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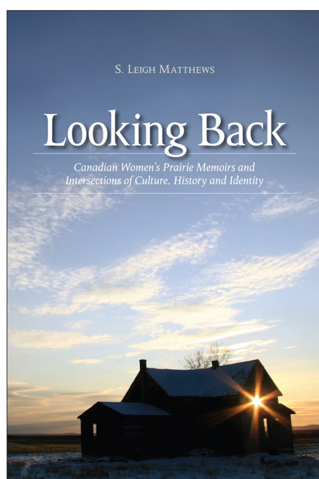

LOOKING BACK: CANADIAN WOMEN'S PRAIRIE MEMOIRS AND INTERSECTIONS OF CULTURE, HISTORY, AND IDENTITY

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"Dauntless Optimism"/"Perverse Endurance": Re-Visioning Literary Narratives of Settler Women

Over these abominable corduroys the vehicle jolts, jumping from log to log, with a shock that must be endured with as good a grace as possible. If you could bear these knocks, and pitiless thumpings and bumpings, without wry faces, your patience and philosophy would far exceed mine; – sometimes I laughed because I would not cry.

– Catharine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836)

How ardently we anticipate pleasure, which often ends in positive pain!

– Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852)

Optimism is more contagious than measles.

– Elinor Marsden Eliot, *My Canada* (1915)

To compose a work is to negotiate with these questions: What stories can be told? How can plots be resolved? What is felt to be

> narratable by both literary and social conventions? Indeed, these are issues very acute to certain feminist critics and women writers, with their senses of the untold story, the other side of a well-known tale, the elements of women's existence that have never been revealed.
>
> – Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (1985)

The production of life writing texts by Canadian women settlers represents a long-established tradition in our literary culture; however, somewhere along the line, the western half of that tradition has largely been lost, from academic attention, at least, if not from the popular imagination. In fact, scholarly attention to Canadian literature dealing with the issue of land settlement has ranged in focus from non-fictional texts written by eastern Canadian women to fictional texts written by western Canadian authors. Canadian literary criticism has produced no concerted examination of the relatively large body of prairie memoirs written by white, English-speaking women who participated in western land settlement in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The inevitable result of this critical lack, I would suggest, is the transposition of experience from east to west and from fiction to real life; that is, given the lack of attention paid to western settlement memoirs, readers interested in the topic of prairie women's lives must either assume a similarity of experience of "pioneering" in any region and time period of Canada and/or they must assume the reliability of fictional representations of prairie land settlement.

The potential problem with this critical situation is a heavy reliance upon cultural image in our understanding of prairie women's lived experience. While we might easily recognize that fictional women are image productions of a specific cultural moment, it is also important to consider that those eastern Canadian women whose texts have received intense critical treatment in the last few decades have arguably become larger than life figures in our national culture – have become iconic images heralding the advent of a tradition of white women's mental/emotional/physical responses to "pioneering" a nation. For example, Elizabeth Thompson's *The Pioneer Woman: A Canadian Character Type* (1991), the only full-length academic study of the "Pioneer Woman" in

Canadian literature to date, begins with Catharine Parr Traill's life writing and fictional texts to establish a "Canadian Character Type," or image, that can be traced across region and time period. While both Traill and her sister, Susanna Moodie, have found their place in the Canadian literary imagination, the critical tendency has been to consider the two women separately as polar opposites in personality (very much like the "cheerful helpmate"/"reluctant emigrant" binary referred to previously in this study), with readers especially "captivated by Catharine's sunny temperament" (Gray x), her more positive self-representation. The inevitable result of creating a (false) Traill/Moodie binary against which all other settlement texts are judged is that the female "character" will be seen *either* to uphold those qualities initiated by Traill, *or* to fail to do so, and their texts will be judged accordingly.

As in Chapter Two, in which I sought to re-vision the large-scale narratives of western settlement to a more localized focus upon women's lived experience, I am primarily concerned here with the function of cultural narratives in the representation of settlement life. Specifically, I am concerned with how the narrative of "dauntless optimism," encapsulated in the figure of Catharine Parr Traill, dominated the self-representation of settler women in the century following her work. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to re-examine the ideal of the "Pioneer Woman" as established by Traill's texts, to trace the degree to which this ideal has been transposed to western settlement texts, and to propose a sort of "moodification" of Traill's iconic image. In this way might we "write beyond the ending" (DuPlessis, *Writing* 5) of white, western, settlement narratives we have been given to believe in lieu of women's own voices. Certainly many of the authors studied here, most of whom published their texts several decades after the experience of prairie life, and often as daughters memorializing the painful experiences of their mothers, literally wrote "beyond the ending" of the cultural moment of land settlement; wrote from an historical moment that was caught in the waves of nostalgia that were the heritage movement in Canada, and that, for many, was in the midst of feminism's radical second-wave, when confrontation was a vehicle for social change. We as readers also need to get beyond conventional characterizations of the Prairie Woman – to get to what DuPlessis in the epigraph above calls "the other side of a well-known tale" – and to do so necessitates that we put

the Traill ideal in dialogue with her less culturally idolized sister, Susanna Moodie, whose own writings will help me to establish the other end of a continuum of white, English-speaking women's responses to settlement life. In this project I take my cue from the most recent biography of Traill and Moodie, Charlotte Gray's *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Lives of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill* (1999), an interwoven treatment of the two "literary archetypes" that finally works to get past the "personalities" that have been "deduced … from their published works"; to discover that "there is much more to both of them than they ever allowed their own readers to know" (xiii–xiv).

Elizabeth Thompson writes that *The Pioneer Woman*'s "creation was, in fact, grounded in the actuality of the pioneer experience, and on details of the experience that were reconstructed and reinterpreted in fiction, often through a moralistic or idealistic filter" (3). The Pioneer Woman is encapsulated for Thompson in the figure of Catharine Parr Traill, who "becomes the single most important contributor to the creation of this new, Canadian, concept of women in both an historical and a literary sense" (5). Traill, who emigrated to Canada with her husband Thomas to Lakefield, Ontario, in 1832,[1] produced two non-fiction texts on the subject of land settlement in the colony, *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836) and *The Canadian Settler's Guide* (1855). What makes Traill's writing, and especially these "two most important and accomplished works," unique, suggests Thompson, is Traill's ability, rather than to lament the "gentlewoman's plight when faced with the exigencies of the Canadian frontier," to attempt to "fuse the two divergent ways of life"; to combine "the real physical necessities of life on a frontier both with her own personal system of values and with her continued perception of herself as an English lady" (32–33). Taking a stalwart approach to her isolated situation beyond the fringes of "civilization," Traill manages to paint the "picture of the typical pioneer woman" as being a "self-assured, confident woman, one who adapts cheerfully to adverse circumstances, one who is capable and active in an emergency, one who plays a vital role in pioneering" (4). Indeed, in *The Backwoods*, Traill answers the question, "What are necessary qualifications of

1 Both Traill and her sister Susanna Moodie emigrated in 1832, a year in which "the flood tide of emigrants to Canada was at its peak" (Gray 51–52).

a settler's wife[?]" as follows: "[A] settler's wife should be active, industrious, cheerful, not above putting her hand to whatever is necessary to be done in her household" (149).

The one word repeatedly used by critics – Thompson among them – in describing Traill's philosophical stance is "cheerful," a word with a fairly simple aspect, yet one that eventually takes on mythic proportions even in Traill's own writing. In her Introduction to *The Backwoods*, in which she outlines her purpose for writing as being a sort of defence, based on lived experience, against the wide-scale and misleading propaganda surrounding the topic of Canadian immigration, Traill displays practically no trace of anger regarding the reality "of the trials and arduous duties she ha[d] to encounter" in the Ontarian backwoods (9). Rather, she writes to combat descriptions of Canada as a "land of Canaan" (85), descriptions which were far too appealing for those younger sons of the gentry, such as her husband, whose future as half-pay army officers had been blighted and who found themselves part of the upper class in name only. It was for such emigrants, and most especially their wives, "the person on whose responsibility the whole comfort of a family depends," that Traill felt she must write, "honestly representing facts in their real and true light" (9–10). Traill's purpose, then, is not to inhibit the desire to emigrate to Canada, but rather to ensure that, once the journey has been undertaken, the female member of the household would approach the project with the "high-spirited cheerfulness" necessary for her family's success and happiness. This type of gender prescription eventually permeated narratives of Canadian settlement, as seen in N.P. Willis's 1842 text *Canadian Scenery*, in which the author advises, regarding the many and various "occupations of an emigrant's wife," that "if a female cannot resolve to enter upon them cheerfully, she should never think of settling in the woods of Canada or New Brunswick" (qtd. in Abrahamson 4).

As Thompson recognizes, the stoic ideal represented by Traill contrasts sharply with Traill's own sister, Susanna Moodie, whose constant "complaining tone" (46) shows her disaffection for, rather than cheerful adaptation to, settlement conditions. Susanna, who emigrated with her husband John W. Dunbar Moodie in the same year as the Traills, also wrote two texts about her experiences in Canada, *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852) and *Life in*

the Clearings versus the Bush (1853), the former of which was, like Traill's text, meant to contradict the tradition of "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 and hardship to be endured in order to secure these advantages" (13). Unlike her sister, however, Moodie does not hide her anger and deep sense of betrayal; she does not easily adopt the cheerful veil recommended in her sister's texts. Put succinctly, "Moodie did not idealize pioneer life" (Thompson, Elizabeth 32). In the first 1852 British edition of Moodie's text, we can see the full extent of the author's anger in the final chapter, in which she states, "If these sketches should prove the means of deterring one family from sinking their property, and shipwrecking all their hopes, by going to reside in the backwoods of Canada, I shall consider myself amply repaid for revealing the secrets of the prison-house, and feel that I have not toiled and suffered in the wilderness in vain" (489). Not exactly "high-spirited cheerfulness."[2]

These distinctions in tone between the two sisters' texts are commensurate with their very different generic formats. In *The Backwoods*, Traill's "Pollyanna cheerfulness" (Gray 62) probably stems at least in part from the fact that the text began its life as "daily journals and letters to her mother and friends in England" (Fowler 62), written as a means to assure them of her survival beyond the fringes of "civilization." Unlike her sister, Traill *is* eminently capable of hiding her fears and anger about the reality of settlement life. As Charlotte Gray suggests, "at one level, Catharine's enthusiasm was genuine," but there was also "a bleak self-justification underlying [her]

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2 It should be noted that in the first 1871 Canadian edition of Moodie's text, there was provided a new "Introduction," which, although still primarily negatively-inspired, illustrates the author's attempt to soften the tone of her narrative "warning to others" and dissuade her Canadian readers from the "most unjust prejudice … felt against her book" (527–28). Although at the time of writing *Roughing It*, she "[gave her] opinion freely on a subject which had engrossed a great deal of [her] attention," Moodie assures her Canadian readers that, after almost twenty more years had passed, "my love for the country has steadily increased, from year to year, and my attachment to Canada is now so strong, that I cannot imagine any inducement, short of absolute necessity, which could induce me to leave the colony, where, as a wife and mother, some of the happiest years of my life have been spent" (528).

upbeat tone. Catharine knew that her mother and elder sisters would find Upper Canada appallingly primitive, and that they would be disgusted at the lack of regard for social status" (112). In addition to her concern for the sensibilities of the audience back home, her letters "brim over with the same cheerful enthusiasm that, by now, Catharine had decided it was her marital duty to provide for her husband" (82).[3] Thomas Traill, as it turned out, was particularly ill-suited, physically and psychologically, for settlement life, and "the most unnerving fact for Catharine was the way Thomas sank into gloom" (62) from the moment of their Atlantic crossing. Says Gray, knowing that "if she allowed herself to linger on the discomforts of their new life, she would be falling in with Thomas's pessimism," Catharine "resorted to playing the role she had so often played within the Strickland family: the resilient optimist, who raised everybody's spirits" (113, 62). For example, in reference to a letter received from back home, Traill acknowledges to the author that "Your expressions of regret for my exile, as you term my residence in this country, affected me greatly. Let the assurance that I am not less happy than when I left my native land, console you for my absence. If my situation be changed, my heart is not. My spirits are as light as ever, and at times I feel a gaiety that bids defiance to all care" (*Backwoods* 166).

