widely accepted that, as Charles Darwin succinctly stated in *The Descent of Man* (1871), “Man is more powerful in mind and body than woman” (597). For example, in *Glaucus* (1855), Charles Kingsley, novelist, poet, parson, and amateur naturalist, presents the portrait of the Victorian lady naturalist at home: “I have seen the young London beauty, amid all the excitement and temptation of luxury and flattery, with her heart pure and her mind occupied in a boudoir full of shells and fossils, flowers and sea-weeds, and keeping herself unspotted from the world, by considering the lilies of the field, how they grow” (50). One cannot help but be struck by the passivity of the young beauty in Kingsley’s image. Depicted as one specimen among others, his London lady is not doing anything with her vast selection of natural objects. She may be considering the lilies and how they grow, but her understanding and activity are confined by her boudoir. The assumption is that Victorian women rarely translated their enthusiasm for natural history into anything aside from personal amusement and that their achievements make a poor showing when set beside the purposeful research conducted by male naturalists.

This dissertation examines women’s intellectual, literary, and scientific experiences of nature in nineteenth-century Canada and investigates the language and scientific systems that were available to them to describe those experiences. I strategically chose a constant variable: geographical location. All of the writers in this study were travelling or living within the region known as Upper Canada (1791-1841), Canada West (1841-1867), or Ontario (1867-present). Focusing on one area highlights how these women were responding as individuals to similar
environmental and social surroundings. Instead of struggling amateurs restricted to domesticity, nineteenth-century women writers were sometimes pioneering naturalists and popularizers of science. Naturalist observation and the analysis of various ways to interpret nature, whether it was hostile, neutral, or divine, were central elements in the creation of the nineteenth-century woman’s identity. The women writing about Canada examined in this study – Anna Jameson, Anne Langton, Susanna Moodie, Mary Ann Shadd, Harriet Sheppard, Frances Stewart, and Catharine Parr Traill – read scientific and literary texts and used the information to shape their understanding of the natural world, the weather, flora, and fauna. Not only did Canadian women writers engage with natural sciences, but also they were proto-ecological and proto-ecofeminist in these pursuits, anticipating insights of modern ecological thought, such as, what James McKusick calls, “the adaptation of species to their habitats, the interrelatedness of all life forms, and the potentially catastrophic effects of human intervention in natural systems” (28).¹ In his Generelle Morphologie der Organismen (1866), zoologist Ernst Haeckel wrote that “ecology” is “the body of knowledge concerning the economy of nature – the investigation of the total relations of the animal both to its inorganic and to its organic environment; including above all, its friendly and inimical relations with those animals and plants with which it comes directly or indirectly into contact” (qtd. in Stauffer 143). Over a century later, the term ecofeminism was introduced in 1984 by the French feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne in Le Féminisme ou La Mort, to describe women’s potential to bring about an ecological revolution. Although Jameson, Langton, Moodie, Shadd, Sheppard, Stewart, and Traill discussed the natural environment before the advent of ecology or feminism, they were still forerunners in ecological and ecofeminist conversations. Their interrogations into ethical ways to see and write about the environment make them foundational voices in a Canadian feminist approach to ecology. Through an

¹ I am using the term “proto-ecological” because the word ecology was not actually coined until 1866.
examination of their work, I ask a series of questions: What role did observing and discussing
Canadian nature play in the creation of a female settler identity? How did women in nineteenth-
century Canada create a compassionate way to understand and write about the natural
environment, plants, and animals? How might a modern audience read nineteenth-century
Canadian women writers as foundational voices in what would develop, in the later decades of
the nineteenth century, into an ecological discussion in Canada? Nineteenth-century women
argued for the moral and emotional consideration of nature and spoke against anthropocentrism;
however, to survive they also cultivated and consumed the natural environment and its
inhabitants.

Despite nineteenth-century gendered constructions that separated women from science,
women were employing scientific language. According to Margaret Rossiter in Women
Scientists in America (1982), the women examined in this study wrote during a time which was
distinguished by cultural concepts that confined women to the home, defined them as possessing
only “emotional feelings and behavior,” and restricted them from scientific discourse, which was
characterized as a “rigorous, rational … masculine” realm (Rossiter xv). Nonetheless, women
did participate in the natural sciences. In “Good Observers of Nature”: American Women and
the Scientific Study of the Natural World, 1820-1885 (2007), Tina Gianquitto examines women’s
contributions to naturalist studies from an American perspective. Barbara T. Gates explores the
topic from a British point of view in Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace
the Living World (1998). Both authors demonstrate that nineteenth-century women writers were
producing original work in the natural sciences and were examining “how scientific terminology
could inform arguments about perception, science, domesticity, and education” (Gianquitto 13).
In their projects of “discovering, recovering, and interpreting such voices” (Gates 1), Gianquitto
and Gates insist that the writers who explored women’s relationships to the natural world as well as the cultural construction of nature should be given significant consideration. To date, few studies exist that are as deeply informed and as capacious in the revision of our understanding of Canadian women’s relationship to the natural sciences as “Good Observers of Nature” and Kindred Nature. A Canadian perspective is both necessary and relevant, however, because Canada’s natural environment cannot be automatically equated with the nature encountered in Britain or the United States. Specific seasons, vegetation, and wildlife are fundamental elements of Canadian experiences, and nature plays a prominent role in the formation of Canadian identities, for instance how Canadians see themselves as survivors in a challenging environment. Canadian scientific and literary responses are specific to the land, weather, flora, and fauna. However, most scholarly studies on Canadian women’s involvement with natural history to date have focused on women’s botanical writing and on what Beverly Seaton calls, in The Language of Flowers (1995), the “culturally approved connection between women and flowers” (2), rather than on a broader involvement with the world of natural history. In order to fill the gap, this dissertation uncovers a multifaceted, evolving history of women’s engagement in Canada with the natural sciences and with the language of naturalism.

In trying to imagine, understand, and represent nature, the women in this dissertation transition back and forth between an aesthetic perspective characterized by the artificiality of art and a desire for the actuality of the physical world, its materiality. Terry Eagleton writes in The Ideology of the Aesthetic (1990) that “[w]hile preserving a root in the realm of everyday experience” (2), an aesthetic approach to the world involves sentiment and borders on “passion, imagination, [and] sensuality” (28). The writers examined in this study frequently examine nature through the lens of the aesthetic, an element of Jameson’s “spectacles couleur de rose”
(Winter Studies and Summer Rambles 16), giving imposed value to the environment from a specifically human perspective. For example, Traill frequently describes scenes as if they are part of a picturesque tour or a landscape painting: “These plains form a beautiful natural park, finely diversified with hill and dale, covered with a lovely green sward, enamelled with a variety of the most exquisite flowers ... whichever way you turn your eyes they are gratified” (Backwoods 77). The focus is on how particular types of nature, for instance, beautiful hills and dales and exquisite flowers, evoke an emotional response and inspire creativity and self-reflection in the observer. However, there are also moments in the writings when the authors attempt to move beyond the aesthetic dimension and experience individual phenomena in a more disjointed fashion with an increased sense of authenticity or materiality. This is what Timothy Morton, in Ecology Without Nature (2007), refers to as ecomimesis. “[E]comimesis purports to evoke the here and now of writing” (32), writes Morton, and has a strong “emphasis on situatedness” (33). The focus is not on where the narrator is coming from or her expectations. Instead, the attention is on a simulation of reality, on where the narrator is: what he or she can hear, see, and smell. The reader gets a glimpse of the environment rather than the person. Based on a concept of immediacy, ecomimesis “wants us to forget or lay aside the subject-object dualism” (151). When ecomimesis gestures to the natural world, it performs a medial function and “interrupts the flow of an argument or a sequence of narrative events, thus making us aware of the atmosphere ‘around’ the action” (37-38). While travelling in the Niagara region, for instance, Jameson writes, “I wandered down to a little wild bosquet beyond the Table Rock ... and just where the waters, rendered smooth by their own infiniti velocity, were sweeping by ... there I sat at the sultry noontide, – quiet, among the birds and the thick foliage, and read” (206). Moments like this, when the attention is on a “vivid evocation of atmosphere” (Morton 32), are
juxtaposed with moments when the authors see the world through an aesthetic lens that separates the perceiving subject from the object.

I investigate the historical construction of nature and its links to cultural conceptions of gender throughout the nineteenth century. An important parallel project to this one would be to explore Aboriginal practices and perspectives in the same time frame. The complete ecofeminist project as outlined by Karen J. Warren in “Taking Empirical Data Seriously” (1997) analyses the intersecting points of cultural domination in three spheres: feminism; science, development, and technology; and Native, indigenous, local perspectives (4-5). In its criticism of woman-nature connections, ecological feminism includes the interconnections among all social systems of oppression, for instance, ethnocentrism, Eurocentrism, imperialism, colonialism, and racism, as well as sexism. The environmental perspectives of Canadian Aboriginal peoples are significant elements in a theoretical framework that rejects universalizing and essentializing approaches to social and ecological problems. For reasons of space and focus, this dissertation concentrates on the first two elements of Warren’s triumvirate and examines the relationships between gender and science rather than Indigenous approaches to both.

Women writers of the nineteenth century have been perceived as avoiding the fundamental and complex questions of science concerning humanity’s place in nature. To a certain degree, this perception is justified; a survey of flower language books certainly supports the notion that female authors did not concern themselves with scientific conversation. Flower language books were a romantic vogue with an emphasis on social decorum and instruction on feminine refinement (Dix 1829; Hale 1833; Hooper 1842; Loudon 1846; Meredith 1836). These flower books contained little scientific knowledge and focused instead upon the regional, non-scientific names, cultural meanings, and aesthetic qualities of individual flower specimens.
Turning page after page of ornate and embellished plates, the typically female reader would find an anthropomorphic interpretation of each flower and gain an understanding of cultural significance and symbolism. The focus was social interpretation rather than scientific inquiry of the botanical world. Consider the following passage from Henrietta Dumont’s *The Language of Flowers* (1851):

> Why has the beneficient Creator scattered over the face of the earth such a profusion of beautiful flowers — … from the tiny snowdrop that gladdens the chill spring of the north, to the gorgeous magnolia that flaunts in the sultry regions of the tropics? … Why do flowers enter and shed their perfume over every scene of life, from the cradle to the grave? Why are flowers made to utter all voices of joy and sorrow in all varying scenes? … They have a positive relation to man, his sentiments, passions, and feelings. They correspond to actual emotions. They have their mission — a mission of love and mercy. (5-6)

Flowers are symbolic of emotions and of human experiences. Many female writers of this period, like Dumont, used the natural world as a means to discuss religion, domesticity, sentimentality, decorum, and morality (Gatty 1878; Loudon 1852; Phelps 1836; Twining 1868). Writers like Jane Loudon and Elizabeth Twining viewed nature as a spiritual realm designed by God and given to humans as a paradigm of moral behaviour. Elaborately illustrated floral books diminished the diversity of nature and reduced its meaning to established social and religious doctrines.

A closer reading of other types of writing about nature produced by women — botanical manuals, travel narratives, settler handbooks, scientific nature essays, and emigration guides — shows that women writers grappled with nature as either a living organism or a machine and with
the scientific advances motivating such shifts in conceptualization. Female naturalists in Canada found their own voices in relation to the natural world through fieldwork and a revision of scientific language. To what extent did Canadian women writers alter narrative modes which used nature as a means to teach lessons on feminine decorum? How did they use language characteristic of the sciences to understand and describe the natural world around them? There were two intersecting narratives. First, there were advancements in the scientific study of natural history during the nineteenth century, including the progression from Linnean classification to Darwinian evolutionary biology. Darwin, although writing after many of the texts in this study, exemplifies the tone and changing attitude of the time. These developments corresponded with the development from an as yet small international scientific society to a Canadian scientific community established around the time of Confederation. Second, in response to scientific advance, women’s literary and linguistic representation of the natural world developed in complexity and perspective throughout the nineteenth century.

**Ecofeminist Autobiography and Natural History**

Building upon concepts from ecofeminism, autobiography genre theory, and a Foucauldian theory of natural history to uncover the neglected, or perhaps forgotten, aspects of the lives and texts of Anna Jameson, Anne Langton, Susanna Moodie, Mary Ann Shadd, Harriet Sheppard, Frances Stewart, and Catharine Parr Traill, I explore what these women add to the study of Victorian natural history. Separated from scientific discourse, these writers turned to various forms of life writing, from writing letters to the emigrant guide genre, in order to write about their daily observations of the natural world around them. These writers, to varying degrees,
knew about nineteenth-century models for interpreting and ordering the natural world and expanded the boundaries of literary and scientific systems of knowledge and language.

Existing scholarly discussions conventionally tend to focus on nineteenth-century women in Canada as mothers, wives, travelers, emigrants, and writers. For instance, in *Mapping Our Selves: Canadian Women’s Autobiography in English* (1993), Helen M. Buss focuses on the “dear domestic circle” (206), the attention to “social customs, social life, and …home places” in nineteenth-century women’s writing (207). In her historical account of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill, *Sisters in the Wilderness* (1999), Charlotte Gray pinpoints a Canadian literary tradition: “the pioneer woman who displays extraordinary courage, resourcefulness and humour” (xiii). This conversation misses, for the most part, an investigation of early Canadian women’s literary and scientific involvement with the natural environment. Women interacted with the physical world around them and contributed to, and even changed, scientific and intellectual discussions of the day.

An ecofeminist approach illuminates the exclusion of nineteenth-century women writers from rationality and science but also the ways in which such writers challenged segregation. Emerging from feminist and leftist thought during the mid-1970s, ecofeminism analyses the conceptual connections between the domination of women by men and the exploitation of nature by humans. Ecofeminists argue that both depend upon a hierarchical culture and language of mastery and claim that “the history of the West plays out a patriarchal logic of domination, and that this logic is at the heart of modern science and technology” (Glazebrook 97). Although focused upon a gendered perspective, ecofeminism supports the basic assumptions of ecocritical theory. As succinctly stated by ecocritic Karl Kroeber, in *Ecological Literary Criticism* (1994), “[e]cological literary criticism concentrates on linkages between natural and cultural processes”
(1) and resists a preoccupation with rationalism at the expense of emotional and sensory aspects. Ecocritics suggest that literature reflects upon and helps to shape human responses to the nonhuman environment and consider the relationship between literature and the history of environmentalist thought and activism. Although the theoretical field of ecofeminism is multifaceted, most ecofeminist scholars explore the “nature of the connections within social systems of domination between those humans in subdominant or subordinate positions, particularly women, and the domination of nonhuman nature” (Warren, “Introduction” 1). The theoretical assumption is that the sexist oppression of women under patriarchy and the exclusion of women from scientific practices is not only connected to the longstanding historical association of women with nature, but also reflects a Western preoccupation with oppositional modes of language and ideology — human vs. nature, masculine vs. feminine, reason vs. emotion, mental vs. physical.

I am particularly motivated by the school of social constructionist ecofeminism because it rejects the basic premise of psycho-biological ecofeminism that women’s voices ought to be given a privilege, based on biological function and reproductive capacity, in articulating a new environmental ethic. Ariel Salleh lays out the latter kind of ecofeminism in “Deeper than Deep Ecology” (1984): “women’s monthly fertility cycles, the tiring symbiosis of pregnancy, the wrench of childbirth ... ground women’s consciousness in the knowledge of being coterminous with nature” (340). The social constructionist branch emerged in response to essentializing attacks in feminist theory (Sandilands 71) and focuses on disclaiming the notion that women’s abilities to care for the natural world are necessarily based in biology. Instead, social constructionist ecofeminists argue that the woman-nature association is a social construction disseminated through systems of language, including literary and scientific ways of

2 For a history of this association in Western culture, see Griffin.
understanding and writing about the world. Nature, human nature, and the woman-nature and man-science correlations are “discursive categories produced in and through social practice” (Sandilands 72) and are historically constructed ideologies.

The literary genre that I use as a framework to analyse the primary texts in this dissertation, especially in Chapters One, Three, and Four, is autobiography. I investigate only written works, but they range from private letters written to family and friends, through journals which anticipate a public audience, to emigrant guides and travelogues written for a wide readership. I call them all “autobiographies.” My working definition of autobiography is a text written in the first person to explore the construction of selfhood, to tell the story of part of one’s life. The intersection of self, life, and writing offers enough room to explore the multi-generic and contextual considerations which are central to the works of the writers in this study. This approach elucidates how Jameson, Langton, Moodie, Shadd, Sheppard, Stewart, and Traill integrated scientific conversations into their everyday lives. An autobiographical perspective also reveals these women’s constant, day-to-day contemplations of ways to represent the world around them and to forge their own female identities. The autobiographer decides where to assign meaning; scrutinizes the cultures of subjectivity available to her; and examines, sometimes with self-consciousness and sometimes not, discourses of identity (Smith 5). Since the late eighteenth century, autobiography has been recognized as a distinct literary genre and the site of critical controversies about ideas including authorship, selfhood, self-presentation, and language. For instance, David Amigoni argues, in Life Writing and Victorian Culture (2006), “Victorian life writing is best seen in terms of complex, overlapping contested constituencies such as class, gender, [and] familial and domestic relations” (2). The female writer defines her
own identity as she presents it either to a private audience of family and friends or to a public readership.

Approaching autobiography from a socio-historical perspective in *Living Autobiographically* (2008), Paul John Eakin asks whether or not determinism lies at the heart of our autonomous identities: “To what extent are the selves we think we are and the life stories we think we’ve lived the product of our position in a field of large-scale cultural [and, I would argue, environmental] forces?” (89) To restate Eakin’s question, does identity formation unfold as part of larger social structures, cultural processes, and environmental contexts? Yes, it does. For example, in his discussion of the emergence of the “meta-concept” of normality, philosopher Ian Hacking suggests that the Industrial Revolution motivated a paradigm shift in the Western concept of selfhood: “During the nineteenth century, the idea of normal people displaced the Enlightenment ideal of Human Nature” (“Normal People” 59). Hacking directs our attention to the curious phenomenon of “making up people”: “Social change creates new categories of people, ... new ways for people to be” (“Making up People” 223). Adopting Hacking’s view that there is a constant interplay between individuals and the available descriptions of selfhood, one may conclude that models of the self and therefore narrative constructions of identity are inescapably specific to culture, period, and nature: “[A]utobiography is a referential art: it self-consciously, usually explicitly, positions itself with reference to the world” (Eakin 21). As a reader and interpreter of autobiographical narrative, one must therefore situate identity formation in the context of cultural and environmental forces.

In autobiography writers not only tell the actions of their life stories, but also publicly speak of the boundaries of value systems, beliefs, ethics, and morals. Diane Bjorklund argues in her study on American life writing, *Interpreting the Self* (1998), that in autobiography, identity
and morality are inextricably intertwined. This is evident in Anna Jameson’s introduction to *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles* (1838) where she writes that her diary is “the result of what I had seen, and the reflections and comparisons excited by so much novel experience” (9). Jameson writes with a “tone of personal feeling” (10). The writer’s discussion of “choices made, emotions felt, and goals pursued” are automatically related to expectations and “ideals of what is honest, brave, just, kind, and responsible in one’s relationships with others” (Bjorklund 159).

Autobiographers may articulate, sustain, or challenge the prevailing moral values of their cultures by accounting for their own choices and actions. Jerome Bruner concludes in *Acts of Meaning* (1990), “The Self as narrator not only recounts but justifies” (121). By examining autobiographies in relation to their cultural contexts, one can perceive the range of issues that the author finds vital, namely what his or her concerns and values are. Autobiography presents an internal dialogue between the self and cultural boundaries of morals, reason, emotion, and individual responsibility.

Because autobiography is a source of biographical information and evidence of individual acceptance of (or resistance to) ideologies of social, literary, regional, linguistic, and sexual identity, analysis of the genre must include commentary on the surrounding environmental and cultural conditions, literary expectations, and linguistic boundaries. Individually, the authors of nonfiction writing extend the range of autobiography beyond personal account to larger cultural and scientific conversations. Their life stories and naturalist observations often collide. “How often do I wish you were beside me in my rambles among the woods and clearings: you would be so delighted in searching out the floral treasures of the place” (189), Catharine Parr Traill writes to her mother in *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836). She continues, “I have made out a list of the plants most worthy of attention” (190). Her style
combines an emotional narrative with a demonstrative, factual approach. Consideration of the natural environment in autobiographical form is therefore often a way to tell a narrative and record scientific observations.

For Jameson, Langton, Moodie, Shadd, Sheppard, Stewart, and Traill, naturalist observations become the key to understanding both a place and Canadian identity. The Canadian landscape, plants, and animals are an integral element in the daily lives and trials of these women writers and an important aspect in the creation of an ethical approach to nature. In his book *Ecological Enlightenment* (1995), Ulrich Beck remarks that “[O]nly if nature is brought into people’s everyday images, into the stories they tell, can its beauty and its suffering be seen and focused on” (14). The success of environmental awareness and environmentalist movements depends on a state of mind. Lawrence Buell argues, in *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001), literature “may connect readers vicariously with others’ experience, suffering, pain: that of nonhumans as well as humans” (2). Narratives may affect some readers’ understandings of the natural world as more or less disposable. Autobiographical writings, in their intimate explorations of an ever-changing relationship between the subject and her or his environment, express an experience of place that is complex. The writers in this study use their narratives about daily observations of nature, to varying degrees, to tell the story of their compassionate bond with the Canadian environment and its animal inhabitants and to encourage a similar responsibility and affection for nature in their readerships.

The ecofeminist and autobiographical models of the world are reflected in the language of Jameson, Langton, Moodie, Shadd, Sheppard, Stewart, and Traill. My ideological model is following Foucault’s *The Order of Things* (1970), which investigates “language as it has been spoken, natural creatures as they have been perceived and grouped together, and [cultural and
scientific exchanges as they have been practiced” (Foucault xiii). In *The Order of Things*, Foucault argues that the work of the naturalist revolved around the containment and classification of individual beings (139). Using meticulous observation of a limited number of specimens to which he applied a Linnean descriptive order, the nineteenth-century natural historian attempted to reduce the distance between things and words so as to bring language as close as possible to the observing gaze, and the things observed as close as possible to words (Foucault 142). “By limiting and filtering the visible,” Foucault observes, “structure enables it to be transcribed into language. It permits the visibility of the animal or plant to pass over in its entirety into the discourse that receives it” (147). The language is ordered; it is primary, certain, and universal. The spaces are “unencumbered … in which things are juxtaposed: herbariums, collections, gardens … [and] grouped according to their common features, and thus already virtually analysed” (143).

The women writers in this study employed a cultural form of natural history. Like some of their male counterparts, they often recognized that the natural world was not easily ordered, could not be accurately described within a continuous, self-enclosed system of language, and could not be separated from human culture. Each writer recognized the importance of careful observation and cataloguing flora and fauna while simultaneously emphasizing useful and practical knowledge. Natural history was not a distinct category with an isolated language; it was inseparable from human life and culture. Naturalist studies were a sort of literary genre, intertwined with story-telling, commentary, records, discoveries, traditions, and beliefs. At times, Jameson, Langton, Moodie, Shadd, Sheppard, Stewart, and Traill opposed the system of the Linnean systematist which in its basis “deliberately ignores all differences and all identities not related to the selected structure” (Foucault 153). The language created by these writers was
not one of universality preoccupied with “the continuity of nature” (160), but rather one of regional experience, adapted from European expectations and ideologies to fit the Canadian environment. In accommodating the challenges posed by local weather, flora, and fauna, the approach to the discipline of natural history was practical and was bound to a historical human condition. Naturalist observations enabled these women to participate in a modified scientific community and provided them with a means to survive in a new colony. The women writers did acknowledge the dominant shift to a systematic view of the natural world, as explained by Foucault, but their work is both literary and scientific.

A theoretical framework which incorporates aspects of ecofeminism, autobiography studies theory, and a Foucauldian approach to natural history supports an analysis of scientific and literary models of language in Jameson, Langton, Moodie, Shadd, Sheppard, Stewart, and Traill. These seven writers complicate the separation between science and literature in their interpretations and representations of the natural environment. I ask, how do their texts reflect the act of forming a female settler identity? What parts do natural science, narrative, and environmental context play in these women’s writings?

**Historical Context: Shifting Perspectives on Nature and Canadian Natural History throughout the Nineteenth Century**

Jameson, Langton, Moodie, Shadd, Sheppard, Stewart, and Traill were writing during a time of significant change in perspectives on the natural environment and on natural history. To analyse their writing as a response to scientific and cultural developments, the particular historical context must be established. Aligned with changing attitudes toward nature, religion, and science, the literary representation of the natural world was transformed throughout the
nineteenth century in response to scientific advancement and a shift from Linnean classification to Darwinian developmental theory. The first half of the nineteenth century saw an emphasis on cataloguing animals, plants, and minerals divided into the three kingdoms of Nature. Naturalists were most involved with the description and classification of species, a venture guided by the work of Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778), the central voice of natural history throughout the eighteenth century and in the early decades of the nineteenth century. In *Systema Naturae* (1735), *Fundamenta Botanica* (1736), *Genera Plantarum* (1737), and *Classes Plantarum* (1738), Linnaeus set out his scientific philosophy, the very philosophy which dominated natural history throughout the first half of the nineteenth century: the fundamentals of botany rely on the systematic classification and naming of plants, both by genus and by species. The descriptive order for natural history, as created by Linnaeus, sought to create a linear system for representing the natural world accessible to anyone. Foucault summarizes the purpose of the Linnean project: “confronted with the same individual entity, everyone will be able to give the same description; and, inversely, given such a description everyone will be able to recognize the individual entities that correspond to it” (Foucault, *Order of Things* 134).^3^ Plant anatomy and physiology were at the forefront of Linnean taxonomy; each specimen was classified according to form, magnitude, the number and position of the different parts (that is, roots, stems, leaves, stamens, pistils, flowers, fruits), and the relation or distribution in space of said parts. In the *Systema Naturae*, Linnaeus refers to his science as concerned with “describing and picturing” (19) and defines a naturalist as one who distinguishes and names the parts of natural bodies.

Inspired by Linnean convictions, naturalists aimed to find new species. Describing, arranging, and collecting specimens was the business to which each naturalist devoted his hours.

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^3^ Foucault’s *Order of Things* (1970) documents social attitudes toward natural history and offers insight into relationships between science and ideology. Also see Allen, Greene, and Thomas.
Naturalists sought “to group animals, plants, and minerals according to shared underlying features and to use rational, systematic methods to bring order to the otherwise overwhelming variation found in nature” (Farber 2). The focus on classification and nomenclature was rooted in a belief in the fixity of species. A species must have constancy and definite characteristics which are unchanged over time (Gianquitto 5). A species was defined as a group of fundamentally identical animals or plants that could reproduce among themselves but not with outsiders. Every species was described in terms of a standard type, usually an actual specimen preserved in a museum or herbarium, to which all members of the species were believed to conform. William Paley wrote in Natural Theology (1802) that “the contrivances of nature [which] surpass the contrivances of art in the complexity, subtlety, and curiosity of mechanism ... imply the existence of an intelligent Creator” (13; original emphasis). Because those “marks of contrivance, choice, and design” in so vast and encompassing a system as nature surpass the abilities of any one person to create, the designer must be God (44). Natural history enabled humans to obtain “knowledge of God through reason and the senses” by examining relationships between objects in the natural world (70), according to Michael Ruse in The Darwinian Revolution (1999). The belief was that the Earth and all the species on it had been created by God to suit humanity’s needs. Natural history in the time of Linnaeus focused on how the structures of individual species were adapted to their way of life according to a divinely inspired design.

Following the publication of Darwin’s Origin of Species (1859) and The Descent of Man (1871), the naturalists of the second half of the nineteenth century produced a new type of science characterized by increasing specialization and theories about the relationships and interdependencies within nature. As Hugh Raup explains, Darwinian developments led to new
ways of seeing natural objects: “Species or vegetation could be considered not as static things, but as mutable entities of which one could see only an existing expression, and which possessed a past and presumably a future development during which their reactions and forms could be different” (327). The species-gathering slowed down; classification began to be understood as a tool rather than the ultimate purpose of natural inquiry. There was a “growing disjuncture between the perception of nature as emblem” of divine design and nature as a “scientific construct … to be observed, investigated, and interpreted” (Gianquitto 12). The new school of natural history, which was most prominent in the second half and primarily the later decades of the nineteenth century, paid close attention to how various species related to each other and how different systems changed over time (Beer 8). The fundamental idea, stated by John Dupre in Darwin’s Legacy (2003), is “descent with modification” (12). Species were evidently not definitive; they included variations, races, sub-species, and individuals. Historically, they were shown never to have been stable.

Naturalists could no longer insist that once a species had been named, described, and preserved, it was completely understood. There was no hope for any full and final classification. Instead, the new natural historians turned their attention back to the field, away from the museums and the fern cases, aquariums, stuffed birds, seaweed albums, and butterfly cases. After Darwin introduced the concepts of selection and variation, writes Michael Ruse in Darwinism and Its Discontents (2006), the ideas had to be tested and applied “throughout the living world, taking in turn instinct, paleontology, biogeography” (16). The new natural scientists studied natural processes and living organisms, not dead ones, and they wanted to study the organisms in their natural environments. They wanted to study ecology. The science
was encouraged by Darwin’s *Origin* with its stress on the interdependencies between species and the dependence of species on their environment.

In Canada, the scientific shift from the early 1860s onward from Linnean classification to Darwinian fieldwork coincided with the historical development from settlement and colonial identity to an increasing sense of nationalism centering on confederation in 1867. Reverend Egerton Ryerson (1803-1882), a Methodist minister, educator, politician, and public education advocate in Upper Canada, wrote in 1848 that “by science a nation is enabled to profit by the advantage of its natural situation” (69). During the colonial period, Canadian naturalists pursued natural history studies that provided information on local species and specimens of plants, animals, and minerals to members of an international scientific community. Since the Hudson’s Bay Company explorers and Company-funded scientists in the late seventeenth century, the sciences had been linked to economic development, and scientific progress was perceived as one of many signs of increasing prosperity. As Canadian historian Lorne Hammond observes, “[C]ommerce was the first external agent in the exploration and assignment of values and utility to [nature]. Commerce predated scientific inquiry [in Canada]” (203). Inventory sciences, such as botany, meteorology, geology, and zoology, supported the vision of the nation’s potential:

Both inventory and nation-building were important processes which Canadians believed would arm them to meet the challenges of industrialization and modernization. Victorian inventory science defined premises upon which a certain Canadian nation could be built, and which gave rise to ‘national’ policies designed to safeguard that existence. (Zeller 169)

Science could be applied to Canada’s social, economic, and even cultural benefit. The great aim of modern science was a “unity of purpose” (Zeller 169), centralization, standardization, and
synchronization. Science was one of the “cultural adhesive[s]” (145), to use Suzanne Zeller’s term, which the developing nation of Canada needed. The second half of the century was characterized by the effort to develop a scientific community in Canada. As naturalists sought to create a regional natural history, science in Canada became increasingly independent of European origins and connections, and after mid century, the exchange of ideas and specimens, collaboration, and publication occurred more often within a North American context in organizations like the *Literary and Historical Society of Quebec* and the *Natural History Society of Montreal* (Zeller 9). New questions emerged: were Canadian natural historians studying and recording their findings in nature for a British or North American audience? What qualities were specific to a Canadian natural history?

During the second half of the century, naturalists started to depict a special quality of Canadian natural history, a focus on field work, which included a return to the living realm of nature and a turn away from the observation of dead specimens in the laboratory and museum. Consider the following excerpt from Philip Henry Gosse’s *The Canadian Naturalist* (1840), in which Gosse presents the pleasures of natural history in the form of a father-son dialogue:

> My son, you have begun to taste the delights of the Study of Nature, and have found it a pleasant and a flowery path to pursue; but as your time since the age of understanding has been spent in England, your personal acquaintance with our natural history must of necessity be slight and limited. I mean your out-of-door researches … An attentive eye, it is true cannot fail to acquire information, ever new, among the countless objects of creation, … but the more fully to avail ourselves of our opportunities, I would propose a more regular and definite course of investigation. Let us from time to time, as circumstances permit, make
excursions in forest or in field, to watch the progress of Nature through the
seasons. (1-2)

Gosse’s own emphasis on our natural history reflects growing regional enthusiasm and the desire
to record science for the development of a Canadian scientific community. Gosse distinguishes a
Canadian understanding of natural history. English natural history observes “the countless
objects of creation,” reflecting the Linnaean goal of cataloguing and classifying as many new
species as possible. In contrast, the Canadian natural history involves a “more regular and
definite course” in which the naturalist makes non-intrusive “excursions in forest or in field.” As
described by Gosse, the Canadian style was moving toward a proto-ecological return to the field
as early as 1840. Christoph Irmscher argues that as a “cautious interpreter of Canadian animal
and plant life” (“Nature Laughs at Our Systems” 65), Gosse devotes his attention
“democratically to things both large and small” (74): “There is no evidence that all his collecting
and catalogue-making ever gave him a sense of domination over his physical surroundings” (64).
The transition is from the systematic imposition of human order on nature to a reflective and
personal observation of the living species within the forest or field. Men and women both
contributed to this progression.

Paying close attention to the living details of Canadian natural phenomena, writers like
Gosse rejected an approach to natural history which was characterized by an anthropocentric
urge to dominate nature. Many books published during this period were written from the
perspective of the “casual, hurried, and often self-important observer ... who regarded Canada as
a kind of gigantic self-serve store where they could hunt, shoot, and fish to their heart’s content”
(Irmscher, “Writing by Victorian Naturalists 151). For example, John Keast Lord (1818-1872)
served on the English Boundary Commission in British Columbia and published an account, The
Naturalist in Vancouver Island and British Columbia (1866), which focuses on classifying the specimens of fauna he collected in the western regions of Canada. Lord’s book underlines the acts of catching, skinning, and examining animal specimens. “A strong case-knife,” he writes, “is by far the best kind of knife for general purposes. Worn at the belt, it is useful for everything, from mending a pen to skinning a buffalo or a humming-bird” (Lord 199). Describing dissections of the “Townsend’s Flycatcher ... [a] rare bird,” Lord says he “shot six of them, and could detect no material difference in plumage between males and females; in the stomachs of those I opened were the remains of small coleopterous insects ... They left the next day, and I never saw them again” (148). Lord is an intruder in the world of the British Columbian animals he lists and inspects. Similarly, Major John J. Rowan, author of The Emigrant and Sportsman in Canada (1876), aims his gun at most animals without pause to reflect on the destructiveness of his actions. “Shoot whenever you see a feather, is the maxim of the cock shooter” (Rowan 144), he tells his readers. The most “luxurious sport” (109), Rowan writes, is the shooting of partridges. To “kill as many partridges as he likes,” the sportsman must take “careful and deadly aim,” load his single barrelled shotgun “again and again,” and fire “with deadly effect” (110). Rowan and Lord illustrate a desire to dominate the natural world that is mirrored in many other late-nineteenth-century writings about nature.

Many women and men writing during the nineteenth century took an approach to nature and to writing about nature that opposed the perspective of writers like Rowan and Lord. Rather than interpreting nature as an inexhaustible resource that was created solely to fulfill humanity’s needs and desires, many sought to understand nature and humans as interactive. The works of Jameson, Langton, Moodie, Shadd, Sheppard, Stewart, and Traill underline such distinctions.
These writers discuss the role of the weather, plants, animals, and birds in the course of their everyday lives and from a proto-ecological standpoint.

**Chapter Summaries**

Through the lens of autobiography genre theory, Chapter 1 interprets the observations on climate in Anna Jameson’s *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (1838), Mary Ann Shadd’s *A Plea for Emigration; or, Notes on Canada West* (1852), and Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing It in the Bush; or, Life in Canada* (1852). This chapter analyses these authors’ commentary on the natural environment as they contemplate and reinvent scientific and literary models of self, identity, language, and narrative available to them. I approach their texts with a series of questions: What does it mean, in each case, to be a woman and a writer within a challenging natural colonial environment? What knowledge systems contribute to the construction of such a selfhood? How does climate affect the actual development and the representation of a Canadian identity? Informed by theorists of autobiography like Paul John Eakin and Marianne Gullestad, throughout this chapter, I seek to “understand the interplay between socio-cultural structure and individual creativity” (Gullestad 31), considering the numerous intersecting cultural, social, and scientific practices that affect the creation and presentation of the Canadian female self. The discussions of weather illustrate, as I argue, a confrontation with the ideological rift between representation and reality. The authors investigate, whether intentionally or not, the disunity between the forms of language (that is, scientific and literary) accessible to communicate personal experiences and the historically bound roles for women in nineteenth-century Canada.

Chapter 2 continues the investigation of how nature and scientific discussions influenced the development of a Canadian identity for nineteenth-century women. I investigate in some
detail Catharine Parr Traill’s personal development as an amateur botanist in Upper Canada, exemplified in *The Backwoods or Canada* (1836), *Canadian Wild Flowers* (1867), *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* (1885), and *Pearls and Pebbles* (1894). Traill’s botanical work corresponds with a period of considerable transition within Canada’s scientific community. An increasingly professional focus on laboratory work and institutional training in the natural sciences, including botany, corresponded with a segregation of women from the culture of scientific inquiry and science writing. Traill devoted much of her sixty-seven years in Canada to challenging the socio-historical elements separating the amateur from the professional and the new man of science from the female collector and educator. The four books examined in this chapter demonstrate her daily use of scientific knowledge as well as her awareness of her literary role. Traill was willing to learn from her own observations as well as those of others, and she insisted upon the importance of female and public education in the sciences in Canada. Throughout her life, she added to an ever-growing knowledge of plant taxonomy and became a well accomplished botanical identifier and collector. Along with her botanical observations, Traill wrote about a proto-ecological awareness of the negative impact of humanity on natural ecosystems.

Chapter 3 combines aspects of autobiography genre theory and ecofeminist philosophy to understand nineteenth-century Canadian women’s daily, identity-shaping interactions with a challenging natural environment and a patriarchal, colonial culture. To illustrate the complexities of establishing an identity in a new, unknown landscape, I focus on the conceptualization and treatment of animals. Using nineteenth-century animal studies as a starting point, this chapter aligns *Our Forest Home* (1822-1872) by Frances Stewart, *A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada* (1837-1846) by Anne Langton, and *Roughing It in the Bush*
(1852) by Susanna Moodie with an important Victorian ethical debate, in Europe and Canada, regarding human attitudes towards animal life. Animal intelligence and animal welfare were subjects of debate, which foreshadowed modern ecological, environmentalist, and ecofeminist discussions. Were animals subservient to humanity and therefore justifiably objectified, hunted, eaten, and sold as commodities for human needs and wants? Or did animals feel pain and pleasure and, as sentient creatures, maintain a certain level of kinship with humanity? If the latter conjecture could be supported, then humans must treat animal beings with respect and compassion. The three writers in this chapter reflect on these questions from a Canadian perspective. On the one hand, they argue for the moral and emotional consideration of animals and speak against anthropocentrism and rationalist detachment. On the other hand, they were each motivated, to varying levels, by the needs of survival in a challenging colonial environment to see animals as creatures to be either feared or consumed.