The publication of Traill's "journal letter"[4] as a sort of public "advice" or "conduct" manual[5] in 1836, only four years after her arrival in Canada, ensured her literary and historical position as icon in Canadian culture. As Gray

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3 In contrast to Traill, Moodie's letters home oftentimes "described [her family's] circumstances with grim realism" (Gray 89). Traill, too, had outlets for her problems: as Gray notes, when she wrote to Moodie she "poured out her worries" to an extent unknown in her published works, and even to long-time friend, Frances Stewart, Traill "reluctantly confided her own bouts of despair" (181, 188).

4 A "journal letter" is defined by Kathryn Carter as being a "diary written in installments and explicitly addressed to a particular person or set of persons. Generally, it features periodic diary entries addressed to distant loved ones in the form of an extended letter" (51).

5 "Advice" or "Conduct" manuals in Britain were books written by both men and women that "prescribed the way in which a woman should behave in all circumstances, and often gave very detailed guides to personal conduct, from sexual behaviour to appropriate reading" (Buck 437).

notes, both Traill and Moodie had publication histories that included "poetry, romantic fiction and children's stories that fit into the Regency tradition of women's writing," meaning that "most of it was insipid and conventional" (x). Traill's letters appeared suitably "conventional" to her sister Agnes, who edited them into an "attractive publication" in which the author's "sunny personality almost leaps off every page" (114–15). Traill creates a precise recipe for settlement success: as "aliens and wanderers in a distant country" (12), she chooses a method of "adaptation/adoption" in order to negotiate her survival in the backwoods of Canada – that is, she found it necessary to "adapt" much of her British assumptions about life to her new surroundings and to "adopt" ways of being in her new home place to survive in a reality for which she had not been prepared by her inherited cultural knowledge. Significantly, "advice literature" often counselled a woman to "adapt herself to circumstances, and particularly to her husband" (254), so that, in providing advice to potential emigrants, Traill obviously knew that she had to practise what she preached, which no doubt also dictated the cheerful tone of her writing.[6] As Doug Owram suggests regarding "European man's" struggle to survive in the wilderness of the New World, "the person who did adapt became, in the natural course of things, an almost heroic figure" (*Promise* 19). This is an effect attributable to Traill, as seen, for example, in E. Blanche Norcross's *Pioneers Every One: Canadian Women of Achievement* (1979), which "tells the story of a number of women who played an outstanding part in the Canadian adventure" (7). Notably, in the section called "Women of the Frontier," Traill is given a chapter while Moodie is not. The need for cultural icons of female behaviour is evident in Norcross's assertion that the women she chose to include in her textual tribute "were heroines who succeeded against great odds. They showed other women what could be achieved" (7).

6 Traill obviously understood the importance of narrative adherence to one's own philosophy, as seen when her brother, Samuel Strickland, with whom the Traills spent time while awaiting the construction of their first home in the backwoods, states, "My pass-words are, 'Hope! Resolution! and Perseverance!'," to which Thomas Traill replies, "This … is true philosophy; and the more forcible, because you not only recommend the maxim but practise it also" (108).

The immediacy of Traill's letters is in contrast with the reflective distance of Moodie's text, which was not published until 1852, some twenty years after her arrival in Canada and "a decade after she had lived through these experiences" (Gray 209), an adequately long time for the stewing of authorial anger. Unlike Traill, whose "upbeat pretense, for Reydon [the family home in England] consumption, about her less-than-perfect marriage and precipitate decision to emigrate now became the gloss over the hardships of pioneer life," Moodie "was able to put some distance between herself and her life. She was candid about the hardships of the immigrant life" (115, 209). For far too long her "candidness" has been negatively read as evidence of, in contrast to her iconic sister, a bad-natured personality,[7] with the end result that, at least until very recently, readers have often missed the complexity of her cultural critique.[8] The situation of the Moodies was in some respects the inverse of the Traills; that is, while Moodie tended towards the gloomy nature of her brother-in-law, John possessed a "blithe optimism" (Gray 84) that often anchored his wife's resolve. To suggest that John Moodie was cheerful, however, is not to suggest that he was any more capable of success at homesteading than Thomas Traill, and it was inevitably Susanna's psychological strength, often fuelled by her anger at the reality of an emigrant's life in the backwoods, which ensured her family's survival. That anger, that reality, suffuses the pages of Moodie's public self-representations. Little wonder, coming from one of the two Strickland sisters (the other being Agnes) who, says Gray, "pushed at the limits of convention" (24) in her published writing. *Backwoods* was no different, for in it the reflective author "was at pains to show the dark underbelly of experiences that her own sister Catharine had

7 As seen, for example, in Agnes Strickland's reaction to *Roughing It*: "In [Agnes's] eyes, Susanna's discovery of her own 'Canadian' voice was simply a whining account of past wretchedness which would have been better forgotten" (Gray 214).

8 For example, in 1979 Dermot McCarthy, although finding the book "fascinating and significant," nevertheless felt that "as writing, it is aesthetically flawed; on the whole, mediocre. Moods, sentiments, attitudes are overstated, cloying, and contradictory; the style, or styles, are uneven" (3). See Misao Dean's chapter on Susanna Moodie in *Practising Femininity: Domestic Realism and the Performance of Gender in Early Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) for an overview of critical readings of the text.

written about with gentle joy" (Gray 206).[9] Critical respect for exposing that "dark underbelly" was a long time coming. As Alec Lucas asserted in 1990, Moodie's text "has seldom received the credit it merits as a work in which themes, characters, and narrative form a coherent whole" (146). Specifically in relation to the many embedded character sketches, Lucas suggests that "critics fail to recognize" that "the autobiographical sketch was the only way, other than the essay, open to Moodie to write realistically and imaginatively of her experiences in the backwoods" (146).

Although there has been critical acknowledgment that Traill's philosophical strengths "may be too idealistic for practical application" (Thompson, Elizabeth 32), nevertheless her narrative cheerfulness all too often finds its place as an ideal of female behaviour, with Moodie perennially consigned to the "other" end of the settler woman spectrum – the negative end, whereby women settlers are judged as failures if they do not uphold Traill's more positive vision. The either/or-ism of the Pioneer Woman image has also affected our understanding of white, English-speaking, prairie women, especially given what has been a too limited focus upon *fictional* transpositions of that image. As settlement of the Canadian landscape moved westward, the Pioneer Woman migrated from *The Backwoods* and adapted herself so well that, according to Thompson, she became institutionalized as an "accepted and essential aspect of female characterization in Canadian fiction" (3):

> [T]he longevity of the pioneer woman as character type in English-Canadian fiction and her recurrent use as a metaphor for Canadian femininity indicate that the character appeals to some common perception of a woman's role in Canadian society, and that the role for women proposed by the early emigrants was indeed an appropriate choice for the Canadian frontier, *regardless of the location and nature of that frontier.* (3; emphasis added)

9 As Gray notes, Agnes's distaste for Moodie's book even affected her response to Traill's proposal for her second volume aimed at female emigrants to Canada, *The Canadian Settler's Guide*, for in a letter she suggested, "Be sure you warn ladies not to make the worst of everything" (237), clearly an indictment of Moodie's work.

While the Traill typology was becoming entrenched in fictional representations of western settlement, real-life women were still confronting the actual western landscape as they emigrated to the prairie provinces, and the extent to which their memoir texts recreate the Traill ideal (or the "cheerful helpmate" ideal, as discussed in Chapter One) reveals how surely cultural image becomes what DuPlessis calls a "literary and social convention." As Sheila McManus notes in her examination of farm women in Alberta,

> Characteristics such as uncomplaining perseverance and adapting to a challenging new environment were generally praised and occupied a central place in these farm women's construction of appropriate femininity. Not possessing these characteristics or actively displaying their reverse, set a woman firmly outside what was acceptable. (128)

We can see the impact of such binaristic thinking, and its specific importance for women of Anglo background, in many of the memoirs gathered in this study. For example, we can see the invocation of a decidedly Traill typology at the end of Kathleen Strange's *With the West in Her Eyes* (1945):

> I feel sure that any modest success, and certainly the great happiness, that I myself have enjoyed in this country has been mainly owing to the fact that I possess one particular quality – a quality that is possessed in a high degree by all people of British stock – that of *adapting* myself. I reminded myself from the outset that Canada was to be my permanent home. It was to provide the means of my husband's livelihood. It was to become the birthplace of my children. I must accept it as my own country. And I did. (292)

In Franklin Foster's "Foreword" to the 1997 edition of Mary Hiemstra's *Gully Farm* (1955), we can see that the cultural embrace of the Traill typology as a palatable mode of being during western settlement necessitated a rejection of a more Moodie state:

> Generations of Can. Lit. students have been exposed to Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* for its rare account of a woman's daily life in the backwoods of pioneer Upper Canada. *Gully Farm* deserves equal rank. It speaks strongly to western Canadians, and Hiemstra avoids the underlying outraged frustration that colours Moodie's recollection of what seemed to her a period of exile on a stump farm north of Belleville. Little Mary Pinder recognized the hardships of pioneer life, but she quickly accepted them as part of the sacrifice necessary to build the new and better life her parents and so many others sought. (x)

In order to get past such extreme either/or thinking, we must, as Gray's biography of Traill and Moodie works to do, put these behavioural binaries in conversation as a means to get at the more complex reality lying behind the idealistic veneer of the Prairie Woman image. By rejecting the either/or construction of prairie womanhood in order to see a reality of experience that rests and ranges on a continuum of possibility, we will be able to discern the ways in which white, English-speaking prairie women "act in accordance with ideals" and also "account for [their] failures and incoherences" (Weir 127) with those ideals. The point is not to contend with the predominance of the Traill image by suggesting that prairie women fit the Moodie model instead; rather, the point is more simply to examine how the memoirists studied here represent issues/behaviours that allow for a more complex understanding of the Prairie Woman as exhibiting a range of responses to western settlement. It is here again important to note that many of these memoirs were written by daughters/grand-daughters with varying degrees of distance from the cultural convention of the Prairie Woman, both in experiential and temporal terms, which allows them a greater chance at confrontation in their texts. While it is certainly true that "written descriptions or artistic-literary expressions of experience, authored both by participants and by observers, contemporary or historical, will be influenced by the images they possess" (Stoeltje 26), it is equally important to recognize the individual's ability to "participate in [her] own constitution" (Weir 127) through articulation of her own experiences.

Traill's "cheerfulness" may have been the ideological starting point for prescribing female emigrants' behaviour, but that single word soon evolved into a cultural myth that has permeated the production and study of women's settlement texts – something I will call (borrowing a phrase from one of the memoirs included in this study) the myth of "dauntless optimism" (Roberts 37).[10] As Thompson suggests, Traill's writings display a consistent and "determined optimism," and "an ability to bow to the inevitable" (39). As Traill herself puts it in *Backwoods*, "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). It is always difficult to discern a woman's part in the decision to emigrate to Canada, but it has been popular to assert both Thomas's central role in making the Traills' decision to leave and Catharine's extreme enthusiasm for Thomas's decision.[11] However, enthusiasm for a fate already decided seems less than purely inspired; rather, as Gray notes, "although the Strickland girls were raised to respect intellectual achievement, they were also brought up to be docile wives to whomever they might marry" (27). We can discern this upbringing in Traill's *Backwoods*, in which the author indicates her adoption of a Ruthian ideology of female behaviour: indeed, Traill explicitly invokes the biblical image of Ruth when on a visit to "the house of a resident clergyman, curate of a flourishing village in the township of ———" (220): speaking of his wife's "decision" to join him in emigrating to Canada, the clergyman states that,

> when I named to her the desire of my parishioners [who were emigrating en masse], and she also perceived that my own wishes went

10 Using this phrase in a discussion of Traill's work seems particularly apt given the assertion in Moodie's text that "The Scotch are a tough people; they are not easily *daunted* – a few difficulties only seem to make them more eager to get on" (261; emphasis added).

11 For example, as Audrey Morris represents the scene back home in England, Thomas, who was "twelve years older than Catharine," "announced not only his own plans for an early departure in the spring to Canada, but also that he was taking Catharine Strickland with him as his wife" (29). Norcross suggests that "Catherine [*sic*] was thirty years old, just married, and eagerly looking forward to a new life in Canada" (47).