Chapter 4 also explores a feminine approach to the natural world and animal life. Written during a time of dispute over pragmatic and ideological approaches to bird life, the texts examined in this chapter, represented by Harriet Sheppard’s “Notes on Some of the Canadian Song Birds” from *Transactions of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec* (1835), Anna Jameson’s *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (1838), and Catharine Parr Traill’s *Pearls and Pebbles, or, Notes of an Old Naturalist* (1894), advocate an anti-violent field perspective. The prominent Victorian assumption was that to observe and classify bird species, the male ornithologist must kill and dissect individual specimens. For example, Thomas McIlwraith writes in *The Birds of Ontario* (1886) that “at a distance it is impossible to distinguish between [Dark-brown Eagles] and the young of the Bald Eagle ... The quickest way of identifying the species [is] close inspection ... by referring to its legs” (145): “I asked a boy,
whose home I thought a favorable point for getting birds of prey, to shoot any Hawks or Owls he saw ... A few days afterwards I saw him approaching my house with a sack over his shoulder ... he shook out a fine large female Golden Eagle which he had shot that morning,” writes McIlwraith (145). McIlwraith was, as Christoph Irmscher points out, dedicated to bird-hunting and displayed an “astonishing lack of squeamishness” when hunting, capturing, and dissecting specimens (“‘So That Nothing May Be Lost’” 153). Opposing these practices, Sheppard, Jameson, and Traill view living birds in their natural habitats and incorporate this activity into their daily lives. With diligence, these three women record taxonomical details (that is, plumage variation, colour, size, and structure) as well as behavioural patterns (including call notes and songs, nesting habits, geographical distribution, and seasonal variance). Not only do Sheppard, Jameson, and Traill reject the practices of some male ornithologists, but they also challenge a rationalist approach to and detachment from the natural world. They combine the factual, rational, and presumably more reliable language of the systematist with the emotional and personal language of the autobiographer and literary writer. In consequence, compassion and a desire to protect become central themes in the texts of these women and in their everyday practice of naturalist observation.

The approaches to nature presented by Jameson, Langton, Moodie, Shadd, Sheppard, Stewart, and Traill offer literary critics a critical vantage point from which to consider our attitudes toward the nonhuman world. Culture and nature are linked, continually affecting, and affected by, each other. The work of the seven writers reveals the ways in which perceptions of the natural world are influenced by how one talks and writes about nature and by the systems of language available in one’s culture. Considering the texts within an ecofeminist framework acknowledges the obstacles these writers faced as nineteenth-century women within a culture
that often excluded them from membership in naturalist societies and publication in scientific journals. Nonetheless, they did observe the natural world and they did write about it, combining emotional and factual approaches, thus breaking down the gendered boundaries of discourse.
1 Searching the Skies: Canadian Weather and Autobiographical Consciousness

What is climate to happiness?

(Samuel Johnson qtd. in Boswell 299)

Nineteenth-century Canadian women were largely excluded from the natural sciences, including meteorology, but not the local observation and interpretation of weather. As observers and reporters, women had an invaluable role. It was the popular book, including the travel narrative, the emigrant guide, and the backwoods journal, which informed the general reading public about the climate and the ways in which expertise could help settlement. Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada (1838) by Anna Jameson, A Plea for Emigration; or, Notes on Canada West (1852) by Mary Ann Shadd, and Roughing It in the Bush; or, Life in Canada (1852) by Susanna Moodie document day-to-day observations of the weather of Canada. These three writers include detailed descriptions and interpretations of weather phenomena and climatic occurrences. Climate was a major determining factor in the building of homes, the procurement of food and agricultural success, and the spread of disease and illness. Sometimes acting as guides to other women wanting to make homes on the frontier, these authors emphasized the influence of climate on health and prosperity as well as the importance of understanding weather according to current meteorological knowledge.

Although each of the three primary books is distinct in style, they may all be fruitfully compared within the framework informed by autobiography genre theory. This approach
elucidates the ways in which Jameson, Shadd, and Moodie integrate scientific, including meteorological, conversations into their everyday lives, life experiences, and authorial agendas, while revealing their adaptations of written ways to represent the world around them. The writers narrate an identity for themselves in relation to Canadian nature and culture. This cultural positioning includes the crossing of disciplinary boundaries. According to autobiography theorists, self-narration links numerous disciplines, including literature, history, cultural studies, and the sciences. Laura Marcus asserts in *Auto/Biographical Discourse* (1998) that personal narratives are situated somewhere between fact and fiction, the individual and the contextual, the popular and the academic, the literary and the everyday. Following this conceptualization, I ask, what are the narrative and scientific frameworks that affect Jameson, Shadd, and Moodie’s display of self-knowledge? How do they create new identities in Canada, on the one hand, and make sense of and interpret natural phenomena surrounding them, on the other?

If women writers have more relational and referential selves than men, as Patricia Waugh argues in *Feminine Fictions* (1989), then their selfhoods will be complex. Fiction, factual reporting, personal interpretation, aesthetic convention, social commentary, and scientific conversations are combined in *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles, A Plea for Emigration*, and *Roughing It*. Reading them from an approach informed by autobiography theory encourages a reading of Jameson, Shadd, and Moodie which considers intersubjectivity. This reading facilitates an exploration of the relationship between personal narratives and the systems of knowledge and language available within the authors’ cultures.
“within the grasp of every thinking man”: Developments in Meteorology in Nineteenth-Century Canada

Telling the story of nineteenth-century weather involves the intersection of two typologies of scientific interpretation and debate: on the one hand, the institutionalization of science and the growth of specialized societies and journals, and on the other hand, the strength of public interest in science in non-scientific texts. Meteorology, the professionalized physical science behind the interest in climate, gained momentum in the nineteenth century in accordance with the assertive presence of men of science with their precision instruments, observatories, statistical data, and scientific authority. Natural philosophers across Britain were already exploring invisible forces like electricity and magnetism and developing new concepts of heat and energy. Katharine Anderson notes that “they built global networks to collect physical data, stretched telegraphic cables across oceans, and with camera and spectroscope penetrated the chemistry of the sun and planets” (1). Confronted with such impressive theories and novel technologies, Victorians saw the problems of meteorology as complex and challenging. However, they believed that with enough observation and coordination, “the weather would become mathematical and certain” (1) and would be predictable. Late eighteenth-century research in chemistry and static electricity created knowledge upon which a meteorological theory could be built. By 1800, basic meteorological instruments such as the barometer, thermometer, and hygrometer made the science possible. These early advances and instruments facilitated the precise measurements upon which later developments relied. The ensuing technical devotion to attaining scientific certainty quickly spread from the mother country throughout the empire.

4 For in-depth descriptions of meteorological instruments, see Middleton.
Canada’s identity within the British Empire, the value of its natural resources, and its geographical complexity made the colony an obvious object of pursuit within a larger meteorological inventory. The Victorian idea, represented by meteorologists like George Kingston (1817-1886), was that it was the intellectual duty of each nation, or developing nation, to contribute scientific information to an international network in order to catalogue the qualities of its geographical position and physical peculiarities (Kingston 1863). Initial attention to Canada, supported by the Royal Society during the 1830s and 1840s, reflected participation in an imperialist network of research. The formation of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1831 promoted co-operation among scientists throughout the British Empire. British North America was clearly a colony filled with information for climatologically-oriented studies. According to surveyors like John Henry Lefroy who managed the Toronto Observatory from 1842-1853, the most evident identifiers of the colony were its northerly latitude and harsh climate. It was originally thought that the north magnetic pole and the source of North America’s winter weather fronts were located somewhere in the vast northern territory (Lefroy 1883). As a result, throughout the nineteenth century, there were numerous evolving theories attempting to explain northern weather systems and how they affect humans.

Scientists and promoters in Canada focused on the creation of a network of Hudson’s Bay Company officers, educational institutions, military and medical professionals, scientific societies, and public institutions in an attempt to gain a thorough knowledge of climate across the land. For example, in 1853 an act was passed by the Provincial Parliament establishing a system of meteorology in Upper Canada at “seminaries and places of education,” making it the “duty” of every country grammar school to keep a meteorological journal (Smithsonian Institution 417-20). Crucial knowledge included temperature and seasonal variations, climatic progress, the

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5 For an examination of Britain’s involvement in the development of Canadian meteorology, see Zeller 115-80.
limits of vegetation, the progress of epidemics, and the general connection between climate and human prosperity (Lachlan). These areas of interest provoked some central questions. Was the colony a landscape unfit for settlers? Could agricultural ventures be successful in the harsh climate of British North America? Was the climate of Canada changing or constant? Did human cultivation of the landscape cause significant temperature variation? The response was that the climate would improve, improvement being defined by an increase in mean annual temperature, with the progressive clearing of forests (McCord 228). Many publications, such as Henry Youle Hind’s *A Comparative View of the Climate of Western Canada* (1851) and Alexander Morris’s *Canada and Her Resources* (1855), used pieces of meteorological data to demonstrate to potential immigrants that the climate of the Canadian colony presented agricultural potential unsurpassed in North America. Also important for emigration and settlement was the question, how negative of an effect did the weather have on the health of settlers? Did the northerly climate contribute to or even cause the spread of disease? The notion was that conditions in the atmosphere, such as seasonal revolution and significant temperature change, were related to the recurrence and spread of disease. Medical opinion leaned toward the presumption that disease was spread over land due to temperature and humidity changes and wind (Craigie 187).

Growing institutional awareness of the connections between meteorological research and nationally significant issues such as climatic change, agricultural promise, and medical topography called for the establishment of scholarly societies and a central observatory. The Literary and Historical Society of Quebec (LHSQ), Canada’s first scholarly society established in 1824, was one such outlet for the discussion, interpretation, and debate of meteorological findings. Established by Lord Dalhousie, who kept personal daily weather journals during his term as governor of Nova Scotia and throughout his transfer to Quebec and appointment as
governor of Canada in 1820, the society expressed a significant interest in meteorology. The society was developed with the help of Dalhousie’s wife, Lady Dalhousie, and a circle of highly-educated residents in Quebec. The meteorological focus was evident in many contributions to the LHSQ’s *Transactions*. Meteorological observers during the 1830s also met in the Natural History Society of Montreal (NHSM). At the instigation of Judge J.S. McCord, the chairman of the Society’s council and a man with personal interest in the meteorology of British North America, the society gained the co-operation of the Hudson’s Bay Company. The HBC’s governor, George Simpson, agreed to have meteorological journals kept at the company’s posts. In 1837 the NHSM's annual report declared that meteorology was making rapid advances on the continent (*Minutes of the Council*).

In response to a growing scientific interest in meteorological study, a central observatory was necessary. In 1837 and 1839, Quebec and Montreal were designated by the British Association for the Advancement of Science as imperial meteorological stations. However, Toronto was chosen for the observation site because of its magnetically stable limestone base (Thiessen 319). 1839 was the official year of the establishment of the Magnetic and Meteorological Observatory, built on land owned by King’s College. The Observatory was established by the British Ordnance department and initially operated by officers and men of the Royal Artillery under the direction of Lieutenant C.J.B. Riddell. By 1844, research in British North America, centred at Toronto, had earned international significance.

However, it was not until 1849 that the Canadian Institute was established, and an organized Canadian study of the physical and engineering sciences was born. The Institute’s meteorological ideas were published in the *Canadian Journal of Industry, Science, and Art* (established in 1856) under the editorship of H.Y. Hind, professor of chemistry at Trinity
College in Toronto. Although institutionalization corresponded with growth in professionalization and development of a technical language, the Institute tried to stir up public interest and inspire the Canadian popular imagination by offering prize medals for essays submitted by local observers on “the physical form, climate, soil, and natural productions of Canada” (Canadian Journal of Industry, Science, and Art 121).

An observatory was founded and scholarly societies and journals expressed interest in the study of the weather. However, interest in meteorology during the early to mid nineteenth century was not restricted to the specialized work of scientists; the regional observer had an important role to fulfill. Departing from the predominantly quantitative approach to other physical sciences, meteorology is explored principally through qualitative observation. Meteorological science includes systems of careful measurement; however, it is understood that only through individual observation can the mysteries of the sky and its phenomena be understood. An ideology valuing the observations of the common man was an obvious advantage in meteorology. Scientific results were declared to be “within the grasp of every thinking man” (Upper Canada, House of Assembly 42). Until the second half of the nineteenth century, meteorologists did not need formal schooling, special mathematical skills, large libraries, or expensive technical equipment to make important contributions to the science. Elementary meteorological and climatological research, like anthropology and archaeology, demanded little more than patience, consistency, persistence, and basic knowledge. As Robert H. Scott, the first director of the British Meteorological Office, asserted in 1874, meteorology had a reputation as a science “within the grasp of every mind” (511). Likewise, disciplined observation, even without specialized knowledge, could produce significant outcomes. “There is no science in which so much may be accomplished by private observers” (204) stated David
Brewster, a founding member of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, in 1856.

Popular books, such as emigrant guides and travelogues written by amateur observers, taught the larger population about the scientific discussion. The premise was that general cultural knowledge and social identity were influenced by science. Women writers realized that, in addition to the distinctive flora and fauna of the landscape, the uniqueness of the new colony was based upon its northerly latitude and its harsh climate, a force with which they contended in their daily lives. Explanations of the climate and suggestions on how to survive influenced what Canadians thought about what it meant to be Canadian.

“What proportion does climate bear to ... human life?”: The Effects of the Weather on the Traveller in Anna Jameson’s Winter Studies and Summer Rambles (1838)

Anna Jameson was born Anna Brownell Murphy in Dublin, Ireland on 19 May 1794. In 1798, her family moved from Ireland to England, settling initially in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and then moving to London in 1806. Her father, Denis Brownell Murphy, was a professional miniaturist and portrait painter. Although he was talented, the family was chronically short of money. In spite of the family’s financial struggles, Jameson was schooled from a young age in language, history, and literature. She was often taught by private tutors and scholars living nearby. Forced by her family’s economic hardships, Jameson started working as a governess at the age of sixteen. Working as a governess, she travelled around Europe and wrote about her journeys in

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6 For biographies of Anna Jameson, see Fowler 139-75; Johnston; and Thomas, “Murphy, Anna Brownell.”
Diary of an Ennuyée (1826), a fictitious account of her travels in Italy. This book was followed by an influential study of Shakespeare’s female characters, Characteristics of Women (1832).

In 1825, Anna Jameson entered into marriage to Robert Symson Jameson, a lawyer, judge, and political figure, a union which resulted in her temporary move to the British colony of Canada. In 1833, Jameson’s husband left their home in London for an appointment as attorney general of Upper Canada. Anna Jameson, already aware of their incompatibility, stayed behind in England. Rapidly gaining prominence and fame as a writer of biography and travel literature, she was content with a life unbound by daily duties to a husband or children. However, in October of 1836, she dutifully, though with much despair and reluctance, made the Atlantic crossing to join her husband in Toronto. While residing in Toronto during the winter of 1837, Jameson lived less than one hundred miles away from Catharine Parr Traill and Susanna Moodie, who were located in the Douro backwoods. However, there is no evidence that Jameson ever met Traill or Moodie.

When she realized their “emotional incompatibility” (Thomas, “Murphy, Anna Brownell” 650), Jameson reached a separation agreement with her husband. She left Upper Canada in September of 1837 and returned to England, ready to return to a life of writing and publishing. The months spent on the Canadian frontier would, however, not be forgotten. Jameson published Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada (1838), which is written in the form of a journal addressed to an absent companion. This Canadian travel narrative records the social and natural environments encountered during a piteous winter in Toronto and an adventurous summer trip across Ontario. By her death in London on 17 March 1860, Jameson had produced a large body of travelogues, biographies, and books on art for a growing audience of women seeking individual involvement with Victorian intellectual culture.
Appealing to a female audience seeking instruction as well as entertainment, Jameson clearly defines *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles* as a work informed by both fact and literary convention. On the opening page of the Preface, she states that she “wish[es] it to be understood that [her] little book, such as it is, is more particularly addressed to [her] own sex” (Jameson 10). Her book, made up of “‘fragments’ of a journal addressed to a friend,” is an “attempt in literature” to portray experiences which “few European women of refined and civilised habits have ever risked, and none have recorded” (9). Her narrative moves away from a strictly factual presentation of “ideas and experiences” and adds the interpretive perspective of “personal feeling”:

To extract the tone of personal feeling ... was like drawing the thread out of a string of beads – the chain of linked ideas and experiences fell to pieces ... I have been obliged to leave the flimsy thread of sentiment to sustain the facts and observations loosely strung together. (10)

Jameson insists that to supplement fact with sentiment is an authorial obligation. Interpretation based upon emotion is Jameson’s “thread” which helps to bring together otherwise incongruous facts. She anticipates the response of her audience. Travel and travel narratives were expected by Victorian audiences to be “a source of enjoyment,” thus providing “an opportunity, especially for women, to escape the rigidity of Victorian society” (Blanton 20). Numerous critics, such as Shirley Foster, *Across New Worlds* (1990) and Wendy Roy, *Maps of Difference* (2005), have analysed nineteenth-century travel and the travelogue as a means to challenge the restraints of traditional female roles. The escapism and sentimentality of Jameson’s narrative, however, must not overshadow the purpose of the travel account as education (Blanton 20). A complete analysis of the narrative recognizes Jameson’s “careful research and astute book-making” along
with her appreciation for “the exactness and apparent validity of observation” (Thomas, *Love and Work Enough* 137). Because of its empirical observation combined with sentiment, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles* is still, according to Rita Monticelli, read as “one of the most important nineteenth-century travel books” about Canada (47).

Jameson created an account which mingles fact and fiction, straightforward reporting and individual creativity. Favouring the “grace of ease and pictorial imagination” and the “leaven of egotism which necessarily mixed itself up with the journal form” (Jameson 10), Jameson asserts, “On no subject do I wish to dictate an opinion, or assume to speak as one having authority: my utmost ambition extends no farther than to suggest matter for inquiry and reflection” (12, emphasis original). She outlines her version of “truth” as a combination of “observing and recording faithfully the impressions made by objects [on her] mind” and “the impress they receive from [her] mind” (16, emphasis original). She acknowledges that the experiences she depicts are mediated by her own imagination and expectations, her metaphorical and feminized “spectacles couleur de rose” (16, emphasis original). Every physical observation, according to Jameson, is altered by the culture that precedes it: “when a traveller goes to a foreign country, it is always with a set of preconceived notions concerning it, to which he fits all he sees, and refers all he hears ... I doubt whether ... it be possible for one to arrive at the truth” (156-57). Instead of aiming for an unattainable truth, Jameson depicts her narrative and her female selfhood in Canada as one influenced by cultural and artistic variation: “Here is the picture as well as I can paint it” (371).

As I previously argued in my MA thesis, “Green Romanticism and Anna Jameson’s Feminist Ecocriticism” (2009), Anna Jameson and other European travelers and emigrants to Canada sought an exciting first-hand experience of the picturesque and sublime within the
daunting wilderness (Matthews 62). The promise of observing uncorrupted nature in Canada became an imagined antidote to the patriarchal, capitalist society of industrial England and helps to explain “the development of tourism into remote places like the northern Ontario bush” (Strong-Boag and Gerson 74). Although many European travellers sought an interaction with a natural environment untouched by industrial expansion, many hoped to cultivate, tame, and assign European signification to the setting. An important component of Jameson’s mediated relationship with nature and her Eurocentric projections onto the environment of Upper Canada is her aesthetic approach. As an educated woman and an avid reader of Romantic texts, she was likely influenced by the treatises of Edmund Burke, namely A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757), and Immanuel Kant, particularly Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime (1764). Both Burke and Kant formulated the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime to account for distinct aspects of human experience in nature.

Jameson recognizes that the greatness of the sublime and the smallness of the beautiful are constructs. She recognizes the violence of the sublime in its “fury” and “tumult”: “the storm burst forth in all its might, the lightening wrapped the whole horizon round in sheets of flame, the thunder rolled over the forest” (171). The storm, as a manifestation of sublimity in this passage by Jameson, is a huge, ominous force that encompasses “the whole horizon” with its “might.” Emphases are on the storm’s presence, forcefulness, and power: it is loud and intimidating, instilling feelings of fear. In contrast, the beautiful is represented as fair, gentle, and small: “After dinner we pursued our course through an archipelago of islets, out of the blue waves, and fringed with white water-lilies; — Little fairy Edens, of such endless variety in form and colour, and of such wondrous and fantastic beauty” (529-530). The beautiful scene is filled
with the innocence implied by “whiteness” and with child-like wonderment and fantasy. The emphasis on smallness, for instance diminutive “islets” and “Little fairy Edens,” suggests the inferior status of the beautiful in aesthetic theory. Passages like these, in which Jameson seems to follow the prescriptions of aesthetic theorists, including the gendered representation of nature in terms of either the masculine sublime or the feminine beautiful, suggest that she has been enculturated into this categorization. However, by demonstrating her familiarity with the categories, she displays her educated understanding of a key theory of her time. Although Jameson does acknowledge that each observation is aestheticized to a certain degree, she does not abandon basic depictions of the physical reality of nature. She employs demonstrative language when she discusses what she refers to as “wise-like things” (Jameson 447). This realm of knowledge is distinguished from “solemn reveries on starlit lakes [and] self-communings” and includes topics like geography, topography, natural philosophy, and meteorology (447).

Jameson echoes male travellers for whom the natural harshness of the British colony complicates European artistic convention. For example, in his *Forest Scenes and Incidents* (1829), English officer George Head writes, “art might fairly be said to enter into an honest competition with nature” (176). Later, while travelling from Halifax to Upper and Lower Canada, he suggests that during the harsh Canadian winter, “the art of man seems to second [nature’s] efforts” (351). Similarly, while travelling through the Niagara region, British naval officer Basil Hall reports in *Travels in North America* (1829) that “the noble works” of art and nature may sit “side by side” in British North America, but they are distinct from each other (214). Perhaps, Jameson, in the style of travel writers before her, wants to impress her readers with the bravery of her travels, her “projects of solitude” (203), which upset the conventional expectations of the woman traveller.
As an author concerned with both the popular and the academic, Jameson is at times compelled to use a demonstrative mode of language to deliver weather accounts. Because the weather physically traps and restrains her during the winter months in Toronto, as opposed to her travels in the Great Lakes region during the summer, Jameson discusses the effects of weather most in the Winter Studies portion of her narrative. Her responses to the weather are directly related to her geographical and temporal positions. Winter moments appear as artless snapshots, for example: “New Year’s Day – colder than ever. This morning the thermometer stood at eighteen degrees below zero, and Dr. R— told me that some chemical compounds in his laboratory had frozen in the night” (Jameson 23). Capturing the severity of the northern climate, she reports on the winter weather: “There is some diminution of the intense cold yesterday and to-day. The thermometer is above zero” (33); “So, there is another month gone; and the snows are just beginning to disappear; and the ice is breaking up at the entrance of the bay” (150); in the “cities of Lower Canada ... the climate is much more severe and the winter longer than with us [in Upper Canada]” (219). These are examples of Jameson putting “poetry and description far from [her]” and writing “common sensible lectures” (217). Jameson’s weather notes sound like logbook entries. A woman during the 1830s would rarely have held a position, such as a military posting, which would have obliged her to keep a logbook. Therefore, the entries might be viewed as a kind of transgression. These notes deny the assumption that women were restricted to seeing nature only “through an artistic medium, since they had been taught that imitation or copying were particularly feminine accomplishments” (Foster and Mills 92). Jameson not only communicates to her readership the facts of Canadian climate, but also establishes herself as a rational thinker who reflects on mental and physical perseverance as a necessary part of colonial identity.
Jameson adopts demonstrative language in matters of climate and health, revealing her awareness of the gravity of Victorian debates on epidemics. She is initially unsure of her qualification to speak about the subject, which is reflected in her insistence on citing male scholars. Partially disputing the epidemic model of the spread of disease, she cites unspecified “medical men:”

They say here that the weather never remains the same for more than three days together; and all agree that the atmospherical changes are violent and sudden at all seasons. Yet the medical men assure me that the climate of Canada, take it altogether, is one of the healthiest in the world, though the immediate vicinity of Toronto be for the present, from local circumstances, an exception. (Jameson 25)

Although she refers to presumably expert opinions, Jameson is unwilling to believe the authorities. She is unsatisfied with the generalization concerning “the climate of Canada,” a characteristic of treatises which minimized the hazards of the Canadian climate in order to encourage emigration: “The climate is infinitely more healthy than England. Indeed, it may be pronounced the most healthy country under the sun” (“Climate of Canada” 58). Aspiring to a more accurate, regionally specific account, Jameson immediately notes that the current circumstances in Toronto do not support the medical theory. She was not alone in the search for observations with a higher degree of local attention. For example, in The Settler’s New Home (1850), Sidney Smith writes, “It is obvious that Upper Canada is by no means so agreeable a climate as those which we shall have afterwards occasion to notice; nor perhaps is it, on the whole, so free from cause of disease” (60). Jameson subsequently reports that in her experience abrupt changes in air temperature do correlate with illness. She argues that there is a “danger
incurred by running in and out from over-heated rooms into the fierce biting air” which induces “sore throats, and agues, and fevers” (24).

After suffering a series of winter ailments, Jameson resolves that there is a causal relationship between climate and illness. She argues, “change of air is the only thing which can counteract the effect of these successive fits of aguish fever” (33). Thus, Jameson participates in the debate over the “salubrity” of Canadian weather systems. Is the Canadian climate unfavourable to the health of mind and body? More generally, does climate significantly influence human health and disposition? Jameson quotes Samuel Johnson, “‘What proportion does climate bear to the complex system of human life?’” (Jameson 87). In his biography, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1832), Johnson is quoted as asking, “What is climate to happiness?” (Boswell 299). To the question, how much does climate bear upon temperament, health, and human life in general, Jameson responds, “A good deal, my dear Doctor” (87). This was a prominent concept. For example, Dr. W.F. Edwards, a member of the Royal Academy of Sciences, spent most of his experiments, performed on animals but applied to humans, observing the effects of temperature change on the physical and chemical properties of bodies. He concludes in *On the Influence of Physical Agents* (1838) that the temperature of the atmosphere, the currents of the air, and barometrical pressure have noticeable effects on physical energy and wellness.

As the severity of the northern climate causes increasing illness in Jameson, she abandons her earlier uncertainty on the subject of weather and illness as well as her references to male experts. The extremeness of the winter temperature has an almost unshakable effect upon one’s nerves: “This relentless winter seems to stiffen and contract every nerve, and the frost is of so much fierceness and intensity that it penetrates even to the marrow of one’s bones” (102).
Sudden and dramatic change in the air becomes a direct cause of illness, according to Jameson. After weighing experience against what she is told by others, she takes a steadfast position of her own. “After very cold weather during the whole week, the air became filled with a haze like smoke, the wind blew suddenly hot as from the mouth of a furnace,” she recalls, “and for a few hours I suffered exceedingly from languid depression and could scarcely breathe” (158). When the weather turns “exceedingly cold [with] a severe frost [and] a keen, boisterous wind,” Jameson reports that she is “too ill to do anything but read” (159). No longer does she rely on the information of others; personal experience gives her the confidence to report on the effects of Canadian weather.

In addition to the correspondence between weather and physical illness, Jameson explores the influence of climate on mental health. Jameson is honest, although at times melodramatic, about the adverse effects of her surroundings on her disposition. Combining fact and emotion in autobiographical style, she records daily occurrences and entertains her readers. Representing the medical knowledge of the time, The Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine (1833) outlines mental disorders as acutely connected to human mobility. The latter in turn is directly correlated with regional topography and climate: “The situation of a country, its soil, its climate ... determine the occupations of the mass of its inhabitants, and by giving greater or less excitement to their faculties, naturally cause more or less activity and enterprise ... The susceptibility ... to various nervous disorders is thus undoubtedly increased or lessened” (Forbes, Tweedie, and Conolly 572). Experiencing a decrease in activity and enterprise, during much of the time described in the Winter Studies section of her travelogue, Jameson loses eagerness to write home, and she sinks into depression: “The cold is at times so intense, that the ink freezes while I write, and my fingers stiffen round the pen ... I lose all heart to write home, or to register
a reflection or feeling; – thought stagnates in my head as the ink in my pen – and this will never do!” (29). As her thoughts and actions stagnate, Jameson becomes pitiful, commiserating with herself and others, “God help the poor emigrants who are yet unprepared against the rigour of the season!” (29). However, her resolve which comes “from within” (29) to overcome the elements (“this will never do!”) re-establishes her as a determined writer and saves her from succumbing to the stereotype of an overly sensitive woman.

Although Jameson is often melodramatic, Marian Fowler notes that “there can be no doubt that [her] sufferings were real, behind her dramatic verbiage, given the emotional stress of her disintegrating marriage, her separation from Ottilie von Goethe [Jameson’s dearest friend], her chilly isolation” (152). Feeling “imprisoned by [the] relentless climate” (Jameson 102), Jameson at times realizes that travel is not always conducive to creativity. Exasperated, she laments, “Will spring ever come? – When I look upon the bleak, shrouded, changeless scene, there is something so awfully silent, fixed, and immutable in its aspect, that it is enough to disturb one’s faith in the everlasting revolution of the seasons ... One day is only distinguishable from another by the degrees of the thermometer” (Jameson 102). Nature, for Jameson, has become utterly without aesthetic appeal. Her surroundings lack the picturesque and the sublime and lie in monotony and silence, offering no inspiration. The climate, symbolized by the degrees of the thermometer, is all that changes; the intense cold has interrupted activity, both natural and human, and has caused severe emotional distress.

Oppressed by depression and illness caused by the winter months, Jameson is relieved to see the arrival of spring. Seasonal change is an integral part of Jameson’s narration of her travels. Many nineteenth-century reporters on Canadian topography, geography, and climate structured their reports according to seasonal change. For example, John Douglas claims in his
Medical Topography of Upper Canada (1819) that “The climate of a country is best exemplified in the revolution of its seasons” (25). Not surprisingly then, Douglas’ account is framed according to “a description of each season, in its regular order of succession” (25). Similarly, Jameson uses the seasons as a thematic and structural device. The Summer Rambles section of Winter Studies and Summer Rambles begins in June with “The Return of Summer.” The seasons not only structure the book, they also influence style and tone: “All life, and light, and beauty were abroad – the resurrection of Nature! How beautiful it was! how dearly welcome to my senses – to my heart – this spring which comes at last – so long wished for, so long waited for!” (163). Seasonal change signals personal change. Focusing upon the antithetical change from winter to spring in Upper Canada, Jameson reports emotions that result from her experience of regional climate.

Jameson’s technique of combining observation with literary language gains her reader’s interest, facilitating the more central aim of educating her audience. Advocating a well-rounded type of education, she insists that a combination of “art, literature, and science” (118) be taught to all women. Its pedagogical motivation makes Winter Studies and Summer Rambles an example of Jameson’s forays into educational reform. Clara Thomas argues, “In all her work, Anna was a tireless advocate of improved education for women, in order to prepare them for productive, useful, and contented lives” (“Afterword” 544). Unlike Shadd who uses climatic conversations for a political aim, namely to encourage African-American peoples to emigrate to Upper Canada, Jameson mingles discussions of the weather with her travel narrative in order to encourage the development of the female mind in the ways of both science and literature. She insists, “Women need in these times character beyond everything else, ... the self-governed, the cultivated, active mind, to protect and to maintain ourselves” (Jameson 119). To be sure,
Jameson does not completely reject the gender roles of her day. Reflecting on her own unhappy marriage and her independent ways of life, she complicates the conventional boundaries of the domestic and public spheres, urging women to develop themselves on a more complex level than Victorian society would encourage: “The cultivation of the moral strength and the active energies of a woman’s mind, together with the intellectual faculties and tastes ... will enable her to find content and independence” (120).

**Depicting a “healthy and temperate” Climate: Mary Ann Shadd’s**

**Endorsement of Canada in *A Plea for Emigration* (1852)**

One of thirteen children born to Harriet Parnell Shadd and Abraham Doras Shadd, Mary Ann Shadd was born in Wilmington, Delaware on 9 October 1823. Both parents were of mixed race ancestry, European and African, and neither were slaves. Shadd’s father worked as a shoemaker. Inheriting an estate worth approximately $1,300 from his father, Abraham Shadd was a financially stable businessman who was able to acquire his own property. The Shadd family moved from Delaware to Pennsylvania to find better educational opportunities for the children. Mary Ann Shadd became a student at the Quaker academy of Price’s Boarding School in West Chester, Pennsylvania in 1833. After graduating from Price’s in 1839, Shadd returned to Wilmington and opened a school for African-American children.

An important event for Shadd was the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, an act of legislation which led to her emigration to Canada. The Fugitive Slave Act sought to expedite the process whereby slaveowners could search out and legally reclaim fugitive slaves. The legislation did not discriminate between slave and freed African-Americans; therefore, free

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7 For detailed biographical information, see Bearden and Butler.
people feared that they would be mistaken for fugitive slaves and claimed by slaveholders. Governed by laws that did not discriminate between Blacks and Whites and did not allow for extradition to the United States, Canada became an attractive destination. Consequently, Shadd and many other African-Americans emigrated to Canada. Shadd arrived in Toronto, Upper Canada in early September of 1850 and settled in Windsor.\(^8\) Shadd promptly opened up a school in an unused military barracks, a school which controversially welcomed both Black and White students. The controversy existed in both Black and White communities. The school was based upon the principle that segregation should not govern any aspect of community life, including church and school.

Shadd’s unwavering view that segregation was unacceptable for African-American emigrants motivated the publication of *A Plea for Emigration; Or, Notes of Canada West* (1852). Belonging to the significant body of early Canadian literature known as the settlement journal or emigrant guide, a genre that included Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852) and Catharine Parr Traill’s *The Female Emigrant’s Guide* (1854), this tract depicts the social and natural realities of the Canadian colony. In her guide, Shadd reports on the potentials of a life in Canada based upon individual observation. As a modern readership, we read these narratives to give us an otherwise unattainable understanding of individual “attitudes of mind” that were brought to emigration and settlement (New, *History of Canadian Literature* 54). Unlike Moodie and Traill, Shadd is not a woman who coped with difficult European migration to Canada. However, like many Europeans including the Moodies (at times), she saw Canada as a haven. Shadd’s guide is motivated by the belief that Canada was a place of refuge for African-Americans, a place about which they needed to know, a place to which they should emigrate for their own safety.

\(^8\) Along with the Niagara region, Windsor was a main point of entry for African-Americans into Canada.
In January of 1856, Shadd married a barber named Thomas Cary. The marriage was unconventional as the couple spent much of their marriage apart; still, they were married until Cary’s death in November of 1860. Shadd cared for her husband’s children from a previous marriage as well as their own son and daughter and devoted her life to the welfare of others: advocating the abolition of slavery; working as a teacher, lecturer, and journalist; and dedicating her energy to women’s rights and suffrage. After the Civil War and the renunciation of the Fugitive Slave Act, she returned to live in the United States in 1865 and died on June 5 of 1893 in Washington, D.C. Shadd experienced culturally and historically specific conditions, which she both accepted and challenged through the living of her life and the telling of her story.

In *A Plea for Emigration*, Shadd initially positions her narrative identity in relation to the social importance of climate. “[T]he climate is healthy and temperate” in Upper Canada, she writes, and the area is “most desirable [for] residence” (Shadd 45). Perhaps she does this to validate her narrative. For Shadd, environmental circumstances as well as social realities set cultural processes in motion. The climate of Upper Canada is intertwined in her narrative with questions of social and individual identity and contributes to a Canadian model of selfhood which is founded upon survival within a challenging northern climate.

The argument of Shadd’s *Plea* is straightforward: the Fugitive Slave Law has made life “dangerous in the extreme” for African-Americans living in the United States, and Upper Canada is the ideal place to start a new life (43). However, the rhetorical strategy employed reveals a more complex understanding of the influence of the non-fiction writer. Shadd’s book is, as previously mentioned, an emigrant guide. Emigrant guides are non-fictional by nature; they describe life experiences as they relate to emigration. As a result, their readers expect emigrant guides to follow the basic rules of non-fiction writing, namely “[t]elling the truth, respecting
privacy, [and] displaying normalcy” (Eakin 32). The first of these rules, Eakin claims, has the most value in our Western culture; “readers expect autobiographers to exhibit some basic respect for the truth” (20). Although articulated by current theorists, the parameters of non-fiction were arguably already understood in the nineteenth century. A clue to this awareness of ethical expectations may be found at the end of Shadd’s “Introductory Remarks.” Although the reader must remember that Shadd is writing with a vested interest in seeing people emigrate, she insists that her book is based on fact. She writes,

>Believing that more reliance would be placed upon a statement of facts obtained in the country, from reliable sources and from observation, than upon a repetition of current statements made elsewhere, ... I determined to visit Canada, and to there collect such information. (44)

Thus begins an emigrant guide explicitly concerned with a self-declared “statement of facts,” “reliable sources” and informed observation, a plea written by an author who is aware of the social responsibility derived from the genre. Facts are necessary, Shadd emphasizes, because “friends, ignorant on this point,” meaning emigration to Canada as affected by climate, “often appeal to “fears having no foundation whatever” (46). In an attempt to counteract this, all of her central points are cross-referenced or attributed, by direct quotation, to those whom she authorizes as experts, such as Scobie’s Canadian Almanac for 1852 and Widder’s Catechism of Information for Intended Emigrants (1848).

Attending to observation and research, Shadd confronts the segregation of women from scientific discourse. Indeed, Shadd constructs a self in the public genre of autobiography. As Patricia Yaeger advises, I am compelled to assume that “the discourse of our foremothers was ... a discourse of inscriptive social change” (16). Marianne Gullestad interprets female individuals
as engaged in a dynamic process of self-invention in which they “creatively refashion and adapt
the knowledge, values, and ideas they receive” (31). Guided by these critics, I argue that there is
a counter-tradition to be found in nineteenth-century women’s writing in Canada, a tradition in
which the female author adopts masculinized systems of language but at the same time revises
them to carve out her own space. Shadd appropriates the language of the male meteorologist and
refashions it to create a new category of selfhood as a promoter for African-American emigration
and an emerging Canadian identity based upon environmental distinctiveness. Connecting social
change and environmental factors, she attacks the “odious Fugitive Slave Law” and employs
information on “the Province called Canada West ... the climate, soil and productions, and the
inducements offered generally to emigrants” (Shadd 43).

Shadd applies the definitive tone and character of a skilled meteorological observer. She
begins her book by identifying British North America according to a combination of geography,
size, and general climate:

  British America, it is well known, is a country equal in extent, at least, to the
  United States, extending on the north to the Arctic Ocean, from the Atlantic on the
east, to the Pacific on the west ... The climate, in the higher latitudes, is extremely
severe, but for a considerable distance north of the settled districts, particularly in
the western part, the climate is healthy and temperate. (Shadd 45)

She then leaves this formulaic description for the territory of scientific debate. Shadd begins by
reporting weather variations across areas with higher population density and regions with
minimal settlement and therefore fewer tracts of cleared land. Locations closer to settled,
populous regions, she indicates, experience less of the “extremely cold, cheerless winters, and
short but warm summers” than experienced in more remote, less-populated northern locations (45).

In discussing climatic progress, Shadd echoes accounts like J.H. Lefroy’s observations from 1844 in which he reports to Edward Sabine that as far north as the Mackenzie River, the soil thawed in the early spring to a depth of two feet in open, cultivated places and only to a depth of one foot in the uncleared woods (27 Mar. 1844). Shadd writes, “Persons living in the vicinity of the Great Lakes and the neighbouring districts say that their winters are much less severe than when, in past years, vast forests covered that region – that very deep snows are less frequent than they were” (46). She argues that clearing the forests will decrease the severity of seasonal temperatures and winter snowfalls. Combating emigrants’ fears of the northern climate, Shadd is aligned with other writers who encouraged emigration and population growth such as Sir Francis Bond Head, Canada’s Lieutenant-Governor from 1836 to 1838. In 1851, Head acknowledged the cumulative benefits of each farmer’s cultivation of the soil: “While every backwoodsman in America is occupying himself ... in clearing his location, every tree which, falling under his axe, admits a patch of sunshine to the earth, in an infinitesimal degree softens and ameliorates the climate of the vast continent around him” (11-12). Shadd similarly argues, with focus upon African-American settlers, that, “From the many instances of [agricultural] success under my observation (particularly of formerly totally destitute coloured persons) ... I firmly believe that with an axe and a little energy, an independent position will result in a short period [for settlers]” (52).

Supporting the argument that the Canadian climate was already and would become increasingly amenable to agriculture, Shadd talks about the promise of agricultural pursuits in Upper Canada. Denying rumours of the “barren soil” and “scarcity of [agricultural] products” in
British North America (Shadd 54), she catalogues each crop available to the farmer who is willing to learn the seasons and the soils of his or her region. However, adding practical perspective, Shadd places emphasis on the necessity of individual hard work and diligence: “The man who is willing to work need not suffer, and unless a man supports himself he will neither be independent nor respectable in any country ... [A]ll who are able and willing to work, can make a good living” (83). This sentiment was common in nineteenth-century farmer’s manuals from Canada. For example, in The Canadian Farmer’s Manual of Agriculture (1874), Charles Edward Whitcombe insists that “Stout hearts and willing hands must be employed to win a way to fortune on our farms” (1); the Canadian farmer “must be essentially a practical man” (1). Subscribing to this practical tone characteristic of farming manuals and almanacs of the nineteenth century, Shadd presents monthly agricultural catalogues of the weather. Consider the following excerpt:

In January and February there are always cold spells and warm alternating, as in our experience; but when the warm season commences, the heat is intense, and the growth of vegetation is rapid ... Though summer is late in beginning, it is prolonged into what is the autumn with us, ... generally, August and September begin the months in which hay, wheat, and some other crops are gathered in. (47)

Following a year-round weather summary, Shadd details the specifics of yield per acre for grains such as buckwheat, oats, barley, and rye as well as botanical category and description of plants such as potatoes, turnips, cucumbers, onions, eggplants, apples, and tobacco (53-55). Following the style and content of meteorological journals and farmer’s almanacs, Shadd displays her willingness to inform her reader. However, by emphasizing the importance of enthusiasm, determination, and industriousness for successful farming, she reminds her readers that she is
also writing a tract on emigration and not only a treatise devoted to agriculture. Because of the attempt to portray Canada in a positive way, Shadd’s descriptions of the weather may be read as inaccurately favourable. Careful in her word choice in the above passage, she emphasizes that there is warmth even in the coldest months of January and February. Shadd tries to divert her reader’s attention from the long winter and delayed summer by highlighting the mildness of autumn (47).

Shadd then turns to judgement, arguing for the superiority of Canadian production. She writes, “Taking ... the regularity of the seasons, and uniform heat or cold when they have such weather, the superiority of many products, as wheat and fruit, may be accounted for” (Shadd 48). “I say superiority,” she continues, “because, in its place, I hope to give such evidence as will substantiate the assertion. Annexed is a table setting forth the greatest degree of cold and heat, in the years mentioned” (48). Shadd presents herself as an expert with sufficient knowledge to assert an opinion about weather and agricultural yields. She hopes to supply evidence to “substantiate the assertion” of Canada’s agricultural superiority, and she often cites her own observations as her source of information. Shadd’s table is based on observations at the Toronto Observatory collected in the eight-page pamphlet written by Frederick Widder entitled *Catechism of Information for Intended Emigrants of all Classes to Upper Canada* (1848). This reference document is an advertising tool published for the Canada Company which sold land to immigrants. Shadd’s citation of emigration propaganda and her own social agenda remind the reader that the guide lies between scientific treatise and social commentary. She uses words like “regularity” and “uniform” (Shadd 48) to persuade her audience to believe that Canada is a place of safety and equality. Her use of the word “superiority” (48) suggests that Canada is a land of opportunity and prosperity. It is not possible to separate Shadd’s documentation of climatic and
agricultural observations from the underlying cultural discourse: social change and emigration opportunities are the threads connecting all of Shadd’s observations and interpretations of scientific fact. She strategically focuses on positive examples to support her political agenda: to persuade African Americans to emigrate to Canada West in order to escape the dangers of living in the United States under the “odious Fugitive Slave Law” (43).

Another element of Shadd’s argument for the superiority of Upper Canada is based upon the correlation between climate and disease. The mathematical master of Toronto’s Upper Canada College, Reverend Charles Dade was a prominent representative of the nineteenth-century medical notion of a miasma, which concerned the facilitation of the spread of disease overland through changes in the quality of air. Dade kept meteorological tables (composed primarily of thermometric readings) during the 1830s in an attempt to link changes in the weather to cholera epidemics in 1832 and 1834. He concluded that although some diseases such as cholera seemed to be more independent of climatic influences, “[t]he effects of ... diseases must be modified by the varying circumstances of climate and locality. All those deadly agents ... are mitigated or heightened by any deviation from the normal state and character of the season” (21). After climate was linked to disease and illness, the consistency and variation of seasonal temperature became an important topic in discussions of emigration and settlement.

Arguments that changes in atmospheric conditions and seasonal variations were directly correlated to the spread of disease were common in the nineteenth century as physicians grappled with seemingly unexplained plagues of illness. For example, Henry Hind links a “healthy climate,” or relatively stable conditions throughout each season with minimal temperature extremes, with an absence of fever, ague, and epidemics (The Dominion of Canada 556). He supports this assertion with statistical analyses of thermometric and atmospheric data.

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9 Also see Fergusson and Rolph.
Appropriating the language of male observers such as Dade and Hind, Shadd writes, “In Canada West, the variation from a salubrious and eminently healthy climate is nowhere sufficient to cause the least solicitude; on the contrary, exempt from the steady and enfeebling warmth of southern latitudes, and the equally injurious characteristics of polar countries, it is highly inductive to mental and physical energy” (Shadd 46). She denies rumours that the Canadian climate is characterized by the inhospitable extremes of southern latitudes and polar countries. She argues, instead, that the seasons are regular and that this regularity promotes good health. Shadd cites experts and provides scientific specifics in an effort to gain her readers’ trust. Her primary reason is that once Shadd is finished with the farms and climate and saw mills, she enters more contentious territory to discuss segregation, education, and religion. She participates in discussions of these issues to develop a sense of what Ian Hacking terms cultural “normalcy,” to establish a level of comfort and confidence with her readership (59). Shadd must first ensure she gains her readers’ confidence in straightforward matters such as climate, topography, and geography before moving on to more radical opinions about social change. From her almanac sources and conversations with “persons of many years’ residence,” Shadd confidently concludes that “climate poses no obstacle to emigration, but that it is the most desirable known in so high a latitude, for emigrants generally, and coloured people particularly” (48). Here, Shadd reminds her readers that scientific inquiry is not her primary motive. Raised in a family that sheltered fugitive slaves, she witnessed social, physical, and emotional atrocities of American slavery. A product of her past experiences, she uses climatic studies and observations for a social purpose: to encourage the emigration of African-Americans into Upper Canada. Shadd’s treatise reveals what is most important to her as a writer and as an individual. She uses climate as a jumping-off point to introduce and initiate social change.
“[I] cried with the cold”: The Pioneer Woman’s Struggles with Canadian Weather in Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852)

Susanna Moodie was born Susanna Strickland in Suffolk, England on 6 December 1803, a year following the birth of her sister Catharine (Parr Traill). Moodie was raised in a literary family. Moodie’s father, Thomas Strickland, supported his family as a business partner in a Norwich coach factory. The family lived in a seventeenth-century Flemish-style mansion, Reydon Hall, in a rural seaside locale on the Suffolk coast. Together with the other Strickland children, Moodie was tutored by her parents in history, languages, literature, and mathematics. The death of Thomas Strickland altered the family’s financial circumstances, and Moodie began to write to earn money. By the time she married John Wedderburn Dunbar Moodie in 1831, Susanna Strickland had published a number of short stories, poems (*Enthusiasm and Other Poems*, 1831), children’s books, and the anti-slavery transcription of *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (1831) and *Negro Slavery Described by a Negro* (1831). She had already achieved modest literary stature and contributed to the maintenance of the family’s social standing.

Susanna Strickland married J.W.D. Moodie in 1831. This union led to the decision to emigrate to the colony of Canada. A British army officer on half pay, J.W.D. Moodie had a small income that was only enough to sustain a comfortable lifestyle for a couple and possibly one child. If the new couple was to have more than one child, there would be financial hardship, reduced circumstances, and a loss of social standing. To overcome such limitations, J.W.D. Moodie proposed emigration to Canada, a developing nation in which it was assumed that an English family could find a new home, live cheaply, acquire financial stability, and avoid the stigma of poverty. Although Susanna Moodie was reluctant, she sailed to Canada with her

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10 For a biographical source which compares and contrasts the life stories and personalities of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill, see Gray. For historical biographies devoted to Moodie, see Shields and Peterman, *A Life.*
husband and infant daughter in June of 1832. Initially, the Moodies somewhat comfortably resided on cleared farmland near Cobourg but then they were beset by economic struggles after they moved to an uncleared backwoods lot north of Peterborough in Douro Township in February of 1834. They settled near the families of Moodie’s siblings, Catharine Parr Traill and Samuel Strickland. In 1840, the Moodie family moved to Belleville where J.W.D. Moodie was appointed Sheriff of Hastings County.

Moodie underlines in her “Introduction” that her book is concerned with emigration and defines her readership as one composed of educated women who seek books which provide them with honest information (385). She reflects that “In most instances, emigration is a matter of necessity, not of choice ... Few educated persons, accustomed to the refinements and luxuries of European society, ever willingly relinquish those advantages” (Moodie xxi). Wanting to maintain her status as a gentlewoman among the class of European society for whom emigration is a necessity, Moodie depicts her tribulations in an increasingly popular genre. As Janet Floyd argues in Writing the Pioneer Woman (2002), “British emigration literature tended to emphasize the prospective emigrant and his family having fallen on hard times and being forced to begin a new life ... The focus lay upon the single emigrant and his – or sometimes her – response to this most extreme change of circumstances” (Floyd 51-2). The emigrant narrates him or herself as part of a common cultural experience which takes the form of a test of his or her ability to survive a traumatic disruption of social identity. The origin of this interruption is one of limited economic agency: “Nor is it until adversity has pressed sorely upon the proud and wounded spirit of the well-educated sons and daughters of old but impoverished families,” writes Moodie, that they “arm themselves with fortitude to meet and dare the heart-breaking conflict” (xxi).
Aware of the upsetting reality of emigration, Moodie reveals that she writes to confront the unrealistically optimistic accounts of life in Canada. Her readers are familiarized with the effects of elements such as intense climate on emigrant families from the perspective of a female settler. In the epigraph to the book and in poetic form, Moodie reports both hardships and triumphs of colonial settlement: “I sketch from Nature, and the picture’s true; Whate’er the subject, whether grave or gay, / Painful experience in a distant land / Made it mine own” (xix).

Like Francis A. Evans who, with a cautionary tone in *The Emigrant’s Directory* (1833), responded to the disappointment and dissatisfaction of emigrants misled by “numerous and extravagant accounts” (28), Moodie confronts the false portraits of the colony drawn in British promotional papers. Framing her narrative with historical and social context, Moodie speaks in a tone of honest authority:

> In 1830, the great tide of emigration flowed westward ... Public newspapers and private letters teemed with the unheard-of advantages ... The general interest, once excited, was industriously kept alive by pamphlets, published by interested parties, which prominently set forth all the good to be derived from a settlement in the Backwoods of Canada; while they carefully concealed the toil. (xxii)

Presumably in an attempt to avoid giving the sources credence, Moodie does not cite the specific newspapers and letters which exaggerated the good aspects of settlement to which she refers. An example of such promotional pamphlets is Henry Boulton’s *A Short Sketch of the Province of Upper Canada* (1826), in which each emigrant is guaranteed to attain fifty acres of freehold land and to be “respected and looked up to,” “seeing his family growing up around him” in prosperity (7). Other accounts, like William Cobbett’s *The Emigrant Guide* (1829), overlook negative
aspects and state that there is an impressive “prospect for the future” in Canada and it is “advisable for many good people to emigrate” (6).

Moodie gathers all early nineteenth-century pamphleteers and political figures into a group of greedy “dealers in wild lands [,] speculators in the folly and credulity of your fellow men” who are responsible for a “mass of misery, and of misrepresentation” (xxiii). Land speculators are transformed into “artful seducers” (xxiv) and are branded as designing men who consciously created a “Canada mania” for economic profit and political gain (xxiii). Supporting Moodie’s assertion, Elizabeth Thompson argues in her introduction to Robert MacDougall’s The Emigrant’s Guide to North America (1841), “So many books were written about Canada in the nineteenth century that British enthusiasm for the subject might well be considered a mania” (vii). Intervening in the exaggerated discourse of political propaganda, Moodie defines her own purpose supported by experience: “What the Backwoods of Canada are to the industrious and ever-to-be honoured sons of honest poverty, and what they are to the refined and accomplished gentleman, these simple sketches will endeavour to portray. They are drawn principally from my own experience” (xxiv). Her errand of honesty and disclosure is driven by social duty to English gentlefolk: “If these sketches should prove the means of deterring one family from sinking their property ... by going to reside in the backwoods of Canada, I shall consider myself amply repaid” (382).

Throughout the book, Moodie uses natural imagery to illustrate the hardships of residence in the backwoods and to depict a specifically Canadian identity, one fixed to a challenging and often hostile environment and climate. According to Margaret Atwood in Strange Things (1995), Moodie, along with her sister Catharine Parr Traill, is part of the “first wave” of Canadian female authors whose confrontation with nature follows three patterns: the
woman as a tourist, as adaptive, and as a “dismayed” emigrant (97). Although “first wave” Canadian women endeavoured to admire the aesthetics of the natural world, up close it was too full of discomforts and dangers. The social situation of each individual woman influences the degree of her inclusion in Atwood’s triad. For instance, Jameson, without children, has the luxury to spend many winter and summer days as a tourist with servants and attendants, sketching images of the “sublime desolation of a northern winter” (49) and recording poeticized “reflections and comparisons excited by so much novel experience” (9). By contrast, Moodie, as a wife and mother, must quickly confront the harsh season as a tangible and threatening aspect of the place she now calls her family’s home, “the land of [their] adoption” (Moodie 385). Her family’s health and comfort and her own suffering become her foremost concerns.

The Canadian climate is so intense and so foreign that it complicates Moodie’s English frames of reference as well as her roles as a woman and a mother. Moodie often begins a description of seasonal weather with facts, combined with powerful descriptive words like “iron”: “The winter had now fairly set in – the iron winter of 1833. The snow was unusually deep” (101). Her vocabulary underlines the foreignness, the unusualness, and severity, the indomitability associated with iron, of the colony’s cold season. The snow is unusual for the British settler and is an aspect of Moodie’s culture shock and fear. She laments the emotional effects of the cold, her young family’s inexperience and lack of knowledge of the new country, and the reality of the meagreness of her family’s shelter:

It being our first winter in Canada, and passed in such a miserable dwelling, we felt it very severely. The rigour of the climate subdued my proud, independent English spirit, and I actually shamed my womanhood, and cried with the cold ...
was a bitter, freezing night. A sharp wind howled without, and drove the fine snow through the chinks in the door. (101)

The severity of the winter forces Moodie to “huddle with [her] little ones over the stove” (215). She repeatedly attempts to project a sense of English fortitude, but finds it impossible to maintain unwavering emotional strength. When Moodie recalls the winter of 1837, she begins as a meteorological reporter, complete with a historical commentary and a monthly thermometric observation: “The early part of the winter of 1837, a year never to be forgotten in the annals of Canadian history, was very severe. During the month of February, the thermometer often ranged from eighteen to twenty-seven degrees below zero” (299). In the following statements, Moodie’s writing becomes increasingly emotionally charged. She draws the reader into the confines of her domestic sphere in which her observations are laden with distress regarding household duties and maternal responsibilities: “The wood that had been drawn for the fire was green, and it ignited too slowly to satisfy the shivering impatience of women and children; I vented mine in audibly grumbling over the wretched fire, at which I in vain endeavoured to thaw frozen bread, and to dress crying children” (299). Moodie’s roles as mother and Canadian settler are inseparable from the intensity of northern weather.

Meteorological conversations helped shape the expectations of nineteenth-century emigrants. The Victorian discourse on climate and epidemics struck fear and terror into the minds of many pioneers, a reality which Moodie does not conceal. Although Moodie attacks the dishonesty of public newspapers, private letters, and pamphlets, many emigrant guides and letters acknowledged recurrent bouts of illness in the Canadas. For example, in *The Emigrant’s Guide to Upper Canada* (1820), Charles Stuart, a soldier and magistrate, records the fact that during seasonal weather extremes there were corresponding “extraordinary concurrences of
unhealthy influences ... [and] dreadful disease” such as yellow fever (32). As well, John Mathison includes an anonymous letter dated October 22, 1833 in his *Counsel for Emigrants* (1834) which reports a climate “favourable to health” in the townships along the Ottawa River but cautions that settlers in other areas, such as the bush country, are chronically plagued by ague and fever (122). Likewise, the first line of the opening chapter, “A Visit to Grosse Isle,” begins with the ominous statement, “The dreadful cholera was depopulating Quebec and Montreal, when our ship cast anchor off Grosse Isle, on the 30th of August, 1832” (1). Opening her account with such a statement situates Moodie within nineteenth-century concerns about health. She refers to a well-documented epidemic of drastic proportions. George C. Kohn writes, “Acute outbreaks of cholera took the lives of at least 25,000 persons in Canada in 1832 and 1834 ... In February 1832, a quarantine station was established on Grosse Isle in the St. Lawrence River ... Upper Canada also suffered from the epidemic between mid-June and August 1832” (57-58). Moodie declares that in Montreal during the month of August, “the cholera was at its height, and the fear of infection ... cast a gloom over the scene” (24). For Moodie, the surroundings are noticeably altered by a sense of doom created by the disease she encounters. Physical setting is changed by emotion.

Moodie’s historical commentary parallels her intervention in the scientific discourse on climate and disease. Some Victorian documents “affirmed, that [cholera and other diseases] passed along under the surface of the ground ... others, that water was a conductor ... others again, that it was borne along the wings of the wind” (Fidler 162). The questions being asked were focused on contagion, the communication of disease from one person or group to another. Was illness spread through water, through the air, or through direct physical contact? After personally experiencing the intensity of the Canadian seasons, Moodie takes a stand on the issue.
She argues that change in air temperature directly correlates with illness: “A late, cold spring in Canada is generally succeeded by a burning hot summer; and the summer of ’34 was the hottest I ever remember. ... [The] ague and fever in the woods, and the cholera in the large towns and cities, spread death and sickness throughout the country” (230). This belief in the spread of epidemics by air and because of temperature change was supported by most influential guidebooks, such as *The Farmers and Emigrants Complete Guide* (1854): “the air, which generally blows from the west and the southwest in the sickly months, carries [effluvia] directly” (Marshall 363). The wind was thought to carry disease into human settlements and individual dwellings. The presumption made by writers like Moodie was that more or less sickness was the consequence of climatic, primarily seasonal, variation.

Climatic variance and associated illnesses had a detrimental influence on Moodie’s family, and her readers are again introduced to the personal effects of climate on emigrant families from the perspective of a female settler. She presents seasonal sickness as it impedes daily comforts and activity: “Ague and lake fever had attacked our new settlement ... my husband was confined to his bed on each alternate day, unable to raise hand or foot, and raving in the delirium of the fever” (245). With her husband unable to support his family because of illness and with no friends, family, or servants to offer aid, Moodie is once again forced to set aside her English pride and care for her family with the limited means available to her. She writes in a tone of upset, “I was left to struggle through, in the best manner I could, with a sick husband, a sick child, and a new-born babe. It was a melancholy season, one of severe mental and bodily suffering” (245). Reminding her readers of her intention of confronting and correcting dishonest images of the colony, she states, “Those who have drawn such agreeable pictures of a residence in the backwoods never dwell upon the periods of sickness, when, far
from medical advice ... you are left to languish, unattended upon the couch of pain” (245). Moodie’s efforts to inform an English audience considering emigration is motivated by more than a concern for the people of her homeland. She is writing especially to future female settlers who will be forced to care for and nurse husbands and children in the colony with limited resources. Her concerns are undoubtedly those of a wife and a mother who knows firsthand the dangers of the new environment and the negative effects of the harsh seasonal temperatures.

Fulfilling one of the most important tasks tied to her purpose, Moodie portrays the effects of the Canadian climate upon agriculture, the primary means of survival for settlers in British North America, and, importantly for her female readers, the necessity of women to aid their husbands in farming in the backwoods. Like Shadd and Jameson, Moodie praises the quick change from season to season and the subsequent rapid growth of vegetation, a process which is characteristic of the northern latitude: “It had been a very late, cold spring, but the trees had fully expanded into leaf, and the forest was glorious in its beauty ... Once the warm weather sets in, the rapid advance of vegetation in Canada is astonishing” (120). However, as an emigrant rather than a traveller, Moodie provides an analysis of the unpredictability of the seasons from a practical perspective. Relying on the success of the Moodie farm for the nourishment of her family and herself, she carefully details the effects of irregular weather on agricultural yield:

The summer of ’35 was very wet ... The rain commenced about a week before the crop was fit for the sickle, and from that time until nearly the end of September was a mere succession of thunder showers; days of intense heat, succeeded by floods of rain. Our fine crop ... was totally spoiled; the wheat grew in the sheaf, and we could scarcely save enough to supply us with bad, sticky bread; the rest was exchanged at the distillery for whiskey. (269)
Her dismayed but matter-of-fact description of a wet season and a spoiled wheat crop is much like those in nineteenth-century farming periodicals: “The wheat sown upon such land in a wet season, when the furrow was running together after the plough, what is to be expected but deterioration, retrogradation, and bad crops?” (*The Farmer’s Magazine* 1836, 314). Farming magazines and manuals were filled with experiential advice on how to prevent unsuccessful crops but also to cope with them if they did occur. Similarly, Moodie’s ability to deal with a disappointing yield to the best of her ability, for example, making “bad, sticky bread” and exchanging the rest at a distillery, advises her readers on how to survive through tough times.

Elizabeth Errington writes in *Wives and Mothers* (1995) that “even the most gentle farming wife sometimes found herself helping to make hay or planting and harvesting” (103). Moodie’s alignment with agricultural manuals illustrates her resistant adaptation to a life as a Canadian pioneer.

Writing as a female settler, Moodie indicates that she performs menial tasks out of necessity. This breakdown of English standards of genteel behaviour was a common experience for pioneer women. Even prominent aristocratic women like Anne Langton (1804-1893) ran a rural household once they were in Canada (*A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada*); “How differently our domestic arrangements are formed here and in England!” Langton observes (249). All pioneer women shared the experience of hard physical labour, particularly when finances or weather complications made the management of farms demanding. The life of the female emigrant, regardless of English status, was inherently “governed by constant physical toil” (Errington 86). Highlighting the Canadian lifestyle driven by material necessity, Moodie writes, “My husband and I worked hard in the field; it was the first time I had ever tried my hand at field-labour, but our ready money was exhausted ... we could not hire, and there was no help for
it” (269). A woman working in the fields as well as the household was common during the first years of settlement when children were small and cash, goods, and labourers were scarce.

Moodie’s social agenda is to correct misinformation and to represent the realistic effects of the hostile northern environment upon the survival and prosperity of emigrant families. Writing for an audience seeking “truthfulness” (Moodie 385), she includes climatic information in an effort to warn English gentlemen and ladies about the hardships which unavoidably await them. Employing weather-related and agricultural observations as markers of settler identity, Moodie criticizes propaganda that coaxes “brave and honourable men” to a life in the bush (xxiii). These men have not “counted the cost” and have “only looked upon the bright side of the picture” (xxiii). Throughout Roughing It in the Bush, her attack on idealized pictures of Canada is informed by the experience of a pioneer woman.

In this chapter, I have examined Winter Studies and Summer Rambles (1838) by Anna Jameson, A Plea for Emigration (1852) by Mary Ann Shadd, and Roughing It in the Bush (1852) by Susanna Moodie and the ways in which the writers make sense of and narrate their Canadian experiences, drawing on social and scientific models of self, identity, language and narrative available to them in their cultures. Individually and for varying purposes, the authors studied in this chapter extend their personal accounts to include scientific conversations. In the case of Shadd, the author’s adoption of scientific language is bound to her identity as a social advocate and her political purpose to encourage African-American emigration into Upper Canada, away from the dangers of slavery in the United States. Jameson presents her records of environmental and climatic observations as those of an upper-class tourist, often in witty, lyrical, romanticized, and entertaining language. However, she seems motivated by the purpose of illustrating a
holistic education for her female audience, which combines literature and science as she intertwines sentimentality with intellectual conversation and scientific fact. Initially classist in its social agenda, Moodie’s narrative shifts back and forth between the style of the witty observer and the identity of the struggling, coping, and finally adaptive female emigrant to warn prospective emigrants of the realities of Canadian hardships. She attacks the idealized view of the Canadian climate projected in some promotional publications to reflect the disunity between cultural ideology and the female settler condition.
2 Professionalization of the Petals: An Ecofeminist Analysis of Catharine Parr Traill’s Writing as an Amateur Botanist

[Their names have gradually fallen into neglect, and the part they played in the advancement of Canadian botany – important if obscure – cannot now be ascertained.

(Penhallow 12)

The advancement of botany leading up to and during the nineteenth century was markedly gendered, being a transformation from an eighteenth-century field of inquiry accessible to women to a professionalized science restricted to men. Throughout the eighteenth century, women had culturally sanctioned access to botany, as well as other sciences like astronomy, physics, mathematics, chemistry, and natural history. Ann B. Shteir suggests, “science learning was part of general and polite culture, [and] women were cultivated as consumers of scientific knowledge” (2). Intertwining aesthetic, utilitarian, and intellectual approaches to the natural world, women collected and studied plants in numerous social and cultural domains such as agriculture, medicine, taxonomy, geography, religion, and commerce. Partially facilitated by traditional mythological and literary associations that link flowers and gardens with women and nature with femininity, women not only had access to botanical work but were considered to be naturally reliable sources on the subject. For example, embodying an Enlightenment approach to the moral and intellectual value of natural knowledge, Priscilla Wakefield’s *Introduction to Botany* (1796) takes the scientific education of young women very seriously, combining
scientific investigation and natural theology. The book, which followed the tradition of Linnean classification, was considered the standard botanical textbook for two generations of readers. Such books gave women substantial intellectual authority (Laura Johnson, *Botanical Teacher for North America* 1834; Almira Hart Lincoln Phelps, *Familiar Lectures on Botany* 1829; Jane Kilby Welsh, *Botanical Catechism* 1819). Collecting plant specimens, drawing them, studying them, naming them, and instructing their children about the plant world and writing accessible books on botany, women stood at the forefront of the popular, public dissemination of botanical knowledge in Britain, the United States, and Canada. Throughout the 1820s and the 1830s, alternative directions toward professionalization in botany became apparent. Women were increasingly discouraged from publishing botanical books, which were beginning to be characterized by hard science and assumed to be appropriate only for men. Women, who were once prominent voices in the field, were “gender-tagged” and placed into a “botanical separate sphere” (Shteir, “Gender and ‘Modern’ Botany” 29), a sphere which was excluded from mainstream discussions and the masculinized world of science. Botanical culture, like scientific culture more generally, was moving in the direction of increasing stratification and specialization, and tensions grew between popularizing on the one hand and professionalizing impulses on the other.

This chapter examines the ways in which the defeminized direction of botanical culture shaped what Canadian women learned, how they practiced science, what they wrote, and how they positioned themselves in relation to audiences. I explore the writing of Catharine Parr Traill (1802-1899) in *The Backwoods or Canada* (1836), *Canadian Wild Flowers* (1867), *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* (1885), and *Pearls and Pebbles* (1894). These four books, written over a sixty-year period, demonstrate Traill’s devotion to scientific knowledge as well as her literary
role, her willingness to learn from her own experiences and observations as well as those of others, and her growing knowledge of plant taxonomy. Following the school of systematical botany which focuses upon comparing the external structures of plants, distinguishing species, and arranging plants into categories of genera, order, and class, Traill collected and identified plant specimens in and around Douro Township in the Upper Canadian backwoods. Traill was contributing to serious science as she discovered, identified, and even named new species in the colony, not to mention the fact that the majority of her narratives centre on a “passion for flowers” (*Backwoods of Canada* 101).

Contributing to the creation of a Canadian botanical taxonomy and a scientific community in the colony, Traill was an important voice in the developing nation’s scientific identity. Other female botanists were also neglected in the nineteenth century, like the regional collectors of Quebec, Lady Christina Dalhousie (1786-1839), Harriet Sheppard (d. 1837), and Anne Marie Perceval (1790-1876). Dalhousie, Sheppard, and Perceval were restricted from publishing their botanical collections and findings because of their sex. Instead, all three women sent specimens and findings, which they could not publish in collections of their own, to contribute to William Jackson Hooker’s *Flora Boreali-Americana* (1833). Lady Dalhousie also contributed to *The Canadian Naturalist and Geologist*, but only within articles written by male botanists. Similarly, Harriet Sheppard sent specimens to John Torrey and Asa Gray for their *Flora of North America* (1838-43), specimens for which she received little recognition. Along with the work of these women, Traill’s achievements as botanist and natural historian have been largely overlooked. As Barbara T. Gates argues, “The hidden, behind-the-scenes nature of

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11 The unfortunate inheritance for modern researchers is that many of these women, such as Lady Dalhousie, have fallen into obscurity based on a lack of acknowledgement for their accomplishments. Alongside scientific exclusion, many of their personal records have been lost. Therefore, finding research materials on many nineteenth-century female botanical collectors is difficult and, in some cases, not possible.
women’s work in the fields of science concealed many individual accomplishments” (Kindred Nature 67). Instead of being recognized for such accomplishments, Michael A. Peterman suggests, “Traill is most likely to be studied as a counterpoint to her more dynamic and outspoken sister Susanna Moodie and as the author of pioneer memoir, settlers’ guidebook, and instructive stories and sketches for children” (174). To address this historical omission, I align myself with Marianne G. Ainley and Christoph Irmscher. Ainley insists that Traill “most certainly was not a ‘splendid anachronism’ nor was her work that of a struggling ‘amateur.’ ... [S]he had the opportunity to explore new areas, observe geographical differences in plant and animal distribution and ‘discover’ new plants” (93). Irmscher underlines the ways in which Traill’s writing illustrates a “commitment to precise observation” (“Writing by Victorian Naturalists” 147) and an attempt to create botanical guides that could “claim to be both science and art” (148; original emphasis). Agnes Fitzgibbon, Traill’s niece who illustrated Canadian Wild Flowers, according to Irmscher, similarly tries to “combine solid science with aesthetic effect” (148). Like Ainley and Irmscher, I aim to foster a deeper understanding of Traill’s work as a serious botanist and to illuminate the significance of her contributions to the scientific knowledge of Canadian botany.

An examination of twentieth-century literary criticism reveals that Traill’s achievements as a natural historian have been insufficiently or superficially analysed by modern scholars. Traill does receive praise, although often lacking in illustration or historical context, for her two botanical studies, Canadian Wild Flowers and Studies of Plant Life in Canada, in a number of essays from the 1970s. Jean Cole argues that “so little work was done in her field in her day that her text [Studies] now stands as a unique record of Canada in its natural state” (79). Elizabeth Collard briefly remarks that “Mrs. Traill not only achieved a place among recognized botanists,
she made original contributions to the science” (32). Elizabeth MacCallum suggests that “the seriousness of her botanical pursuits went beyond a genteel taste for floral beauty. She was interested in every aspect of the plant” (45). Tributes of this kind are praiseworthy, and they are a starting point from which to recognize an important but often obscured aspect of Traill’s life and work. However, they lack concrete socio-historical substance as they ignore the tensions, complexities, and challenges that Traill faced as a nineteenth-century woman writing within an evolving Canadian literary and scientific environment. Consequently, Traill’s work as a whole often receives the condescending response originating in Northrop Frye’s “Conclusion” to Carl Klinck’s *The Literary History of Canada* (1965) in which Frye criticizes Traill for promoting an overly idealistic, sentimental myth of nature, “a somewhat selective approach to the subject reminiscent of Miss Muffet” (845). As a result, Traill has been labelled as a simple pioneer who uses domesticity and botanical gleanings to avoid the hostile realities of Canadian life (Fowler 1982; MacGregor 1985) and as Peterman suggests, an unprofessional botanist: “an outsider to the emerging, self-conscious, and self-promoting world of science in colonial Canada” whose work may have been important but had “little impact on the study of botany in the ... nineteenth century” (179).

The neglect of Traill’s scientific writing is, in part, the result of a lack of an appropriate context for a gendered history of Canadian science or for women’s science writing. It is also an illustration of an androcentric perspective, which focused on the accomplishments of men and neglected or excluded writing produced by women, initiated by some nineteenth-century male writers. Especially from an ecofeminist perspective, it becomes apparent that nineteenth-century Canada’s female writers often used natural history to discuss popular concepts of nature and culture. Traill interpreted the physical world around her and contributed to the scientific debates
of the day. Ecofeminist theory helps to correct the shortcomings of readings and interpretations which have framed women as struggling and ultimately failing naturalists.

The work of John Lindley (1799-1865), professor of botany, writer, and institutional power broker in early Victorian England, anticipates the focus upon the professionalization of botany. Central to Lindley’s campaign for the modernization of botany was the reconfiguration of the field into a masculine, utilitarian science, thereby cutting the ties between botanical studies and the polite accomplishments that were considered the realm of women. He rejected Linnean systematics and botany as taxonomy, favouring the natural system and morphology instead. In other words, he rejected Linnean botany as a discipline open to both sexes. Defining institutional botany as something different from an activity of amusement for ladies, Lindley’s *Ladies’ Botany* (1834-1837) illuminates the Victorian effort to separate women from science. Lindley writes for “the unlearned reader” who “would become acquainted with Botany as an amusement and a relaxation” (iv). The text is written in epistolary form, organized as fifty letters to a mother who wants to teach her children about plants. The rhetorical qualities of the book, for instance likening the veins of leaves to “the hem of a lady’s gown” (271), locate the female reader in a realm of botany confined to the home. *Ladies’ Botany*, a prime example of the Victorian attitude toward the natural sciences, does not prepare women to contribute to new taxonomies, to undertake botanical research, to collect specimens for the modern science, or to do fieldwork of any sort, work that women like Traill undertook with great success. Instead, a woman’s role in relation to botany was to teach her children. Lindley arranges plant species in groups or “tribes” according to what the readers’ “children must be familiar with” (77). Lindley’s text underlines that women were “confined to a narrow range of marginal activities, away from (or, at best, auxiliary to) the centres of prestige and innovation in research and
publishing” (Gould 29). Women with scientific interests were accepted as informed readers who understood the natural world because they were connected to it because of their reproductive capabilities. However, this understanding was set apart from mainstream rational pursuits.

The Socio-Historical Development of Botany in Nineteenth-Century Canada

From the late-eighteenth to the late-nineteenth century, the historical development of botanical science in Europe and in the colonies was part of a larger narrative of scientific development. There was a transformation from a field of inquiry accessible to amateur scientists of both sexes to a professionalized science restricted to men working in academic disciplines. As a result of eighteenth-century Enlightenment science and its taxonomic efforts to collect and systematize nature, botany was a popular activity that combined amusement and improvement. The easily adopted and understood system of Linnaeus made the naming and classification of flora possible for both sexes, regardless of prior scientific education. As Lady Charlotte Murray writes in The British Garden (1799), “The expensive apparatus of the Observatory, and the labours of Chemistry, confine the science of Astronomy, and the study of Minerals to a few; ... but the study of Botany, that science by means of which we discriminate and distinguish one plant from another, is open to almost every curious mind” (vi). However, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the imperial and Canadian focus shifted to complex geographic and genetic studies of plant life supported by laboratory evidence. By the last decades of the century, botanists were oriented towards institutional and academic scientific disciplines, including anatomical, physiological, and paleontological botany.

Early botany in British North America had close ties with imperial interests and was therefore inspired by the same Linnean convictions and goals which characterized European and
British botany. Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820), who popularized the Linnaean system and brought science into the political arena of Britain as head of the Royal Society (Fara 2003), and Sir William Jackson Hooker (1785-1865) and his son Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817-1911) participated in important expeditions which resulted in a rise in the economic importance of systematic botany to the British Empire.\textsuperscript{12} Besides applying plant taxonomy to record and control plants accumulated and redistributed within the empire, naturalists like Banks encouraged careful studies and cultivation of foreign and domestic species in order to secure imperial proprietorship over vast agricultural lands.\textsuperscript{13} In British North America, a science focused upon the identification and cultivation of plants in harsh northerly latitudes was of evident utilitarian importance to an evolving agricultural economy. Naturalists like Banks and Hooker as well as local amateurs, men and women alike, added to the catalogue of knowledge on northern vegetation, crucial for the development of British North America. Imperial investment in and personal enthusiasm for the expansion of Canadian botany encouraged a growing recognition of the potential importance of a botanical inventory.

Canadian emigrants, male and female amateurs, participating in systematic botany throughout the first few decades of the nineteenth century were influenced by three different but related approaches: the intellectual, the agricultural, and the scientific. The first type, the intellectual argument, is illustrated by David Chisholme, editor of the \textit{Canadian Review and Magazine in Montreal} during the 1820s. Chisholme believed that it was time to turn from sensational features of the Canadian landscape such as the solitude of its forests and the roaring of its cataracts to more specific objects of research. A thorough inventory of the country was

\textsuperscript{12} Tropical regions were valued for their lush, exotic vegetation which was both aesthetically appealing and useful (e.g. cinchona, cacao, coffee), but Canada held imperialist attention as a source of the white pine most suitable for ship masts; see Brockway.