> with them, she stifled any regretful feeling that might have arisen in her breast, and replied to me in the words of Ruth: –
>
> "Thy country shall be my country; thy people shall be my people; where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me." (224)[12]

Subtly implying that perhaps she had been feeling less than enthusiastic about her life in Canada, after this scene, Traill assures her readers that "the pastor told us enough to make me quite contented with my lot, and I returned home, after some days' pleasant sojourn with this delightful family, with an additional stock of contentment" (227).

While Traill's adaptations thus appear to be biblical in nature, Moodie appears to be unable to perform the adaptation of the "British gentlewoman" image or the "dutiful Ruth" image to the physical reality of life "in the bush." Initially at least, Moodie does appear to adopt this role, as seen in her acknowledgment that it was her husband who "finally determined to emigrate to Canada" (72),[13] a decision with which she concurs, saying she had "bowed to a superior mandate, the command of duty" (194). Although nowhere in her text does Moodie explicitly invoke the image of Ruth, nevertheless at several points she paraphrases the sentiments of that image.[14] However, the reality

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12 Despite the fact that I am relying here upon traditional distortions of the Book of Ruth as "reinforcing repressive stereotypes of docile and angelically 'good' women" (Kates and Reimer xx), a distortion to which Traill and many of the prairie memoirists included in this study obviously subscribed, it is important to point out the considerable feminist scholarship that has attended to this and other female-centred biblical stories in recent years. On the Book of Ruth in particular, see, for example, *Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story*, eds. Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (New York: Ballantine, 1994).

13 As Moodie clarifies in the 1871 Canadian edition of her text, her husband, "not being overgifted with the good things of this world – the younger sons of old British families seldom are – he had, after mature deliberation, determined to try his fortunes in Canada, and settle upon the grant of 400 acres of land, ceded by the Government to officers upon half-pay" (525).

14 For example, she writes that "emigration may, indeed, generally be regarded as an act of severe duty, performed at the expense of personal enjoyment, and accompan-

behind Moodie's Ruthian self-representation is quite different: as Gray notes, even before she and John were married, Moodie's rebellious nature rose to the surface: "In January 1831, while John was still in Scotland [visiting relatives], [Susanna] abruptly broke off the engagement: 'I have changed my mind. You may call me a jilt or a flirt or what you please.… I will neither marry a soldier nor leave my country for ever.…'" (32). Suggests Gray, "the prospect of emigration appalled Susanna. She did not want to leave England" (43). In addition, Moodie provides a scene in *Roughing It* in which a male emigrant remarks upon the unfairness of subjecting women to the conditions of immigrant life, then she uses the scene as a subtle means to criticize her husband's own decision to emigrate to Canada. Having attended a lecture on the merits of emigrating to Canada, from which Susanna is certain her husband will return "quite sickened with the Canadian project" (64), John Moodie arrives home accompanied by a friend, Tom Wilson, who makes the following less than optimistic prediction of their chances for success at life in the colonies: "we shall both return like bad pennies to our native shores. But, as I have neither wife nor child to involve in my failure, I think, without much self-flattery, that my prospects are better than yours," a statement that Moodie upholds when she advises her reader that "there was more truth in poor Tom's words than at that moment we were willing to allow" (72). If we accept that "Moodie's narrative of Tom's story becomes a strategy by which she may say things, realize things about her husband that cannot be said, cannot even be thought, inside the wife's discourse" (Buss, *Mapping* 89), then it is apparent that Moodie's narrative rejects her sister's Ruthian cheerfulness.

The contagious nature of "dauntless optimism" – which, as will be seen, is reflected by a number of synonymous terms – in the decision to emigrate, its particular attraction for potential male settlers, and the woman settler's role in spreading the infection, are all aspects of land settlement in Canada

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ied by the sacrifice of those local attachments which stamp the scenes amid which our childhood grew, in imperishable characters upon the heart" (11). The concept of female duty is also present in her "Lament of a Canadian Emigrant," in which she writes, "And the babe on my bosom so calmly reclining,/ Check'd the tears as they rose, and all useless repining./ The stern voice of duty compell'd me to roam,/ From country and friends – the enjoyments of home" (85).

which eventually migrated to the prairie region. For the institutions which promoted western settlement, the myth of "dauntless optimism" functioned as a dominant cultural narrative and, at least according to the considerable number of prairie memoirs I have read, it was a myth that was initially most attractive for men. In his discussion of promotional materials for western settlement while Clifford Sifton was Minister of the Interior, David Hall says it was "a masculine audience to whom the writers appealed; the assumption clearly was that men were making the decisions about settling in the West" (85–86). There has been considerable debate about which gender was most likely to choose emigration. For example, while Sara Brooks Sundberg suggests that "the lure of cheap land, the chance for economic independence, captured the imaginations of women as well as men" and that, "in fact, women were sometimes the first to recognize the opportunities inherent in western land" (73–74), John Mack Faragher's study of women on the Overland Trail makes the contrary observation:

> In their diaries and recollections many women discussed the way in which the decision to move was made. Not one wife initiated the idea; it was always the husband. Less than a quarter of the women writers recorded agreeing with their restless husbands; most of them accepted it as a husband-made decision to which they could only acquiesce. But nearly a third wrote of their objections and how they moved only reluctantly. (163)

While the truth of the matter is that the decision-making process was a complex one, affected by individual personality, family economics, gender ideologies, etc., nevertheless what is beyond doubt is that the promotional literature aimed at settlement presented the Canadian West with a distinctly seductive air, as seen especially in the "profusion of pamphlets with alluring titles" (Bruce 4), such as "The Last Best West" and "The Granary of the British Empire."[15]

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15 This propaganda campaign was initiated by governmental sources and represented an amazingly vast undertaking: "The chief function of the federal Department of Agriculture from 1867 until 1892, when the responsibility was transferred to

A sort of romantic wooing was undertaken by the pamphleteers, who no doubt understood, as did Emily Ferguson, that male readers in particular would be "caught and lured by colour, atmosphere, the hidden, the desire for the new, the ache for adventure, the something behind the hills" (*Open* 111).[16] For example, in *Gully Farm*, Mary Hiemstra represents a conversation between her mother and her Uncle Sam, who says about Mr. Pinder's enthusiasm for emigration, "'He seems *quite smitten* with Canada'" (7; emphasis added). Nellie L. McClung writes in *Clearing in the West: My Own Story* (1935) that her eldest brother Will was the first in her family to be taken in by the tide of western immigration: feeling restless about the "narrow gauge" of life on a farm in "The County of Grey," Ontario (29), Will began to pay attention to the books and letters being produced in the late 1870s about land settlement in the Canadian west. As McClung writes, "the majority of the farmers were skeptical … but men, particularly young men, who worked on stony farms listened eagerly" (30). When a young male emigrant comes back home for a time to get married, he has "many tales to tell" about life in the

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the Department of the Interior, was the promotion of immigration.… Starting from a faith in the importance of free land, the branch spent large sums on maps, pamphlets, prospectuses, and other printed advertising material in a wide range of languages – probably at least a million pieces per year after 1870" (Friesen, *The Canadian* 185).

16 The assumption that male emigrants would respond most enthusiastically to promotional materials is evident in Ferguson's sarcastic description of the special brand of optimism inspired by such materials:

> [I]t is natural that in a land where despondency is unknown, the whole lion-hearted generation should be addicted to magnifying themselves and their wonderful country.
>
> A lie is nothing serious to a Westerner. He need not check his reputation on such occasions. His "stretchers" are mere natural ebullitions arising purely from rewarded toil, prosperity, and a singularly ozonated atmosphere. (119)

A rare and more realistic consideration of the virtues of Canadian homesteading occurs in Heather Gilead's *The Maple Leaf for Quite a While* (1967), in which the author says of her father that "he had a thorough instinctive mistrust of all fast bucks, all easy money, all short cuts to wealth and/or the millennium," so he chose a "semi-desirable farm which would yield a living if you treated it right, but never much more than a living" (12).

West, such as that there are "hundreds of acres of land, without a stone, or a bush, *waiting to be taken*" (31; emphasis added). The result is inevitable, for the young men of the community "could see the sea of grass and the friendly skies above it, and they could feel the intoxication of being the first to plant the seed in that mellow black loam, enriched by a million years of rain and sun." As McClung acknowledges, "Will caught the fever," and he became the touchstone for the family's future: "Will would go at once and if he liked it we would all go in a year" (38). At the beginning of the twentieth century, Winnie E. Hutton's family began to "talk of going to the North West": as she describes in *No "Coppers" in Saskatchewan!* (1973), "brochures we received used flowery language to tell of the 'Wonderful West' which was opening up. There were photos of nice homes being built after only a short time, giving the impression that we would be rich in a few years. They never mentioned the words drought, frost or hail" (1). As with McClung's family, Hutton's brother Roy Sinden is the first to go west, and his "enthusiasm" upon return is so infectious that both the author's "father and brother-in-law decided they would also get homesteads. They were each able to file on a ¼ section adjacent to the one Roy had, and the business was completed in the East" (2). The land having been taken sight unseen at the time, Hutton's retrospective and subtly sarcastic account of the family's arrival at the homestead sites calls into question her brother's original optimism: "We were happy to arrive at the homestead and see the rest of the family. We had to get accustomed to the flat prairie with no trees, but we were not going to let a little thing like that dampen our enthusiasm. After all, we were looking forward to the wealth we had read about in the brochures" (4).[17]

While "dauntless optimism" was initially highly attractive – or highly contagious, depending upon the chosen metaphor – for male immigrants, the philosophy also required that women settlers submit themselves to the infection, incubate it, then renew its strength from time to time as the positive vision was dimmed by reality. Indeed, the male settler did not always and easily

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17 For more examples of male enthusiasm about western settlement, see also Baldwin 21–31; Campbell 3; Ebbers 9; Hiemstra 2; Holmes 44; Moorhouse 5; Parsons 5–6, 68; and Schultz 31–37.

maintain an air of "dauntless optimism" for the homesteading project; on the contrary, as Helen Buss states it, the male settler's enthusiasm "flags easily" ("Settling" 173). Thus it was of the utmost importance for a prairie woman to stiffen her husband's resolve; to magnify his own surety of himself in relation to the homesteading project. Indeed, contemporary writer Arthur E. Copping illustrates the settler woman's importance to "dauntless optimism" as he recounts the following meeting with a prairie farmer: "'Looking for a jarb?' shouted the bronzed man in the blue shirt and great floppy wide-awake; and, as the buggy drew up, I noticed that the woman's face reflected her husband's eagerness" (37).[18] Later in his text, Copping asserts that Canada is, in fact, "a nation of optimists" (262), and he provides a chapter specifically on the topic of "Women Settlers," in which he advises, "out on the prairie I met many English housewives. If asked to classify them, I should be tempted to say: a small minority are grumblers; a large majority are optimists," the latter of whom (like Traill before them) take "everything very good-naturedly from the outset" (221–22, 226).[19] Copping goes on to provide an illustration of the female "optimist" by referring to a Mrs. Fisher, "the ideal prairie housewife" (226), in the following tableau:

> "Lonely!" echoed Mrs. Fisher in amazement. "Lonely? What, when we are surrounded by such nice neighbours, and I'm always driving round to see them, and they're always driving round to see me! And when we have so many whist parties at this house and musical evenings at their houses! Lonely – no, that's quite impossible out here. I pity anybody trying to be lonely with five children

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18 Nellie McClung's meeting with a female suffragette confirms Copping's mirror image – with a twist: says Mrs. Brown, a widow left to run the family farm alone, men "want women to be looking-glasses, howbeit false ones that make them look bigger than they are" (305). In *We Swept the Cornflakes Out the Door* (1980), Edith Hewson provides an image that suggests that the prairie woman also reflects an optimism inherent in the landscape itself: she says that the prairie town of Wapella "was the centre of a rapidly widening wheat country, golden with promise that overflowed *across the face* of western Canada" (1; emphasis added).

19 Writing about Catharine Parr Traill, Gray states that, "Catherine [*sic*] rarely indulged in grumbles" (189).

> about. And if they might be at school, and there was nobody at home, and I wanted to talk with somebody but hadn't time to go out – well, there is always the telephone. I don't mind telling you, I often have a chat with my friend Mrs. Knight – when I'm waiting for the bread to rise, and she's doing the same three miles away."
>
> When Mr. Fisher next came in – to join us in the pretty parlour – I found myself regarding him with a new interest. For I now had a clue to the smile of placid contentment that seemed never to leave his face. (69)

On pain of being read in the category of "grumblers," I admit my own distrust of those too-insistent exclamation marks used at the beginning of Mrs. Fisher's speech; after all, we have only Copping's translation of her voice (assuming she actually was a real personage), and we must remember the title of Copping's text, which is *The Golden Land*.[20]

Other contemporary writers also insisted upon the value of a settler woman's optimistic outlook, even above more practical achievements: for example, in 1901 Elizabeth Lewthwaite advised readers of her article "Women's Work in Western Canada" that "a cheerful, happy temperament will be worth all the technical knowledge in the world" (717), and as late as 1925 Howard Angus Kennedy purportedly met with a prairie "house-wife" described as "singing as she comes to the door" and who, although she "admits when asked"

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20 A year after the publication of Copping's text, Emily Ferguson published *Open Trails* (1912), in which the author provides what I would suggest is a slightly more sarcastic image of the enthusiastic settler woman:

> The Frau, who is a Norwegian, tells me she has been in town but once in six years, on which occasion she spent two months in the hospital. Previously she lived at Lac Sainte-Anne, where she rarely saw a white woman. On account of the bad trails it took six days to reach Edmonton, and one could only travel on horseback.…
>
> But hear, O world, and wonder! The Frau says she was never unhappy. It would seem that she whose heart is wisely blithe has an enduring holiday. Or it maybe [*sic*] this Norwegian had the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. The vision of the pioneer, unlike other visions, is one that makes for contentment. (39–40)

that "she and her husband have had difficulties" in their new life, "brushes them lightly aside for cheerful topics" (198). For Marion Dudley Cran in 1910, the prairie woman becomes a physical embodiment of the "dauntlessly optimistic" vision of prairie life, as seen in her presentation of a feminine ideal who "makes beds and rushes from room to room like a Utopian whirlwind that leaves order in its train" (133–34). Meanwhile, those women who dared to deviate from the "dauntlessly optimistic" script were regularly taken to task for their ideological (and thus practical) failure. Arthur Copping's portrait of a female "grumbler," for example, is only referred to as "Mrs. Y---," as though he cannot even name that which will hurt the propaganda purposes of his travel narrative. Copping tells of his visit to "a beautiful quarter-section of rich soil in Southern Alberta" (which immediately implies, how could you fail to prosper there?), where he meets Mr. Y---, "a dissatisfied chemist in England, and scarcely knowing a horse from a cow," whose wife was unable to adapt to the new environment and who, suggests Copping, "ought to be deported" (222, 226). While not making light of the husband's ineffectiveness as a prairie farmer, nonetheless it is the wife who suffers the harsh judgment of banishment from the Promised Land.[21]

Female characters in western Canadian fiction tended to fall in line with this either (optimist)/or (grumbler) dichotomy. One of the true heroines of western literature, Nellie McClung's Pearl Watson, is most notable for her "contagious optimism," her "optimistic vision" (*The Second* 104, 159). In *The Second Chance* (1910), McClung writes about a Mrs. Cavers, who possesses the "good gift" of "hid[ing] her troubles" from her sister and mother back home in eastern Canada: indeed, in the spirit of Traill, Mrs. Cavers's letters "were cheerful and hopeful," and she herself was "a brave woman and faced the issues of life without a murmur" (313). In Harold Bindloss's *Prescott of Saskatchewan* (1913), heroine Muriel Hurst, who visits western Canada from

21 For women who even dared to "grumble" publicly, the powers-that-be were ever-present to enforce silence. Once again, Emily Ferguson makes this point humorously clear when she says, "If I, waxing bold, send an article to an Ontario, or even to a United States, magazine, and mention the fact of noticing alkali in the soil, the editor – profligate fellow – promptly blue-pencils it. I do not know the reason unless he, also, has real estate to sell in the North-West" (*Open* 9).

Britain and falls in love with the title farmer, feels an immediate sense of confidence about prairie life, a confidence that emanates from the landscape itself: "Last had come the prairie – the land of promise – which seemed to run on forever … its vastness and openness filled the girl with a sense of liberty. Narrow restraints, cramping prejudices, must vanish in this wide country; one's nature could expand and become optimistic here" (13–14). Later, when asked what she thinks of "the country," Muriel responds, "[I]t's delightful! And everybody's so energetic! You move with a spring and verve; and I don't hear any grumbling, though there seems to be so much to do!" (32). The "wide plain and sense of freedom" of the prairies "banished moody thought" (Bindloss, *Prairie* 181–82), and, accordingly, the "grumbling" woman is often subject to censure in fictional texts: for example, in Bindloss's *Prescott*, the less than feminine ideal Ellice, whose "slight accent suggested the French Canadian strain, though Prescott imagined that there was a trace of Indian blood in her," is once described (significantly for the topic of this chapter) as being "moody of late" (27). Ellice, whose status as wife to an unsuccessful wheat farmer named Jernyngham is under question, acts as the anti-ideal to the Ruthian image, for she is suspected of taking advantage of those men capable of providing for her material needs rather than participating with them in their "dauntlessly optimistic" quest. When the narrator of Arthur Stringer's *The Prairie Wife* (1915) finds herself far removed from city life in New England and becomes the wife of prairie farmer Duncan Argyll McKail, she resolves *not* "to be a Hamlet in petticoats" (66), and "especially" not to become another Mrs. Dixon, a "sad-eyed soul" who "seemed to make prairie-life so ugly and empty and hardening" (69).

The contemporary message was painfully clear: to be acceptable in the context of the decision to emigrate to the Canadian west meant to be "a contented wife, submissive, self-sacrificing, retiring, and resigned" (Rasmussen et al. 88) – to be, as Traill's adaptive philosophy dictated a century before, a Ruth on the prairie. The Ruthian role was a natural one for women settlers, whose "leaving was activated by the things women believed and expected of themselves. Their own social and personal values demanded that they be loving

and obedient wives, faithful and ever-present mothers" (Faragher 174).[22] The image of Ruth and commitment to that icon of obedience sometimes occurs explicitly in the memoirs included in this study, as in *With the West in Her Eyes* (1937) when Kathleen Strange explains her decision to emigrate with her husband by saying, "[A] woman has to follow her mate. With Ruth I had said: 'Whither thou goest, I will go … and where thou lodgest, I will lodge'" (273). Similarly, in a memoir titled *Mamie's Children: Three Generations of Prairie Women* (1997), Judy Schultz makes clear that it was her grandfather who was "seized" by "the Canada-or-bust euphoria," a feverish desire to emigrate north and westward, against which Mamie Elizabeth Harris had no recourse: "[W]hat could Mamie say? She did as she was told and started packing" (36). Writes Schultz, it is "doubtful that, given a choice, Mamie or any other woman would willingly leave a home she knew and possibly loved for the danger and uncertainty of a foreign frontier, yet women did it, willy-nilly, in the faithful thousands" (32). What Mamie is "faithful" to is a traditional marriage script wherein a woman's "duty was clear" and that faith, for Schultz's family, at least, had repercussions for generations of female experience:

> She would follow Ernest. Like some latter-day Ruth, she believed the scriptures had clearly marked the path for women like her: "Wither thou goest I shall go, whither thou lodgest I shall lodge, thy people shall be my people forever. …" (It was one of her favorite passages from the Bible, and many years later, after my own father had announced that we were moving yet again, I heard her repeat it to my exasperated mother, who was near tears at the very idea of another move. When I married, the Song of Ruth was part of the ceremony at Pearl's suggestion.
>
> Though she didn't say so, I knew it was for Mamie.) (35)

22 In fact, even outspoken feminist Emily Ferguson humorously admitted about her emigration to northern Alberta in the early part of the twentieth century that "the Padre [her husband] has decided to come to Edmonton to live, and I have decided to remain at Poplar Bluff. We will compromise on Edmonton" (*Janey* 208).

However, the Ruthian image does not always remain undisturbed by contrary behaviour. For example, in *Gully Farm*, Mary Hiemstra is open about the fact that, every time her father expressed enthusiasm for emigration to Canada, Sally Pinder showed herself to staunchly inhabit the Moodie – or the "grumbler" – half of the Prairie Woman dichotomy by making negative comments such as: "Papers don't seem to care what they print these days," "You can't believe all you hear, and only half you see," and "There's drawbacks there just as there are anywhere else" (2–3). After the decision to leave has been made, Sally Pinder's participation in the undertaking is informed by the fact that her husband has promised that they "were not going to Canada for ever. In a year, two at the most, [they] would be back" (23). Her half-hearted adherence to the Ruthian script is thus underwritten by a serious Moodie strain. Once arrived in Saskatchewan, and while searching for a homestead site, the family stops in the "city of tents" known as Battleford, where, according to Hiemstra, the Moodie reality disperses itself more widely amongst the female half of the Barr colonists:

> While we were in Battleford Dad went to the land office and asked about homesteads. He was told the same story: there wasn't much good land left around there. A few fairly good quarter sections might still be vacant a little to the north, but the best land was farther west.
>
> Dad and Mother discussed the matter and decided to go north first. Dad was anxious to get settled, and Mother felt that the sooner we stopped the sooner we would get back to England. In her opinion this long, hard trip was mostly a waste of time, but it was the only way she knew to convince Dad that Canada was impossible.
>
> Most of the other women thought as Mother did, and endured the hardships of the trail for the same reason. (97)

This frank portrayal of her mother as embodying the "reluctant emigrant" half of the Prairie Woman coin, however, is not simply a capitulation to the culturally accepted either/or dichotomy. As the memoir progresses, we learn that

being perennially pessimistic is a part of the functioning dynamic between Mr. and Mrs. Pinder, who do share a deep emotional connection. Sally Pinder is genuinely regretful at times about having left her home and life in England, but for all of her seeming moodiness, she is not incapacitated. She does display an incredible practical commitment to prairie life and even occasionally finds reason for happiness. And ultimately, towards the end of *Gully Farm*, she does admit the suitability of the Ruthian script for application to the marriage bond, as we see when Hiemstra writes about a time when her father left her mother alone with the children and when she details some of the ways that the family passed the time, including the following emotionally resonant moment:

> When Mother wearied of the fairy-tales she read the Bible to us. One afternoon she read to us from the Book of Ruth. Her voice flowed evenly until she came to the place where Ruth elected to go with Naomi. "And Ruth said: Intreat me not to leave thee," Mother read slowly, "or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."
>
> Mother's low voice faltered as she read, and when she came to the end of the verse she stopped reading altogether and looked at the little window for a long time, then softly and as if speaking to herself she said: "It ought to have been written about marriage." (261)

The invocation of the Ruthian script at this late point in Hiemstra's memoir when Mrs. Pinder is seriously concerned about her husband's survival on the prairies, reflects an emotional change from her mother's seeming incoherence with that script throughout the earlier parts of the text.