\textsuperscript{13} See Crosby for a study of the ways in which the successes of European imperialism were connected with a spread of organisms, namely disease, flora, and fauna.
needed, including its flora, in preparation for permanent settlement and a parallel growth in intellectual and scientific independence. According to Chisholme in 1825, Canada was emerging “from the dark and gothic gloom” and therefore must “commence to examine into its interior, and find how far she is capable of being independent of other nations for her resources” (287). The second type of botanical inventory was more narrowly focused upon agricultural improvement. This movement was represented by John Young (1773-1837), a Scottish emigrant to Nova Scotia, who published a series of open letters entitled *The Letters of Agricola on the Principles of Vegetation and Tillage* (1818) in the Halifax *Acadian Recorder*. Young’s goals were to reveal the flaws of regional agricultural practices and to convince Nova Scotians and Canadians at large that grain could be successfully harvested. He believed that to use the land, “enlightened and scientific men” must be appointed to prepare botanical reports on the plants best suited for various districts (Young 13-23). In order to survive within the imperial economic system, Canadians needed to determine the extent of their country’s agricultural potential. The third approach to Canadian botany was more strictly scientific and focused on inventory for the purpose of advancing scientific knowledge. W.J. Hooker’s *Flora Boreali-Americana; or, the Botany of the Northern Parts of British North America* (1833) was central to the development of a sophisticated botanical study in British North America. Judged by Victorian botanists like Asa Gray to “mark an epoch in North American botany, which could now be treated as a whole” (*Scientific Papers* 325), Hooker’s compendium notes the great strides made in Canadian botany by collectors on expeditions like Sir John Franklin’s first two polar expeditions from 1819-1822 and from 1827-1827 and David Douglas’ travels across north-western North America from

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14 Most settlers accepted without question that a quick inventory of the types of plants and trees in a district could determine the correct choice for a fertile and prosperous homestead; see Strickland.
1825-1826. Hooker informs an international audience that British North America had produced many native botanists and was developing its own botanical inventory.

Often intersecting and complementary, the intellectual, agricultural and scientific approaches to Canadian botany initiated significant argument over practical approaches to the science. As a result of theoretical division on the purpose of botanical study, there was no obvious institutional centre for a botanical inventory. In the spring of 1856, the Botanical Society of Montreal (BSM), formed by members of the Natural History Society of Montreal (NHSM), met for the first time. However, the BSM quickly lost support and was followed by a national organization, the Botanical Society of Canada (BSC), founded in December of 1860. Although the Society inaugurated the *Annals of the Botanical Society of Canada* in 1861, it did not last long. The concept of a botanical inventory of Canada did not attain national public support until the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC) was expanded to include natural history in 1877.

Although early botany could be distinguished from the other Canadian inventory sciences by its lack of centralization and institutional organization, rising scientific interest was evident within the country’s already established societies. Both the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec (LHSQ) and the NHSM reported that many Canadians had turned their attention to serious botanical pursuits. The LHSQ and the NHSM strove to encourage the scientific development by offering popular lectures on botany (LHSQ, *Transactions* 30 Dec. 1830; NHSM, *Annual Report* 1830, 1835). Lectures organized, for a primarily male audience, by the two societies increased popular awareness of native trees, shrubs, and flowers. Prizes were offered for essays on the plants of Canada as well as the commercial and manufacturing value of various plant species.
In the second half of the nineteenth century, the pursuit of a botanical catalogue was changing alongside scientific professionalization. There was a split between the Linnean systematist and the emerging geneticist. The dominant morphological view was gradually superseded by the genetic, culminating in Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of the Species* (1859). This increasingly complex approach to vegetable life, aligned with interest in what would grow in certain geographical areas, further advanced the professionalization of botany originally presented by men like Lindley. Scientific activity was transformed from the “individual, occasional pursuit of private research as an avocation, to the prosecution of science by full-time professionals” (MacLeod 111).

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Canadian focus had turned away from the traditional inclusion of amateur collectors and had fully embraced the new exclusionary emphasis on training male professionals in anatomical and genetic botany. The female collector was largely removed from the history of Canadian botanical science. This shift, which had taken half of a century to develop, was embodied by David Pearce Penhallow (1854-1910), an American trained at Boston College who was appointed as Professor of Botany at McGill University in 1885. In the *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* for 1897, Penhallow contributed a well-received historiographic paper entitled “A Review of Canadian Botany from 1800-1895.” Michael A. Peterman defines the essay as “a report to the elite and initiated” (174). Penhallow is full of praise for influential botanists like Frederick Pursh, George Lawson, John Macoun, the Abbé Léon Provancher, W.J. Hooker, and Sir William Dawson. However, in his bibliography, which lists over 100 names and nearly 500 publications, Professor Penhallow names no women and only a small group of male amateurs. Even Traill,

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15 For a historical study of the emergence of Darwinism, including its divergence from the attention to systematic ordering, see Radick.
then ninety-five years old and the subject of significant professional attention, is nowhere named, even as a prominent amateur. It is only in the context of Hooker’s remark in his *Flora Boreali-Americana* (1840) that “the more densely inhabited parts of Canada have produced many native botanists” (11) that Penhallow names two women, Lady Dalhousie and Anne Mary Perceval. However, he observes that Dalhousie, Perceval, and all female botanists have been consigned to obscurity and therefore to inevitable historical omission:

> Owing to their work being wholly confined to collecting, and in the absence of published writings, their names have gradually fallen into neglect, and the part they played in the advancement of Canadian botany – important if obscure – cannot now be ascertained. (Penhallow 12)

This bow to amateurism reveals the attitude of exclusionism that developed from professional training, status, and advantage. Considering socio-historical context, one notes a determination to separate the masculinized professional from the amateur, the methodologist from the observer, and the man of science from the female collector. Nonetheless, some women like Traill were actively participating in botanical observation, collection, and writing.

**From Suffolk to Lakefield: A Brief Biography of Catharine Parr Traill**

Catharine Parr Traill was born Catharine Strickland in Rotherhithe, England on 9 January 1802. She was the fifth daughter of Thomas Strickland and Elizabeth Homer.16 Although Traill spent nearly seventy years in Canada, the foundation of her values, beliefs, and interests was established in the picturesque, rural locale of her childhood. Closely following her birth, her father, Thomas Strickland, retired as manager of the Docks on the Thames and moved his family

16 For biographical studies of Traill, see Eaton, Fowler 55-87, and Gray.
to the Suffolk coast. A man with vast intellectual interests, Strickland aspired to undertake the education of his daughters. At Stowe House and later at Reydon Hall on the coast, the children were taught in such subjects as geography, history, natural history, literature, and mathematics. Strickland also emphasized the value of industriousness and careful observation beyond the classroom, encouraging his children to make their own toys, raise their own pets, collect and observe flowers, and tend to personal gardens. The intimate knowledge of flora influenced Traill’s passion for botany. Her autobiographical work, *Sketches from Nature; or, Hints to the Juvenile Naturalists* (1830), reveals that close attention to the natural environment was an integral part of her childhood education. In addition, the children’s mother, Elizabeth Strickland, educated the girls in skills such as cooking, sewing, embroidery, and home medicine. As mentioned in the section on her sister Susanna Moodie, the death of Thomas Strickland in May of 1818 at Reydon Hall left the family in a state of poverty. Like her sister Susanna, Catharine turned to literary aspirations in an attempt to maintain the family’s life at the hall. In the mode of Thomas Day, Maria Edgeworth, and Sarah Trimmer, between 1819 and 1831, Catharine Strickland published ten stories characterized by moral instruction, didacticism, and autobiographical reminiscence (e.g. *Little Downy; or, the history of a field mouse: a moral tale* (1822); *The Keepsake Guineas; or, the best use of money* (1828); *Sketchbook of a Young Naturalist; or, hints to the students of nature* (1831)).

On 13 May 1832, Catharine Strickland married Lieutenant Thomas Traill, a marriage that was promptly succeeded by emigration to Canada. Thomas Traill, a widowed Scot and half-pay British army officer, was already in substantive personal debt, and Westove, the family estate in the Orkneys to which he was heir, was burdened with arrears. Therefore, with the hope of a fresh start, enticed by cheap land prices in Upper Canada, and optimistic about Thomas’
prospective employment as a land-grant entitlement officer, the Traills boarded the Laurel in early July of 1832 in passage to British North America. The problems stemming from their lack of funds were at first eased by Catharine’s younger brother Samuel Strickland as he arranged for their land grant to be near his own property in Douro Township and provided them with a home while their log cabin was being built. However, Thomas Traill had no experience as a farmer and found isolation in the backwoods depressing. Besieged by debts and discouraged about his limited success as a property dealer, Traill sold the Douro property in 1839 and moved his growing family to Peterborough, followed by numerous unsuccessful relocations throughout the 1840s. Between 1833 and 1847, Catharine gave birth to nine children, two of whom died in infancy. Illness and pregnancy rendered her inactive a great deal of the time. However, to help alleviate financial strains she tried school teaching in Peterborough and she continued to write stories, sketches of nature, botanical manuals, autobiographical narratives, and the occasional piece for John Lovell’s magazine and the Literary Garland. The 1850s were a decade of difficulty for the Traill family, marked by death, illness, lack of basic necessities, crop failures, and bouts of depression suffered by Thomas, who died on 21 June 1859. Catharine Parr Traill lived out the remainder of her long life in a quiet Lakefield cottage until her death on 19 August 1899.

A Gentlewoman’s “passion for flowers” and Emigration in The Backwoods of Canada (1836)

The episodes of the Traill family’s first three years in the Upper Canadian bush are recounted in Catharine Parr Traill’s best known book, The Backwoods of Canada (1836). The book is composed of 18 letters, which were adapted from ones sent by Traill to her family in England, to
tell the story of emigration, settlement, and adaptation. The epistolary form with dialogue and conversation interspersed was popular in the literary and cultural history of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Ann B. Shteir underlines the form as a “foundational narrative mode for fiction, pedagogical writing, and popular science writing” (Cultivating Women 81). In the accessible style of writing home, Traill offers a practical guide for English gentlewomen faced, as many were throughout the 1830s, with the formidable prospect of emigration to the British North American wilderness: “‘Forewarned, forearmed,’ is a maxim of our forefathers ... and following its spirit, the writer of the following pages has endeavoured to afford every possible information to the wives and daughters of emigrants of the higher class who contemplate seeking a home amid our Canadian wilds” (Backwoods 9). Describing environmental surroundings – both floral and faunal – travels, house-building, food preparation, and land-clearing, Traill interprets the Canadian experience through a lens of feminine respectability, social class, and good taste. She characteristically aims to adjust her expectations without compromising her English principles: she was resilient, educated, resourceful, curious, and ever devoted to a strong, Anglican faith. Depicting daily triumphs of the English spirit in meeting with harsh environmental conditions, Backwoods sent a positive message to prospective middle- and upper-class emigrants while also acknowledging the difficulties faced by new settlers, particularly by “the female part of the family” who, according to Traill, peculiarly feel the “hardships and difficulties of the settler’s life” (12). Backwoods is a guide to making habitable and learning to inhabit the Upper Canadian bush; it is the narrative of a developing bond between an English gentlewoman and the colonial backwoods.

By the time Traill sailed from Britain to Canada in 1832, the study of natural history and popular science writing had become accepted occupations for upper-class European women.
Known to her British audience as a naturalist, botanist, and successful author, Traill brought with her to Canada a prominent interest in science and numerous years of experience as a published writer. She was writing in accordance with the “tradition of women writing [botanical books] in the form of letters and conversations” (Shteir, *Cultivating Women* 61). In the early nineteenth century, as Marianne G. Ainley indicates, “Science and literature were still considered as a part of general culture rather than mutually exclusive activities,” and women were the main popularizers of science within mainstream writing (79). However, the narrative approach to science was already starting to be severely criticized by the time of *Backwoods*’ publication.

Exemplifying a gendered critique, in *The First Lines of Botany, or Primer to the Linnean System* (1827), John S. Forsyth excoriates the “familiar style” of the female educator, cast as a “garrulous old woman” or “pedantic spinster”; the familiar format, he argues, is “that which is thrust forward in the conversational or epistolary style, by people indifferently acquainted with the sciences they would thereby promulgate” (17). Forsyth’s stigmatization of women as popular science educators may be extreme, even in his time. However, his attack is aimed at a narrative practice widespread in women’s writing.

Undeniably, Traill was not a trained scientist and was not writing in narrative form for an audience that necessarily coincided with Lindley’s concept of modern botany or Forsyth’s masculinized “industrious and inquisitive mind” (17). She did not begin her botanical collecting or writing with the language, training, books, equipment, or funding of the sophisticated botanist. She often laments the lack of access to up-to-date books in the backwoods: “There is a public library at York, a small circulating library at Coburg, but they might just as well be on the other side of the Atlantic for any access we can have to them” (Traill, *Backwoods* 234). In addition, there is no reference in her publications or her correspondence to Charles Darwin, which
suggests she may have been unfamiliar with the complexities of the evolving world of science or else objected to Darwin’s views, as so many did.\textsuperscript{17} For the majority of the nineteenth century in Canada, the natural historian and the practical scientist were parallel and often intersecting contributors to the evolution of a Canadian science. Both the amateur and the developing professional were responding to “nature’s unpredictable and brutal force” (Zeller 3). The methodological approach to the natural environment contained a hopeful “counter-thrust” to issues of geography and to the threats of a northern climate and offered a means of evolving from “mere survival” to “real prosperity” (3). Central to a study of figures like Traill, this progressive spirit included the premise that “Any individual could add piecemeal to the stock of knowledge” or to the “common inventorial purpose” which characterized the budding science of botany in colonial Canada (4). Traill integrated her knowledge of science and her “love of natural history” (\textit{Backwoods} 23) into her writing during the sixty-seven years she lived in Upper Canada. Therefore, despite the difficulties associated with residence in the backwoods and her distance from cultural centres, she maintained her interest in the various channels of natural history. In \textit{Backwoods}, she writes about geology, fossils, mineralogy, zoology, and ornithology in addition to botany.

In a new colony, according to Traill, the “volume of history is yet a blank, [but] that of Nature is open” (129). Natural history and botany become a means to develop a body of knowledge and a comforting sense of accomplishment for a female audience. Traill aims, in demonstrating the “Utility of Botanical Knowledge” (189), to show that the studies of the naturalist might compensate for the absence of family, friends, and “those lighter feminine

\textsuperscript{17} Darwin’s ideas and the concept of evolution at large were critically attacked in Canadian scientific circles. In fact, geologist William Dawson was one of Darwin’s major antagonists in the 1870s; see Berger 60, 70.
accomplishments” (12) in the bush. For Traill, botany is an integral aspect of a serious female education in the colony, cultivating and enlightening the mind:

The writer is earnest in recommending ladies who belong to the higher class of settlers to cultivate all the mental resources of a superior education ... She would willingly direct their attention to the natural history and botany of this new country, in which they will find a never-failing source of amusement and instruction, at once enlightening and elevating the mind. (11-12)

Combining instruction and delight, botanical collection and study are sources of a multifaceted strength, engendering not only peace of mind and educational growth but also a firm sense of identity. In personal terms, the study of nature and particularly of flora helped emotionally sustain Traill through prolonged periods of difficulty and deprivation. “For myself,” she writes in May of 1833, “I can easily enter into the feelings of the poet and the enthusiastic lover of the wild ... I can yet make myself very happy and contented in this country” (129). Botanical study provided an invaluable link between past and present, childhood and adulthood, Suffolk and Upper Canada, and cultivation and wilderness. She suggests to her readers that the beauties of nature open “stores of unmixed pleasure,” which will “not permit her to be dull or unhappy in the loneliest part of our Western Wilderness” (12). For Traill, botany offered a distinct measure by which one may understand matters of knowledge, identity, moral worth, and divine order.

Integrating her Old World value system into her adaptation to the Canadian environment, Traill’s observations of the natural world are often religious. Carl Berger states that the centrality of theology within British botanical literature “went generally unchallenged until the later Victorian period” (31). Succinctly stated in 1834 by Eliza Eve Gleadall in *The Beauties of Flora*, “There is religion in a flower” (iii). Reflecting imperial ideological ties, the inventories of
nineteenth-century Canadian botany, and natural science at large, were supported by a religious conservativism. Throughout the nineteenth century, natural history was “an instrument for the appropriation and control of nature and a vehicle through which divine purpose stood revealed” (Berger 77). As Traill makes clear at the end of Letters XIV and XVII in *Backwoods*, flowers and other natural phenomena are rungs on a Jacob’s ladder up which the human might move towards God. As educators and moral guides for both children and the general public, for Traill, women must instil the connection between botany and natural theology: “My dear boy seems already to have a taste for flowers, which I will encourage as much as possible. It is a study that tends to refine and purify the mind, and can be made, by simple steps, a ladder to heaven, as it were, by teaching a child to look with love and admiration to that bountiful God who created and made flowers so fair” (Traill, *Backwoods* 206). Throughout *Backwoods*, nature provides Traill with emblems for her own industrious movement towards adaptation and a Canadian self, a selfhood defined by the curiousity and diligence of the botanist.

Traill continually notes the unparalleled opportunities for field-setting discovery and identification in Canada. When she first arrived in Canada, in 1832, she found that “this country opens a wide and fruitful field to the inquiries of the botanist” (80-81). She already had a “passion for flowers” (101) dating back to her Suffolk childhood and botanical lessons from her parents. But arrival in the colony presented new opportunities for serious botanical inquiry and participation. Identifying plant species that had yet to be catalogued or described by European or American botanists was undoubtedly an exciting pursuit for the amateur. Traill did not hesitate to name her new findings. “As much of the botany of these unsettled portions of the country are unknown to the naturalist,” she tells her readers, “I take the liberty of bestowing names upon them according to inclination or fancy” (102). Though aware that “our scientific botanists in
Britain would consider me very impertinent in bestowing names on the flowers and plants I met with in these wild woods,” in a new country and in the absence of available documentation she felt free, she notes, to “give them names of my own choosing” (120). Quite consciously she distances herself from the European centres of botany and defines herself as a specifically Canadian, woman botanist.

Within a few months of her arrival in Upper Canada, Traill was becoming acquainted with the numerous species of flowers and plants she observed in the woods and the clearings of Douro Township. She collected specimens and compiled dried flower collections. She collected “some of the most singular of our native flowers for one of the Professors of Botany in the Edinburgh University” (Traill, *Backwoods* 195), and she diligently studied the size, shape, life cycle, and succession of numerous plants. Every letter in *Backwoods* includes a narration of collecting, identifying, and describing plant species. All entries are marked by a close attention to detail. Traill worked hard to add to her personal knowledge and to the knowledge which she might share with others. For example, in the October 1832 letter, she writes, “I have begun collecting, and though the season is far advanced, my hortus siccus [dried garden] boasts of several elegant specimens of fern; the yellow Canadian violet ...; two sorts of Michaelmas daisies, as we call the shrubby asters, of which the varieties here are truly elegant” (101-102).

She preserves specimens to send back to her family in England, although she realizes that specimens are poor representations of living beauty:

> These [winter-greens] I carefully preserved for you, but the dried plant will afford but an imperfect idea of the original. You always called, you know, your dried specimens corpses of plants ... The flower-stalk rises two or three inches from the centre of the plant, ... the stigma is of an emerald greenness, forming a slightly
A student of botany, Traill uses technical language, terms like flower stalks, stigmas, and stamens, to describe the winter-greens while maintaining her characteristic attention to blending aesthetic commentary and scientific detail. As Irmscher writes, “Traill delights in her knowledge of botanical language” in a style which combines “taxonomic exercises and poetic personifications” (“Nature-writing” 101).

Focusing on a regionally specific narrative of the natural environment, Traill includes information gathered from older settlers and local Aboriginal peoples. Traill develops her skills in plant lore through experience and knowledge passed on in oral traditions. She describes her experiences “mingl[ing]” with the Aboriginal peoples (Traill, Backwoods 173): trading small trinkets with them, listening to their stories, learning their traditions and habits, and admiring the “peculiarly sweet and soft” cadence of their language (175). Traill had, in fact, settled on their traditional territory. From Ojibwa people in the district who lived in encampments frequently visited by Traill, she learned the medicinal properties of North American plants and the practical uses of natural products. For example, “The Indians use the juice of this plant (the strawberry blight) as a dye, and are said to eat the berries: it is often made use of as a substitute for red ink, but it is liable to fade unless mingled with alum” (197). She draws on local knowledge to combine scientific description, practical application, and local plant use to create a Canadian taxonomy. As the caretaker of her family, Traill is interested in the pragmatic uses of botanical information. Local plant lore adds to her ability to be a successful pioneer woman in the Canadian backwoods: “This is a very handsome arum, the root of which resembles the cassava, I am told, when boiled: the leaves or this arum are handsome, slightly tinged with purple ... the
Indians use the root as a medicine, and also as an esculent; it is often eaten by the settlers as a vegetable” (197). The arum root is evaluated as a food and medicine source. Traill uses indigenous knowledge, which has been shared with her, for the benefit of settlement.

By naming and describing flowers, Traill made the flora of Canada known. In order to familiarize herself with the world of systematical botany and develop as an amateur botanist, Traill studied Frederick Pursh’s *Flora Americae Septentrionalis* (1814), borrowed from her new Canadian friend Frances Stewart (1794-1872) and studied with the help of her husband. As she writes, “It is tiresome blundering out Latin descriptions to one who knows nothing of Latin beyond what she derives through a knowledge of Italian” (Traill, *Backwoods* 190). Her difficulty in understanding the Latin motivated her to write her later botanical publications, *Canadian Wild Flowers* and *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* with a wider readership in mind. Nonetheless, from *Backwoods*, it is evident that Traill developed self-confidence from her expanding knowledge. For example, when she found that Pursh’s *Flora* provided no satisfactory description for a plant specimen, she identified it “to be a species of honey-suckle, from the class and order, the shape and colour of the leaves, the stalks, the trumpet-shaped blossom, and the fruit; all bearing a resemblance to our honeysuckle in some degree” (194). Combining pre-existing knowledge of the British honeysuckle with her observations of the Canadian form, Traill develops a detailed description.

Traill’s narrative incorporates previous scientific knowledge but also exposes gaps in that knowledge. In this way, Traill is an emerging authority on Canadian plant life. She describes flowers that are special to the Canadian wilderness and catalogues species according to season, description, and geographical distribution. For example, “The hepatica is the first flower of the Canadian spring; it gladdens us with its tints of azure, pink, and white, early in April ... The
Canadians call it snowflower ... We see its gay tufts of flowers in the open clearings and the deep recesses of the forests ” (196). Traill was a pioneering naturalist who maintained a well-ordered homestead in the wilderness and developed an informed approach to the natural environment. Her approach is characterized by accessibility, as is apparent in her botanical guides, Canadian Wild Flowers and Studies of Plant Life in Canada.

“many a fair flower that withers unnoticed”: Canadian Wild Flowers (1868) and a Public Botanical Education

A work of female initiative and talent, Canadian Wild Flowers (1868) was the first Canadian botany book with easily accessible scientific language, as well as colourful prints. It was appealing to a general audience. Although Traill had never learned flower painting in England,18 her Canadian-born niece, Agnes Moodie Fitzgibbon (later Agnes Chamberlain) (1833-1913), illustrated the book to make it an entirely female and entirely Canadian production. As Ann B. Shteir suggests, during the eighteenth century and moving into the nineteenth century, “botanical illustration became a tool of both descriptive and systematic botany” (Cultivating Women 39).

The attractive lithographs combined with the readily understood wording made Traill’s botanical manual sufficiently popular to go through four editions in four decades. Because accessibility is a central feature of the book, all botanical description is in English. Pursh’s Flora, written in Latin, was too technical to reach a broad-based readership, and W.J. Hooker’s Flora Boreali Americana (1833) was too technical and too expensive to appeal to a general audience. Traill writes to her audience,

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18 In Backwoods, Traill writes to her mother, “Deeply do I now regret having so idly neglected your kind offers while at home of instructing me in flower painting ... I daily lament that I cannot make faithful representations of the flowers of my adopted country” (190).
The only work that treated in any way of the Wild Plants of Canada, the country owed to that indefatigable botanist, Frederick Pursh, whose valuable labours were but little appreciated ... The land, with all its rich vegetable resources, lay as it were an untrodden wilderness for many years, save by those hardy settlers who cared little for the forest flowers that grew in their paths ... It was to supply a deficiency that has long been felt in this country, that the Authorress first conceived the idea of writing a little volume descriptive of the most remarkable of the Wild Flowers. (Wild Flowers 7-8)

Indeed, in 1868 Traill’s botanical guide was the only widely accessible and easily understood scientific botany book focused on Canadian plant life. Traill was a key educator of the Canadian public on the subject of botany. She adds to existing local names coined by Aboriginal people and “old settlers” (7). It was time, Traill argued, for someone to give the plants of Canada “written descriptions” and to “compile a native Flora ... of the Wild Plants of Canada” (7). This botanical education would “foster a love for the native plants of Canada” and turn the nation’s attention to “valuable and interesting matter” (8). Traill’s pedagogical role was of immeasurable importance to an evolving society.

Traill wrote to a public audience with the aim of adding “to our [Canadian] scientific literature” (8). Canadian Wild Flowers exemplified Traill’s evolving focus on knowledge. She no longer harnessed her scientific knowledge to maternal and other family responsibilities as she had done in Backwoods. She increasingly adopted technical terms and scientific expressions in order to disseminate learning among the Canadian public. To educate the public in science, as Nina Baym observes, “simultaneously introduce[d] the subjects to scientists of the future while instilling in non-scientists the appreciation of science necessary to gain popular support” (3).
Traill appealed to an audience of men and women who lacked the means to attend institutionally organized lectures or the meetings of societies like the LHSQ or NHSM. Her attention to a non-scientific readership complicated the cultural division between popularization, professionalization, and the reshaping of plant study into ‘botanical science.’ Underlying this tension was the question, as Shteir puts it, “Was botany an academic area or a popular one?” (Cultivating Women 150). Traill writes in favour of a hybrid approach that was both academic and popular. As Suzanne Zeller argues in Inventing Canada, popular science “enabled Canadians to make sense of the New World ... It refocused Canadians’ vision of the land they inhabited, broadening their conceptual horizons and encouraging them to carve out a place for their developing society” (6). Traill helped both female and male members of the Canadian public to make sense of their new environment.

*Canadian Wild Flowers* contains ten plates and botanically-specific descriptions of thirty-one species of Canadian flora. From an innovative perspective, plant groups are arranged generally in the seasonal order in which a botanist might encounter them, rather than alphabetically as in old herbals or according to taxonomic sequence as in scientific botanical manuals. As in *Backwoods*, Traill is enthralled by the plants which are foreign to her and takes great pleasure in identifying and naming them. For instance, she describes the Painted Cup, commonly named the Scarlet Cup by Canadian settlers, in the descriptive terms of a botanist. She describes colour and shape that would be recognized by the non-specialist, while at the same time following the Linnean system in counting and describing the distribution of the reproductive organs, the stamens and pistils: “The flower is a flattened tube, bordered with bright red, and edged with golden yellow. Stamens, four; pistil, one, projecting beyond the tube of the calyx; the capsule is many seeded. The radical or root leaves are of a dull, hoary green,
tinged with reddish purple” (15). Traill records seasonal, geographic, and topographic details with the precision of an explorer, combined with the metaphorical language of the seventeenth-century naturalist:

The Scarlet Cup appears in May, along with the smaller white and red trilliums ... As the summer advances, our gallant soldier-like plant puts on all its bravery of attire. ... If you would find it in its greatest perfection, you must seek it on the high, dry, rolling plains of Rice-Lake, Brantford, to the north of Toronto, Stoney Lake, the neighbourhood of Peterboro, and similar localities; it is neither to be found in swamps nor in the shade of the uncleared forest. (16)

The scarlet cups dot the plains of Rice Lake. The colour and group formation of the scarlet cups mixed with white and red trilliums reminds Traill of British soldiers who dress in white and red uniforms. A dual mode of perception at once scientific and poetic, for example the military vocabulary of the “gallant soldier-like plant” in “its bravery of attire,” permeates Traill’s Canadian writing, including Canadian Wild Flowers.

Traill observes Canadian plant life with the scientific detachment of a botanist; however, she aligns scientific descriptions of plants with poetry and often becomes absorbed in a contemplation of the colony’s natural beauty. In this way, Traill resisted mid-nineteenth-century changes in the narration of the natural world, the divergence between the literary and the scientific. In her description of the Speedwell plant, commonly known as the American Brooklime, Traill writes, “Flowers spring up and die ungathered” (Wild Flowers 27).

Reminiscent of the feminine flower language books, the passage continues, “[T]he blossoms of the Veronica or Speedwell are said to mean undying love, or constancy, but the blossoms of the Speedwell are fugacious, falling quickly, and therefore, one would say, not a good emblem of
endurance” (27). Traill focuses on the symbolic significance of the species and uses the flowers to express human emotion. Writing with the enthusiasm of the poet, Traill enriches her scientific observations with anthropomorphic imagery. The plants hail seasons and accompany the birds while captivating the sentiments of the human observer. Of the Spring Beauty, she writes “Our SPRING BEAUTY well deserves its pretty poetical name. It comes in with the Robin, and the song sparrow, the hepatica, and the first white violet; it lingers in shady spots, as if unwilling to desert us till more sunny days have wakened up a wealth of brighter blossoms to gladden the eye” (85). Catering to an audience that would be enticed by depictions of species “growing promiscuously” and of “delicate white flowers of the small arrow-head rest[ing] their frail heads upon the water” (72), Traill reveals that she is aware of the demands of appealing to a general readership composed of specialists and non-specialists. She exerts imaginative effort to transform immediate natural descriptions into passages which impart vitality and emotional life to the flowers and to the natural world. Traill illustrates the poetic possibility that flowers can be more closely linked to human emotions than we might think.

Traill uses figurative language to awaken her readership to botanical discoveries “native to Canadian soil” (Wild Flowers 65), inspiring a regard for the natural beauty and promise of her adopted country. When describing the Flowering Raspberry, she distinguishes Canadian flora from that of the United States, from the “Rhododendrons and Azaleas that adorn the Western and Northern States” (26). She suggests that the beauties of the colony are not appreciated enough because of a lack of awareness and knowledge. She writes with a tone of melancholia, “[Canada] possesses many attractive shrubs that are but little known, which flourish year after year on the lonely shores of our inland lakes and marshy beaver-meadows ... with many a fair flower that withers unnoticed and uncared for in its solitary native haunts” (26). Reminding her
audience that *Canadian Wild Flowers* is a field-setting botanical text, Traill draws her readers’ attention to species like the Cone Flower which have otherwise been “known only to the wild Indian hunter” (20). She is a culturally aware Canadian, interested in local lore and knowledge. She is also a public educator who reveals newly discovered secrets of the Upper Canadian flora.

Like many of her contemporaries, Traill saw nothing contradictory in writing about her practical observations while classifying plants according to Linnean taxonomy. Throughout the book she makes numerous references to male scientists, such as Hincks, Lawson, and Gray, but is not afraid to offer dissenting views. Writing about the Wood Geranium, Traill writes, “The blossom consists of five petals, obtuse and slightly indented on their upper margins, and are lined and delicately veined with purple. The calyx consists of five pointed sepals; stamens ten; the anthers are of a reddish brown” (*Wild Flowers* 2). She reports that “Gray gives the blooming season of the Cranes-bill from April to July” (2). However, she corrects this information according to her own observations: “[W]ith us it rarely appears before June, and may be seen all through July and August” (2). She adds practical information for an audience in search of applicable knowledge: “Our plant possesses virtues which are well known to the herbalist as powerful astringents, which quality has obtained for it the name of ‘Alum root,’ among the country people, who apply a decoction of the root as a styptic for wounds; and sweetened, as a gargle for sore throats and ulcerated mouth” (2). She relies on the scientific authority of men to legitimize her descriptions, revealing that she is writing for a mixed audience of other naturalists as well as the general public. For instance, her description of eelgrass “behaviour” was “vouched for by Dr. Gray and many other credible botanists” (69). The references to Asa Gray and other botanists of credit remind us that she remained aware of her lack of laboratory training. Nonetheless, Traill’s self-assurance in her botanical education was growing, enough so that she
could record her own observations, even when they opposed the reports of prominent botanists, and could connect them to her own regionally specific practical knowledge.

“[I]f we would read it aright”: Traill’s Studies of Plant Life in Canada (1885)

After Canadian Wild Flowers was reprinted several times, Traill was encouraged to write a more comprehensive volume. Almost two decades later, she published Studies of Plant Life in Canada (1885). By the time Studies was published, however, the status of botany had changed in Canada. Botany was now represented by figures like Professor John Macoun (1831-1920), who was hired in 1882 as Dominion Botanist by the Geological and Natural History Survey of Canada to produce a methodical inventory of the country’s flora, the Catalogue of Canadian Plants (1883-1886). Macoun’s work was useful in the context of creating a scientific inventory of the colony; however, because of its technical language, it was only really accessible to a limited number of professionally trained male naturalists. Traill maintained her status as a female educator and popularizer. Echoing her authorial approach in Canadian Wild Flowers, Traill informs the audience of Studies that, “Every plant, flower, and tree has a simple history of its own, not without its interest if we would read it aright. It forms a page in the great volume of Nature which lies open before us” (1). She was determined to maintain a “familiar style in [the] descriptions of the plants, thinking it might prove more useful and interesting to the general reader” (Traill, Studies i). Traill offers her botanical manual to Canadians “with the hope that it may prove a means of awakening a love for the natural productions of the country, and a desire to acquire more knowledge of its resources” (ii).

Traill is original in the way she blends her scientific and literary interests. She is concerned with the botanical aspects of each plant, such as flower colour, leaf shape, stalk
texture, size and distribution of blossom clusters, and with their connections to human culture.
Canadian plants are, for Traill, “like dear friends, soothing and cheering, by their sweet unconscious influence, hours of loneliness, and hours of sorrow and suffering” (Studies 3). As a result of Traill’s multifaceted approach to botanical inquiry, her work as a natural historian has fallen between the disciplinary boundaries of botany and literature. However, this interdisciplinary quality of her writing popularized her work and enabled her to teach the Canadian public about scientific findings which were otherwise confined to the difficult works of Macoun, Pursh, and Hooker. As Irmscher points out, Traill attempted to please an audience of more scientifically inclined readers while maintaining accessibility for a public audience (“Writing by Victorian Naturalists” 148).

She also integrates the traditions of local Aboriginal peoples and practical information circulating “among the lumbermen and the old backwoodsmen” (Studies 137) that reflect a holistic sense of nature’s interactions with human culture. Traill integrates non-Western information and practices. She writes, for instance, that the “orange, fibrous roots and rootlets” of the gold thread are “intensely bitter, and are much used by the old settlers as tonic remedies ... The Indian women use it for their little ones in case of a sore mouth and sore gums in teething” (Traill, Studies 37-38). The “leaves of this beautiful Wintergreen are held in high estimation by the Indian herbalists who call it Rheumatism weed (Pipsissewa)” (48), and “the Indian chews the young leaves” of the Slippery or Red Elm, “and applies them as healing application for wounds” (182). She enriched her scientific learning with the teachings of influential “teachers” made up of “old settlers’ wives, and choppers and Indians” (2). “These [teachers] gave me knowledge of another kind,” she writes, “and so by slow steps I gleaned my plant lore” (2-3). Scientific and local sources of botanical education are presented equally, with no emphasis placed on either as a
source of superior learning. When recording her observations of Indian Tobacco, Traill seamlessly integrates local plant knowledge: “This plant is much sought after by the old settlers, and by the Indian medicine-men, who consider it to be possessed of rare virtues, infallible as a remedy in fevers,” with scientific description: “The Indian Tobacco is a small branching biennial, from nine to eighteen inches high; leaves ovate-lanceolate, light green; seed vessel inflated; flowers pale blue, veined with delicate pencilled lines of a darker hue” (97). She records certain plants’ “astringent and narcotic properties” (137) as well as reporting which plants are “to the eye of the farmer, troublesome, unprofitable weeds” (12). The scientific taxonomy of established botanists and the local knowledge of colonial inhabitants and Aboriginal peoples intertwine in Traill’s botanical narrative. By equalizing sources of information, Traill presents the gathering of indigenous knowledge as an act of sharing rather than appropriation.

Although Traill’s botany is simultaneously scientific and literary, one must not overlook the fact that she was well informed as an amateur botanist by the time of Studies’ publication. Challenging the idea that women’s botanical writing and work “was introductory and elementary” and confined to an audience of only women and children (Shteir, Cultivating Women 197), Traill had become an active participant in the exchange of North American plants and the production of Canadian botanical knowledge. In Studies, Traill meticulously describes more than 200 flowering plants, 7 species of grass, 76 species of flowering shrubs, 64 species of forest trees, and 51 native fern species, all in terms of scientific nomenclature, appearance, location, and habits of growth. Based on fifty years of study and observation, Studies is guided by the diligent and “curious eye of the Naturalist” (Traill 250). The book is three times longer
than *Canadian Wild Flowers* and so significantly more substantial: there is more information on geographic variation, ecological relationships, and medicinal and other practical uses of plants.

From this work it is clear that Traill had significantly expanded her scientific knowledge and botanical inventory since her emigration to Canada in 1832 (and the publication of *Backwoods* in 1836). She recalls, “When [I] first settled in the then unbroken back-woods ... the country at that time was an unbroken wilderness ... I soon found beauties in my forest wanderings ... Every flower and shrub and forest tree awakened an interest in my mind, so that I began to thirst for more intimate knowledge of them” (1-2). Narrating her personal development as a botanist, she displays the ways in which she had evolved from an interested observer with a thirst for knowledge to an actual authority on Canadian plant life. Recording particular plant qualities such as “roots creeping with running subterranean shoots,” “clusters of evergreen leaves, slightly waved and scalloped at the edges,” “blossom[s] set on a slender pedicel,” and “stamens ascending in a cluster” (46), Traill’s entries are precise and comprehensive in the manner of Linnean systematists. When describing the False Fox-Glove, or *Gerardia quercifolia*, she emphasizes the importance of her observations in correcting errors or supplying information missing in the work of other botanists. With a belligerent tone, she writes, “It has been said by one who was a diligent botanist and naturalist, (the late Dr. G.G. Bird) that no Gerardias were found north of the Great Lakes; ... this however was a mistake. At that date very little was known of the Canadian Flora ... Several fine species have been found growing on the Islands of Lake Ontario, and on the banks of the Humber” (92).