Even where Ruth is not mentioned by name, language reminiscent of the cheerful and dutiful wife still dominates women's narratives; competes with instincts and feelings to the contrary of the "dauntlessly optimistic" script. It is no coincidence that Nellie McClung's novel, *Sowing Seeds in Danny*

(1911), is “lovingly dedicated to [her] dear mother” (n.p.), who is included in McClung’s memoir *Clearing in the West* as being in that category of “typical” pioneer women described as “calm, cheerful, self-reliant, and undaunted” (82). Although I suggested earlier that it is McClung’s brother, Will, who first initiates discussion of westward immigration, nevertheless it is the author’s mother who enunciates the masculine privilege of land ownership and adventure and ultimately inspires the family to leave home:

> Strangely enough, my mother was more impressed than my father with Red Michael’s story. She questioned him closely, and unlike some other questioners, listened when he answered. I think Michael liked talking to her.
>
> “We’ll have to go some place, John,” she said one night to my father. “There’s nothing here for our three boys. What can we do with one-hundred-and-fifty stony acres? The boys will be hired-men all their lives, or clerks in a store. That’s not good enough!”
>
> Father was fearful! There were Indians to consider, not only Indians, but mosquitoes. He had seen on the Ottawa what mosquitoes could do to horses; and to people too. No! It was better to leave well enough alone. Had any of us ever gone hungry? And now when we were getting things fixed up pretty well, with the new root-house; and the cook-house shingled, and the lower eighty broken up, and a good school now, with a real teacher, and an inspector coming once a year anyway, and a fine Sunday-school too, and all sorts of advantages.…
>
> We all knew mother was agitated as she went around the house, for she banged doors and set down stove-lids noisily. And she kept everyone going at top speed. Even I knew she was in some sort of tribulation of spirit.… (32–33)

What a delightfully confrontational scene! First of all, it presents a repositioning of the traditional gender constructs with the author’s mother being the one “impressed” by tales of prairie life, as told by a young settler who has come back to marry before returning west, and the author’s father

hyper-inhabiting the "reluctant emigrant" role usually reserved for women. But it is also confrontational in another key way, for Mrs. Mooney is originating enthusiasm for the settlement project rather than adhering to Ruthian notions that settler women merely follow/reflect their husbands' enthusiasm as a point of obedience.

What I particularly enjoy about McClung's portrait of her mother, however, is that it shows the real prairie woman as having a variety of responses to the issue of western settlement, triggered by a variety of personal experiences. For example, the family's first winter dampens Mrs. Mooney's spirits a bit, as seen in a letter to a female friend from back home: drawing her concerns clearly along gender lines, she writes,

> I get worried sometimes about my own health and wondering what would happen to the little girls, if I should be taken. Boys can always get along but it's a hard world for girls; sometimes I blame myself for coming away so far. There's no doctor closer than Portage, which is eighty miles away. I can't say this to anyone but you, I don't blame Willie; he is a good boy, if there ever was one. It's at night, when every one is asleep and this great prairie rolls over, so big and empty, and cruel. (78)

Mrs. Mooney's letter acknowledges that in the contemporary moment of settlement a woman's expression of fear was antithetical to cultural ideals; was something unintelligible beyond the privacy of personal correspondence. However, by including this letter in her memoir, McClung seeks to move beyond the predominance of the "undaunted" image she has already drawn for her mother. Later in the memoir, when writing about her eldest sister's serious illness that first winter, McClung indicates that even "typical" prairie women could experience a sense of failure and a wavering of faith in the inherent optimism of western settlement:

> My mother, who was a wonderful nurse, had tried every remedy she had, but there was not one flicker of response. Hannah and I were doing what we could to get meals ready, but on this worst day

> of the storm, no one wanted to eat. It was like a horrible dream. The storm tore past the house, and fine snow sifted through the walls.
>
> Mother came out from behind the quilts which hung around Lizzie's bed, and sitting down in the rocking-chair buried her face in her hands.
>
> "I'm beaten, John," she said. "I can't save her! I am at the end of my resources!"
>
> Her shoulders shook with sobs and it seemed like the end of everything. No one spoke. Behind the quilts, that labored breathing went on, hoarser and heavier.
>
> "My little girl is dying for want of a doctor, in this cursed place – that never should have been taken from the Indians...."
>
> "The Indians have their revenge on me now, for it's tearing my heart out, to see my little girl die before my eyes.... We shouldn't have come John, so far – so cruelly far – What's money? – What's land? What comfort can we have when we remember this – dying for want of a skilled hand – the best child I ever had." (79)

As McClung recreates the scene in her memoir, her mother's anxiety manifests in an overt critique of the purposes ("What's money? – What's land?") and the inevitable result ("never should have been taken from the Indians") of western settlement, as well as of her own infection with the spirit of the project. However, narrative compliance with cultural ideals is restored when McClung goes on to note the timely and divinely inspired arrival of a new Methodist minister: writes McClung, "[F]rom the moment he entered the feeling of the house changed. I saw the fear vanish from mother's face. *She was herself* in a moment" (80; emphasis added). Nevertheless, Mrs. Mooney continues to be subject to "low spirits," and is sometimes found to "sit drooping and sad under the pall of loneliness that wrapped [the family] around for many months in the year" (172). McClung's honesty about her mother's fluctuating enthusiasm for prairie life becomes a lesson in the need to reconcile the Ruthian typology characterized by Traill with the less than perfect response to settler life represented by Moodie. Indeed, looking one day into her mother's face, the

young author reaches the following understanding, one that speaks well to our re-visioning of the settler woman's life: "some glimmering of life's plan swept across my mind. Sorrow and joy, pain and gladness, triumph and defeat were in that plan, just as day and night; winter and summer, cold and heat, tears and laughter. We couldn't refuse it, we must go on. We couldn't go and sulk in a corner and say we wouldn't play" (143–44).

One of the least Ruthian prairie women represented in the memoirs studied here is Marjorie Wilkins Campbell's mother Mary Eleanor: indeed, in *The Silent Song of Mary Eleanor* (1983), Campbell reconstructs the significant and telling moment – a moment reminiscent of Susanna Moodie's own initial reaction to the subject of emigration – of her family's arrival at their homestead site by providing an adequate tableau of her parents' different responses to prairie life:

> Out of the mass of typical pioneer homecomings, each settler came to cherish his own peculiar memories, the little events that colored that memorable day; like a wedding night, joyous or tragic, it could never happen again. Of the scores of such occasions remembered by scores of old-timers, one scene remains clear in my imagination: the man looking up from beside the loaded wagon, the woman cradling their children and trying to control her emotions as she looked down to him.
>
> In their particular moment he must have recalled her spirited opposition to his suggestion that they emigrate to one of the colonies and the scene that triggered their first quarrel. She as vividly recalled his equally spirited retort that if she felt that way about it he would go to Africa alone, neither of them believing that he actually would book passage to Cape Town.
>
> Under the hot noonday sun, marooned on this sea of grass, as she contrasted his eloquent descriptions of life in Canada with the reality, mother wished she had refused the pearl engagement ring and later the wedding ring he had brought her from Africa. Father, content with every promising aspect of his quarter section, in that long assessing moment wondered why he had written the fulsome

> diary addressed to *My Dearest Nellie* and now faced the possibility of having to transform 160 acres into a productive, prosperous farm with so seemingly hostile a wife. (23–24)

Campbell's use of the word "marooned" in relation to her mother, and her insistence on the "contrast" of "reality" from "description," clearly undercuts the vocabulary associated with her father, words such as "promising," "productive," and "prosperous." Mary Eleanor's "seeming hostility" is an open contradiction of the expected Ruthian role. As Campbell explains about her mother, unlike her husband's futuristic visions of a land of plenty, Mary Eleanor "could not see what he saw. She could not match his enthusiasm" (25). No wonder, given that Campbell also remembers her father as a man who "never actually admitted to anything but a bright future" (54). The imagery in Campbell's text is in direct contrast to that provided by Beulah Baldwin in *The Long Trail: The Story of a Pioneer Family* (1992). Baldwin's father is clearly the one who made the decision to emigrate to northern Canada; however, he is also the first one to experience misgivings about what he and his family are undertaking. Even at the moment of departure from Edmonton, while Mr. Freeland is harnessing the horses, he "could not help but worry how his young pregnant wife and eighteen-month-old son Carlton would endure the long, tedious hours sitting cramped and cold in the horse-drawn sleigh, and the discomfort of primitive accommodations along the way" (2). Not much optimism in these words, yet, as Baldwin assures her readers, Olive Freeland's presence works as a reflection of her husband's original eagerness to undertake the journey north:

> Dad need not have worried. The young woman who stood watching from the upstairs window had a look of determination and courage in her sparkling blue eyes. She was small, just an inch or two over five feet, with golden brown hair piled high on her head. When her husband looked up and waved for her to join him, she waved back, and the answering smile that broke across her face made her truly beautiful. (2–3)

Having accepted the necessity of her family's emigration to Alberta at the start of the twentieth century, in *Of Us and the Oxen* (1968), Sarah Ellen Roberts advises that the homesteading project is secured by the family's unwritten agreement to maintain a deliberately optimistic spirit when entering, as she herself sarcastically calls it, "the 'promised land'" (16). At any point that some "calamity," some literal contradiction of imagined promise, befalls the family, the members gather together and renew in one another the spirit of "dauntless optimism": for example, having lost their first successful crop to hail, she writes,

> I could never tell what that destruction meant to us. To understand, one must remember that we had no means, that we had been through three summers with constant expense and that this was to be our first crop. For myself, I must say that I had watched that grain from the time the first tiny green blades appeared until the very day of the tragedy – for tragedy it truly was. I had feasted my eyes upon its beauty and fed my soul with the hopes that were centered in those beautiful billowy golden acres. Bound up in that grain was almost an entire summer's work and our winter's supply, and as it neared harvest time, it promised to pay for the one and be ample for the other. Then in less time than it takes to tell it, it was annihilated.
>
> I didn't go out into our field until the next day. I just couldn't. When I went, I went alone. I did not want anyone to be with me when I went to view the wreck of the summer's work and the winter's hope, for I knew it would be my hour of weakness. And it was. I wondered indeed, whether we wanted to "cast in our nets in these barren sea waters" again. But when we were all together no one admitted discouragement. Disappointment there was, but each of us did all that he could do to fortify the courage and resolve of the others, and we all asserted with a confidence which was no doubt assumed, that we would have better luck next time. (124)

As indicated by her suggestion that "courage and resolve" had to be "fortified," and that the guise of "confidence" was merely "assumed," Roberts and her family are struggling to maintain a "dauntlessly optimistic" role that women themselves were meant to quite routinely exhibit in the face of sometimes extreme adversity. If an entire family cannot maintain that role together, what chance does a single woman have? For Roberts, no chance at all. From the moment she arrives and sees the rather rudimentary housekeeping conditions in which her husband and son have been "batching" while awaiting the arrival of the rest of the family unit, Roberts finds herself confronted with the practical futility of optimism within a homestead environment. When she arrives, she is literally sickened by the sight of the family tent, but she notes her "resolve" that "as soon as [she] was able to work, 'things would take a turn'" (6). Significantly, that last part of her sentence, "'things would take a turn'," which indicates her attempt to reproduce the air of optimism with which the "adventure" was undertaken, is placed within quotation marks, almost as though she is marking her knowledge that the phrase works better as a theoretical than a practical goal. In the end, although Roberts has earlier asserted that she does not mean to present her memoirs as "a calamity wail" (29), she nonetheless makes the following confession to her reader:

> If I could have been an enthusiastic optimist and could have said and believed, "Oh, everything will be all right in the end," I might have been spared most of this anxiety. But however desirable such a state of mind might have been, I was not able to make it mine, nor can I see how such a mental attitude could have caused a rise in temperature or have opened the windows of the heavens and brought the rain that was so greatly needed. (204)[23]

As evidenced already from women's use and intermittent rejection of Ruthian-type language, and as I've already indicated about Traill's "cheerfulness," the

23 For more examples of the invocation and rejection of the Ruthian typology, see also Gilead 14–15; Holmes 15, 73–76; Hopkins 20–23; Magill "Dedication," 2; Moorhouse 5, 8; Parsons *passim*; and Schroeder 94, 101.

mere adoption of the philosophy of "dauntless optimism" does not preclude the presence of contrary feelings. In fact, I would assert that Traill's upbeat attitude sometimes betrays an underlying sense of the author's own experiences of personal/psychological disjunction with her New World environment. For example, as the epigraph from Traill's *Backwoods* at the head of this chapter illustrates, the ideal of the Pioneer Woman relied upon a sort of "hypnotized confidence" (Mitchell 174) – a deliberately engineered program of emotional self-denial. When I read Traill's avowal, "sometimes I laughed because I would not cry" (97), I imagine the presence of a very real emotional distress lying just below a thin veneer of "cheerfulness" – after all, Traill states that she "*would* not cry" rather than that she "*could* not cry." The corduroy road over which Traill travels threatens to dislodge the stoic Pioneer Woman from her perch as it becomes representative of the sometimes "jolting" reality of backwoods life,[24] a reality that, as Gray illustrates in her biography, Traill so determinedly attempts to deny as a source of personal discontent.[25]

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24 Peggy Holmes begins *It Could Have Been Worse: The Autobiography of a Pioneer* (1980), a memoir about settling in northern Alberta, with a chapter titled "Undaunted Optimism," in which the author undergoes a similar experience to Traill:

> As I tried to relax on the hard, springless wagon seat, jogging over the rough trail taking me to my new life in Canada, I glanced up at my husband.
>
> Could this possibly be the man I'd married only four years ago in England? Even though I knew he owned property in northern Alberta, I had never had any burning desire to be a wild west pioneer, and when I repeated my altar vow, "For better, for worse", such a drastic change in my lifestyle was beyond my wildest dream. (15)

After a narrative explanation of how she came to find herself in this position, Holmes comes back to the moment of emigration and notes that "after sitting all day, or one should say rolling, on a hard wagon seat with no springs, my enthusiasm was at a low ebb. I was sore in both body and spirit" (74).

25 Early in *The Backwoods*, Traill is able to make a similar judgment about other emigrants to the one which I am making of her here: speaking of the "house[s] of public resort" in Montreal, a stop-over on the journey to their homestead site, she first notes that "the sounds of riotous merriment that burst from them seemed but ill-assorted with the haggard, careworn faces of many of the thoughtless revellers," then, in a line that forms its own and purposeful paragraph, she states that "the contrast was only too apparent and too painful a subject to those that looked upon this

In fact, denial of the sometimes agonizing reality of settlement life is often a primary feature of recollective texts, which "seem to imply that hardships were actually ennobling experiences – proof of pioneer character – rather than sources of trouble and suffering" (Bennett and Kohl 56). Underneath the myth of "dauntless optimism," there was "trouble and suffering," in varying degrees. For myself as reader of settlement memoirs, the question that inevitably arises from the jolting scene in Traill's text is, at what point does the romantic notion of "dauntless optimism" devolve into a less idealistic contagion we might call "perverse endurance" (Silverman, "Foreword")? Judy Schultz provides an interesting image that encapsulates what I wish to invoke in this latter phrase when writing in *Mamie's Children* about her great-great-grandmother Magdalena. Imagining Magdalena's experience of emigration from old Bavaria to the United States in 1840 in "steerage class," Schultz says regarding the terrors of such an ocean journey, "I've tried to fit the woman who was my ancestor into this picture, and in my mind she always ends up on deck, facing the storm and in some perverse way enjoying it, if only because she was surviving it" (19). I would suggest that through recovery of this "perverse way" of enduring the conditions of western settlement we are able to continue the confrontation of the Traill typology's mythic proportions and achieve a less idealistic, hence more realistic, picture of women's experiences.

Annora Brown's *Sketches from Life* (1981) supplies me with a particularly apt illustration of the "dauntless optimism"/"perverse endurance" dichotomy of which I speak: regarding a group of trees, "old pines and firs," she notes "their roots pinched by rocks, their branches tormented by incessant winds from the [Crow's Nest] pass, these trees have developed distinctive characters. As we worked [at sketching them], such titles as *Where Life is Hard*, *Undaunted*, *Valiant*, *Stout-hearted* came to mind" (156). Moodie's text, I would suggest, in all its narrative deviation from the myth of "dauntless optimism," inspires a re-evaluation of women's settlement texts for the presence of "pinched roots" and "tormented branches" – of "perverse endurance"; it aids us in getting beyond the happy ending of the Pioneer Woman "Traill" to begin to answer some of

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show of outward gaiety and inward misery" (39). Does this "too painful a subject" betray the author's own experience of "the contrast" in question?

the questions posed by Sara Brooks Sundberg back in the early stages of the recovery of western women's lives:

> The image of the stoic, hardworking helpmate not only homogenizes prairie women's experiences, it leaves some experiences out altogether. What about the women who could not cope with frontier life on the prairie? What factors made the difference between success and failure? We lose part of the story of women who stayed, when we ignore those who left. (86)

Some historians would caution against this approach to women's settlement texts, as does John Mack Faragher:

> If we are to trust and respect their revelations in their diaries and recollections, the greatest struggle of women on the trail was the struggle to endure the hardship and suffering without becoming bitter and resentful, without becoming the carping wife, without burdening their marital relationship with the bad feelings that burned inside them. If we are to judge them not by our standards but their own, we will not resurrect and applaud every little act of womanly resistance and mean feminine spirit but examine and attempt to understand the powers of endurance that permitted them to act out the role of good wife through the whole hated experience. (174)

Remembering that, in fact, "their standards" were only theirs insofar as they lived within a specific society in a specific time period – even Faragher allows that settler women were forced to "*act out the role* of good wife" – I would suggest that Faragher's caution resounds with condescension ("every little act of womanly resistance and mean feminine spirit") and ignores the fact that these women may have had legitimate reason at times to feel "bitter and resentful," to "carp" and "burden," to "resist" and show "spirit." It also ignores the fact that these kinds of supposedly negative reactions did not necessarily mean that a woman was stuck exclusively in a Moodie mode of being, and that they could,

in fact, represent ways and means of coping with "trouble and suffering" and thus form an essential part of the process of settlement in a new land, rather than simply being a threat to that process.

For example, after spending years away from the family farm, in her memoir *The Maple Leaf for Quite a While* (1967), Heather Gilead is explicitly on a personal journey to understand her mother's experience and she does not demure in representing a certain level of domestic tension in her family household; indeed, she is fairly condemnatory of her mother, at first, for being the cause of that tension. As the last of six surviving children, the author, invoking the Traill script, first states that "home was a cheerful enough place as I first recall it," then revises that declaration by acknowledging the uniqueness of her position in the family, a position that facilitated her emerging awareness of the reality lurking beneath the surface "cheerfulness":

> My sisters got on rather well together. They were twelve, ten and eight years older than I. Then there were my two brothers, four and five years older than I. But all too soon my sisters were away at school, then married or working. The boys were early engaged in men's work, as farm boys used to be. I might almost have been an only child about the house then.
>
> And so, by the time I was eight or ten, the house was too quiet, too free of distraction, for me to remain unaware of my mother's chronic unhappiness which she had converted into specific grievances. (2)

After telling her readers about her parents' continued night-time amours, she goes on to describe the daytime reality as follows:

> But, come the dawn, and nothing much remained but recriminations on the one side and, on the other, the door quietly, definitively closing. No sooner had [my father] gone out, shutting the door behind him, than my mother would start muttering to herself as she worked, rehearsing the next grievance to be aired so that no

> time need be lost in delivery when my father should appear in the doorway again. (4)

Unable at the time to understand her mother's reaction to what would now be labelled her father's "passive-aggressive" behaviour, one morning the young author, at "the sensitive age of thirteen or so," takes an emotional stance against what she sees as her mother's incessant "nagging":

> As he closed the door on it one day I rounded on her – it must have been shocking, like being savaged by a bunny rabbit – and announced, "If ever I speak to my husband like that I hope he beats me!" Then I stood awaiting the wrath to come. She turned her back. I thought at first that she hadn't heard, and wondered if I should ever get enough courage screwed up to speak out again. She resumed her work about the kitchen. After a few minutes I realized that she was silently weeping. I crept off, appalled. I doubt if she had wept since the death of that infant son so many years before.

This is a very compelling scene, not the least because Gilead and her mother essentially duplicate the domestic tension of the household, this time with Gilead playing the nagging, confrontational role of the mother, who is not being "heard," and the mother reacting by "turning" away as the author earlier describes her father doing. It is in this moment, told in retrospect, that Gilead begins to understand the extent of her mother's painful reality living on an isolated farm with a husband who never listens, never reacts, never responds. Gilead's decision to openly represent in her memoir her mother's almost ritual acts of "carping" and "burdening" represents her mature understanding of the settler woman's desire for some type, any type, of human interaction. As she now knows, her mother, who had grown up in a small community in the United States, was showing a fairly reasonable response to the conditions she faced:

> Seal bats' ears with wax, release them in a space fraught with obstacles around which they have been accustomed to navigate without difficulty, and they will promptly clobber themselves on every obstacle in sight and be reduced to squeaking, quivering disorientation. Marriage must have been something like that for my mother, except that instead of being released into the midst of obstacles she was, so to speak, released into the midst of infinity, so that none of her emitted signals were ever bounced back to her. (4–5)

As Gilead concludes, her mother "had not been born a nag," she had simply lived "without an adequate supply of perpetual, direct human relationships." The inevitable result, "it must have left her as bruised and baffled – and as shrilly resentful – as the sealed-up bats" (6). This new awareness about her mother forces Gilead to tentatively re-evaluate her heroic feelings about her father, as well:

> How many years it took her to become a sort of broken record, reiterating a catalogue of peripheral grievances, I don't know. That marriage had endured twenty years before I became aware of it and decided to be bruised by my poor father's martyrdom.
>
> Martyrdom! This quiet, courteous, tranquil little man was not one to excite outrage. Besides, by the time I learned that his serenity was not a brave and stoic performance, but the Real McCoy, he was long since in his quiet prairie graveyard. No, not outrage: I didn't feel outrage. But that he should have lived with that woman all those years and never even noticed her pain! And he was a kindly, generous man – it would have grieved him, I'm sure, had any measure of it registered.… (7)

Gilead's attitude towards her father is a balancing act between kind words on the one hand and incomprehension at his absolute lack of sympathy for her mother's "pain!" on the other. In the middle, the reader discerns an implicit

understanding of the "trouble and suffering" that underlay her initially "cheerful" memory of a prairie childhood.

Gilead's text is a good example of the fact that, unlike Faragher, I am not dealing with immediate diary accounts, but rather with texts that were written at a far remove from the settlement experience, often in response to a cultural desire for nostalgic representations of Canada's prairie heritage, and often by the less-constrained daughters of prairie women, so that evidence of alternative images to the Traill ideal may be read as a speaking out against, a confrontation with, conventional scripts. Thus, recovering the process of "moodification" at work in these texts is not intended to glorify some victim image of white prairie women as simply "reluctant migrants," but rather to suggest that women's involvement in land settlement was far more complex than the narrative of Ruthian adaptation allows. Indeed, I am suggesting that "adaptation" as a coping mechanism is not simply a prescription that can be "cheerfully" fulfilled at will, or not; rather, "adaptation" is a whole process in which the individual experiences a variety of physical/psychological reactions, with the result that, in the end, she has undergone a journey of self-discovery equal to the geographic one of immigration. As Gray suggests of Moodie's *Roughing It*, it "was more than a collection of 'events as may serve to illustrate a life in the woods,' as Susanna modestly claimed. It was the dramatic story of her own journey of self-discovery, as she faced the rigours and disorientation of pioneer life" (208).