The most evident examples of Traill’s well-developed skill and importance as a botanical collector are the entries which include original species or variation identification. Identifying herself as a botanist in a colony that lacked substantial collection and cataloguing, she reveals the
value of her fieldwork and publications: “It seemed a pity that no record of [Canadian plants’] beauties and uses should be preserved; and as there is no national botanical garden in Canada, ... any addition to the natural history of the country that supplies this want is therefore not without its value to the literature and advancement of the country” (Studies ii). She exposes the incomplete taxonomy of male botanists while revealing her unparalleled regional knowledge, cataloguing the “distinguishing characteristics” and “peculiar arrangements” (234) of Canadian flora unmatched in other countries or regions. Traill emphasizes her role as a discoverer of new specimens: “Another very striking form of this species I discovered in the Oaken glades of the Rice Lake plains ... As the house in which I lived was on a sloping bank, above the valley where I found my ferns, I had a good opportunity of observing their peculiar habits and progress from day to day” (260). Defying Victorian expectations that women were frail and so justly confined to the home, Traill penetrates areas as daunting as “the swampy flats of low lying lakes and boggy meadows or the banks of shaded creeks” and persists throughout the seasons, observing species amidst “the winds and rains of Autumn and the frosts and snows of Winter” (250). Traill’s achievements and success as an amateur botanist culminate in the naming of a distinctive variety of fern after her – *Mrs. Traill’s Shield Fern, A. marginale, var. Traillae*:

Rearing its noble dark-green fronds among the broken piled up branches of a brush-heap, I found the fine tall fronds of the dark-green fern to which Professor Lawson has given the name *Traillae*, in compliment to the finder. From a hardy, woody, chaffy root-stock, standing some inches above the soil, close to the roots of an old Beech stump, sprung up some six stout fronds of a deep-green colour, pinnae long and narrowly pointed ... This fern is so distinctive in its features that I think it may be considered a species rather than a variety. (241)
Traill was thus recognized by some of her contemporaries like George Lawson who was appointed the Professor of Chemistry and Natural History at Queen’s University in 1858 and was considered to be one of the founders of Canadian botany. Traill participated in botanical discovery as an active and esteemed participant in the inventory of Canadian natural history.

“pebbles from note-book and journal”: A Lifetime of Responding to Nature in

*Pearls and Pebbles* (1894)

For Traill, botany was not only an intellectual and economic resource, but also a central factor in her life-long identity as a writer and naturalist. *Pearls and Pebbles; or, Notes of an Old Naturalist* (1894) draws on her life-time of field experience and detailed observation within a specific region, the Upper Canadian wilderness. Traill aims for her readers to “add but one pearl to [their] store of knowledge” (*Pearls and Pebbles* xxxvi). Her book intertwines Canadian observations in the realms of botany, ornithology, entomology, bryophytology (the study of non-vascular plants such as mosses), and lichenology with anecdotes, poetry, and personal interpretation. She portrays herself as a “now aged naturalist” who has gathered “the pebbles from note-book and journal written during the long years of her life in the backwoods of Canada” (xxxvi). An expert on regional natural and cultural environments, Traill educates her readers about habitat destruction, plant and animal life, and Aboriginal environmental beliefs. The book is a synthesis of Traill’s multilayered approach to the natural and cultural world around her, to her writing, and to systems of knowledge, both scientific and literary. She combines taxonomy, natural theology, and local plant lore as she did in her earlier publications; however, in this work which reflects on a life-time of observations as a naturalist and botanist, Traill
develops a proto-ecological vision of the cyclic qualities of the natural world and of the destructive interruption of humanity.

Throughout her Canadian writings, Traill’s vision of nature and her personal involvement with the natural world are characterized by contradiction between varying modes of adaptation to a challenging environment. She devoted much of her time and writing to identifying, cataloguing, and recording for publication the floral and faunal species of the environment around her. By documenting Canadian species, she was preserving them in textual form. Additionally, Traill’s concern for future generations of young Canadians prompted her to express her views on disappearing plants and animals and on the need for their preservation (Studies 151-53). She explored issues such as the need to preserve fragile habitats and create national parks (212-13). As Marianne Ainley argues, Traill was in the forefront of natural history and conservation in Canada (92). Indeed, Traill foreshadows twentieth- and twenty-first-century concerns regarding ecosystemic damage at the hands of humanity. However, as an emigrant and early pioneer, she was motivated by necessity to participate in the destruction of wild habitats and the recession of forest lands in order to make the backwoods habitable for human settlement. Not only was the Traill family an agent of land cultivation, but Traill also interpreted this role as her right and obligation as a human and in fact often a source of contentment: “We cannot help regarding with infinite satisfaction the few acres that are cleared round the house ... A space of this kind in the midst of the dense forest imparts a cheerfulness to the mind” (Backwoods 196). Traill never seems even remotely aware of her role in displacing Indigenous Canadians. Her Canadian books are fraught with tension as she tries to navigate between the necessities of survival in a hostile environment and the desire to preserve and appreciate the natural world.
Throughout *Pearls and Pebbles*, Traill reflects on the creation of her complex selfhood in the Upper Canadian backwoods, an identity which hinges on her role as a botanical observer. Challenging the traditional gendered divide between the passive woman in the home and the active man in the field, Traill defines herself as an active, “enthusiastic botanist” (208). Separate from the “timid botanist,” Traill is willing to enter into a “paradise of wild flowers and flies, moths and beetles” unafraid of “mosquitoes or wet feet” or “tripping in a hidden network of tangled roots” (208). With her attention to details, acute observational skills, and an intertwining of personal observation and scientific curiosity, the naturalist as presented by Traill develops a space that lies between the figurative language of literature and the methodical approach of science. Traill’s taxonomy interprets nature as a realm designed equally for human consumption and appreciation. Go out, she tells her audience, into “the lovely wild garden” (208). This return to a world which is simpler, more harmonious, and characterized by an esteem for the natural world is, for Traill, driven by an “inborn sense of the beautiful” and is evidenced throughout the book by a nostalgic and emotive tone, particularly when she talks about “the fresh fair flowers” and the “eager hand” of the botanist (*Pearls and Pebbles* 38).

Attempting as a serious botanist to make the formidable Canadian environment knowable, Traill employs in *Pearls and Pebbles*, as in her earlier botanical guides, a Linnean taxonomy. Systematical botany, for Traill, originates in an ideological distinction between wildness and cultivation. Illustrating this dichotomy, she writes about the separation between the civilized garden and the wilderness just beyond it: “There is a large bed of these flowers just outside my garden, but they will not condescend to enter within cultivated ground, though I have often tried to coax the obstinate beauties to take root with me. They love their free-born liberty, and will have nothing to do with me and civilized life” (*Pearls and Pebbles* 66). Trying
to familiarize such wildness and appreciate its complexities, Traill employs what D.M.R. Bentley calls a “grid of taxonomy” (298). Traill refers to Linnaeus and “such scientific naturalists as Jussieu, Malpighi, and others” as well as the powers of “the medium of the microscope” (202, 203) in the course of her observations. She is committed to understanding the “correctness of the descriptive name[s]” and to properly observing and describing the “whole plant – root, stem, and flowers” (177). For example, she carefully describes the *Pipsissewa* with its “glossy shining leaves and lovely wax-like pink flowers” and its “stamens and amethyst-colored anthers surrounding the thick-ribbed, turban-shaped stigma in the centre of emerald green” (136) and the rare *Moneses uniflora* with its singular pistil, “one pure milk-white blossom,” and “closely appressed stamens” (137). She yields to the scientific impulse to identify, describe, and catalogue. “I would point out wild rocky headlands bright with golden lichens and deep green velvet mosses, or inland coves half hidden by drooping ferns and native willows or red with the changeful crimson of the glossy-leaved American Creeper (*Ampelopsis Virginica*) ... What glorious spikes of cardinal lobelias and azure-fringed gentians were growing wild and free” (*Pearls and Pebbles* 44-45). Through the process of interpretive observation, Traill seeks to make systematic botany approachable.

Searching for an unobtrusive sense of stability in her environment, in her writing as a whole, and in *Pearls and Pebbles* in particular, Traill finds the hand of a beneficient Creator in the natural world. The “squirrel, the field-mouse, the groundhog, the porcupine, and others of the roving denizens of the woods and wilds” are “God’s pensioners,” and for animal and plant, the “bountiful Father openeth His hand and filleth all things living with plenteousness” (133). Traill’s scientific search for definition is linked with faith in the divine. The trees themselves reach “their plumed heads so high above” to form a roof “for His temple who reared them to His
praise” (134). God is presented as a benevolent economist who wastes nothing: “Unseen and unnoticed by us, every atom has its place and its part to fulfill. Nothing is lost” (236). As Linnaeus wrote in “The Oeconomy of Nature” (1775), “we understand the all-wise disposition of the Creator in relation to natural things, by which they are fitted to produce general ends, and reciprocal uses” (39). The natural world becomes an illustration of synergy.

Traill shows nature to be a series of intersecting chains and cycles. In the concluding section of Pearls and Pebbles, “Something Gathers Up the Fragments,” the subject is a decomposing tree which lies within walking distance of Traill’s home. This localized space quickly expands as the narrative lens widens to include other flora and fauna, intricately linked in a chain of nature where “every atom has its place” (Traill, Pearls and Pebbles 236). Traill turns her attention from “various insect larvae” (237) to human settlers, from “minute vegetable growths” (239) to “the old giants of the forest” (237). Inspired by her devotion to the march of ‘civilization’ and her belief in the benevolence of natural and cultural ‘progress,’ humans are at the top. The settler uses the rich soil (created by the natural decomposition of the forest trees) for his own purposes: “He sows the wheat and corn upon the rich black vegetable mould, but he may not think that he owes much of its fertility to the unseen, insignificant agents that for unnumbered ages, under the direction of the infinite God, have been preparing the ground to receive the grain for the life-sustaining bread for himself and his children” (241). But note that the human is a “stranger” (241); driven by necessity, he “must cut down the living trees and clear the ground with axe and fire” (241). The diction reveals Traill’s discomfort with a complacent acceptance of categorical Linnaean thinking. Traill sees nature not as passive matter and as a mere object of study, but as an active subject which constantly develops and changes. This conception of nature is central to modern ecological studies generally and to an ecofeminist
insistence upon reimagining nature and human relationships with the natural world. “To be an ecofeminist,” writes Linda Vance, “means to be constantly aware of relationships – between humans, between humans and nonhumans – and to be keenly attuned to the patterns of domination that may be at play” (134).

Discomfort with traditional, hierarchical thinking becomes increasingly apparent in Traill’s use of cyclical patterns in her narrative. “Fragments,” for example, begins with, and then rejects a rhythmic cyclical structure. Traill invites her readers to accompany her on a walk into the Canadian woodlands. Purposefully turning away from the world of the laboratory, Traill directs, “Let us rather go into the forests” (Pearls and Pebbles 236). Once there, the reader is asked to look respectfully with her at a tree: “Here lies one of the old giants of the forest at our feet. Take heed how you step on it” (237). From the present, when the tree lies decomposing at her feet, Traill looks back in time to imagine the tree’s existence with other flora and fauna in a mutually dependent ecosystem:

The earth had sustained it year after year, giving strength and support to the mighty trunk from its store of mineral substance through the network of cable-like roots and fibre ... But while the tree had been receiving, it had also year by year been giving back to earth and air, in an altered state, something that it did not require for itself. It had given back to the earth fresh matter, in the form of leaves, decayed branches and effete bark and fruitful seed. It had purified and changed the gases that it had first inhaled, and deprived them of the properties that were injurious to animal life. (237-238)

Then Traill looks forward to a time when the tree will be converted to a “rich black vegetable mould” (241). It is here that the cycle should begin again with the “power in the living germ of a
tiny seed.” We anticipate that the “seedling of some delicate flower will burst through the environing mould” (190), but it does not. Coinciding with the arrival of the settler, the cycle of nature, as well as the cyclic pattern in the textual structure, is interrupted and broken. There will be no more walks into the forest once the settler’s “axe and fire” have killed the “living trees” (241), and the plough has disturbed the richness of the soil.

Evidently, there are indications in *Pearls and Pebbles* that Traill has developed, through a lifetime of botanical observations, an awareness of the negative impact of humanity on self-sustaining ecosystems. Taught to interpret the world from an imperialist perspective, she should have been an eager pioneer and colonizer. And indeed she does often argue for the settler’s right to alter the frontier from forest to field through horticulture; humans are “enabled to acclimatize, improve, and, as it were, educate the plant for his own uses, through the power given him by God” (Traill, *Pearls and Pebbles* 188). In seeming contradiction though, she persists with her concerns about environmental preservation, philosophically considering the existence of a vegetable instinct characterized by a “property analogous to life and sensation,” an ability to “refuse to grow and flourish” and the possibility of resisting or interfering with “man’s will” (187-88). The unknown reactions of the plants are placed at the forefront. Rather than arguing that plants have mental faculties similar to those of humans, however, Traill suggests that the environment needs to be valued and protected.

Traill witnessed firsthand that she and her fellow emigrants had forever destroyed a working ecosystem:

I find notes of many things that struck me in the first years of my sojourn in my forest home ... There is a change in the country: many of the plants and birds and wild creatures, common once, have disappeared entirely before the march of
civilization. As the woods which shelter them are cleared away, they retire to the lonely forest haunts still left, where they may remain unmolested and unseen till again driven back by the advance of man upon the scene. (101)

Traill notes the effects of forest recession and the relationship between human action and environmental destruction. Nostalgic for a time predating civilization, she presents man as interfering in natural ecosystems, motivated by an unyielding anthropocentric determination. Civilization marches and advances in an almost militaristic fashion, molesting and driving back the common flora and fauna of the country. Traill was never entirely comfortable with her colonial identity as a “Canadian squatter” who takes a “right of soil” from a previously undisturbed Eden of “sweet purple violets, primroses, and the little sun-bright celandine” (40).

While developing as an amateur botanist, Catharine Parr Traill wrote The Backwoods or Canada (1836), Canadian Wild Flowers (1867), Studies of Plant Life in Canada (1885), and Pearls and Pebbles (1894) during a period of considerable transition within Canada’s scientific community. An increasingly professionalized focus on laboratory work and institutional training in the natural sciences, including botany, corresponded with a segregation of women from the culture of scientific inquiry and science writing. Cognizant of, and assumedly dissatisfied with, the exclusionary institutionalization of botany and the natural sciences at large, Traill devoted much of her sixty-seven years in Canada to challenging the cultural trends which were alienating the populace from scientific learning, the amateur from the professional, and the man of science from the female collector and educator. Approaching botany from a stance that is simultaneously literary and scientific, Traill establishes her authorial intention to publically extend scientific learning to the specialist and the nonspecialist, women and men. The four texts
examined in this chapter demonstrate her deep engagement with scientific knowledge as well as her consistent awareness and appreciation of her narrative role, her unwavering insistence upon the importance of female and public education in the sciences in Canada, her development as a well-accomplished botanical identifier and collector, and her developing awareness of the negative impact of humanity on natural ecosystems.
3 Domestic Pragmatism and Moral Consideration: Women Writers and their Interactions with Animal Life in Canada

[I]f we suffer, we grow humbler and wiser… animals have not this advantage, and man should not prevent their enjoying all the happiness of which they are capable.

(Wollstonecraft 15)

Throughout the nineteenth century in Canada, in contrast to the accepted public role of women in disseminating botanical information, wildlife studies and animal stories were still predominantly masculine realms. As Carole Gerson observes in Canadian Women in Print, 1750-1918 (2010), “Animals figure much less prominently than plants in Canadian women’s writing about the natural world, even though many female authors dealt with farm and domestic animals in their everyday lives, and occasionally with wild creatures as well” (131). Moving into the later decades of the nineteenth century, several male writers achieved public esteem for semi-fictional tales of animal life in the wild, most notably Charles G.D. Roberts (1860-1943) and Ernest Thompson Seton (1860-1946). Most women authors throughout the century approached animals from a personal, domestic perspective. For example, Catharine Parr Traill ‘tames’ the wilderness and its animal inhabitants in her children’s story Lady Mary and Her Nurse; or, a Peep into the Canadian Forest (1856)\textsuperscript{19} by creating nursery dialogues between the fictional characters of Lady Mary and her Canadian nurse. Alongside Lady Mary, the audience, assumed to be composed mostly of children, is introduced to harmless but intriguing animals such as the flying squirrel and the chipmunk and instructed to treat God’s creatures with kindness. Also famous for

\textsuperscript{19} Also see Traill, Cot and Cradle Stories, which includes many moralistic animal stories.
animals stories marketed to a young readership, Maritime author (Margaret) Marshall Saunders (1861-1947) wrote about the humane treatment of domesticated animals, commencing with her bestselling novel narrated by an abused dog, *Beautiful Joe* (1894), a companion piece to the English classic *Black Beauty* (1877) written by Anna Sewell (1820-1878). In contrast to the careful almost scientific detail of most male-authored animal stories, the majority of female-authored books, like *Lady Mary* and *Beautiful Joe*, were aimed at reforming human conduct.

Setting the tone for many women writers in the nineteenth century, the poet Charlotte Smith (1749-1806) published *Rural Walks in Dialogues Intended for the Use of Young Persons* for the purpose of instructing children about nature and animals. She wished to present the “instruction of the [natural history] schoolbook ... mingled with narrative” (iv) for the overall purpose of “instruct[ing] the rising generation” on how to treat animals with respect and moral consideration (v). As this chapter explores, though, Canadian women’s domestic and moral approaches to the natural world and its animal inhabitants were not wholly restricted to fictional accounts and children’s stories.

As “Nature’s crusaders” (Gates 113), many female writers throughout the Victorian period crusaded on behalf of the moral consideration of animals. They were well-educated observers of the natural world who were willing to challenge the self-serving professionalization of science as well as the commercialism of their day. The concern for faunal species and the linking of cruelty towards animals to women’s rights dates back to authors like Mary Wollstonecraft. In *Original Stories* (1783), Wollstonecraft’s female instructor illuminates the gendered immorality of animal cruelty, the stoning of a bird by a young boy (6-7). Conduct books like Wollstonecraft’s helped lay the foundation for the ethic of kindness toward animals that flourished during and after the 1820s. By the later decades of the nineteenth century, writers
like anti-vivisection activist Frances Power Cobbe (1822-1904) viewed the rational materialism of science as the enemy of both women and animals. Women like Cobbe in no way shunned scientific and social advancement; however, the anthropocentric and sexist qualities of Enlightenment science were a concern.

This chapter investigates nineteenth-century Canadian female writers’ production of non-fiction, namely *Our Forest Home* (1822-1872) by Frances Stewart (1794-1872), *A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada* (1837-1846) by Anne Langton (1804-1893), and *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852) by Susanna Moodie (1803-1885), and their approach to animals from two distinct but often interacting perspectives. On the one hand, they interpreted animals through the lens of domestic pragmatism, accepting the necessity of hunting and butchering animals as food sources. In Canada, these women became more involved with the killing and preparation of animals. Although animals were seen as food sources in both English and Canadian households, the Canadian women writers discussed here no longer had the distance from acts of slaughtering and butchering that would have been done by butchers or servants in England. The women, therefore, had to justify their participation in the task of turning animals into food. On the other hand, they considered animal life with the sensitivity and responsibility owed to animals as independent, conscious beings. These writers develop an ethical approach to nature that is governed by their positions as women, whether it is as mothers, wives, writers, housekeepers, or caregivers. In *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (1987), Harriet Ritvo points out that animals’ physical and behavioural characteristics, their place in the natural order, and their relationship to people “symbolized a range of primarily human concerns” (6). Discussions of a variety of human-animal interactions in Stewart’s, Langton’s, and Moodie’s writing share a general concern about human identity in Canada. Even the situations
apparently most structured by economics or anatomy, such as hunting and killing animals and consuming the meat, were influenced by concerns about the ethical treatment of the natural world. How did the alternation between seeing animals as resources and animals as sentient beings influence the conception of female settler identity?²⁰

Stewart’s, Langton’s, and Moodie’s texts are based on the authors’ lived experiences as emigrants in the backwoods of Upper Canada; it is precisely these autobiographical narratives that according to feminist historians must be analysed in order to “re-inscribe women’s history into [Canadian] history” (Gerson, “Anthologies and the Canon” 63). As Elizabeth Thompson writes in *The Pioneer Woman: A Canadian Character Type* (1991), in their accounts of the domestic rituals and daily patterns of settler life, nineteenth-century Canadian emigrants, like Stewart, Langton, and Moodie, define what it means to be a successful pioneer woman in a challenging environment while attempting to maintain the ideals of Victorian gentility. Cobbe wrote in *The Modern Rack* (1889), “to help one order of sufferers [animals] is to help all, for it is to keep alive in human hearts those feelings of justice and compassion on which not only charity, but civilization itself is founded” (238). In addition to the concern for animal welfare, understanding the importance of domestic animals for agriculture and farming and awareness of wild fauna for reasons of subsistence and safety were crucial aspects of successful pioneering.

Through the process of accurately observing and reporting on their experiences, Stewart, Langton, and Moodie test the limits of the languages (that is, domestic or pragmatic, ethical, religious, aesthetic, and literary) available to describe the Canadian environment. Writing within the genre of autobiography, these writers are innovative because they depart from the typical eighteenth- and nineteenth-century female-authored animal stories, exemplified by *Beautiful Joe*,

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²⁰ A focus on settlers is the reason for not including Anna Jameson in this chapter. However, throughout *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles*, Jameson discusses animals of various species.
which consisted of fictional animal fables aimed at an audience composed largely of children. Each woman redefined what it meant for women to act as gentlewomen, Canadian emigrants or travellers, and authors. They all adhere to models that depicted nature as an economical space designed for humanity’s use by a beneficient Creator. Simultaneously, they each devote attention to portraying themselves as sensible and sensitive members of a community in which both humanity and nature ought to be valued and protected. These writers oppose the perspective that animals were only “significant primarily as the object of human manipulation” (Ritvo 2). Instead, these writers attempt to advocate what ecofeminist Catriona Sandilands defines as a female “ethical relationship to animal subjects” (170) that includes care, interconnection, and collective responsibility. Stewart, Langton, and Moodie interrogated their own ways of seeing the animals around them, exploring the “creed of kinship,” a “belief in the interrelationship of all living creatures” (Gould 114), as Peter Gould describes it in Green Politics (1988). These writers shifted between survival needs and moral considerations and tried to find a balance between the two.

**Rationalism and “Marketing Wildlife” in Nineteenth-Century Canada**

Partially driven by imperial ventures, like meteorology and botany, studies of animals were included in what Suzanne Zeller terms the inventory sciences of early Victorian Canada: “Natural history was often described as a human struggle against the chaotic and unfathomable variety of nature” (11). Colonists identified, mapped, and catalogued raw materials and natural phenomena. To them British North America was a hostile wilderness in need of physical and ideological cultivation and the colony served as a wealth of resources for European industrial and consumer markets. Undoubtedly, the discourse of hunting justified and celebrated Britain’s
imperial enterprise. Expanding from an initial demand for beaver pelts and timber, Lorne Hammond suggests in “Marketing Wildlife” (2006), new markets were emerging in the early decades of the nineteenth century for additional natural products found in the colony, such as furs,\(^{21}\) teeth, oils, and feathers, products acquired from the deaths of vast numbers and species of animals (204). The source of this supply was guarded closely, and even ruthlessly monopolized, by the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC), originally incorporated by English royal charter on May 6, 1670. At the height of its expansion (1821-1869), the HBC “ruled an area of more than 3,000,000 square miles, approximately one-fourth of the continent of North America” (Galbraith 3).\(^{22}\) Led by Governor George Simpson (1787-1860), the HBC “manag[ed] and standardiz[ed] wildlife as [commercial] products” (Hammond 203). Governor George Simpson reported on the diversification of species in Canada and the commercial promise of wildlife, creating a “regular flow of potential products from the hinterland posts to London, from grizzly bears to the small hoary marmot” (204). Animal specimens, often only parts of an animal such as the skins or horns, were sent to London to assess their economic value and market demand. Mass numbers of animals were killed in the name of profit and capitalist ventures. As Farley Mowat observes in *Sea of Slaughter* (1984), a “massive diminution of the entire body corporate of animate creation” ensued (5). In the context of the fur trade, which influenced general attitudes toward the natural environment in the colony, “the natural world [was] a commodity” (Mighetto 104) and animals were a harvest.\(^{23}\)

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\(^{21}\) See Nadeau for an investigation of the interwoven relationships between the Canadian fur trade, concepts of sexuality, national identity, and colonialism. Also, see Emberley for an examination of how fur has been a symbol of class, gender, and imperial power in European colonies.

\(^{22}\) For a history of the Hudson’s Bay Company as an agent of imperialism and European capitalism in British North America, see Galbraith.

\(^{23}\) For discussions of the exploitation of wildlife in the literature of environmental or ecological history, see Crosby, Dunlap, Mighetto, Mowat, and Prescott-Allen.
The early-nineteenth-century appropriation of zoological knowledge by organizations like the HBC exposes an exploitative mentality focused on the commodification of nature. Many Euro-Canadians were interested in the profit to be gained from the new environment and the commodification of its nonhuman inhabitants, seeing “wild animals as objects to be used and used up” (Dunlap 5). The ideology of dominance was often complemented by an ideology of exploitation for commercial purposes. Although the HBC’s exploration of the natural environment was primarily a capitalist enterprise, what Hammond refers to as “an ecological war” between human and nonhuman (204), the company’s endeavours did much to promote local knowledge. The company maintained a small museum of natural history in London and assisted institutions, artists, and scientists in their research both in England and in the colony. The natural historian John Richardson (1787-1865) was one such scientist who, “indebted to the exertions of the Hudson’s Bay Company,” aimed to move beyond the narration of “personal adventure” and “incidental anecdotes of the animals that are objects of the chase” to provide “descriptions sufficiently characteristic to identify the species” (ix). Richardson studied and documented plants, birds, mammals, and fish during John Franklin’s Arctic expeditions between 1819 and 1827. His work culminated in the publication of *Fauna Boreali-Americana; or the Zoology of the Northern Parts of British America* (1829). Studies and excursions were frequently funded and organized by the HBC, and the observations of natural historians like Richardson included commentary on genetic and aesthetic variation, reproductive and demographic cycles, and geographic distribution.

At the same time as the HBC was suggesting that wildlife could be husbanded by the application of human policy, changes occurred within the natural sciences which supported an aggressively anthropocentric, emotionally detached perspective regarding Canada’s animal
species. Beginning in the first few decades of the nineteenth century in Britain, and subsequently in Canada, the study of animal life was being revolutionized by scientists whose work and approach were characterized by a brisk efficiency; the prototype was the English naturalist George Montagu (1753-1815). Contributing to a rebirth in British natural history, Montagu’s *Ornithological Dictionary* (1831) transformed zoological study. Emphasizing the importance of “single facts or circumstances personally observed” (Montagu iii), Montagu is methodical and distrustful of any hearsay, local lore, or assumptions. Inspired by Thomas Pennant’s (1726-1798) massive compendium *British Zoology* (1776), whose comprehensive descriptions are motivated by a determination to present a standard, indisputable account based upon “utility, truth and certainty” (Pennant iv), early nineteenth-century animal studies were aimed at a small group of affluent gentleman-scholars. Their lavish character and exorbitant price put them out of reach for most amateurs, including most female observers.

Because prominent voices like Pennant and Montagu argued for the superiority of scholarly, institutionalized studies, the world of animal studies was becoming increasingly professionalized, a field of inquiry for the laboratory. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, advances in fields such as comparative anatomy and fossil geology, especially the work of zoologist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829), anatomist and geologist Georges Cuvier (1769-1832), and geologist Sir Charles Lyell (1797-1875), among others, demonstrated various adaptive developments in organisms. As American botanist, ecologist, and geographer Hugh Raup explains, such developments led to new ways of interpreting natural objects: “Species or vegetation could be considered not as static things, but as mutable entities of which one could see only an existing expression, and which possessed a past and presumably a future development during which their forms and reactions could be different” (325). The research of
Lamarck, Lyell, and Cuvier challenged the notion of design which opened a space for Darwin to deny a teleological conceptualization of nature. Lamarck in particular argued for the theory of modification of species. He believed that all life was in constant motion and organisms were always reacting and adapting to their environment (Burkhardt 143). Darwin argued instead in favour of an evolutionary process that was determined by natural and sexual selection mixed with chance and species adaptation. The first half of the century was devoted to discovering and taxonomically recording variety in nature; the second half was devoted to exploring how and why this variety had occurred. These new areas required a new type of investigator. According to David E. Allen, “[i]t was now necessary to probe beneath the surface of nature and explore processes and mechanisms: to leave the field and to neglect those scholastic niceties with which natural history had come to be erroneously over-identified” (180). Laboratory work and the technical language of the biologist emerged.

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the biologist developed a self-sufficient, highly specialized language; for the first time, a considerable group of scholars emerged who felt no need to communicate with the greater public. As a result, the language of the biologist became a stark, precise instrument. The non-professional found it increasingly impossible to keep up with the required specialized knowledge. American historian Philip J. Pauly observes in Biologists and the Promise of American Life (2002) that the academic zoologists were overzealous: “their organizational base was too limited, their intellectual aspirations too grand, and their scientific practice too tedious” to be accepted by a public audience (6). The public rejected the new scientific approach as dispassionate and indifferent to any aesthetic, emotional, or moral implications (Allen 183). The professional was becoming alienated from the amateur and the public readership.
Throughout the nineteenth century, the study of animals and the natural sciences as a whole were becoming increasingly professionalized, commercialized, and notably non-emotional. Harriet Ritvo argues that the many scientific discourses on animals of the nineteenth century “both discussed and exemplified a central theme of domination and exploitation” (5-6). Writing against this prevailing approach, many amateurs were condemned by zoologists as unscientific and sentimental for “revealing their liking for and emotional involvements with the animals they study” (Hays 336). They were criticized for their lack of close analysis and absence of formal scientific education. However, amidst the efforts of men of science to push women out of nineteenth-century scientific conversations, “women did look and they did speak, creating a counterdiscourse not just about nature but also about science” (Gates and Shteir 10). According to Barbara Gates and Anne Shteir, female writers functioned as public educators and remained devoted to the “moralizing of scientific discovery” throughout the century (14). Stewart, Langton, and Moodie each, to varying degrees, approach the natural world and animals with sensitivity and moral consideration but are also aware of the demands of frontier life and the needs of survival.

Frances Stewart’s *Our Forest Home (1822-1872)* and the Struggle to Reproduce a Proper Life in Douro

Frances Stewart was born Frances Anne Browne on 24 May 1794 in Dublin, Ireland to Reverend Francis Browne and Anna Maria Noble.²⁴ Two years after the birth of Frances, Reverend Browne died quite suddenly in front of his wife. The trauma of this event left Anna Maria Browne devastated and she was an invalid for the remainder of her life until her death in 1809.

²⁴ The biographical information is from Stewart and Aoki 29-38.
Frances was left in the care of her affluent great-uncle, Robert Waller in Allanstown, Ireland, where she was raised under the care of Harriet Beaufort, who managed the household. Under the careful and loving instruction of the well-educated Beaufort, Frances received an exceptional education in botany, natural history, chemistry, music, Italian and French, classical literature, and theology. In addition to receiving excellent private tutoring, Frances was influenced by the accomplishments of an extended family, including the British hydrographer and inventor Sir Francis Beaufort and the novelist Maria Edgeworth.

In the summer of 1816, in the company of her aunt Susan, Frances travelled to Belfast to visit family friends, the Stewarts. During this visit Frances met her future husband with whom she would later emigrate to Canada. After a brief courtship, Frances married Thomas Alexander Stewart (1786-1847) on 16 December 1816. Thomas Stewart worked for a linen, silk, and cotton manufacturer, Robert Reid and Son, a company which eventually fell into bankruptcy. Hoping to find better prosperity, Frances and Thomas Stewart decided to emigrate to British North America. On 1 June 1822, Frances, Thomas, their three young daughters, and two servants, boarded the ship George in the city of Belfast to begin the seven-week transatlantic crossing to Quebec. From Quebec, the Stewarts travelled to Kingston, and then to York, where Thomas and Robert were each granted 1,200-acre parcels of land with the stipulation that they settle in an unsurveyed township. On 9 September 1822, both men chose plots of land along the Otonabee River in Douro Township, where one could travel “nine miles without seeing a house or clearing” (Stewart 26). By 11 February 1823, the Stewarts were moving into their new log home located just north of the settlement that was to become Peterborough in the District of Newcastle, a home which Frances Stewart had anticipated with a sense of “feverish impatience” (5). Life in Douro was isolated for Stewart, but she managed to adjust to and care for her home, husband,
and children with optimism and even humour. Thomas Stewart died from an attack of typhoid fever in 1847. Frances Stewart died 25 years later on 24 February 1872.

Nineteenth-century journals, emigrant guides, letters, travelogues, and botanical studies written by women like Susanna Moodie, Catharine Parr Traill, and Anna Jameson were intended for a public audience and published either in their lifetimes or shortly after. Frances Stewart’s letters are uncharacteristic when considered within this group. Her letters were written for a private audience, for family and friends, and were published following her death by her daughter, Ellen Dunlop (1819-1907). Her letters were meant to be passed among family members and friends in Ireland. The experiences that Stewart records remind her reader that women faced many tribulations in a novel environment. Narrating personal trials and successes, Stewart tells a story in which she not only survived the physical, environmental, and psychological demands of life in the uncleared Canadian bush, but also raised a family, oversaw household activities, educated her children, and reproduced to the best of her ability her idea of what a proper life should look like.

Given a European education, which included natural history, Stewart familiarizes her readers with Canadian wildlife. Simultaneously, she is inspired by virtues that included a sense of compassion for animals. In the style of a taxonomist, she describes the animals of the colony as a way to increase local knowledge. For instance, she admits, “We know little of the habits of the ‘Goosander,’ as it is a solitary shy bird.” She continues her informative depiction of the “shy” species, establishing her intimate knowledge based upon careful watchfulness: “It stays in lonely solitudes, by unfrequented lakes and rivers. Some people say they cannot fly, but this must be a mistake as they migrate in autumn” (Stewart 197). Even before her transatlantic voyage has come to a close, she observes her natural surroundings with the keen eye of the
naturalist. Initially conforming to the style of Victorian natural history books, which included the “mapping and cataloguing of resources and other natural phenomena” (Zeller 4), Stewart first orients her reader geographically and then proceeds to inventory animal species:

[W]e were between Cape Race in Newfoundland and Cape North in the island of Cape Breton. … We have … seen whales at a distance spouting their jets d’eau into the air [and] we have often seen a smaller species which comes closer to us … [W]e were accompanied by little birds called ‘Mother Carey’s chickens,’ very pretty little creatures of the swallow tribe, but web-footed. (Stewart 5-6)

Immediately following the catalogue of local creatures, Stewart’s approach changes from that of the inquisitive informant to that of a sympathetic caregiver who nurses the weak and injured. Coming to the aid of a bird that is experiencing the same long, uncomfortable journey as herself, she writes with empathy: “About a week ago a little bird was found in one of the boats and I took it to nurse, as it proved to be a land bird and we were not near land at the time. … I have kept it in a basket. … It is a dear little thing” (6). Like the little bird, Stewart has not seen land in weeks, an unnatural situation for the human animal. Perhaps seeing her own discomfort in the conundrum of the “dear little thing,” she develops a level of compassion which may be interpreted as an aspect of what Gates calls nineteenth-century “women’s sensitivity to suffering” (*Kindred Nature* 127).

Combining taxonomical information and passages about compassionate bonding with animals does not necessarily imply competition with the male world of science. Rather, as Brian Easlea suggests in *Science and Sexual Oppression* (1981), the combination changes that world “into one [complemented] by what [many nineteenth-century feminists] saw as more ‘feminine’ qualities, in particular sympathy and compassion” (152). This nineteenth-century attempt to
infuse virtues into rationalism was most succinctly represented by Frances Power Cobbe who declared that the cold world of science needed to collide with the “natural field of feminine courage” and turn “with sympathy and tender helpfulness to the weakest and most forlorn of God’s creatures, whether it be man or woman or child, or even brute” (553). In the following passage, Stewart carefully represents the beauty of a wild goose and is thankful when it escapes the violent attack of a male hunter: “A beautiful wild goose came floating down the river. … [It] came back and lit in one of our fields close to the garden; this was altogether an unusual circumstance … They are beautiful birds. The head and neck are fine glossy black with a broad white stripe from the eye down the neck.” The scene of quiet admiration is abruptly disrupted when a male hunter breaks the stillness and calm: “Ivan O’Brien ran, without a hat on his head, to Mr. Reid’s for a rifle to fire at it.” However, the situation ends with the escape of the wild bird and the relief of the other onlookers: “There was some delay about charging the gun … We were glad that the poor goose should escape, when he came so near us with such confidence” (Stewart 185-86). Although this type of compassionate sentiment opposes strict rationalism, women writers and advocates for animal welfare were determined to combine empathy with fact.

Throughout her correspondence, Stewart’s descriptions of Canadian animal life are enhanced with anecdotal interpretation and a level of anthropomorphism that inspires emotional attachment in her readers. Assumptions are made about the experiences of animals based on human experience. Differences are not eliminated, but they are made less significant and less likely to be used as a justification for a hierarchy based upon species distinction. Although there is a slippery slope between anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism, an image of animals void of any anthropomorphism, as Onno Oerlemans argues, in Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature (2004), “turns all that is not human into an otherness subservient to human needs” (69).
For Stewart, watching the animals around her farm provides a source of “interest and pleasure” (32) in a life otherwise characterized by isolation. In a “place so lonely that in spite of all [her] efforts to keep them off, clouds of dismal thoughts fly and lower over [her]” (39), she finds “delight” in the animals as they become “like old acquaintances” (31). Stewart’s representations are anthropomorphic, giving animals human qualities and criticizing human interference with animal habitats. Using animal behaviour as a mirror for her own struggles to survive and nurture a family in the harsh surroundings of the colony, Stewart puts herself into nature and, anticipating modern ecofeminism, “incorporate[s] empathy for individual other-than-human animals” (Kheel, *Nature Ethics* 2). She feels compassion even for the smallest of creatures. As a mother, Stewart endows animals with what she sees as maternal instinct and care, but the following anecdote may also possibly be read as a plea against cruelty:

> When chopping down a hollow tree to-day [a neighbor] observed a red squirrel rush out. She was crying pitifully but bravely went back and brought out a young one about the size of a small field mouse, she carried it by the under side of the stomach and it held on to her with its claws, she … ran back in all haste and brought another, all the time uttering her pitiful cries. She succeeded in getting her four little ones safely off, though she appeared completely out of breath and exhausted. (Stewart 165)

After her home has been destroyed by the axe of the backwoodsman, the squirrel cries out pitifully, shrieks which Stewart interprets as expressions of a mother’s fear and anxiety. The details of the animal’s actions and assumed emotions and the narrator’s obvious sympathy highlight Stewart’s view of intelligence, courage, and inherent nobility of the animal which clings to life and her place in nature as diligently as any human would. The narrative celebrates
the “grim determination” of an animal whose primary desire is to “exist away from human interference” (Oerlemans 81). The animal’s behaviour mirrors the cultural practice of mothering, caring for one who requires preservation and assistance toward growth. Stewart employs a maternal vocabulary to sympathize with the instinctual determination of the red squirrel who risks her own life to save her “little ones.” She turns the squirrel into a symbol of herself and into an avatar of a “maternal ethic” (Donovan 183). The priority is to conserve the fragile and to develop respect for the processes of life.

Such intimate representations exemplify the prevailing Victorian fascination with animals as both forces of nature and metaphors for human behaviour. Stewart frequently depicts animals in order to reflect versions of human relationships. At the same time, she assumes a certain kinship with the personified animals. The emotional and ethical consideration of animals provokes questions about animal intelligence. Is there a hierarchy of animal intelligence? Do plants and animals have the ability to feel? If they do, then the anthropocentric abuse and exploitation of animal beings cannot be justified. As Jeremy Bentham wrote in his Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1823), “It may one day come to be recognized that the number of legs, the villosity of the skin, of the termination of the os sacrum, are reasons … insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to [pain and suffering] … the question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?” (235-36; original emphasis). As a product of a genteel European education, Stewart would have been aware of ongoing discussions regarding animal intelligence and feeling.

Although Stewart received an intellectual education, survival compels her to adapt her behaviour to life in the Canadian backwoods. She insists that “[T]hough my employments are of necessity so much changed, my tastes are still the same. I enjoy reading, music, etc., as much as
I did twenty years ago” (Stewart 115). However, as Virginia Rouslin notes in her article “The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Pioneering in Canada” (1976), adjustment to the new environment forced pioneer women like Stewart to formulate a new feminine role, one which suited frontier life and prepared the way for other women to follow. Shaped by circumstance, their new identities were connected to increased domestic duties. They were often responsible for all household duties and the welfare of their family. Catharine Parr Traill wrote in *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836), “The female of the middling or better class …sighs for those little domestic comforts, that display of the refinements and elegancies of life … The accomplishments she has now to acquire are of a different order” (151). Traill illustrates that the responsibilities of Canadian emigrant women are vast, including “milking their own cows, making their own butter, and performing tasks of household work that few [English] farmers’ wives would condescend to take part in” (150). Expectations and realities collide for women like Traill and Stewart and force a reinvention of the conceptualization of how women, especially gentlewomen, ought to behave.

Stewart’s transition to the demands of life in Canada involves an understanding of necessity and an appreciation of economy. The Stewart family must waste nothing and use everything: “Economy we have always practiced but I find the necessity increased, for our little family is larger and we cannot, I see, make anything by our farm, although we can live on it” (110). Although Stewart writes, “We have lived economically and studied to keep strictly to necessaries in our expenses” (146), the family is often desperate for sources of subsistence, surviving on very little, particularly through winter months for spans of time that “at home [in Ireland] would have half killed us” (58). Surviving with severely limited resources requires many changes for Stewart; for example, animals must often be seen solely as food resources to
be used by humans. Passages that describe animals as food are void of anthropomorphism and read like a practical emigration guide. For example, Stewart reports on the consumption of deer meat while travelling: “He took the venison, cut it with his knife and put salt into it, then took a stake, made it sharp at one end, ran it through for spit, then stuck the other end into the ground near the pin to roast it …we all sat down in a row near the fire” (21-22). With similar language focusing upon subsistence and sources of animal food, she writes, “The Indians, coming in their canoes, bring also fish and venison which they exchange for pork or flour. Our workmen shoot numbers of partridges which, unaccustomed to any disturbance, come quite close to them when at their work” (42). A distinction may be drawn between hunting out of desire and hunting out of need, which is the type of hunting endorsed by Stewart. The obstacles to surviving and nourishing a large family in the face of severely limited resources are common subjects in Stewart’s correspondence; these challenges instigate a re-evaluation of the value and role of animal life.

The Interaction between Human-Constructed and Natural Environments in

Anne Langton’s A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada (1837-1846)

Anne Langton was born on 24 June 1804 in Fairfield Hall, Bolton Abbey, England, the second child and only daughter to Thomas Langton and Ellen Cutler. The Langtons’ upper-class status and good fortune were the result of Thomas Langton’s self-made success in the hemp and flax trade. A few months after Anne’s birth, the Langton family moved to Lancashire, into a mansion near Ormskirk, Blythe Hall. At Blythe Hall, the Langton children were schooled by their parents as well as private tutors in subjects such as literature, botany, mathematics, music, and theology.

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25 Biographical information is from Langton and Williams.
The children were also influenced by a culturally rich milieu of extended family and distinguished family friends, including the Brontës. In order to broaden and diversify the children’s education, Thomas Langton took his family on travels abroad in 1815. After renting out Blythe Hall, the family spent six years travelling across Europe through Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, and France. Anne and her siblings learned the languages and cultural traditions of each visited country. Whenever the family remained in one location for any length of time, Thomas employed local masters to instruct the children in the subjects of mathematics, science, languages, literature, geography, and writing as well as accomplishments such as art, music, and dancing.

The Langton family’s pursuit of culture and education ended abruptly when a floundering family business required their return. The family moved back to England in 1821, was forced to sell Blythe Hall, and took up residence in a small house in Liverpool where, from 1821-1837, Anne would keep house, visit close family and friends, copy art works in private collections, and practice miniature painting. By 1826, Thomas Langton was virtually bankrupt, and the family had lost their fortune, their property, and their social standing. Anne’s life was no longer one of guaranteed leisure, privilege, and ease. Her father’s loss of status meant there would be no dowry and there was no likely prospect of suitors for marriage.

Attracted to the promising reports of prosperity and financial independence in British North America, Anne’s brother, John, emigrated to Canada in 1833 and took up residence on Sturgeon Lake near the Stewarts, the Traills, the Stricklands, and the Moodies. By 1837, the Langton’s financial resources in England were so low that Anne, never married and considered to be a spinster already in her thirties, and her parents set sail from Liverpool on a ship named Independence headed for Canada. Although Langton was initially shocked by the roughness of
Upper Canada, she applied her intelligence resourcefully to practical pioneering: glazing windows, keeping journal accounts, sewing upholstery, preserving and preparing food, and manufacturing candles and soap. To communicate the realities of the family’s new life to family members and friends back in England, Langton kept journals and sketched her surroundings. Although Langton made numerous extended visits to England, she remained with and cared for her brother and his family, moving away from the backwoods and into Peterborough in 1851 and finally into Toronto in 1878. Never marrying or having children of her own, she died in Toronto on 10 May 1893.

Like Stewart, Langton did not sketch or write for publication. As Janet Floyd maintains in *Writing the Pioneer Woman* (2002), Langton’s writing has been overshadowed by other emigrant writers like Moodie and Traill because she does not offer the ideological glimpse into “the hidden treasure of frontier individualism and expansion nor the opposing model of Victorian suppression” (168). However, Langton’s optimistic tone is noteworthy. As Clara Thomas claims, Langton’s journals are special because of their unquenchably good humour, adaptability, and hopes (103). Her perceptive chronicle of life in Upper Canada in letters and journals, published posthumously by her nephew Hugh Homby Langton as *A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada* (1951), provides a lively account of daily domestic, farm, and community life over a number of years (1837-1846). Langton may have known that her audience would grow, as she writes, “Did you ever write a journal with the intention of sending it to any one?” (175) The impressively detailed entries, which Langton refers to as “journal-letter[s]” (112), report both hardships and triumphs of early pioneer life, including the gradual progression from woodland to

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26 I am using the 2008 edition of *A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada*, edited by Barbara Williams. Williams’ edited collection includes more of the author’s views on women’s social and familial roles in nineteenth-century Canada than the 1951 text. Williams’ edition was published following the advent of feminism and the increasing interest in rethinking Canadian history from a female perspective that flourished in the 1990s; see Buss, Gerson, and Gray.
farmland, the acquisition of new survival skills, daily observations of flora and fauna, disappointing crop failures, and drought, fire, and illness, from the perspective of a gentlewoman, artist, and resilient pioneer settler.

Langton was writing for family and friends, and her writing is embedded in a material sense of place, time, and social situation. However, her journal also records validation of selfhood within new surroundings. According to Diane Bjorklund in her study on autobiography, *Interpreting the Self* (1998), “A crucial part of giving meaning to the world is giving meaning to one’s self – how we reflect about ourselves and our experiences” (4). Expressive of the internal quest to develop a lasting identity as a Canadian woman, while walking through the backwoods with her brother, Langton wonders whether her tracks through the snow will be seen, presumably by other settlers and other animals who walk the trail: “I shall begin to be acquainted with the tracks of the beasts of the forest. I looked back at my own tracks, and wondered if mine would be recognized as that of a woman” (209). Knowledge of Canadian nature becomes, for Langton, a key to knowledge of the self. The fresh, solitary animal tracks symbolize her own steps through a previously unexplored landscape. Briefly equating human and animal, her tracks mingle with those of the creatures of the forest, suggesting that humans and animals both walk the same paths and struggle for survival in the same challenging environment. Like the animal forging a path through the wilderness, the Canadian settler breaks new ground and creates a place in the forest. Langton does not merely represent her footsteps as those of a human settler, though; they are specifically those of a woman. Langton’s negotiation of the boundaries of the self is undoubtedly gendered. In “Textual Boundaries: Space in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Manuscript Diaries” (1996), Cynthia A. Huff argues that “Nineteenth-century British women’s manuscript diaries are … an
ideological site of contestation, a space where the gendered interpretations of true womanhood meet. … [T]heir structure is … loose enough to accommodate a woman’s self-creation” (123).

Langton uses the form of journal-letters to draw a straightforward image of life in Canada for her family and friends back home. At the same time, she uses the diary to explore the development of beliefs and qualities appropriate in a new environment.

Langton approaches New World wildlife with the inquisitive wonder of a naturalist while adding aesthetic qualities reminiscent of a literary education. As practitioners of modern-day environmental studies, such as Catriona Sandilands, realize, “Even when we are apparently alone in the wilderness, we bring with us our mental daypacks; … nature is ‘always shaped by rhetorical constructs like photography, industry, advertising, and aesthetics, as well as by institutions like religion, tourism and education’” (“The Marginal World” 47). With the eye of a skilled artist, Langton seeks vantage points from which to recreate the Canadian environment: “I have made no sketch of the place yet, but shall be on the lookout for a good point for one” (150).

Echoing Frances Stewart’s first sighting of Canadian animal life, Langton reports on whale sightings from eastern shores of Canada. Although the scene and tone are similar to Stewart’s, Langton’s description is more artistic and narrative, focusing on the behaviour of the “sporting” and playfully elusive “fine fellows” as opposed to attempting to establish geographical location and animal species identification. She writes, “I was summoned on deck to see some whales sporting in our vicinity. There appeared to be several, from the spoutings of water in various directions. Two only came near to us, and allowed us occasionally to see the length of their backs. They were fine fellows certainly, [and] I was well pleased to have seen them” (121). Her concern with keeping her audience “fully informed” through her “journalising” (218) involves an attempt to convey, to a certain degree of accuracy, what she observes on her travels as she sees
it. She also plays into her readers’ expectations that the colony is a land overflowing with adventure, aesthetic beauty, and exciting new animal species.

Attempting to fit the unknown landscape and foreign animal species of the New World into pre-existing moulds informed by Romanticism and aesthetic conventions, Langton occasionally describes the “entrance into the new world” as a picturesque and exciting “romantic adventure” (126). Langton’s impressions of Canada are shaped by a European framework composed of what W.J. Keith terms, in Literary Images of Ontario (1992), “built-in cultural attitudes and assumptions, set ways of looking at the land and ‘landscape’” (20), and animals. For example, she depicts the hunting of a buck as a Crusoe-type adventure, a scene that does not result in the death of the animal and focuses instead upon the thrill of a chase between man and animal: “We just missed the novel adventure of bringing down a buck in the water. We saw two swimming across the lake, and followed both. The first, however, only with a view of seeing him land, but of the second we had a good chase, and were within three or four yards of him when he gained his feet” (151). The buck, like the whales observed off the coastline, is one element among many arranged into a larger composition, giving the reader an impression similar to that of a piece of landscape art. The animals, in these two situations, are not portrayed with any sort of detail; instead, they add to a panoramic vision. Detached approaches to nature and a willingness to be excited by the thrill of the hunt, as presented in the format of the hunting narrative emphasizing “the difficulties and dangers encountered by the hunter to magnify his eventual triumph” (Ritvo 257), are characteristic of an anthropocentric discourse. Langton adopts this tone to entertain her audience with the expected excitement.

With time, Langton was drawn into the much less adventurous daily realities of life as a pioneer woman. The Canadian woman, often coping with the temporary absence of male family
members because they were harvesting, hunting, or gathering supplies, finds herself controlling all aspects, domestic and agricultural, of an isolated homestead. Misao Dean, in Practising Femininity (1998), points out that emigrant women, despite the demeaning nature of physical work, were held in high esteem by those who read their correspondence and books because they contributed to the survival of their families. Sacrificing their European ideas of femininity, women like Langton forged a new identity characterized by agency on the farm and in the household. According to Langton, women must maintain a masculine level of activity within the household and control over animals in contexts where they are sources of sustenance. “As long as the lady is necessarily the most active member of her household,” Langton writes, “she keeps her ground from her utility” (289). It is through utility that the Canadian woman avoids mental and physical deterioration in the backwoods.

The struggle to negotiate between the ideals of femininity and masculinity is reflected in Langton’s approach to animal life, namely the blurred boundary between seeing animals as objects necessary for survival or as individuals to be cared for and protected. Often, Langton categorizes animals as a food resource. In these cases, the animal is catalogued not according to Linnean classification, but according to the anatomical parts which are valuable for butchery and the culinary product: “We hung our first bacon; six hams now in pickle will soon decorate our kitchen. It is John’s ambition to see it adorned by twenty flitches and twenty hams” (Langton 261). Some modern-day ecofeminists like Lori Gruen criticize the preparation of meat by women as a site of subservience for both women and animals: “Women prepare and cook; animals are prepared and cooked. Both play subservient roles in the male-dominated institution of meat eating” (72). Indeed, the practice of meat preparation and eating relegates women to a

27 During Langton’s lifetime, advice manuals for gentlewoman farmers were gaining popularity in England; see Loudon and Martineau.
particular physical space, namely the kitchen or its equivalent. But should the ecofeminist criticism be applied to specific nineteenth-century colonial circumstances? In pioneer life, each member of the family is required to participate in the survival of the whole. Domesticity is the sphere in which women exercise control and develop specialized skills. Showing her acceptance of the role of the pioneer woman, Langton represents the act of butchering: “To-day’s occupations were very much in the line of [a butcher] … [We] cut up a quarter of beef. … [T]he saw and cleaver were … wielded by female hands. The kitchen scene would have entertained some of our English friends, and possibly shocked others” (207). The settler woman becomes a dissectionist who quarters and carves animals like a skilled butcher. Langton acknowledges the oddity of the scene of women actively wielding “saw and cleaver” (356). However, she insists upon the necessity of the act in Canada, representing the graphic act of butchering as the “natural care” of the emigrant woman. “We have been busy in the kitchen to-day,” she writes, “and if you could have looked in upon us the sight would have appeared rather strange in your eyes. It has ceased to seem strange to me. I regard hams and pigs’ heads as the natural care of the mistress or daughter of the house” (356). The animal is reduced to its parts; the importance of the pig is as food product rather than as sentient being. Depictions like this are evidence of the role as provider that settler women were required to fulfill in the colony.

Butchering animals becomes an important facet of Langton’s settler identity and of the utility which she maintains is integral to her new life. She is not ashamed of her domestic labour, proposing that the performance of menial tasks is a source of achievement. It is every woman in a Canadian household “whose ingenuity is tasked to spread a decent table before the family” (Langton 379). The butchered animal symbolizes women’s control and usefulness. Langton communicates to her readers a type of food preparation and cooking that involves the
hands-on conversion of live animals to meat products. She strives to perfect her new skills with determination and practice:

A pig was slaughtered to-day and my mother and I discovered that we are not quite perfect in our business yet, for the black puddings, which have rested with us for some time, gave evidence of our inexperience. … There are certainly many things I can do which I might never have learnt in England … I am going to exercise my skill in shaping a ham to-night. (218)

Janet Floyd argues that perhaps Langton’s scenes of herself as “engaged in converting nature (animals) to cultural artefact (meat) matches the ‘civilizing’ project of the emigrant woman” (184). Floyd’s argument is that the bloodless image of butchering disguises the appropriation of land and nature as energetic domestic industry and endorses a patriarchal duty of women to prepare meat for men. In Sociology on the Menu: an Invitation to the Study of Food and Society (1997), Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil discuss the “crucial association in patriarchal societies between meat eating and male power” whereby the production of meat is part of the “demands men make upon women” (212). Langton butchers the meat in a particular way and uses a method to which a servant cannot be trusted to adhere. She stresses the necessary participation of emigrant women: “This morning my mother and I cut up a little porkling we had killed yesterday, and we agreed, when on a small scale, it was more agreeable to operate ourselves than stand by and give directions” (Langton 187). In the act of converting animals to meat, Langton appropriates the masculine act of butchery and asserts her feminine utility.

Driven by necessity, survival, and domestic routine, much of Langton’s approach to animals is involved with the production of meat. At other times, she maintains a spirit of ethical caring for animals, treating even farm animals with compassion. Langton describes a world in
which women were responsible for most duties on the farm, including the care of farm animals.

This reality is a frequent topic of conversation among the women: “We had many discussions on topics connected with women’s duties in this country – the management of a dairy, etc.” (Langton 286). Langton uses her aunt’s devotion to her chickens as an example of the careful seriousness with which women undertook farm and domestic jobs: “Aunt Alice is discussing her poultry yard whilst I write. It is her entire charge, and begins now to repay her care. She brought in eleven eggs this morning, but now is ambitious of having a dozen as the produce of a day” (226). As Langton argues, animals “require great care in this country” (286). The female attendants become attached to the creatures as companions. Pioneer women also cared for animals to keep them safe to produce items like eggs. Langton writes with concern, “The first news this morning was bad news. The mother of our youngest brood of chickens had been destroyed by some unknown murderous creature in the defence of her little ones, which were all safe” (Langton 237). Following the death of the mother hen, Langton is nominated “guardian” of the young “nurslings,” a job she takes on with care and emotion. Saving the motherless chickens from the destruction recommended by other family members, she writes, “[I] felt my honour concerned in the protection of the interesting orphans committed to my charge. So I rigged up a little mansion for them, where they are snug and comfortable” (237).

Adopting chickens as pets was commonly described in women’s writing of the period and was not restricted to the Canadian experience. Animals as pets became substitutes for human companionship. For example, Anna Forbes, wife of Henry O. Forbes (1851-1932), Scottish explorer, ornithologist, and botanist, writes about the tension between befriending chickens and eating them. She writes in *Insulinde: Experiences of a Naturalist’s Wife in the Eastern Archipelago* (1887), “I had one little companion, a chicken which I had bought from a
passing mountain-lad” that “would come fluttering to perch on my bed” (Forbes 297). However, when Forbes is affected by severe fever and she is alone without the energy to gather sufficient food, she must consume “the trusting little thing, whose nearness ... [she] had found companionable” (297). Although she spends “hours in utter misery” after slaying the chicken, she makes soup from it which she is determined saves her until aid comes (297). Forbes’ killing of the chicken causes emotional distress, but the chicken is also a necessary source of nourishment for survival.

Langton narrates her despair at the loss of any of her new animal companions. This personal investment in the safety of individual animals supports the suggestion made by ecofeminists that women “have [historically] developed more of a sense of emotional bonding with animals” (Donovan 168). For instance, Langton laments, “We are in alarm to-night lest we have lost our pigeon. It is absent from its accustomed haunts. ... It has been a great pet all winter, living almost entirely on the staircase window, where it receives its meals” (314). The loss of animals like the pigeon, a “dire calamity” (318), is not quickly forgotten and has a lasting effect on Langton’s emotions. Even after replacing the bird, she is distraught about the absence of her “old friend”: “We have now a pair of pigeons, but not our old friend of the staircase window. The particulars of our pet pigeon’s end I do not like to think about – it was a tragedy” (327). The loss and injury of animals is a common occurrence in a life in the wilderness. Langton writes, “John has had a loss of four little pigs, carried away two successive nights by some wild beast, most probably a bear. ... Jordan had a three-months’ old calf eaten by the wolves within his own clearing the other night” (336). At another point, she tells of a near tragedy: “A hawk got a hold of one of our pigeons the other day but, being pursued, let it drop. The poor creature was almost dead with terror, but otherwise no worse” (351). Situations like
these are hesitantly accepted as unavoidable. To counterbalance the dangers, when Langton is able to act as protector, she does so intently: “John’s ewes … had scarcely any sustenance for their offspring, so the lambs had fared badly. We took one little lamb to rear, which has been a source of interest and amusement the last month” (368).

At times, Langton describes animals as individuals with specific qualities. It is at these moments that she brings animals into the house or extends special attention to them outside. Encompassing the animals within the safety of her domestic sphere where she cares for them as though they were members of her human family, Langton upholds what ecofeminist Josephine Donovan terms “a humane relationship ethic with animals” (168), which is devoted to challenging the abusive treatment or neglect of animals. Langton depicts the care of wild and domestic animals as a job she fulfills with emotion and responsibility. Mary Midgley, a modern-day animal rights theorist, urges, “What makes our fellow beings entitled to basic consideration is surely not intellectual capacity but emotional fellowship” (60). As illustrated in the preceding emotional passages, Langton’s concern for animal welfare is enriched by human feeling. She maintains sympathy even amidst a frontier life in which domestic responsibilities and survival necessities often overshadow moral considerations.

A “stranger in a strange land”: The Incompatibility of Gentility and Pioneer Life in Susanna Moodie’s Roughing It in the Bush (1852)

Unlike Langton and Stewart, Susanna Moodie maintained her belief that gentility was incompatible with life in the backwoods. For Moodie, in Roughing It in the Bush (1852), the act of emigration is a catalyst for physical and emotional crisis. Portraying emigration as “an act of severe duty, performed at the expense of personal enjoyment” (Moodie xxi), she hoped she
would deter English gentlemen and women from moving to the backwoods and “shipwrecking all their hopes” (382). Consequently, Moodie’s style is emotional and often histrionic. This focus on trials and hardships aligns Moodie’s emigrant guide with the memoir. In “The Memoir: New Perspectives on a Forgotten Genre” (1977), Marcus Billson writes, “The memoir as genre is closely associated with periods of crisis: both historical crises … and intellectual crises … In times of crisis, the memoir-writer … experiences life more intensely, because the very foundations of life as [s]he has known them are threatened” (169). In her first years in Canada, Moodie presents herself with a disconnected sense of self, living within a wilderness “prison-house” (382). By coming to Canada, Moodie sees herself as in a permanent exile, “a stranger in a strange land” (22). Her book is filled with moments of melancholic nostalgia for her homeland: “I would sit for hours at the window … watching the massy foliage of the forests pictured in the waters, till fancy transported me back to England … It was long, very long, before I could discipline my mind to learn and practice all the menial employments which are necessary in a good settler’s wife” (231). It is difficult to say if this incongruity was her belief or an authorial stance adopted to heighten the dramatic effect of the narration of her colonial trials.

Underlining her determination to highlight negative aspects of pioneer life, Moodie dramatizes the terror that a gentlewoman faces in the Canadian backwoods, illustrated by the recurring image of threatening wild beasts of the forest. The landscape and animals should accord with an idea of ordered Nature, according to Moodie’s expectations. However, as W.H. New argues, in Moodie’s interpretations of the natural world and its inhabitants, “expectation and experience are at odds” (69). She often professes fear of, rather than romanticized reverence for, nature. The Canadian environment is uncultivated, and Moodie is often intimidated. Invoking one of the most powerful images of concern, maternal protection, Moodie represents a
situation where the natural world threatens her young child: “Hearing [Katie, still a young toddler] talking very lovingly to something in the grass … I ran to the spot, and found that it was a large garter-snake that she was so affectionately courting to her embrace. … I snatched the child up in my arms, and ran with her home; never stopping until I gained the house and saw her safely seated in her cradle” (Moodie 120). Although Moodie describes herself as a protector, responding speedily to what she interprets as potentially dangerous encounters with the natural environment, she makes no attempt to depict herself as heroic. For her, life in Canada is not coloured by the adventurous hue it occasionally has in Langton’s writing. Moodie dramatically emphasizes the fear she feels in the Canadian backwoods.

Moodie’s fear of wild animals reflects the Victorian idea of femininity, which she tries to maintain. The ideal of frail womanhood is sharply contrasted to survival demands in Canada. Barbara Welter’s research on the “Cult of True Womanhood” (1966) points out that during the nineteenth century many middle- and upper-class women grew up trying to imitate the four cardinal virtues that “distinguished a true woman from a false one: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” (152). These virtues are achieved by limiting physical activity and exertion, rather than expanding it as pioneer life demanded. Moodie is influenced by these Victorian ideals. Anna Jameson criticized these ideals as an enfeebling “weakness of temperament … essential to feminine grace and refinement” (258). Telling a story of a walk taken with her sister Catharine, Moodie writes of fear and anxiety. Employing the popular conventions of the Gothic novel, including its emphasis on feminine distress, the metonymy of horror, the overwrought emotion, and the atmosphere of doom, Moodie writes settler life as Gothic experience:

I felt rather timid when I found myself with only my female companion in the vast forest … This foolish dread of encountering wild beasts in the woods, I never
could wholly shake off, even after becoming a constant resident in their gloomy depths ... The cracking of an old bough, or the hooting of an owl, was enough to fill me with alarm, and try my strength in a precipitate flight. (Moodie 206)

Moodie’s timidity and “dread” of the “gloomy depths” of the woods and the “wilds beasts” hidden therein often transforms even the least perilous occurrence, like the “cracking of an old bough,” into ghastly nightmares. Perhaps stemming from her own sensibility, or perhaps embellished for the entertainment of her readership, she presents her intimidation as debilitating at times, filling her with alarm and diminishing her strength. However, it must be remembered that there were very real dangers in forests, and the wild beasts of Moodie’s narrative were not all imaginary.

As Harriet Ritvo argues in *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (1987), wild animals, particularly beasts of prey, were disturbing to the Victorian English sensibility. The fear was that “their carnivorous way of life disposed them to challenge people rather than to serve or flee them.” Ideologically, wild predators “were rebels who refused to accept the divinely ordained dominance of humankind” (Ritvo 25). Throughout *Roughing It*, the threat of uncultivated, unrestrained, and defiant nature is embodied in the representations of the wolf. Wild animals evoke primal states that stir the imagination; the wolf’s cry has the power to chill the heart (Moodie 256). The sounds of the wolf, the “detestable howls” (134) and “the cries of … the dirty brutes from the wood” (256), represent human horror and uncontrollable natural power. Moodie’s description reads as though the wilderness and its creatures were intentionally hostile. Moodie writes, “I had often heard, and even been amused, during the winter, with hearing the howls of these formidable wild beasts; but I had never before heard them alone … Just as the day broke, my friends the wolves set up a parting benediction, so
loud and wild, and near to the house, that I was afraid lest they should break through the frail windows, or come down the low, wide chimney, and rob me of my child” (133-34). Once again, Moodie’s maternal instinct conflicts with the terrifying presence of the natural world. The rawness of the Canadian environment is not always comprehensible. Identification with the wilderness involves fear, especially of the unknown or unknowable.

However, Moodie entertains her readers with stories of pet animals who display human qualities, animals who are depicted as dear companions. Ritvo suggests that Victorians viewed pets with affection and “sentimental attachment” because nature was not a “constant antagonist” in these animals (3). Aboard the Anne, the ship upon which the Moodies make their transatlantic voyage, her affections are taken with the captain’s Scotch Terrier, her “old friend Oscar” (20). The dog becomes attached to her and a protector of her child. Using anthropomorphism to illustrate the connection made between animal and human, Moodie confronts the Western rationalist tradition, which, according to ecofeminists like Greta Gaard, devalues “whatever is associated with women, emotion, animals, [and] nature” (5). The “faithful” and “attached” animal becomes a guardian to her child, acting with a “sagacity” or wisdom which makes him a special individual: “When my arms were tired with nursing, I had only to lay my baby on my cloak on deck and tell Oscar to watch her … if any one dared to approach his charge, he was alive on the instant, placing his paws over the child … Oscar was the best plaything, and as sure a protector as Katie had” (Moodie 20). Although the story of Oscar takes place before she arrives in Canada and before she is confronted with wild animals, Moodie revisits the wisdom and cleverness of animals periodically throughout her Canadian experiences. She does not argue that animals are capable of intellectual reasoning or objective understanding. Instead, she suggests that animals can become such close companions that humans treat them as equals.
Moodie’s consideration of animals as beings capable of companionship with humans is also illustrated by a motherless bear, a “young denizen of the forest” who is successfully adopted by a fellow emigrant, Tom Wilson. As Barbara T. Gates writes in *Kindred Nature* (1998), early Victorians “had begun to regard certain animals as possessing individuality and a capacity for deep feelings and to treat them accordingly” (113). The young bear is brought into Tom Wilson’s home through adoption. Through the process of domestication, the bear’s potential threat as a wild animal is neutralized. Moodie writes that while “quietly masticating a cob of Indian corn,” the bear looks “half human as he sat upon his haunches, regarding us with a solemn, melancholy air” (50-51). The bear is regarded as a “child of nature,” a being with the qualities of “truth and sincerity” (51). Tom Wilson suggests that perhaps he and the bear are bound by the ties of brotherhood (51). Moodie interprets Tom Wilson’s actions and words through the lens of anthropocentrism in order to use the anecdote as proof that an emotional bond might exist between humans and animals.

Faced with the struggles of life in the Canadian backwoods, Moodie must also see animals from another perspective. As a pioneer woman living on a relatively isolated settlement, she must procure food by harvesting and consuming the animal and plant resources of the natural world. Carol Fairbanks argues in *Prairie Women: Images in American and Canadian Fiction* (1986) that “The settler, who takes physical and economic risks, will be inclined to see the landscape in terms of survival; only those elements that are potentially destructive or sustaining are significant to enter this particular field of vision” (44). The hardships of the Canadian emigrant’s life, according to Moodie, compel humans to “conquer” the natural environment and animals: the colonist “treads in tracks but little known; he has to struggle with difficulties on all sides. Nature looks sternly on him, and in order to preserve his own existence, he must conquer
nature, as it were, by his perseverance and ingenuity” (387). Moodie’s language invokes an anthropocentric worldview in which the natural world is demarcated as an “Otherized group” which is considered to be “both inferior and radically separate” from the dominant “Center,” in this case, humanity (Plumwood 337). However, considered in the context of nineteenth-century Canadian emigration and the physical struggles that Moodie describes throughout her narrative, perhaps Moodie does not support the oppression of nature by humans. She more precisely represents an unavoidable circumstance; the settler “must conquer nature” to “preserve his own existence” (Moodie 387). Would the juxtaposition of humanity with the natural world still fall under the “attitude of arrogant ascendancy over nature” as posited by Frye as an element of early Canadian literature (Divisions 20), or do necessity and survival require a different understanding?

Moodie’s personal narrative is laden with scenes of destitution and near starvation, circumstances that force humans to provide for themselves as best they can from “Nature’s bounteous lap” (250). The supply of animal food for the Moodies is continually meager. They never exceed and often barely meet the basic level required for satisfactory health. Unforeseen complications are disastrous. Moodie writes of one such experience:

The death of [six hogs] deprived us of three barrels of pork, and half-starved us through the winter. That winter of ’36, how heavily it wore away! The grown flour, frosted potatoes, and scant quantity of animal food rendered us all weak, and the children suffered much from the ague. (274)

Illness and starvation are threats throughout Moodie’s account. Maintaining her faith in Providence, she depends on the stores of the natural world and the protective care of a caring God.
Driven by necessity and guided by her belief in Providence, Moodie accepts and condones the human consumption of various animal species, animals she would never have eaten in England. As she states when instructing her domestic readers on how to cook small animals like squirrels and chipmunks when other animal food is scarce, “Necessity has truly been termed the mother of invention, for I contrived to manufacture a variety of dishes almost out of nothing” (Moodie 273). According to some modern ecofeminists, hunting “first and foremost, for the purpose of procuring food” (Kheel, License to Kill 88) is excluded from hunting as a violent act which is part of “our [Western] society’s destructive relation to the natural world” (86). For Moodie, hunting and fishing provides much-needed food sources. For instance, the lake by the settlement is referred to by the Moodie children as “Mamma’s pantry,” a source from which “many a good meal has the munificent Father given to his poor dependent children” (Moodie 273). Fishing and hunting are transformed from their Old World identification with “field sports” (252) into New World subsistence: “[T]he very idea of our dinner depending upon our success added double zest” (273). During the harsh winter of 1836, with her family suffering the effects of insufficient nourishment, Moodie is grateful when the family’s farmhand shoots a buck. Her husband, John Moodie, declares, “Providence has hitherto watched over us and kept us from actual starvation.” Moodie continues, “The flesh of the deer, and the good broth that I was able to obtain from it, greatly assisted in restoring our sick to health” (275). The hunting and consumption of animals practiced by the Moodies is not competitive and it is distinct from sport-hunting, which is severely criticized by ecofeminists as a dramatized “heroic battle” and an exploitative “masculine venture” (Kheel, “From Heroic to Holistic Ethics” 246). Instead, Moodie justifies the hunting of wild animals in the light of necessity and prudence: “We had been for some days without meat, when Moodie came running in for his gun. A great she-bear
was in the wheat-field at the edge of the wood … This was quite a Godsend, and lasted us until … the fall” (Moodie 310-11). As a result of severe hunger and depleted provisions, Moodie learns to acquire food from various animal resources. Although her spirit often falters when she fails to meet harsh conditions with the cheerfulness of her sister, Catharine Parr Traill, she does trust in a benevolent God to provide in nature for humanity.

An example of Moodie’s struggle between expectation and experience is her occasional sentimental pity for wild animals, which contradicts her more common domestic acceptance of the necessary death of animals for food. Her acceptance of the death of animals to feed her hungry family is accompanied by a distance from the actual hunting expeditions. Her perspective is altered when she is a spectator to the pursuit. She presents herself as a passive observer of a scene of natural beauty and calm: “Just as the sun rose, and the haze parted and drew up like a golden sheet of transparent gauze, through which the dark woods loomed out like giants, a noble buck dashed into the water” (273). Moodie admires the animal strength of the deer as it is chased by the hunters, the hunters themselves being intruders into the natural scene of beauty and harmony. “It was a noble sight,” she writes, “that gallant deer exerting all his energy, and stemming the water with such matchless grace, his branching horns held proudly aloft, his broad nostrils distended, and his fine eye fixed intently upon the opposite shore” (273).

This hunt is a sport not connected to any need or hunger. It is a competition, a battle for power between the natural instinct of the animal and the energy of the men. Marti Kheel suggests that “It is necessary to recognize that the perpetrators of violence throughout the world are, by and large, men, and the victims of this violence are primarily women and the natural world. […] Hunters currently kill more than 200 million animals every year. They cripple, harass, and orphan millions more” (“License to Kill” 110-111). Kheel distinguishes between aggressive
men and their animal victims. Similarly, Moodie rejoices when the animal escapes from the chase, unspoiled: “Several rifle-balls whizzed past him … [and] my very heart leaped for joy when, in spite of all his foes, his glossy hoofs spurned the opposite bank and he plunged headlong into the forest” (Moodie 273). As in Stewart’s story of the “beautiful wild goose” (185), the narrative resolution of the hunt, that is the death of the “noble buck” (Moodie 273), is absent in Moodie’s anecdote. Perhaps, the missing dénouement undermines the masculine dominance at the heart of the sport-hunt. The buck eludes the efforts of the hunters, and the aggressive intention of the men is ungratified.

Barbara T. Gates points out that the growth of animal protection movements was highly supported by English women from the middle and upper classes throughout the nineteenth century. However, shooting remained a favoured pastime for Victorian men, a masculine “contest between a human’s caniness, intelligence, and prowess, on the one hand, and an animal’s instincts and strength, on the other” (Kindred Nature 200). The hunting expedition is a symbol of masculine force and power. Marti Kheel argues that “Sport hunting in the nineteenth century functioned as a form of ritualized display, justifying male dominance over subordinates,” primarily women and animals (Nature Ethics 79). If we accept the interpretations of Gates and Kheel, sport hunting creates a power dynamic, establishing a hierarchical arrangement in which male patriarchs exhibit their ability to exercise control over animals and nature and perform their aggressive dominance in front of women. Moodie’s depiction of personal pleasure at the unsuccessful sport of the male hunters and her joy at their lack of prowess undermines the mastery at the core of their hunting practices.

The tension between Moodie’s contradictory view of animals as beings with inherent value or pragmatic sources of food provided by a benevolent God culminates in Moodie’s story
of “Brian, the Still-Hunter” (124-38). Ethical consideration of animals is not a simplistic, unilateral relation of easy identity between animals and humans. Representing the complexity of human-animal relations in pioneer Canada, Moodie tells the story of “Brian, the Still-Hunter.” A friend to her and her husband, Brian is regarded by Moodie as a “gentleman” and “a man of benevolence and refinement” (128), qualities which she holds in high regard. Brian’s story is an anecdote to entertain her readers about the type of backwoodsman one might encounter in Canada; however, she uses the story to answer some of her own questions without assigning definitive value to any individual perspective. Moodie asks Brian why he has a fondness for hunting. He responds that he enjoys the excitement of the hunt; however, he immediately qualifies his answer with an ethical statement: “I am sorry for the creatures, too, for they are free and happy … Sometimes the sight of their dying agonies recalls painful feelings; and then I lay aside the gun, and do not hunt for days. But ‘tis fine to be alone with God in the great woods” (129). Brian is presented as an ethical hunter, a respectful man who finds God in nature. Like Moodie (and through Moodie’s recounting of his story), Brian represents the animal world as one filled with natural foes and battles for survival, instilling an appropriate fear of predators and a respect for those who struggle with courage to survive. Moodie writes Brian’s recollection of his first hunting excursion: “[A] noble deer rushed past me, and fast upon his trail [was] a pack of ten or fifteen large, fierce wolves, with fiery eyes and bristling hair … I felt every nerve within me tremble for the fate of the poor deer. … His nostrils were dilated, and his eyes seemed to send forth long streams of light. It was wonderful to witness the courage of the beast. How bravely he repelled the attacks of his deadly enemies” (130). The natural environment is a dynamic realm and is always in motion. If one recognizes the existence of qualities like nobility, fate, courage, bravery, and the presence of enemies in nature, one questions that nature is a mere
resource, static, simple, and void of inherent value or identity. Employing emotion and pragmatism, Moodie approaches the animal world from two perspectives: nature simultaneously supplies humans with necessary stores for survival, and it is a realm filled with individual beings to be valued and respected.