So now we return to that image of Traill refusing to cry. As characterized by Audrey Morris, Traill "seldom cried, for she had an innate talent for taking delight out of every occasion" (18). Susanna Moodie, on the other hand, was "given to frequent tears" (19), as illustrated by her text. Having exhorted her reader to "bear with me in my fits of melancholy, and take me as I am" (89), she then shows herself, at various points throughout her text, succumbing to fits of homesickness so that "all [her] solitary hours were spent in tears" and "it was impossible to repress those outgushings of the heart" (337). In fact, Moodie notes the facility of crying when she states that "tears are the best balm that can be applied to the anguish of the heart. Religion teaches man to bear his sorrows with becoming fortitude, but tears contribute largely both to soften and to heal the wounds from whence they flow" (60). Some prairie women

who understood tears as "the best balm that can be applied to the anguish of the heart" still felt the impulse for self-control – for continued adherence to the Traill typology – as a matter of maternal duty, as seen when Nellie McClung's mother writes to a female friend about the loss of the family cow:

> "Our first Christmas was not very happy because we lost our nice little black cow.… I can't tell you how I miss her.… She had winsome ways, coming to the door and shoving it in with her nose if it wasn't latched, or rubbing the latch up and down, reminding me it was milking time. I had great hopes of Lady! She was going to establish a herd for us, all having her gentle disposition, but that's past! You know I do not cry easily but that morning I did. Just for a minute, and when I saw I was breaking up my whole family, I had to stop, though I would have been the better of a good cry to ease my heart, but when a woman has children, she has no freedom, not even the freedom to cry." (77)

In contrast, a prairie *Summer Storm: A Manitoba Tragedy* (1985), a memoir of homesteading near Pendennis, Manitoba, in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, becomes the vehicle for Velma Inglis to contextualize the facility of a prairie woman's tears to the restoration of commitment to the settlement project in the face of personal anguish. As Inglis illustrates through her grandmother's emotional reaction to the untimely death of a family member, an open and deliberate policy of crying helps the settler woman to cope with this most painful reality of prairie life and to get back to the practical needs of the family farm: after the death of the author's Uncle Marsh,

> Grandmother walked up and down the path between the house and the barn sobbing and crying in the rain.… She refused to be consoled by anyone and said just to leave her by herself, as this was the way she handled grief when her daughter Eunice had died five years earlier, and that she would be better the next day and she was. The grief was still there but she was cried out and was able to function and do the many things that had to be done. (67)

I would suggest that, for many prairie women, crying is an emotional release – a "moodie" outburst – which, although temporarily deviating from the myth of "dauntless optimism," nonetheless ultimately allows her the space and time to re-assert control over – to adapt to – her experiences. Evidence of an experiential reality that exceeds the smooth surface of the myth of "dauntless optimism," tears (of either anger or sadness) are a generational rather than an incapacitating force that allow prairie women to get beyond the considerable difficulties of settlement life. Daughter-authors were very often "privileged witnesses" to their mothers' bouts of crying, an expressive behaviour typically performed in moments of privacy within the domestic world, when male family members were absent from home. For example, describing a time in winter when her father was away from home, in *Pioneering in Alberta* (1951) Jessie Browne Raber notes her mother's position at the intersection of the Moodie/Traill as follows:

> One evening, we knew it was the coldest yet, so Mother said she would help us cut more wood. We children had to haul it by hand from the creek, then Mother and Billy cut it, using the crosscut saw. No one was used to it, but we got by for awhile, until Mother said her hands and feet were about frozen. Going into the house to warm up, she rubbed her hands and jumped up and down to warm her feet, crying all the time, saying they hurt her so. We children felt so bad, we worked hard at the wood cutting and splitting. They were only small trees and we were nearly frozen too, but didn't say anything. We cut until it was nearly dark. Mother got to feeling better, talking about what her relations would think if they only knew what hardships she put up with out in Alberta. But Mother wouldn't write to them about it. (55)

In a moment of privacy, away from the eyes of her husband, Mrs. Browne is able to temporarily succumb to feelings that are unproductive of "dauntless optimism," although we are also given the stoic face that she, like Traill, presents in her letters back Home. Besides being a tool through which she manages to "feel better" and to once again face the "hardships" of prairie life, Mrs.

Browne's bout of crying is also practically productive for, as Raber tells us, her father "stayed around a few days and cut fire wood every minute he had to spare after some of the younger children told him about Mother crying" (56).

A good example of this "moodification" strategy also occurs in Beulah Baldwin's *The Long Trail*, in which the author's mother is fairly consistently represented as a "vital" component of her husband's pioneering project. Indeed, in a chapter titled "Mother's Story," Baldwin represents Olive Freeland as having come from a long line of courageous and independent immigrant women. Given this behavioural heritage, one might well expect Olive Freeland to be represented as an icon worthy of Traill herself; nevertheless, Baldwin ruptures the calm surface idealism of her own text when she honestly represents her mother's periodic lapses into incapability and disaffection with the settlement experience. Helping to run a northern Alberta hotel while waiting for her husband to finish work on their homestead site, Baldwin's mother becomes frustrated by the shame she feels while "having to wait on table in her [pregnant] condition, especially as most of the boarders were men," and so, "one lovely Sunday … Dad suggested to Mother that she escape the noise and confusion of the hotel and accompany him to the homestead where he wanted to repair the fences" (142). As Baldwin continues her anecdote,

> After reaching the cabin, Dad pointed to the far corner of the yard where he would be working within calling distance. Mother decided to rest. With a book in hand, she headed for the small cot in the cabin. But the woods through the open door seemed to beckon to her. She put her book down and walked toward them. Standing at the edge of the clearing, she contemplated the tall trees – untouched except by birds and squirrels, rain and sunlight – the way they had begun in God's mind, tree beside tree, standing at random beneath the blue sky.
>
> Noticing the markings of a trail, she decided to follow it. The trees soon began to thin out allowing the sun to filter through. Ahead, in the bright sunlight, she saw a patch of tall-stemmed wild blue flax swaying in the gentle breeze. Enchanted by this lovely display she picked a few flowers. She stopped to watch birds

> nesting overhead and laughed when she heard herself confiding aloud that she was nesting too. Mother came to another clearing covered with spikes of lavender fireweed and Indian paintbrush. She had been told that they were the first growth to appear after the earth was scorched by fire. She began picking them and soon had a big bouquet, pleased at how well the scarlet paintbrush blended with the lavender fireweed and blue flax.
>
> When she decided to go back to the cabin, she looked for the path but could find no trace of it. She had been drawn to the flowers and had not realized that the path had petered out. After wandering around, she discovered a faint trail and followed it until it branched off. By this time she had lost all sense of direction and began to panic but, remembering Dad's advice, she decided to sit and wait for him to find her. (142–43)

This is a critical scene in Baldwin's text on many levels. Initially, the city girl Olive Freeland seeks the possibility of "escape" within the confines of a book, but her perspective changes when she is "beckoned" by the woods beyond the "cleared" area of her husband's farm. Forgiving for a moment her assumption regarding the spiritual origins of the woods, Freeland's "contemplation" of the "tall trees" which remain "untouched" by human hands forms a clear contrast with the activity of her husband, who repairs fences, or felled trees which no longer create a home place for "birds and squirrels, rain and sunlight." Looking beyond the ordered world of the land survey system of her husband's "clearing," Olive Freeland feels the pull of "randomness" towards emotional escape from her husband's visionary migrations, as seen in her change of focus from the "tall trees" to the trail beneath her feet. Her "enchantment" at the "lovely display" of naturally occurring "wild blue flax" juxtaposes the futuristic focus of the large-scale agricultural pursuits of the land settlement project, as does the lush growth of the natural "clearing" in the woods. More personally, her identification with the "nesting" birds in this space, her psychological awareness of this space as an "untouchable" home place, calls into question her husband's delay in providing such a place for her own comfort and security. Most importantly, in the detail of the "growth" that follows when "the earth

was scorched by fire," we see the possibility that this place and Olive Freeland's recognition of its inherent value will allow for a sort of rebirth, a ritual renewal of self and spiritual strength in a time of personal crisis. After some initial patience with her situation, we are told that Olive Freeland succumbs to tears: "sinking onto the grass, she sobbed out her fear as well as the frustration and tension that had been building up for months. After a few minutes, she wiped her eyes with her petticoat and realized that she felt better" (144). This brief narrative moment might seem to be a less-than-transformative experience, but it is necessary to reiterate the constraints under which settlement memoirists write, given an agricultural and heritage context in which farmers and their wives are posited as optimistically and heroically "proving up" their participation in the homesteading project. Even the simple act of representing a woman's tears, especially when they are a result of having "lost all sense of direction" (143) with regards to the beaten path of cultural expectations, can be read as "confrontational." Indeed, the facility of a temporary "moodification" for restoring the settler woman's equanimity is apparent in the above scene from Baldwin's text and, in a later period of emotional crisis, when a relative's visit has resulted in "great waves of homesickness" to "sweep over" her and Olive Freeland has her husband (who becomes an unsuspecting emotional midwife) once again drive her to the homestead cabin, for she "wanted to be alone to cry out her frustration" (152). Once again entering the woods, she feels "her faith strengthened" and is "resolved to hang on, no matter how bad the storm."

In *With the West in Her Eyes*, Kathleen Strange, too, undergoes a process of "moodification" as a means to regain her resolve about undertaking prairie life. When Strange and her new husband had originally planned to leave England after the war, they had decided to repatriate to Hawaii, where Harry Strange had previously worked in "a position of responsibility as general manager of a large Honolulu company" (4). However, Strange's husband had been injured in the war and was told by a doctor to "take up some form of outdoor life, preferably farming, in a more bracing climate than that of Hawaii" (8), and they eventually decided upon Canada. Almost immediately upon her arrival at their new Alberta home, the author is confronted by the reality of a rather rudimentary lifestyle: having been told previously by her husband "we haven't

any house at all – yet" (18), Strange soon learns that her family will be living in "a small wooden shack" and sleeping in "some five or six granaries" located behind that shack (19). Feeling the disorientation of having come from an urban environment in England, Strange's reaction seems reasonable:

> After some more or less disjointed conversation – for we were all feeling strange – I sought the opportunity of retiring to my own granary-bedroom to commence unpacking.
>
> Once there, I confess, I gave way to an outburst of tears. I thought of how by this time we might have been well on our way to Hawaii. How thrilled I had been at the idea of going there in the first place! My husband had painted many glamorous word pictures of the Islands for me. And now he had brought me to *this*! Disappointment, resentment, and an active dislike of my new home fought together within me. I would be no heroine, I told myself, swallowing my own feelings for the sake of my husband's future. I would tell him just what I thought of the place, and of him for bringing me to it. (22)

Given that (as indicated earlier in this chapter) elsewhere in her memoir Strange represents herself as having an inherently Traill personality type (292), her outright rejection of Ruthian resolve here, as well as her inability to maintain "dauntless optimism" in the face of the first obstacle she encounters with life in Canada, suggests that the process of "adaptation" is not as seamless as cultural constructions of settlement women might suggest. For Strange it comes easier than for others, though, as we see when her husband comes into the room and she writes, "to my utter amazement I realized suddenly that he himself actually *liked*" their living conditions, which makes her hold back her critique. Later in that first day, Strange and her husband take a walk "to a piece of high land to the west of the house" so that they can survey their "domain" (24), and the author represents her return to coherence with the Ruthian script:

> "It *is* beautiful," I thought to myself, "but it's, oh, so different!" I wondered if I would ever be able to endure it all and to settle down. Harry's voice broke in upon my thoughts.
>
> "There's something rather romantic about building from the ground up, isn't there?" he said. "We're starting off with practically nothing. We'll put up a fine house and good buildings. We'll look after our surroundings as well as our crops. One day we'll have a garden and maybe, right here where we stand, a tennis court. Of course, it will take time and patience and a lot of hard work and fighting. Yes, fighting, for if there is one thing I've already learned about farming, it is that whatever else a man wins out of the land, at least he can be sure of one thing, and that is a struggle. There's always the challenge to fight. And I love a good fight!"
>
> Despite myself I felt my own spirit catching some of his enthusiasm. I'd fight side by side with him in this battle for a home and happiness. It should be a partnership in every sense of the word. (27–28)

Certainly Strange's invocation of the word "partnership" here suggests something more equalitarian than the note of obedience usually struck in references to the figure of Ruth, and that phrase "Despite myself" sits there in a subtly confrontational manner that moves readers beyond a mere stereotyped understanding of the "cheerful helpmate" image.

Ferne Nelson's mother certainly found it difficult to maintain a cheerful face, especially on a cold and windy "washday" in March: as the author begins Chapter Two of *Barefoot on the Prairie: Memories of Life on a Prairie Homestead* (1989),

> How had we got into this mess? Banished to the bedroom, our faces streaked with tears, we scraped away the frost on the little window and watched Mama struggling to hang the clothes on the line outside. The garments froze as her stiffened fingers fastened the wooden pegs. The long underwear and rigid petticoats

> whipped back against her body as she patiently pushed them back, stopping now and then to beat her cold hands against her sides. Poor Mama. Life was hard on this prairie farm. She worked so hard, and today she looked so tired and worn. How could we have made fun of her just because she had become fat lately? (4)

A rather odd opening to a chapter titled "We Wanted Ice Cream," and one that is clearly meant to erupt through the romantic titular image of childhood joys on a prairie homestead. Life for Myrtle Alexander is obviously less than romantic, as seen in another of the author's descriptions: "Her hair, which had broken loose from the combs that were meant to restrain it, hung limply about her face. She pushed it back with a soapy hand and scrubbed vigorously at a grey sock" (4–5). We are told that the author and her sister are busy drawing pictures on the frosty windows and trying to stay busy because "Mama had been irritable and impatient all day, and with the washing to do, had had no time to invent the usual little games" (5). As the scene continues, Myrtle Alexander's "unrestrained" physical appearance takes on psychological dimensions:

> We continued our drawing, moving over to the other unblemished window pane. Ve drew a very fat lady with a big stomach and wispy hair. Underneath it she printed a word that I could read: MAMA. I laughed. It did look like Mama in her big apron with her hair all messy. We both dissolved in giggles. Mama looked up from the washboard and laughed too. She was happy to see that our boredom had disappeared.
>
> Ve flushed with pleasure. She was amusing her little sister and showing off the sophistication she had acquired in a year at school.
>
> "Mama is fat!"
>
> "Mama is fat!" I echoed. I looked at my mother fearfully, sensing that I shouldn't have said such an outrageous thing. Mama hadn't heard us above the monotonous scrubbing.
>
> "Mama looks like a fat old cow!"
>
> "Mama looks like a fat old cow!"