Frances Stewart’s *Our Forest Home* (1822-1872), Anne Langton’s *A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada* (1834-1846), and Susanna Moodie’s (1803-1885) *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852) were written during a period of considerable debate, within Europe and Canada, regarding human attitudes towards nonhuman life. Foreshadowing modern ecological, environmentalist, and ecofeminist discussions, questions were being raised concerning animal intelligence and animal welfare. The three writers in this chapter reveal the tensions between two conceptualizations of how to appropriately interact with animals from a specifically Canadian perspective. On the one hand, they advocated the moral and emotional consideration of nonhuman nature and challenged hierarchical anthropocentrism and rationalist detachment. On the other hand, they were each motivated, to varying levels, by the needs of survival in a challenging colonial environment to objectify animals as creatures to either be feared or consumed. Mingling the emotional, the personal, and the ethical with the rational, they encourage their audiences to interrogate ideologies of human-nature relationships and to re-evaluate their own interactions with the natural environment and its nonhuman inhabitants. The letters and journals in this chapter are self-conscious examinations of the natural and cultural worlds surrounding each author. They are also narrative declarations of identity. For Stewart, Langton, and Moodie, textuality provided a physical and tangible means through which to create a personal storyline, allowing
for the complex construction or reconstruction of the writers’ sense of who they were and how they saw themselves in relation to the world around them.
4 Guns or Glasses, Field Sport or Field Work: The Gendered Division of Nineteenth-Century Bird Study

Bird-collecting is the ultimate refinement – the ne plus ultra of all sports of the field. It is attended with all the excitement, and requires all the skill, of other shooting, with a much higher degree of theoretical information and consequent gratification in its exercise.

(Cassin 278)

The pragmatic approach to nineteenth-century ornithology was characterized by a division: many shot and stuffed or dissected bird specimens for examination while others practiced field ornithology and observed birds in their natural habitats armed with little more than a spyglass and a notebook. The former was designated as superior and was assumed to create trustworthy knowledge on bird species throughout most of the century. For instance, the English ornithologist Charles Thorold Wood (1777-1852) argued in his Ornithological Guide (1835) that field ornithology “requires little or no exercise of the higher powers of the mind” (26), whereas the “very good naturalist” (27) “examines [the bird’s] structure in every minute particular ... He observes all those external peculiarities of shape of color, or of markings, which distinguish the object before him as a species; he refers to his collections, compares it with others, and thus ascertains its true characters” (28). Wood’s guide demonstrates the prevailing belief that birds, interpreted as objects of science, could be accurately identified according to species and sex only if they were killed, dissected, and closely examined. Darwin wrote in The Descent of Man (1871) that it was the common practice of ornithologists to “pull out a few feathers from the
breasts of ... bullfinches, and from the head or neck of ... gold-pheasants in order to ascertain their sex” (205). Dissections were often more invasive than pulling feathers and removing skin and focused on viewing internal, including reproductive, anatomy and morphology. The English ornithologist Charles Waterton (1782-1865) wrote in his influential collection, *Essays on Natural History, Chiefly Ornithology* (1838), “[i]f you dissect a guillemot, you will find a knot of eggs within her” (158), and “[i]n the bills of birds, the colours are either produced from internal substances ... or [are] inherent in the horn or bone itself ... In either case dissection is absolutely necessary” (85). Many of the birds (and animals) examined by Darwin and other Victorian naturalists were easily captured because they lived in areas which were uninhabited by humans. The birds had not yet learnt that humans were dangerous and to exercise caution. Although one assumes that Darwin and others were interested in catching the birds to dissect them, or perhaps eat them, there is a tone in some of Darwin’s accounts in *Voyage of the Beagle* (1839) which suggests a cruel sense of sport: “There is not one [terrestrial bird] which will not approach sufficiently near to be killed with a switch, and sometimes, as I have myself tried, with a cap or hat ... I often tried, and very nearly succeeded, in catching [mocking-birds] by their legs” (288). Regardless of a chilling disregard for animal life, observing, killing and dissecting birds were important elements of the “quest of natural history” (Waterton xviii) and activities befitting respectable English gentlemen.

The cultural association with activities typically pursued by upper-class men gave early ornithology a quality of privilege as well as sexist social standing. As with other branches of natural history, women were excluded from societies like the British Ornithologists’ Union and the Nuttall Ornithological Club. Exemplifying the gender-bias of the century, Joseph M. Wade, editor and owner of the periodical *Ornithologist and Oologist*, which was in circulation
throughout the 1880s and 1890s, always addressed his readership as “gentlemen” and stated that “all nature belongs to all men” (85). This exclusivity did not exist without its discursive dangers but carried a risk of scientific limitation. Without the circulation of ornithological observations in public, widely accessible books, the emerging field was deprived of popular interest and support. It was men and women amateurs, with their spyglasses, field notes, and narrative language who taught the larger population about the birds and instructed their audiences on how to approach birds in the field. Throughout the century, as Ann Blum suggests in *Picturing Nature* (1993), women “continued to meet and cultivate a taste for prose and pictorial descriptions of whole animals in nature” (319). The literature of popular natural history was available to both women and men of all classes and educational backgrounds. In Canada too, women authors were contributing to the transformation of systematic ornithology into regionally specific findings and modifying the expert language of science into a combination of language, fact, and interpretation.

This chapter examines the language of the field approach to ornithology, with its literary quality, in Canadian women’s writing, as represented by Harriet Sheppard’s “Notes on Some of the Canadian Song Birds” from *Transactions of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec* (1835), Anna Jameson’s *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (1838), and Catharine Parr Traill’s *Pearls and Pebbles, or, Notes of an Old Naturalist* (1894). As the three previous chapters demonstrate, Canadian female authors were aware of the uniqueness of the colony’s climate, flora, and fauna. They were also interested in the relationships among humans and natural environments and animals. Rather than removing birds from their surrounding environments in order to identify, classify, and dissect, women in the field focused on the behaviour and characteristics of each species in relation to larger ecosystems. Nature was
interpreted as a system of interdependencies; human life and culture were linked to the natural environment. With basic natural history knowledge, a notebook, and a keen sense of observation, Sheppard, Jameson, and Traill went into the fields and woods of Upper Canada and learned about the birds around them.

Emphasizing non-violence, a putting aside of the gun as a tool of science, Sheppard, Jameson, and Traill were part of a growing emphasis on the protection and preservation of birds. In the final decades of the nineteenth century, women in Britain and North America publicly denounced a patriarchal model that interpreted plants and animals as objects of human use. For instance, in a leaflet entitled *Destruction of Ornamental-Plumed Birds* (1897), Eliza Phillips (b.1823), vice-president of the Society for the Protection of Birds, expresses disgust at the free nature of bird warehouses, “where it [was] possible for a person to walk ankle deep – literally to wade – in bright-plumaged bird skins, and see them piled shoulder high” and openly condemns those who neglect the “duty of righteous and merciful dealing with every living creature” (Phillips). By challenging scientific practices, policies, and theories that were traditionally masculine, women like Phillips, Sheppard, Jameson, and Traill foreshadowed modern-day ecofeminist scholars who dedicate their writing to the “recognition and elimination of male-gender bias wherever and whenever it occurs” (Warren, “Introduction” 1). In understanding the importance of valuing and preserving natural organisms, individuals, and populations, many nineteenth-century women writers argued for the equal standing of birds as rational creatures. For example, Mary Treat (1830-1923), a naturalist who corresponded with Charles Darwin, suggested that birds display in the “quality of their intellectual operations ... no manifest difference from the reasoning of human being” (“Notes on the Intelligence of Birds” 359). In debates on animal intelligence, the hierarchy of nature was assumed to be fluid. According to
Darwin’s *Descent of Man*, “the difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, is certainly one of degree and not of kind” (130). Animals in a world that emphasizes a dynamic relationship between organisms and their environments lack the fixed habits assigned to them by natural theology and likewise lack the assigned value within a hierarchical model. As Treat argues throughout *Home Studies in Nature* (1885), birds must be valued and protected as rational creatures. She writes that birds “might lay fair claim to the possession of reason, not only in the management of the young, but in many other things” (Treat 68).

Likewise, women producing scientific illustrations were approaching their subjects with practices that set them apart from illustrators who drew dead specimens. For example, Jane (Jemima) Blackburn (1823-1909), a Scottish amateur ornithologist and the most acclaimed female bird illustrator of her time (see her *Birds Drawn from Nature* published in 1862), took pride in painting birds ‘from nature’ rather than from dead models or skins as did John James Audubon (1785-1851). In her preface to *Birds from Moidart and Elsewhere* (1895), she writes as a popularizer, disclaiming scientific exclusivity and authority. “I do not,” she writes, “attempt to give a complete collection of British birds, or even those of Moidart, still less to describe them scientifically ... but only to represent such birds as I have known personally, and to add ... observations which I have had the opportunity of making on their life and habits” (Blackburn 1). Blackburn viewed each bird species in their original habitat: she “hung from ladders to capture the sight of owls in their tree, struggled with frozen paintbrushes as she depicted swans in the cold, and peered over cliffs to view sea eagles in the nest” (Gates 79). Women like Blackburn set a precedent for other women naturalists in their painstaking observations and insistence upon carefully familiarizing themselves with the habits of the animals that they studied and drew. The
approach was nonviolent and embraced an emotionally sensitive understanding of complex ecosystems.

Corresponding with this shift away from anthropocentric ideologies of how humanity ought to treat the natural environment and nonhuman beings, initiatives and societies for the protection of birds flourished, often with women at the forefront. Barbara Gates points out that “by the 1870s, women had taken the lead in animal protection movements, and by the 1890s, they were crusading to save every type of animal” (114). As early as the 1860s, the common use of seabirds as hat decorations led to the passage of the Sea Birds Protection Act of 1869: “[u]nfortunately, this measure seemed only to encourage the use of other kinds of birds in millinery, particularly imported birds” (115). The crusade for humane treatment of birds in Britain culminated in the founding of the Society for the Protection of Birds (SPB) in 1889, which would later be incorporated by Royal Charter in 1904 and be renamed the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). In her history of the RSPB, Margareta Lemon (1860-1953), the society’s first secretary, writes that new members of the society took a pledge to “discourage the wanton destruction of Birds, and interest themselves generally in their protection” (68). The group was headquartered in London and was formed by women. In North American, the most notable action of the late nineteenth century was instigated in 1886 by George Bird Grinnell (1849-1938), naturalist and long-time publisher of Forest and Stream. Grinnell proposed and formed the first Audubon Society dedicated to the “protection of wild birds and their eggs” (41). Membership in Grinnell’s Audubon Society was free and open to anyone, women and men, who pledged to “prevent as far as possible, (1) the killing of any wild birds not used for food; (2) the destruction of nests or eggs of any wild birds, and (3) the wearing of feathers as ornaments or
trimming for dress” (Grinnell 41). Membership in the public forum quickly increased, and many local chapters were organized and maintained entirely by women (Barrow 118).

David E. Allen briefly notes in his social history, *The Naturalist in Britain* (1976), that the opposition to linking shooting and bird study in the end of the nineteenth century was partially affected by what he refers to as “Feminine Emancipation;” he suggests that the influx of women into the field of ornithology helped usher in a “radical about-turn in ethics” because most women “had little liking for weaponry” (230). Although Allen sees the influence of women as peripheral, as a matter of taste and limited to the final years of the nineteenth century, women participated actively in ornithological study. They also participated in the corresponding debate over practice in Britain and the colonies throughout the century, a neglected aspect of Canadian natural history that this chapter aims to illuminate. It is accurate that “[o]ne of the most striking features of the ornithological community in ... the nineteenth century is that it was almost entirely male ... During this period, women occasionally became accepted, if marginal, members of the botanical and entomological collecting networks” (Barrow 43). Women did carefully observe bird species in the field throughout the century and described them in terms of both popular and systematic approaches. Women writers helped popularize technical ornithological information in a time of increasing professionalization. Simultaneously, they belonged to a literary tradition that championed the value and rights of animals. They worked for the protection and preservation of bird species during an era in which birds were being killed in massive numbers in the name of science and of fashion.
“Birdskins are capital”: The Nineteenth-Century Cultural Connection between Ornithology and Field-Sports

Ornithology, the branch of zoology that deals with the study of birds, was defined by ornithologist Charles Wood in 1835 as “the science which has for its object the investigation of the habits, affinities, and nature of birds” (ix). Throughout the nineteenth century, the foci of the science, classification and anatomy or behavioural description were constantly shifting. These shifts corresponded with the debate over defining ornithology as either a scientific study or an expansion of field sports. Assumed by many scientists to be necessarily bound to the killing of large numbers of birds, systematics, that is the naming, classification, and description of organisms, represented the core activity of scientific ornithology throughout the nineteenth century, primarily in the second half. As Mary Louise Pratt claims in Imperial Eyes (1992), many nineteenth-century natural history practices extracted plants and animals from their habitats, placed species into pre-determined classification systems, and focused on accumulating specimens within metropolitan centres (31). This Linnean focus is boldly asserted in the 1901 introduction to Robert Ridgway’s immense, multi-volume technical manual, The Birds of North and Middle America. Eleven volumes were published between the years 1901 and 1950. Although Ridgway’s compendium was published after the work of Sheppard, Jameson, and Traill, his stance is reflective of the debate within bird study that preoccupied nineteenth-century ornithologists.

According to Ridgway, there were two different kinds of ornithology: systematic or scientific and popular. The first dealt with “the structure and classification of birds, their synonyms, and technical descriptions,” while the second focused on birds’ “habits, songs, nesting, and other facts pertaining to their life-histories” (Ridgway 1:1). Although Ridgway
admitted that scientific and popular ornithology were related and to a certain degree interdependent, he reveals in the following excerpt from 1901 the exclusionary and anti-amateur attitude of late-nineteenth-century ornithologists who favoured professionalization, institutionalization, and rationalism:

Popular ornithology is the more entertaining, with its savor of the wildwood, green fields, the riverside and seashore, bird songs, and the many fascinating things connected with out-of-door Nature. But systematic ornithology, being a component part of biology – the science of life – is the more instructive and therefore more important. Each advance in this serious study reveals just so much more of the hidden mysteries of creation, and adds proportionately to the sum of human knowledge. (1:1-2)

Whereas Ridgway’s predecessors, like Alexander Wilson (1766-1813), sought to make their work accessible to scientists and novices alike, both men and women, the new biological ornithologist aimed his publications at a small group of technically trained men. Descriptions of the life history and behaviour of birds that were central to earlier publications by ornithologists like Wilson were overshadowed by exhaustive synonymies, technical descriptions of plumage variations, research into external morphology, and reports of geographical distribution, all largely based on vast skin collections amassed by collectors.

A focus on increasing minuteness and detail of study throughout the century led to greater specialization and professionalization in Britain and Canada, resulting in the emergence of specialist societies. For example, in November 1858, Alfred Newton’s celebrated Sunday afternoon gatherings of prominent men developed the concept for the British Ornithologists’ Union (the BOU) with the primary aim of introducing a periodical “devoted exclusively to birds”
the Ibis was drafted in a matter of months and still continues. The membership was exclusively male. Over a decade later, the first ornithological society in the United States and in North America at large was established in the early 1870s when several young bird enthusiasts began gathering regularly to share their exploits and pore over volumes considered to be the acme of North American ornithology, like Wilson’s American Ornithology (1808-1814) and Audubon’s Birds of America (1827-1838). After two years of informal meetings, the group founded the Nuttall Ornithological Club in November 1873 (Barrow 48). The club was named after Thomas Nuttall (1786-1859), the well-known English botanist and zoologist and author of the popular Manual of the Ornithology of the United States and of Canada (1832). Uniting gentlemen, businessmen, taxidermists, natural history dealers, and students, the organization attracted men with “varying levels of expertise and from differing social, occupational, and educational backgrounds” (Barrow 48). However, as William Davis points out in the History of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, 1873-1986 (1987), the exception to the generally inclusive membership policy was women who were barred from membership in the Nuttall Club for the next century (89-92).

In the last decades of the century, a development in the world of North American ornithology suggested the need for a central society to be developed. Two contradictory lists of North American birds had been published, namely Robert Ridgway’s “Catalogue of the Birds of North America” (1880) and Elliot Coues’ Check List of North American Birds (1882). Recognizing the need for nomenclatural reform, Coues wrote in the Bulletin of the Nuttall Ornithological Club in 1883 that there was a need to “secure the greatly desired uniformity of nomenclature” (“Compliments” 6). Partly in response to the discrepancies between the Ridgway list and the Coues list, twenty-three ornithologists attended the organizational meeting of the
American Ornithologists’ Union (AOU) on 26 September 1883 (Barrow 52). At the time of the
meeting, systematics formed the main activity of scientific ornithology. As a result,
classification and nomenclature were the most active and influential branches within the society.
According to the printed invitation in the *Bulletin of the Nuttall Ornithological Club* (1883), the
purpose of the society was the “promotion of social and scientific intercourses between
American ornithologists,” and the “special object” was the adoption of a “uniform system of
classification and nomenclature” (Allen, Coues, and Brewster 221). The AOU was exclusionary
in practice and anti-amateur in perspective, aiming their publications and meetings toward a
highly educated, technically oriented audience, barring most amateurs and all female
membership. Restriction from groups like the AOU was a disappointment for nineteenth-century
women who were interested in ornithology. Therefore, women made use of other outlets such as
writing autobiographies, letters, journals, and emigrant and naturalist guides to express their
ornithological interests.

Historian Mark Barrow notes in *A Passion for Birds* (1998) that throughout the
nineteenth-century ornithological community, there was an unresolved tension between
“entrepreneurial and Romantic impulses” (17), a strain which was externalized in the antagonism
between the traditional practice of shooting birds and the non-intrusive observation of species in
their natural habitats. John Cassin (1813-1869), one of the most influential American
ornithologists and America’s first taxonomist, argued in 1856, “Bird-collecting is the ultimate
refinement – the *ne plus ultra* of all sports of the field. It is attended with all the excitement, and
requires all the skill, of other shooting, with a much higher degree of theoretical information and
consequent gratification in its exercise” (278). A passion for ornithology was aligned with the
ideology of frontier individualism. Birds, particularly in the grand, uncultivated settings of
colonies like British North America, were seen as elements of untamed wildness. The ideological connection to concepts of masculinity supported an age-old fixation on skill with the gun to such an extent that, as influential member of the American Ornithologists’ Union and the Nuttall Ornithological Club Charles Batchelder (1856-1954) suggested, there was not “much of a dividing line between ornithologists and sportsmen” (13) throughout the nineteenth century.

Nineteenth-century Canadian practices too aligned field-sports with ornithology. As Suzanne Zeller argues in Inventing Canada (1987), “The basis of science as it was practised in Canada during the Victorian age was inventory [as well as] material potential” (269). A focus on value and product influenced the vision of zoologists and ornithologists who, like Canadian botanists of the time, devoted their time to collecting, cataloguing, and displaying specimens. British North America was imagined as a wilderness overflowing with uncultivated and inexhaustible floral and faunal resources. The rational study of nature and the scientific taming of its species, by way of collection and examination, were assumed to offer a chance for cultivation and prosperity (Zeller 3). Unsurprisingly then, the Canadian naturalist who saw himself as contending daily with a challenging environment which needed to be controlled, endorsed the shooting of bird species for taxonomical purposes. English Officer Sir George Head (1782-1855) wrote in 1815 that British gentlemen and military officers of Canada were sportsmen-naturalists, or “male monarchs,” who anticipated the excitement of the hunt, armed themselves with the “double-barrelled gun,” and were “quite ready for the birds of the country” (Head 192). This cultural tie between the male naturalist and hunter is illustrated by publications such as Major William Ross King’s The Sportsman and Naturalist in Canada (1866). King depicts British North America as a land of “vast tracts of primeval forest” with “game-stocked prairies of boundless extent” (v) and himself as a naturalist recording the “haunts and habits of
the birds and animals,” “constantly [with] rod in hand or roaming the woods with dog and gun” (vi). He writes that the Canadian sportsman-naturalist may “float over the great Lakes; fill his sketch-book with the glorious views [and] may kill his grouse on the broad prairies” all in one day (v). According to King, gathering information for natural history necessarily entailed the physical domination and destruction of nature.

The assumption that the spread of education must be facilitated by the collection of specimens led to an unprecedented growth in private and public collections throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century. Rachel Poliquin points out in The Breathless Zoo (2012) that “both taxidermy and taxonomy were vital to naturalists from the early eighteenth century onward ... Taxonomy was built with actual specimens. Naturalists had to see the animal, measure its parts ... and compare coloration and patterning with other collected specimens” (115-16). Brian Easlea suggests, however, that the “new scientists” of the nineteenth century were not “mere Aristotelian contemplators of nature.” Instead, they were the violent and oppressive “penetrators and masters” of the natural world (126). By 1820, the accepted practice was to display whole groups of birds together in one case with details of their natural surroundings added as a picturesque setting (Allen 144). Some collectors no longer used cases and placed bird skins in cabinet drawers with tags corresponding to entries in the collector’s notebook denoting colour, sex, species, and other taxonomical details. Consequently, the idea of the natural history museum wavered between “private-hoards or public peep-shows” and “store-houses of carefully preserved ... records” (Allen 144). It was these practices of killing, collecting, and storing dead specimens that Sheppard, Jameson, and Traill opposed. These writers focused instead on watching live birds and recording field observations.
Numerous businesses devoted to the sale of natural history specimens further reinforced the idea that nature was a resource or commodity, existing solely for human ends. In the culture of nineteenth-century collecting, “the boundaries between scientific ornithologists, ... collectors, taxidermists, and commercial dealers were fluid” (Barrow 135). For instance, the wide distribution of natural history dealers’ catalogs influenced the tone of many ornithological collecting manuals, such as American ornithologist Elliot Coues’ *Field Ornithology* (1874). In support of the idea of human domination over nature, Coues declares in evidently commercial terms, “*How many Birds of the Same Kind do you want? – All you can get ... Birdskins are capital ... Birdskins are a medium of exchange among ornithologists the world over; they represent value – money value and scientific value*” (12; original emphasis). Indeed, the very act of collecting itself was evidence of an anthropocentric worldview based upon getting and spending, to borrow Wordsworth’s phrase from his poem “The World is Too Much With Us” (ca. 1799). Cabinets of specimens contained the lifeless remnants of once autonomous beings now removed from their natural habitats and ordered according to each collector’s design. The goal was to collect, catalogue, and display as many natural objects as possible. The method was shooting followed by taxidermy, either skinning or stuffing.

Collecting and systematics, along with a reliance on shooting and mass collecting, dominated nineteenth-century ornithological practice. However, in the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, there were field and behavioural ornithologists who were slowly encouraging a setting aside of the gun in mainstream discussion. By the 1880s, signs began to appear of an interest in watching birds within their natural habitats without any attempt to shoot them. The earliest male voice of the field perspective was Charles Dixon (1858-1926), an English ornithologist who developed theories about bird migration.
Although his work is too specialized to be accessible to the amateur, in his *Rural Bird Life* (1880), the word “observation” is repeated frequently, revealing the methodological emphasis. Speaking out against the professionalization of ornithology, Dixon says, “[My] materials have been obtained by unwearied personal observation in the field and the forest, and for the most part written in the several haunts of the birds described, and free from the harsh, and, in a measure, unmeaning technicalities with which at the present time ornithology is so pervaded” (vii-viii). A notebook and telescope or set of field-glasses are the basic tools of the ornithologist, according to Dixon, and the only ones that are needed. This focus was mirrored in *A Year with the Birds* (1889) by William Warde Fowler (1847-1921). Fowler points out a growing interest in behaviour, that is “habits, songs, and haunts” (viii), that would preoccupy many twentieth-century bird watchers. For Fowler, the avid ornithologist must form a careful “habit of watching and listening” (vii) to the birds. An important element of this watchful field approach was the description of bird songs and call-notes recorded by Harriet Sheppard in 1835.

**“singing birds not mentioned”: Harriet Sheppard’s “Notes on Some of the Canadian Song Birds” (1835)**

Harriet Sheppard was born Henrietta Campbell in Quebec in the late 1780s or early 1790s; no specific record of birth has so far been located.28 She was the fourth of five children born to Archibald Campbell and his wife Charlotte, née Saxton. Charlotte Campbell’s family was from New England, and Archibald Campbell was of Scottish descent. Loyalists to the Crown, both the Saxton family and Archibald Campbell forfeited their European properties after the Revolutionary War and emigrated to Nova Scotia. Staying in the maritime region for only a

28 Whether by poor record keeping, fire, loss of documents, or other circumstances, the historical record of Sheppard’s life is incomplete. Facts and biographical assertions are taken mostly from Creese 139-40.
short time, both families moved to Quebec where Archibald established himself in the burgeoning timber export trade, earning a considerable fortune. Conforming to middle and upper-class European standards, all five Campbell children were educated in different subject areas. Two of the three sons, John Saxton and Archibald Jr., developed successful business careers, owned large country estates, and became notable figures in Quebec social and cultural life. Harriet received an education, from private instructors and tutors, in botany, natural history, chemistry, music, classical literature, and theology and possibly spent time at a ladies’ school in Montreal established by her aunt, Harriet Saxton. Harriet’s education reflects the value her family placed on women’s education.

In 1809, Harriet married English immigrant William Sheppard, a respected naturalist who would have a positive influence on Harriet’s own natural history work. William Sheppard was a Montreal merchant in the timber and shipbuilding trades. In 1816, seven years after their marriage, the couple moved to the property known as Woodfield, a fine country estate surrounded by one hundred acres of park and woodland in the township of Sillery, west of Quebec City. The location was optimal for the development of Harriet and William’s passion for naturalism as well as a perfect location for the couple to build a reputation as respected natural historians in local intellectual circles. At Woodfield, there was a library of approximately three thousand volumes, a picture gallery, and a small natural history museum. There was also a sizable garden overlooking the river and an aviary and numerous greenhouses. Harriet was a skilled botanist, bird observer, and conchologist. Following serious financial losses in William’s timber export business in 1847, the Sheppards had to sell Woodfield and move to Fairymead, a residence on the St. Francis River about ninety miles southwest of Quebec City. No information has yet been uncovered about Harriet Sheppard’s later years or death.
In 1824, Harriet and William Sheppard, alongside two of Harriet’s brothers, Lord and Lady Dalhousie, and other distinguished members of Quebec’s social and intellectual circles, played leading roles in the founding of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec (LHSQ). Harriet frequently took part in the society’s social activities and publications. For instance, her extensive list of shells of the region, “On the recent shells which characterise Quebec and its environs” (1829), complete with descriptive notes including specific geographical locations, is considered to be one of the earliest publications on Quebec conchology. Writing three decades before the publication of Darwin’s *The Origin of the Species* (1859), she followed the classification system proposed by Darwin’s predecessor Jean Baptiste Lamarck, whose *Histoire naturelle des animaux sans vertèbres* (1815-1822) had recently been published. Sheppard’s work reveals an understanding of the Linnean system, a familiarity with current natural history literature, as well as a fluency in both French and English. Lamarck’s work helped her to establish genus, but he did not describe many of the species specific to the region. Although William Sheppard published numerous reports on Canadian plants in early issues of the LHSQ’s journal *Transactions*, Harriet’s botanical work was focused only on collecting. Accompanied by her close friends Lady Dalhousie and Anne Mary Perceval, she went on regular botanizing expeditions around Sillery. In fact, Sheppard, Dalhousie, and Perceval collected extensively for botanist Sir William Jackson Hooker and are cited many times in his *Flora Boreali-Americana* (1833) as contributors of Canadian specimens. Following the departure from Canada of Anne Perceval in 1828 and Lady Dalhousie in 1829, Sheppard may have felt disconnected from other female naturalists, though her ornithological interests continued into the 1830s.

Harriet Sheppard’s ornithological report, “Notes on Some of the Canadian Song Birds” (1835) published in *Transactions* is evidence of her competence as a naturalist. She used
Alexander Wilson’s *American Ornithology, or the Natural History of Birds of the United States* (1808-1814) as a reference guide, setting out to add classes of song birds not catalogued by Wilson. The debate over whether or not the birds of North America sing was of interest to both British and Canadian naturalists. Describing the songs of twenty-four bird species which were catalogued in Wilson’s guide, James Rennie, professor of natural history at King’s College, London, published an article entitled “Sketches of twenty-four American song birds” (1828-1829) in the *Magazine of Natural History*. To this list, Sheppard’s “Notes” added seven newly observed species. In the opening remarks to her own report, Sheppard suggests that Rennie’s “sketch is quite sufficient to prove that the American woods are by no means deficient in melody” (222). However, she takes on the task of offering “additional examples of singing birds not mentioned ... by Wilson” (222). Sheppard not only added to Professor Rennie’s list which described species already identified in Wilson’s *American Ornithology*, but she also contributed new species to the larger field of ornithology, species which were not included in Wilson’s widely renowned ornithological compendium.

Although Sheppard only published one essay on ornithology, it is an important, field-setting piece that was produced during a time when ornithology was not yet a primary focus of Canadian naturalists and when very few women were publishing in mainstream journals like *Transactions*. With the exception of Sheppard’s 1835 article on Canadian song birds, ornithology remained overshadowed by commercially driven studies in geology, meteorology, and botany within the LHSQ and the Natural History Society of Montreal (NHSM) throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Canadian ornithology therefore emerged informally and was studied by British military officers, settlers, and tourists who created amateur networks, private collections, watercolour paintings and drawings, and writings about birds. Sheppard’s
article presented an example of what the inclusion of ornithology in mainstream intellectual discussion might look like and represented a reversal in which men are the amateurs and the woman is the professional. Her work diverged from the sportsman-naturalist’s method. Her reliance on field features, such as call-notes and songs, foreshadowed a late-nineteenth-century shift in ornithological focus from identification to bird behaviour.

Sheppard was a field ornithologist devoted to observing and describing living birds in their natural habitats. Alexander Wilson, the author of Sheppard’s trusted ornithological reference guide, a naturalist whom she probably admired as a source of dependable knowledge, also approached the birds from a nonviolent perspective. During his “wild wood rambles” (xc), Wilson devoted himself to both scientific description and the details of the “manners and disposition of each respective species” (xci). As a “faithful biographer” to the birds, he delineated their “various peculiarities, in character, song, building, economy, &c.” (xci). Wilson’s method of unintrusive observation influenced Sheppard’s work. Of course, the task of describing the songs of bird species necessitates that the animals be alive. However, even when describing the plumage and structures of particular birds, Sheppard observes them in the wild rather than in display cabinets. For example, portraying a particular species of sparrow, she presents information that could be gathered only from careful observation of a group of living birds over numerous months and seasons: “The Fox Coloured Sparrow (Fringilla albicollis) sings sweetly here during the summer. Numerous flocks arrive early in May, and remain until autumn. [Wilson] states that the colours of the female are less brilliant than those of the male, the throat not being of so pure a white; that, however, only denotes the young birds, and the full grown in their winter dress” (Sheppard 222). Sheppard is subtle in her correction of Wilson,
revealing esteem for his work. She is cautious not to alienate herself from the already developing field of ornithology.

After specifying Linnean classification, correcting Wilson with due attention and respect, and carefully establishing the scientific authority of her observations, she proceeds to emphasize the usefulness of her own project. The observation of behavioural sounds and song is a way to distinguish sex that does not require catching birds and dissecting them: “The song although rather monotonous ... consists of a loud clear whistle, each note very distinct and sweet ... Several pair have been seen so exactly alike that they could only be distinguished by the peculiar noise which the female often utters for some time previous to [nest] building” (222). Arguing that bird songs are a way to determine sex counters the argument of many Victorian ornithologists that birds must be killed and closely examined to be properly catalogued. Leading American ornithologist Elliot Coues writes in his *Handbook of Field and General Ornithology* (1890), “Field ornithology must lead the way to systematic and descriptive ornithology” (3). Specimens must be collected, prepared, and preserved; to this end, he tells the student of ornithology, “The Double-barrelled Shot Gun is your main reliance” (3). By contrast, in its observation of systematic and descriptive modes in her field report, Sheppard’s work acts as an effective example of the ways in which birds can be classified without the use of gun, trap, or snare.

Sheppard’s “Notes” are reminiscent of the aesthetic awakening and profoundly personal love of nature essential to previously published field guides like Gilbert White’s *Natural History of Selborne* (1789) and the *History of British Birds* (1804) by English engraver and amateur ornithologist Thomas Bewick (1753-1828). Bewick’s book laid groundwork for successive authors in its emphasis on nonviolence and on approaching birds with care and respect:
“[I]eaving those denizens of nature to enjoy their own native woods, the sheltering coppice, or extended plain” (vi). Bewick describes and artistically depicts species in their natural habitats displaying their natural habits. Sheppard too describes the birds in her study as one would find them, closely observing, but never interfering with, their behaviour. For example, she observes the Purple Finch (*Fringilla purpurea*), “another bird with whose song Wilson was unacquainted” (Sheppard 222). Describing a species wholly absent from Wilson’s study, Sheppard is more obvious in establishing her authority, her regional expertise, and the importance of her additions. Although the birds become like friends to Sheppard and her family, “flitting close over the house [and] hopping on the windows as if striving to gain admittance” (222), Sheppard reminds her readership that she is observing the habits of wild birds, not domesticated pets, thereby emphasizing a field approach to ornithological study. Sheppard documents the actions of the finches that “may be heard here, both in summer and winter.” They are welcomed as loyal guests: even “the coldest weather does not prevent those pleasing visitors from paying us their morning call” (222). She continues, “After mid-day they disappear, seeking shelter in the thick pine forests, and we see them no more until the next clear cold morning. They have a most melodious chant, composed of a variety of soft notes: even when quarreling their threat is not expressed by harsh or sharp sounds” (222). In the style of Wilson and Bewick, Sheppard details her accounts with notes on animal behaviour and glimpses into the “life histories” of each individual species (Barrow 75). Establishing habit in specific detail, she reveals a devotion to detail which demands daily, seasonal, and annual attention.

Sheppard’s approach is simultaneously rational and sentimental. Her emotions are stirred by the beauty of the purple finch as it flies and sings alongside other local species, species which are accurately designated by both common name and taxonomical genus and species. Watching
the birds act as individuals within a natural community, she records, “In their excursions they are often accompanied by the Pine Grosbeak (*Pyrrhula enucleator*) and the lesser Red Pole (*Fringilla linarea*). The lively colour of all those birds, together with their sweet whistles and sprightly motions, add much to the exhilarating feelings caused by a bright winters morning” (Sheppard 222). Sheppard enriches her empirical observations with an interest in the effects that the natural world and its inhabitants have on the emotions of the human subject. Throughout her “Notes,” Sheppard includes seasonal details, which emphasize environmental structure and process and track the “rhythms of the environment,” to borrow Tina Gianquitto’s diction (105). Sheppard’s narration of bird activity guides her readers across seasonal changes, a knowledge which can come only from considerable residence in and careful attention to a specific locale. Involvement with one’s environment leads to an understanding of the close connections between humans and nonhuman beings and inspires an intense, personal response. The presence of the birds enlivens Sheppard’s spirit and curiosity: “At such times a pleasing astonishment is felt that happiness so pure may be produced by merely observing a small portion of the beauties of creation, and that too in the depth of winter when all is supposed to be dreary and uninteresting” (222). The emotional response of the observer opens channels of communion between human and nonhuman, between inside and outside.

Sheppard’s study of Quebec’s birdlife is not only evidence of a Victorian battle to counter the patriarchal sportsman-naturalist alignment, but also anticipates modern-day ecofeminist concerns with anthropocentric scientific methodology. Unlike the biological ornithologist who must dissect, Sheppard describes the natural world from the perspective of an appreciative observer. When she depicts the Hermit Thrush (*Turdus minor*), she writes of its song and movements with specific detail: “Part of the song resembles the higher notes of a
distant violin, at times only just audible, then a few notes may be distinctly heard more full and mellow ... Few birds excel this in elegance of motion ... they will at times alight gently in a theatrical posture” (Sheppard 222). By rejecting a violent approach to science, Sheppard’s work may be seen as foreshadowing Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva’s concerns in their field-setting work *Ecofeminism* (1993). Mies and Shiva argue against “the postulate of value free research,” which is defined by an “indifferent, disinterested, alienated attitude towards the ‘research objects’” (38). They speak out against rationalism that disrupts the organic whole of ecosystems by “separating the research objects by force from their symbiotic context and isolating them in the laboratory, ... dissecting them – analysing them – into even smaller bits and pieces” (47).

Instead, nature and natural phenomena ought to be left intact in their environment. According to Mies and Shiva, a non-violent approach to nature and science is the only way to begin to redress humans’ nineteenth-century separation from and their subjugation of nature, an approach followed by women like Sheppard who focused on the songs and call-notes of living birds within their habitats. However, observing birds within their natural settings was not restricted to scientific manuals and reports; several writers of journals and travel narratives also endorsed a field approach to the world of ornithology.

“*listening to the soft melancholy cry of the whip-poor-will*”: Anna Jameson’s Literary Approach to Birds in *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles* (1838)

Anna Jameson illustrates a literary field approach to the natural world and to the birds which, as Barbara T. Gates suggests, is distinctively Victorian in its focus upon the individual emotional and moral encounter with the natural world in which “language ventures out and tries to envelop the vastness of space” (169). Jameson’s travel writing promotes a natural aesthetic, one with a
noticeable ethical agenda. Jameson “wants to make us love nature” (Morton 152): “This beautiful Lake Ontario! – my lake – for I begin to be in love with it – it changes its hues every moment, the shades of purple and green fleeting over it, now dark, now lustrous, now pale ... and flights of wild geese, and great black loons, were skimming, diving, sporting over the bosom of the lake ... all life, and light, and beauty were abroad” (Jameson 163). Jameson is so overcome by a growing love for the beauty of the nonhuman world and captivated by the movements of the flights of birds that she “transcends normative human life” and is beset by a “loss of human distinctiveness” (163). While on Lake Huron, Jameson says, “I cannot, I dare not, attempt to describe to you the strange sensation one has, thus thrown for a time beyond the bounds of civilised humanity ... nor the wild yet solemn reveries which come over one in the midst of this wilderness of woods and waters. All was so solitary, so grand in its solitude, as if nature unviolated sufficed to herself” (444). Inspired by the grandiose sublimity of “nature unviolated” (444), the observer realizes the ineffectual nature of language and culturally bound description. Momentarily detaching herself from “civilised humanity,” she becomes part of nature, part of “the atmosphere” (Gates 163). The feminine mode of understanding the natural world proposed by Gates is distinct from the Victorian male approach to the natural world which Pratt terms “the-monarch-of-all-I-survey” mode (201). The monarch employs a distanced panoramic gaze in order to appropriate and claim what he sees. Invoking a “rhetoric of presence” (Pratt 205), the male gazer establishes himself as superior to nature, in order to validate his imperial and patriarchal authority over the natural landscape and animals. This approach is distinct from Jameson’s sensual involvement with her surroundings, her emotion-laden delivery of natural observations, and her love for the wild geese and black loons.
Jameson does in her travels render nature accessible through art and through literary language, but she does not envision herself as a monarch figure. Her contact with nature, particularly birds, comprises the moments that seem most meaningful and most memorable. Often these passages are written in a nostalgic tone as retrospective narratives. Jameson remembers, “I was alone with nature and my own heart, bathed in mountain torrents ... not thinking, not observing, only enjoying and dreaming! As on that lake I have seen a bird hang hovering, poised on almost motionless wing, as if contemplating the reflection of its own form, suspended between two heavens, that above and that beneath it; so my mind seemed lost to earth and earth’s objects” (354). Referring to “earth’s objects,” Jameson supports a metaphysical system in which subject and object are divided – a dualism which, according to ecocritic Timothy Morton in *Ecology without Nature* (2007), is “the fundamental philosophical reason for human beings’ destruction of the environment” (64). However, abandoning a rationalist concept of selfhood, that is “not thinking, not observing,” to the momentary and visceral (Jameson 354), Jameson endorses an undoing of the separation between nature and the human self. Like the bird hovering between two planes, Jameson’s writing is suspended between two levels, namely scientific form and literary form. She hovers between morphology and emotion when she describes the birds. The bird reflecting upon its own form might be read as a symbol of Jameson using her travelogue as a means to contemplate her textual form. Jameson’s interest in the bird comes in part from her enjoyment of qualities she ascribes to it, perhaps even longing for them. The bird’s poise speaks of Jameson’s continual reflection on the cultural and ethical purposes which her narrative could serve. Yet, no matter how much Jameson sets up bird life as a “counter-reality” (Oerlemans 82) to her own, her narrative reveals a consideration of animals as independent, conscious, and even intelligent.
The hovering bird is poised, “as if contemplating” (Jameson 354), a more-than-human other with communicative powers. For Jameson, the individuality of the bird is the key to the power of place. As ecofeminist Val Plumwood argues in *Environmental Culture* (2002), “A world perceived in communicative and narrative terms is certainly far richer and more exciting than the self-enclosed world of meaningless and silent objects that exclusionary, monological and commodity thinking creates” (230). Jameson experiences the fact that she is embedded within the world around her, “alone with nature and my own heart,” constantly affecting and affected by it. She often sees the Canadian environment in traditional terms as a collage of objects and scenes: “Innumerable flocks of wild fowl were disporting among the reedy islets, and here and there the great black loon was seen diving and dipping, or skimming over the waters” (362). She also breaks down the distinction between inside and outside. Jameson “burst[s] through the confines of rational analysis ... thinking, feeling, and sensing viscerally the presence and movement” of nature (Lahar 100). Beings like the suspended bird and the “great black loon” are pieces within a larger system, one within which Jameson sees herself as a sensitive and rational participant.

Throughout most of her narrative, Jameson creates an emotional connection to the natural world. However, she does not wholly abandon rationality. As an advocate of women’s education, she insists upon balancing emotion and reason. Jameson discovers a view of language that combines “symbolic ... or emotive functions” with “language as meaning” (Buss 101). As Jameson claims, “A man may be as much a fool from the want of sensibility as the want of sense” (189). An academic “taste for natural history” accompanies her romantic depictions of the natural environment. She states that she values the knowledge of the scientific observer in Canada who “know[s] the habits and haunts of the wild animals which people their forest
domain,” makes valuable “collections of minerals and insects,” and “trace[s] each herb and flower that sips the silvery dew” (171). However, Jameson never supports killing animals for examination.

By taking up a scientific posture, Jameson includes herself within a tradition of scientific observation and a system of knowledge from which women were barred throughout most of the century. However, the science she endorses is not that of the dissector or biologist. Instead, she underlines a field approach which includes anthropomorphic language. She writes with reliable detail, careful to maintain and emphasize her role as respectful and perceptive observer: “I observed some birds of a species new to me; there was the lovely blue-bird, with its brilliant violet plumage; and a most gorgeous species of woodpecker, with a black head, white breast, and back and wings of the brightest scarlet” (Jameson 237). Like Wilson and Sheppard, Jameson enriches the descriptive catalogue of species with a narrative of the woodpecker’s character, a piece of its “life history”: “[I]t came flitting across our road, clinging to the trees before us, and remaining pertinaciously in sight, as if conscious of its own splendid array” (237). She attributes self-consciousness, a human characteristic, to the bird. Jameson describes appearance, structure, and plumage, as well as cataloguing according to genus, familiarising her readers by way of comparison: “There was also the Canadian robin, a bird as large as a thrush, but in plumage and shape resembling the sweet bird at home ‘that wears the scarlet stomacher.’ There were great numbers of small birds of a bright yellow, like canaries, and I believe of the same genus” (237).

Jameson situates herself in relation to fields of study that were still assumed to be masculine by her contemporaries; however, like Sheppard, she does not accept the pragmatics of ornithology. Abiding by her emotional and ethical approach to the natural world, Jameson refuses to remove birds violently from their natural habitats in order to relocate them within a
system of collection, examination, and display. Instead, Jameson is clear that her “business here is to observe” (354) with a “sense of enjoyment keen and unanticipative” (373). Jameson collects “memoranda,” not specimens (447). In The Death of Nature (1980), Carolyn Merchant illustrates that modern natural science is based on the destruction and subordination of nature as a living female organism and that nature is raw material for the emotionally detached dissector and examiner. Merchant shows how this patriarchal science necessarily goes hand in hand with violence, power, and ideologies of hierarchy. Jameson partially disconnects herself from the discursive tradition of the rationalist scientist and the emerging biologist by foregrounding personal involvement. Her voice is not that of the male scientist who kills to learn. Instead, she is an observer who enjoys and records the sights and sounds of the birds, “walk[ing] up and down the verandah, listening to the soft melancholy cry of the whip-poor-will” (171) or gazing out onto the lake, reflecting on the seasonal migrations of the birds: “When driven from the ice-bound shores and shallows of the lake, [the water-fowl] came up here to seek their food, and sported and wheeled amid the showers of spray. They have returned to their old quiet haunts” (212). In Jameson’s Canadian scenes, birds are alive and active in their natural habitats displaying their natural behaviours and admired for their wildness.

Establishing a nonviolent approach to science is aligned in Jameson’s travel narrative with a personal ethic of care for individual birds. Jameson sees this as a feminine quality, something women must add to a male-dominated Western culture which is preoccupied with rationality at the expense of compassion and morality. Denying the claim that men are “held down in conversation by the presence of women,” Jameson argues instead that men are “held up rather, where moral feeling is concerned” (87; original emphasis). She muses that “female character rises with the pressures of ill fortune” (101), suggesting that her sensitivity would have
been heightened by stressful events such as her estrangement from her husband, her difficult journey to the new country, and the harshness of the Canadian climate and landscape itself.

Throughout her travelogue, Jameson provides her audience with numerous examples of what she interprets as a distinction between men’s and women’s interactions with birds, and animals in general. Wendy Roy suggests in “The Politics of Hunting” (2007) that Jameson sometimes, when she is not overcome by hunger, “figuratively separates herself from the men by emphasizing her aversion to seeing animals killed, in contrast to the men’s pleasure in hunting” (308). Her concern is not, however, confined to a critique of hunting. For instance, in the following anecdote, the torture of a pigeon is emblematic of the larger issue of cruelty to birds, an immoral act perpetrated by men:

A man stood near me ... he was crushing a beautiful young pigeon, which panted and struggled within his bony grasp in agony and terror. I looked on it, pitying.

‘Don’t hurt it!’

He replied with a grin, and giving the wretched bird another squeeze, ‘No, no, I won’t hurt it.’ ...

‘What will you do with your pigeon there?’

‘O, it will do for the boy’s supper, or may be he may like it best to play with.’

I offered to redeem its life at the price of a shilling, which I held out. He stretched forth immediately one of his huge hands and eagerly clutched the shilling, at the same moment opening the other, and releasing his captive; it fluttered for a moment helplessly, but soon recovered its wings ... The man turned away with an exulting laugh, thinking, no doubt, that he had the best of the bargain – but upon this point we differed. (Jameson 297-98)
Jameson is evidently distraught at the abuse of the “beautiful young pigeon” that becomes a prisoner in the crushing hands of the brutish man. The mistreatment of the bird is a grotesque example of a larger assumption that birds exist for human use, either to be eaten or toyed with. Deeply affected by the man’s disregard for animal existence and aggression, Jameson opposes an unemotional and materialistic approach to bird life. She intervenes and rescues the helpless pigeon.

In Jameson’s narrative, a disconnected sense of self embodied in the aggressive man leads to a lack of compassion and a violent disregard for the life of another being. Valuing the bird’s life, something that has no meaning to the man who is so eagerly swayed by the material wealth of the shilling, and consequently feeling a responsibility to secure its wellbeing, Jameson anticipates a modern-day ecofeminist approach. Ecofeminist Marti Kheel claims, in “Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology” (1990), that identification with the natural world must emerge from “an existing connection with individual lives ... Our sense of oneness with nature must be connected with concrete, loving actions” (137). Although Jameson is writing from a privileged position which endows her with a shilling to spare, she does not hesitate to part with it for the sake of a helpless bird that is being mistreated by a man, perhaps reminding her of the ways she had been neglected and undervalued by her husband. In the anecdote of the pigeon, the reader gets to know Jameson as she wants her reader to know her. Her stories of encounters with birds, animals, and the natural environment reveal a personal ethic characterized by compassion, caring, trust, and reciprocity with members of her own species as well as individuals belonging to other species. This ethic was also pursued and endorsed by other women of the time, like Catharine Parr Traill.
“My Feathered Friends”: Systematic and Popular Ornithology in Catharine Parr Traill’s *Pearls and Pebbles* (1894)

Throughout her ornithological observations, Catharine Parr Traill endorses a love of nature while focusing on taxonomical and behavioural facts about the birds around her. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Catharine Parr Traill had little access to natural history books during her first few years in Upper Canada. Nonetheless, “charmed by the romantic natural beauties of the surrounding scene[s]” (*Pearls and Pebbles* 45), she maintained an enthusiastic and keen interest in all aspects of natural history, including ornithological study. Although observations of the natural world became peripheral to her pragmatic guide for emigrant families, *The Female Emigrant’s Guide* (1854), Traill carefully observed and wrote in detail about animals, plants, rocks, fossils, and minerals throughout most of her autobiographical Canadian publications. As Marianne G. Ainley observes in her article “Science in Canada’s Backwoods” (1997), Traill had significantly more access to botanical guides, like Pursh’s *Flora Americae Septentrionalis* (1814), than to influential works on North American birds; therefore, she “initially learned about them from her own observations and from the stories of natives and older settlers” (Ainley 84).

An expert on the Canadian environment and the bird species inhabiting its “cold climate in the shelter of the pine forests and the cedar swamps” (Traill, *Pearls and Pebbles* 76), Traill established her own knowledge and challenged the assumptions of others. From the writing of *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836) onward, she relied on her personal observations rather than basing her material on the experiences of others, as she had done in *The Young Emigrants* (1826). In *Pearls and Pebbles* (1894), Traill has a resolute confidence in her own findings that comes from a lifelong devotion to naturalist observations. In spite of her lack of access to
specimens of birds in museums and private collections for comparison, the accuracy and detail of her observations is remarkable.

Traill’s field observations of living birds in their natural habitats include commentary on the appearance and classification of each species and their behaviour. Consequently, she challenges the separation of systematic ornithology from popular ornithology, as suggested by scientists like Ridgway. Writing of the snow sparrow, for instance, Traill methodically describes its plumage “of slate-grey, white breast, darker head, flesh-colored bills and legs and feet, with some snow-white feathers at the tail, and the edges of the long shaft-feathers of their wings also tipped in white” (*Pearls and Pebbles* 51). Immediately after, she entertains her readership with a narration of the natural behaviour of the snow sparrow, written with commonplace, congenial diction that humanizes them, such as “friendly” and “flit about”: “These birds usually appear in company with the small brown and the chestnut-crowned sparrows, with which they seem to be on most friendly terms, mixing with them as they flit about the garden seeking for seeds” (51). Seamless transitions back and forth between the methodical language of the Linnean cataloguer and the narrative style of the popular ornithologist are common throughout Traill’s book. She describes birds in meticulous detail and ensures that her readership may use her book as a field guide to identify species: the Blue Jay’s plumage is “of a dusky slate-grey, loosely set and hairy, the neck and head a shade darker, with a dirty yellowish ring around the neck; there was some white, too, on the under part of the breast and tail” (84). However, augmenting the systematic, generalized account of the species, Traill goes on to describe the ‘personality’ of the bird. The Jay walks “with a would-be careless air” (84), “which together with the quick glancing, mischievous expression of the eye, gave a peculiar character to his countenance, and marked him
as a bold, daring, yet sly, unscrupulous fellow” (85). Traill’s representations simultaneously educate, entertain, and humanize.

Traill approaches each species with the affection of a nature writer. The perspective of the nature writer defined by Thomas Berry in *The Dream of the Earth* (1988) is characterized by an imaginative and physical “meeting ... with our kin in the earth community, ... [with] the eagle and the hawk, the mockingbird and the chickadee” (1), a meeting “activated by the ... display of color and sound, of form and movement, such as we observe in ... the singing birds” (11). For Traill, the Baltimore Oriole is “a flash of glorious color,” “gorgeous” with its plumage of “gold, scarlet-orange and purply black in varied contrasts.” The oriole is a “summer visitor” rather than a native bird, and Traill “eagerly” anticipates its annual return. Via anthropomorphic language, she writes with a sense of longing and lingering attachment, “Once seen it is never forgotten ... But it is shy, and while we long for a second sight it is gone” (67). The nostalgic desire to see the bird foreshadows the melancholy in her later observations about the disappearance of numerous bird species “before the march of civilization” (102). Among the other aspects of the oriole’s behaviour, Traill observes the skillful nesting habits. The remarkable and “curious piece of workmanship” of “so shy a bird” is “composed of all sorts of thread materials ... The nest is made of a mass of strings, pack thread, whip cord, cotton warp and woollen yarn. All these materials are most skillfully woven together in a regular network” (68). Traill notes the practical ingenuity of the oriole as it finds use for the discarded materials of humans, like pack thread and cotton warp. Perhaps Traill sees the oriole making a home out of the most unlikely materials as a simile for her own efforts to create and maintain a home in the backwoods with scarce resources. She admires the birds for their colour and form, which is important for classification.
She also observes their daily movements and character, which are elements of behavioural ornithology.

Her enthusiasm for behavioural patterns and habits has Traill not only “charmed” by the appearance of the birds (82), but also by the songs and sounds of the birds, a subject area within which she establishes herself as a dependable field observer. An “aged naturalist” (xxxvi) by the time of the publication of *Pearls and Pebbles*, she recalls that even in the “joys of infancy” of her “youthful days” spent along the Suffolk coast, she was fascinated by “the song of the blackbird, linnet, and robin, and the far-away call of that mystery of childhood, the cuckoo” (37). For Traill, the songs of each bird reflect a mood and the character of each species: “A lively burst of song greets me just above my head ... How well I know the cheerful notes! It is the dear little brown wren’s song. ... They look down shyly at me from their coigne of vantage above” (51). Traill continues, “[T]hen, as if quite sure it is an old and trusted friend, they burst out with a joyous chorus of greeting” (51). The wren and indeed all of the birds in Traill’s book are part of a presence of nature, “a sign that consciousness can be something other than human” (Oerlemans 84). Revealing her intimate acquaintance with local birdlife, Traill corrects misconceptions: “It is a common idea that the note of the cat-bird is most discordant, like the mewing of an angry cat; but this is, I think, a mistake. The true song of the cat-bird is rich, full and melodious, more like that of the English thrush” (59; original emphasis). Repeatedly, Traill describes a field approach to animals and directs her readers to stop and “Listen to that soft whispering sound” of the birds flitting among the forests and gardens. Her directions are to activate one’s senses, not to disturb or alarm animals, just to look and listen.

Traill approaches the ornithological world with the detail, knowledge, and attentiveness of a skilled taxonomist and field naturalist. However, this systematic perspective is
complemented by the lyrical, anthropomorphic language of a literary narrator. When she describes a heron, it takes on an eerie, witch-like appearance: “[T]he motionless figure of a heron standing on a fallen cedar overhanging the margin of the water ... spread her grey wings and noiselessly flew onward to take her stand once more on some other prostrate tree. There was a sort of witch-like weirdness about this lonely watcher of the waters” (47). Like the heron, Traill is a solitary watcher of the waters and the woods. She observes her natural surroundings with a keen and watchful eye, but she does so alone and as noiselessly as possible, careful not to disturb the delicate balance of air, water, and earth. “Fascinated by the bird,” and perhaps equally fascinated by a sense of similarity, Traill confesses, “I could not help but follow her silent, mysterious flight and observe the shadow of her wings upon the lake ... I watched her until weariness overtook my senses” (47). Unlike the sexist association of women with small, weak, and less imposing birds who are admired for their attractive appearance and pretty song, Traill links herself with the distinctive species of the heron which is notable for its tall height and impressive wing span. The heron is not a tame or caged bird. Instead, it is wild, free, and mysterious. Traill anthropomorphizes the heron but maintains the animal’s mystery, encapsulated in its lonely silence. Onno Oerlemans suggests that the anthropomorphization of animal life in art and literature from the eighteenth century onward reveals the ways in which “nature can both seem fully invested with a kind of being which seems continuous with our own and yet possess an irreducible otherness which makes it seem wild” (70). Traill familiarizes the heron as an avatar of herself, a fellow mysterious “watcher of the waters.”

Traill’s most personal use of anthropomorphism is her invocation of maternal instinct and familial behaviour to relate to the behaviour of the birds. When she describes the nesting habits of mother-birds, for example, Traill extends more than instinct to the birds and suggests that each
individual bird feels protective toward her “nursery”: “[W]hile the young ones are yet unfledged and helpless, the mother-bird becomes bold and excitable. If anyone approaches too near her nursery, she flies round the nest with outspread wings uttering strange angry cries, as if resenting the impertinent attempt to pry into her family affairs” (58). Traill characterizes the behaviour in anthropomorphic terms. That birds experience emotions is demonstrated to her by their songs and their behaviour to their offspring. Traill shows a willingness to consider that “consciousness, intelligence, and emotion are not features that define only human existence” (Oerlemans 138). Arguing that animals do feel, Traill suggests that the protective actions of the birds spring from “a love for their offspring that never tires” (53), a “labor of love” (73). At times, Traill extends the anthropomorphism even further to suggest that humans might learn about their own social affairs from observing the birds. She writes that although “In most instances it is the female bird who takes upon herself the labor of building the nest” (73), “the male [robins] come before the females” (72). According to Traill, the sharing of duties and responsibilities between the male and female robin “speaks well for the domestic harmony of their lives, this looking out for the future comfort of their partners” (72). She insists that the robins’ behaviour is “a good example for our young men to follow before taking to themselves wives” and commends “the wisdom of Mister Robin” (72). By admiring the harmonious social network in the bird community and applying it to human culture, Traill acknowledges a certain level of intelligence in the animal kingdom. Traill transforms the bird into a symbol for something human; the actions of the robin are evidence that there is life beyond human life that is worth considering.

Traill’s concern for nonhuman beings is not only rooted within a familiarity with each species, but is also manifest in compassionate concern for individuals. As her autobiographical
writings reveal, Traill’s approach is both rational and emotional as she feels her way through encounters with the natural environment of Upper Canada. As a naturalist, she catalogues the local birds, while reminding her audience that these are no mere biological specimens, but welcomed companions, “My Feathered Friends” (76): “Let me see who of my old acquaintances are among them. There are the neat little snow sparrows (*Junco hyemalis*), which are among the first and most constant of the small birds to visit us [and] the snow sparrows and crossbills (*Loxia curvirostra*), and the tom-tits or black-caps, and many others” (50). Traill cares for and about birds. She wants us to know what specific things she has witnessed not only to tell her experiences but also to give evidence that allows her readers to see how creatures live together. Traill narrates the following emotional anecdote of a bird entangled in string:

[A]bout to leave the nest [the cat-bird’s] legs became entangled in some loose strings ... [and] unable to free herself, she fell down head foremost into a rosebush ... [Her] unusual outcry brought me to the rescue, and at my near approach she ceased her cries, and I truly believe the poor captive looked to me for help ... [W]ith my scissors [I] soon set her free. With a joyful cry she flew away. (58)

Writing in the style of future ecofeminists, Traill might be viewed as an excellent example of Gruen’s claim that people need to “recognize sympathy and compassion as fundamental feature[s] of any inclusive theory” of relationships between humans and nonhumans (80). Traill feels compassion for the entangled cat-bird, an emotional response that stimulates action. Traill does not turn away from the creature. Instead, she accepts personal responsibility for its welfare. The cat-bird had already been embraced within the concept of Traill’s backwoods community, being one of her catalogued “Feathered Friends.” Through her devoted observations of the bird she developed a sense of closeness and a desire to protect the animal. For Traill, reason and
emotion are inseparable in her daily involvement with the natural world. The anecdote provokes the reader into viewing the entangled bird as a symbol for the weak or disenfranchised and the act of saving it as an act of moral principle.

Holding the world of the birds and the natural realm in high esteem is bound throughout *Pearls and Pebbles* to a critique of human society and an indictment of the aggressively practiced hierarchy of humans over nature. Traill writes with longing of a past era in which humanity and nature, represented by birds, coexisted in a mutualistic system, a time before aggression and violence disrupted the peace:

The mother-bird is sitting, and her faithful mate comes to cheer his little wife ...

[H]e knows by experience that I am an old friend ... [B]efore sin marred the harmony of Nature the birds and animals were not afraid of man ... Now all is changed. The timid and defenceless flee from man, as from an enemy. His presence awakens hatred and fear in the wild denizens of the forest. (62-63)

In this passage, Traill represents herself as an “old friend.” She is a nostalgic observer who spends enough quiet hours in the presence of her bird couple for them to be comfortable with her. She has learned to live in a long-abandoned state of harmony with nature, establishing a friendship with the “wild denizens of the forest.” A central element of Traill’s conciliatory approach is her acknowledgement of a situation in which humans are hostile toward nonhuman beings.

Traill confronts a worldview in which nature is subordinate to culture and the environment exists solely to serve humanity. Birds and other animals are therefore justifiably dominated by man. She criticizes what she defines as the “short-sighted ... judgements” perpetrated by “Man in his greed” (94). Traill refers to local cultural and natural change in
Upper Canada. She reflects upon the British “march of civilization” across the Canadian colony, a phenomenon which she participated in from the 1830s to the end of the nineteenth century. She observes,

There is a change in the country: many of the plants and birds and wild creatures, common once, have disappeared entirely before the march of civilization. ...It is rarely now that I catch a passing glimpse of the lovely plumed crossbill, or the scarlet tanager; seldom do I hear the cry of the bobolink, or watch the sailing of the bald-headed eagle or the fish-hawk over the lake, as I did formerly. (102)

Traill laments that human incursion affects nature negatively. Noting that she now rarely sees the crossbill, the scarlet tanager, the bobolink, the eagle, or the fish-hawk, Traill describes a decline in species and the threat of extinction. In accord with her realization that man has destroyed his harmony with the natural world, she observes that “Old things are passed away” (148). Human technology and culture, represented by “the village school-house, the church spire, the busy factory, the iron-girdered bridge, the steamboat, the railroad, the telegraph, the telephone” (148), have created towns, cities, and bustling metropolitan centres which have little interest for the birds. Traill does not celebrate the loss of the “lonely forest settlements” (148) from the early years of her emigration. Instead, the disappearance of the birds leads her to mourn the changes from “the early days of the colony, when the thick forests gave warm shelter to the wild-birds” (50), before the disappearance of the trees and the ever-growing rift between humans and nature. In Pearls and Pebbles, Traill adopts the role of an ecologist. She shows us not only a love for her natural environment but also an ecological concern over the destruction of natural habitats and animal species.
Traill’s bonding with the animals and birds which have become part of her backwoods community climaxes in her proto-ecological plea, “The English Sparrow: A Defence” (*Pearls and Pebbles* 95-100). She speaks on behalf of the misunderstood sparrow and opposes the acts of “thoughtless men” (96). She asks, “Harmless ... despised, reviled sparrows, who is brave enough to take your part?” And, she answers, “I dare so to do” (95). Using theriomorphic language, Traill is a “sheltering wing.” She is bird and she takes up a cause and publicly declares “a word on [the sparrow’s] behalf” (95). Emphasizing the seriousness of her argument, she depicts the persecution of the sparrow as a destructive, merciless act, which is void of all justice or reason: “A regular hue-and-cry is being raised for their destruction, and nowhere are they to be shown mercy. Now, I would fain take their case in hand and endeavor to prove that this wholesale persecution is both unjust and unreasonable” (96). She is angered by the cruelty inflicted on the sparrow. However, she ensures that her statements will not be dismissed as those of an irrational woman. She is careful to underline that the extermination of the sparrow not only opposes moral obligation and sentimental concern but that it also contradicts reason.

Traill cites human ignorance as the origin of the “war of extermination” against the sparrow (96). Traill demands, “In the first place, were not the birds first brought into the country through avarice and ignorance ... by some adventurous Yankee who ‘assisted’ them across the Atlantic in order to make merchandise of them? Were they not introduced into the agricultural districts as destroyers of the weevil, army-worm and all other kinds of injurious insects?” (96) The capitalist farmers focus on agricultural progression and disregard animal welfare. Traill argues that the sparrow was simply acting according to its instinct, a set of habits with which she is familiar with as a conscientious field naturalist: “He is not dainty; he will take anything and everything that falls in his way. *As paterfamilias*, he is a good provider for his numerous
offspring. Small blame to him!” (97). Traill reminds the farmer that the sparrow has also been doing good: “[T]he sparrows have been cultivating the crop, too, in eating and destroying the numerous insects that infest it while it has been in the blade and in the flower” (97). She concludes her plea by reminding her readers that it was man who brought the sparrow to Canada; it was man who misunderstood the sparrow’s nature; it is man who calls for death. “[T]he sparrow, an invited guest, and assisted immigrant,” Traill writes “was at first welcomed; then, when he had done the work required of him, we find he has other qualities for which we gave no contract, consequently we would like to ... exterminate him” (97).

Traill’s defence of the sparrow, a creature who in her estimation is unjustly chastised through the ignorance of man, encapsulates her defence of the natural world as a whole. She presents the history of the sparrow in Canada. But the point of the plea is to present an argument against the mistreatment of animals. The actions of the farmers are spurred by ignorance. In contrast, according to Traill, observing the individual animal and noting its particular qualities lead to an ethic of conservation. Traill deconstructs anthropocentric “control, power, production, and competition” (Gruen 84). Traill acknowledges the persecution of the sparrow and feels compassion for the birds. She urges her audience to view Upper Canada from her perspective in which each bird, every heron, crossbill, cat-bird, oriole, and sparrow, is valued for its natural beauty and character. This admiration, for Traill, results in a rational and emotional respect for nature. Like Sheppard and Jameson, Traill endorses a nonviolent approach to the natural world, particularly to the birds, that underlines feelings of responsibility and acts of stewardship.

Written during a time of gendered dispute over pragmatic and ideological approach to studying bird life, the texts examined in this chapter, Harriet Sheppard’s “Notes on Some of the Canadian
Song Birds” (1835), Anna Jameson’s *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles* (1838), and Catharine Parr Traill’s *Pearls and Pebbles* (1894) advocate an anti-violent field perspective. These writers did not accept the widespread patriarchal notion that ornithology was a branch of field sports and that it was therefore logically designated as an activity reserved for upper-class men. Opposing the prominent contemporary assumption that to thoroughly observe and to accurately classify bird species the ornithologist must kill and dissect individual specimens, Sheppard, Jameson, and Traill view living birds in their natural habitats. Correspondingly, these three women record taxonomical details, such as plumage variation, colour, size, and structure, as well as behavioural patterns, namely call notes and songs, nesting habits, geographical distribution, and seasonal variance. By encompassing the life history of each bird and narrating the stories of individual nonhuman beings as they interact with humans, Sheppard, Jameson, and Traill write nature as a system of ever-shifting interactions. In the process of intimately observing the natural world, each writer seems to draw the proto-ecological conclusion that human culture (and human life itself) is inseparable from environmental context. In consequence, respect, compassion, emotionally-invested interest, and a desire to protect become central themes in the texts of these women and in their everyday approaches to nature and naturalist observation.
Conclusion: “It is the birth of a new and pleasurable emotion”: An Innovative Approach to Nature in Nineteenth-Century Canada

“The white throated sparrow (Fringilla albicollis) sings here during summer ... So calm and composing are their notes that a feeling of tranquility is imparted to the listener.”

(Sheppard, “Notes” 222)

Despite gendered limitations imposed by their European and Canadian cultures, Anna Jameson, Anne Langton, Susanna Moodie, Mary Ann Shadd, Harriet Sheppard, Frances Stewart, and Catharine Parr Traill entered the fields of literature, natural science, environmental ethics, and nature writing and, in doing so, helped shape nineteenth-century and modern ideas about the Canadian natural world. Influenced by the prevailing vision of the nineteenth-century emigrant as domesticator of the dangerous, chaotic Canadian wilderness into arable farmland, the seven women in this study did participate in the domination of nature. However, a closer examination of the language of their emigrant guides, journals, letters, travelogues, or natural history pieces reveals a more complex perspective. All of the writers in this study, to varying degrees, use the language of natural history and of scientific investigation to comprehend and cultivate the foreign and often overwhelming natural world of the colony. This careful devotion to observation was, in part, motivated by Linnean natural history and its rational, systematic urge to catalogue and organize nature. The area of experience is restricted and controlled by the naturalist with the goal of seeing a few things systematically, seeing what can be analysed, can be recognized by all, and given a name that everyone was able to understand. The universalized
language is focused on “the order of things … well organized … well regulated” (221), according to Foucault in *The Order of Things*. However, the long hours spent watching and recording the behaviour of the animals, examining the morphology of each tree leaf, noting every hue and fragrance of the flowers, and describing the tone and pitch of each warble and bird song often developed into association and personal involvement with the natural world and its inhabitants. “We hear the murmur of the summer wind among the rustling green flags beside the river,” recalls Traill; “we scent the flowers of the hawthorn, and the violets hidden among the grass, and fill our hands with bluebells and cowslips ... It is the birth of a new and pleasurable emotion” (*Pearls and Pebbles* 5). As a result of this increasing sense of intimacy and connectedness, an ethical component develops in their writing. Underlining relationships and interdependencies between humans and nonhumans, they anticipate modern ecocritical and ecofeminist arguments. Humans are no longer superior, and nature is no longer a separate realm created purely for human use and exploitation. This ecologically minded perspective which nostalgically longs for and regrets the human corruption of a time when there was harmony with nature, that is when “birds and animals were not afraid of man, but rejoiced in his presence” (23), is remarkable in its combination of rationality and compassion.

To appreciate the endurance and adaptability motivating the development of an approach to nature that combines scientific rationality with an emotional connection and a sense of ethical responsibility, one must acknowledge the ways in which these writers’ perspectives developed from and surmounted feelings of fear, alienation, and disappointment. Jameson, Langton, Moodie, Shadd, Sheppard, Stewart, and Traill faced the formidable natural surroundings of the Canadian wilderness and the anxiety of being separated from their familiar homelands. Isolated from the comforts of companionship, recording their trials – whether in letters, journals, or
emigrant guides – was often the only outlet of personal expression and the primary source of emotional connection for these women. The act of narrating their life stories was a way to navigate their relationships to the natural surroundings.

Initial interactions between the nineteenth-century settler and the colonial environment were rarely harmonious, and there was a common disappointing, even shocking, tension between expectation and reality following emigration. As Anne Langton wrote in 1840, from the perspective of a settler in Upper Canada, “we have so often been disappointed in our hopes” (278). The imbalance between romanticized anticipations and actuality was a frequent characteristic of the first responses of women writers. For instance, upon seeing Niagara for the first time, Anna Jameson laments, “the reality had displaced from my mind an illusion far more magnificent than itself – I have no words for my utter disappointment” (57). Frequently, this strain led to a dichotomous understanding of nature as the antithesis of human culture. Canada was not always the Edenic land of opportunity, of agricultural “superiority” (Shadd 47), that European settlers had been promised by frontier land speculators and imperial officials whom Susanna Moodie calls “dealers in wild lands” (xxiii) and “artful seducers” (xxiv). Even Traill, amidst her steadfast optimism, writes that many new settlers “are dispirited by the unpromising appearance of things about them. They find none of the advantages and comforts of which they had heard and read” (Backwoods 87). The colonial environment was often harsh, intensely cold or unbearably hot, filled with unknown dangers, and aesthetically unpleasant, rather than fulfilling the Wordsworthian ideal of nature as divine and inspirational.

Resulting from disappointed hopes and expectations, the image of the Canadian environment in nineteenth-century literature was often, as Margaret Atwood suggests, either nature as “alive but indifferent” or nature as “alive and actively hostile towards man” (Survival
If nature was interpreted to be separate from and indifferent to humanity, then Canadians imagined themselves to be isolated or alienated from nature. For example, Langton juxtaposes landscape elements such as the intimidating, “interminable Forest” (131) and plains as “boundless as the ocean and entirely covered with forest” (139) with the unsettling evidence of settlers’ presence, namely the “sad disfiguring appearance” of stumps (132), to create a sense of distance, dislocation, and isolation. A place of arrival should be welcoming, but instead, the colonial landscape appears as forlorn, presenting an objective correlative of the hesitant and frightened emigrant confronted by the ruggedness of the new landscape. At times when nature was anthropomorphized to be hostile, Canadians assumed they were threatened and obligated to react against nature. Nature thus became an agent of intentional destruction: “the rafters of our log cabin shook beneath the violence of the gale,” Moodie recalls, “which swept up from the lake like a lion roaring for its prey ... Flesh and blood could not long stand this cutting wind” (373-74). The image of nature as antagonist resulted in an aggressive attitude toward nature. Intimidated and vulnerable, the Canadian pioneer often became preoccupied with cultivating the presumably malicious environment. “A Canadian settler hates a tree,” Jameson argues, “regards it as his natural enemy, as something to be destroyed, eradicated, annihilated by all and any means” (64). After accepting nature as his foe, the emigrant settled on a previously uncleared plot of land and focused his efforts on improving the natural surroundings, applying what Traill calls the “charm” of human civilization (Backwoods 55). The goal was to transform the wild Canadian backwoods into a landscape resembling the Old World, characterized by “romantic villages, flourishing towns, cultivated farms, and extensive downs” (55).

Nineteenth-century Canadian writing is characterized by an antithetical attitude to the natural environment, an approach that can be found in all of the primary texts in this study.
However, there is an alternative approach to human-nature relationships. These writers attempt to accept their experiences in relation to the unknown environment and they respond to the initial fear, both rationally and creatively. At least partially overcoming the sense of alienation, these women see nature as neither purely idyllic nor purely hostile. Instead, they approach the natural world from a more holistic perspective. Nature is a system within which human beings are an element rather than a controlling force. This approach to nature is in contrast to depicting nature as an aggressor and therefore a realm that must be overcome and dominated. Instead, these women attempt to understand their natural surroundings through observation and field experience. For instance, “A fine frosty morning led me to set out early in the day for another walk on the margin of the lake,” Langton narrates; “[I was] bent upon exploring the coast a little further whilst the state of the waters admits of it” (193). Rather than focusing on cultivation and interference, the writer explores the contact zone between human and nature. She interacts rather than reacts.

The acceptance of the powerful presence of Canadian nature and the accompanying adaptation to a life that was sharply different from life in Europe were key elements in identity formation for nineteenth-century Canadian women. As Traill writes, “For my part, I see no wisdom in carping the good we do possess, because it lacks something of that which we formerly enjoyed” (Backwoods 141). Emotional fortitude in the face of adversity becomes a central characteristic of the pioneer woman: “Nothing argues a greater degree of good sense and good feeling than a cheerful conformity to circumstances, adverse though they be compared with a former lot” (150). When she stops living in fear of the natural surroundings, the Canadian woman gains a novel degree of ingenuity and perspective. She learns that survival in Canada is most accessible to those who see nature as connected with human life, rather than as opposed to
it. For example, Langton writes, living in Canada meant that she must be practiced in “looking about [her] within and without, penetrating the forest to the beaver meadow, or diving into the depths of the storeroom, where the traces of womankind may be seen” (150). Looking within and without meant establishing a respect for the value of outside and inside, of nature and human settlement. These writers sought to observe nature and to be inspired by their environment. They adapted, and this adaptation bred new ecological perspectives. Moodie argues that adversity becomes the “best teacher, the stern but fruitful parent of high resolve and ennobling thought” (142). It was this eventual willingness to learn from the challenges posed by Canada’s natural environments that, in part, motivated the creation of a Canadian identity and inspired the writers in this study.

For a modern reader, guides, letters, diaries, and manuals written by early women in Canada offer a glimpse into expectations, disappointing realities, and environmental, physical, and psychological trials faced by nineteenth-century female pioneers. Texts like these also present a view of the ways in which nineteenth-century Canadian women acknowledged and often acted against the destructive approach of the male European settler. With the passage of time, the writers became increasingly dissatisfied with the pioneer’s desire to violently cultivate the natural world. Jameson asks during her travels in Canada, “When these forests, with all their solemn depth of shade and multitudinous life, have fallen beneath the axe – when the wolf, and bear, and deer are driven from their native coverts, and all this infinitude of animal and vegetable being has made way for restless, erring, suffering humanity – will it then be better?” (268).

Combating the destructive tendencies of the pioneer, these female writers take the time to observe and understand. “The simplest weed that grows in my path, or the fly that flutters about me,” writes Traill, “are subjects for reflection, admiration, and delight” (Backwoods 23). Traill
acknowledges that it is important to “refine and purify the mind” (206) with observation and to develop admiration for the natural world.

These writers were keen observers and knowledgeable educators. As instructors to other women who would in turn teach their own children, these women strove to produce accessible books about life in Canada and about nature. In aiming to be approachable to scientific and non-scientific audiences alike, they combined rationality and affective response. As popularizers of natural science, they led the way in approaching nature from an informed perspective based on gathering existing information and adding facts from personal experience and observation. The importance of knowing one’s surroundings was integral to many nineteenth-century writings by women. For instance, Jameson insists in her travelogue that “living in the heart of the forest” necessitated that women be strong and educated; there is no place for a “weak, frivolous, half-educated, or ill-educated woman” (259). At the same time, as narrators of the intimacies of daily life, these writers taught their audiences about the importance of feeling their connection with nature. Sheppard states in her ornithological article that while observing and recording the movements and appearances of the birds in winter, “a pleasing astonishment is felt that happiness so pure may be produced by merely observing a small portion of the beauties of creation” (“Notes” 222). Jameson, Langton, Moodie, Shadd, Sheppard, Stewart, and Traill each offered their readers a novel way of approaching nature by suggesting that a choice did not have to be made between reason and emotion. Science and sensibility could co-exist, and they did in these writers’ narrative approaches to natural observation. Consequently, the Canadian settler could survive and consume natural resources while still maintaining ethical considerations and compassion. These women proposed new and complex identities. The figures of the ethical
pioneer, the emotional pragmatist, and the literary scientist emerged from the adversity of life as a female settler or traveller in nineteenth-century Canada.
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