> We marched around the kitchen, turning the words into a sing-song chant."Mama is fat! Mama is fat, fat, fat!"
>
> Mama stopped scrubbing. A look of disbelief chilled her pretty face. Then she looked at the picture on the window.
>
> Two girls were slapped hard. Two little girls and their mother burst into tears. Mama went back to the tub, her tears falling into the soapy water. We huddled in the corner, howling. We weren't slapped very often. (5)

Looking back, Nelson realizes that her mother's tears are the product of something more than simply the naive taunting of bored little children; indeed, the sympathetic reader of Nelson's text can feel the tension in this scene mounting from the woman's "struggling to hang the clothes on the line outside," to the "vigorous" and "monotonous" scrubbing on the washboard, to the extra weight (physical and psychological) of performing these tasks with a "big stomach" – the import of which most readers must by now be aware – and right through to the proverbial straw that broke the pioneer woman's resolve, the taunting voices of girl children growing up in a culture that will inevitably try to consign them to the same experiences as their mother. The effect of Myrtle Alexander's crying spree upon the family unit is ultimately solidifying for, after supper that night, Nelson and her sister help with the cleanup and their father attends to bringing the laundry in from outside (6). Meanwhile, Myrtle's maternal equanimity appears restored, especially after the chapter ends with her having given birth to a healthy baby boy, whom the Nelson girls would happily trade for "new shoes, bananas, ice cream – anything to a new baby brother!" (9).[26]

Part of the problem with a woman's crying in the present moment was that it provided tangible proof that her optimism about the settlement process was not entirely "dauntless." Perhaps even less desirable, however, was the act of looking or, worse yet, going back; of grieving the lost past "back Home" and

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26 For more examples of the presence and facility of settler women's tears, see also Hiemstra 258; Holmes 61–62; Hopkins 56–57; McClung 77; and Roberts 58, 202–3.

regretting the decision to leave that Home. According to Traill, a debilitating attachment to the past was the norm of experience for female emigrants, as she notes when speaking of a group of settlers with whom she was acquainted both in Canada and in Britain:

> The men are in good spirits, and say "they shall in a few years have many comforts about them that they never could have got at home, had they worked late and early; but they complain that their wives are always pining for home, and lamenting that ever they crossed the seas." This seems to be the general complaint with all classes; the women are discontented and unhappy. Few enter with their whole heart into a settler's life. They miss the little domestic comforts they had been used to enjoy; they regret the friends and relations they left in the old country; and they cannot endure the loneliness of the backwoods. (90)

Traill goes on to assure her readers that she does not herself share this "general" trend:

> This prospect does not discourage me: I know I shall find plenty of occupation within-doors, and I have sources of enjoyment when I walk abroad that will keep me from being dull. Besides, have I not a right to be cheerful and contented for the sake of my beloved partner? The change is not greater for me than him; and if for his sake I have voluntarily left home, and friends, and country, shall I therefore sadden him by useless regrets?

Expressing one's "regrets," or "pining for home," continued to be viewed as a potential threat right up to the period of prairie settlement. In Harold Bindloss's *Prescott of Saskatchewan*, for example, the title hero says to heroine Muriel Hurst, "Do you know the secret of making colonization a success? In a way, it's a hard truth, but it's this – there must be no looking back. The old ties must be cut loose once for all; a man must think of the land in which he prospers as his home" (274).

Unlike Traill, Moodie makes little effort to hide her numerous acts of looking back, as seen in one of the most emotional experiences of her backwoods life:

> After breakfast, Moodie and Wilson rode into the town; and when they returned at night brought several long letters for me. Ah! those first kind letters from home! Never shall I forget the rapture with which I grasped them – the eager, trembling haste with which I tore them open, while the blinding tears which filled my eyes hindered me for some minutes from reading a word which they contained. (121–22)

The poignancy of this moment has resonance for our reading of Traill's text, for while she may well have been writing letters home to assure friends and family of her own "cheerful" experience of settlement life, it is important to recognize that Traill, too, is continually receiving letters, so that her "dauntlessly optimistic" prescription for emigration is actually based upon the act of looking back and not the renunciation of family and community as a measure of female "endurance." Indeed, I would suggest the facility of looking back psychologically/emotionally – of keeping the image of "back Home" always within present range – for allowing the female emigrant to settle into the new place and keep her from the really threatening physical act of "going back"; of truly giving up on the prospect of western settlement. As prairie poet Ethel Kirk Grayson wrote in *Unbind the Sheaves: A Prairie Memoir* (1964): "[T]he unpardonable sin, written in the creed of a man with houses and streets and wheat in his blood, was in going back: and in letting nature, the snow, the wind, the drought, the hail, outwit you" (22). Elizabeth Lewthwaite subtly makes this point when writing about visiting her brothers' residence on the prairies with her sister in 1901: "At the end of twelve months our *ménage* had to undergo reconstitution, as my sister had to return to England, partly on private matters, but partly, truth compels me to admit, because the life did not suit her. The atmosphere so bracing to me, and, indeed, to the majority who go there, had an entirely reverse effect upon her" (714). The situation seems not to have changed much in recent years, for in the popular imagination it is most

often those women who endured all the negatives of prairie life who secure our greatest admiration: as Barry Broadfoot writes about women's participation in *The Pioneer Years 1895–1914*, "for every woman who quit, there were thousands who stayed with their men and took it" (199).

Some of the memoirists studied here include in their recollections negative images of women going back Home rather than staying and "taking it." For example, on their journey west from Winnipeg, Nellie McClung's family meets up with "a tragic family who had turned back, discouraged and beaten" (58). Specifically we are told in *Clearing* that "it was the wife who had broken down," and certainly McClung's narrative attention to the woman's clothing indicates her temperamental unsuitability for the role of "dauntlessly optimistic" pioneer: "She wore a black silk dress and lace shawl and a pair of fancy shoes, all caked with mud. She would have been a pretty woman if she would only stop crying." In explanation of her attempt to penetrate the western landscape, the woman makes the following confession: "I want to go back to [my mother]; she never wanted me to come, but I thought it would be fun, and Willard [her husband] was so crazy to get land of his own." The meeting with this woman – this failed Ruthian figure – is potentially threatening to the Mooneys' own immigration project, for, as McClung writes about her mother's reaction to them, her "zeal began to flag, 'Take her back,' she said to Willard, 'she's not the type that makes a pioneer'." However, McClung clearly counts her mother among those women who do "make a pioneer," as seen when the other couple moves on and the author represents her mother getting to the heart of the matter by saying that poor Willard "made the mistake many good men have made – he married a painted doll, instead of a woman" (59). In *Of Us and the Oxen*, Sarah Roberts provides more than one image of the danger of going back, seemingly as a means to highlight her own powers of endurance despite strong feelings of homesickness. Roberts's husband was a doctor in the United States before emigration to the Canadian prairies, where he is quickly put to service by fellow settlers in need of medical attention. At one point, a woman neighbour requests that Dr. Roberts attend upon a Mrs. Rosenberg, for it would appear that the latter woman "was not in her right mind, her obsession being that she must go back to her home in Michigan to spend the coming winter. This was in spite of the fact that she had spent the

preceding winter there and that her husband had sacrificed much to send her" (135). While Roberts states that her doctor/husband deems Mrs. Rosenberg to be "a very sick woman" and "diagnose[s] her trouble as typhoid, complicated by kidney trouble, uremic poisoning and dropsy," nevertheless the author herself clearly identifies with a different psychological cause for the woman's desire to return Home; that is, "her case was another sad one. From what I heard, I think that she could not adapt herself to the conditions of life on the homestead."

Just over half way through *Upon a Sagebrush Harp* (1969), Nell Wilson Parsons reveals a little secret lurking just behind her mother's seeming adherence to the myth of "dauntless optimism," a secret regarding the family's emigration to the Canadian prairies. First the author explains her mother's presence in North America with a very typical emigration story; however, she goes on to indicate a little wrinkle in the typical narrative:

> Though we had come north from Iowa, where Rena and I had been born, my parents were English. Cecil had been born in England. I had better explain how that happened. Alone in the world at seventeen, Papa had come to the States, where he worked on Iowa farms for ten years. Returning to England on a visit, he met and married Mama. They returned to rent an Iowa farm.
>
> At the end of three years their prospects were excellent. They could have bought the farm they rented. But Mama, homesick for her family, wanted to go back to England. They sold everything and returned.
>
> As so often happens, returning to a place enhanced in memory proved cruelly disappointing. In two weeks Mama realized they had made a great mistake. However, another baby was coming, and it takes a great deal of money to get a family across an ocean, and half across a continent. It took them three years to save enough to leave England a second time. (88)

Annie Wilson's physical return Home as a spur to eventual adaptation to prairie life is the rare case, for it is more usually the ability to look back, to

keep Home within the heart and mind, that acts as a stimulus to psychological endurance. Indeed, Mary Eleanor Elliott Wilkins begins to look back towards Home the moment that she arrives in Saskatchewan in 1904, a fact that Marjorie Campbell chooses to highlight rather than obscure, making it function ultimately as a personality strength in *The Silent Song of Mary Eleanor*. We see this in the author's description of her mother watching her husband walk away from the boarding house at which she will stay until their move out to the family homestead:

> Two days later when he left at dawn to inspect the quarter section, she watched him stride north along the rutted trail, scarcely able to recognize his sturdy figure in the unfamiliar breeches and high boots. She had never before seen him with a pack on his back and the double-barreled gun in the crook of his arm, except in the African albums. The very strangeness made her feel lonely. When, almost out of sight on the horizon, he turned and waved his hat, the loneliness overwhelmed her. Desolate as she had never been, she turned and rushed back to the boarding house and upstairs to the children who were just awakening.
>
> Missing the rocking chair she had always sat in while nursing her babies, now she braced herself on the edge of the bed. When she had unbuttoned her blouse and cradled the infant against her breast she cuddled the toddler close in her other arm. She told herself that of course he would be back again in a week or ten days, as he had promised. (8)

Her feelings of "strangeness" at the moment of her husband's departure inspire Mary Eleanor to engage in a routine maternal occupation as an act of connection with the past and its comforts. Later in that same day, writes Campbell, her mother realizes that she will have to "face up to her terrifying loneliness, not easy for a woman accustomed to city life and the close proximity of a warm group of family and friends. She longed for them all, but particularly for her sisters." Remembering her past life of comfort and community makes her mother question, "Why had they left it all for this raw, empty, lonely land?"

(9), but that questioning, after a good night's sleep, is ultimately productive of a renewed resolve: "That early morning she wrestled with her fears and her emotions, 'stood herself up in a corner' as her north country-lowland Scots ancestors would have said." Realizing that "her aversion to leaving home" (10) had prevented her from fully understanding her husband's desire to emigrate, she takes symbolic action to help her face the future:

> Now she was in Canada, Western Canada, and the new life had commenced. Though she sensed that she was poor stuff for a settler's wife, for the first time she wanted to know what he might expect of her.
>
> Quietly, so as not to waken the children, she got out of bed. At the narrow, oak-veneered washstand she poured cold water from the enameled iron jug and in the basin made her first attempt to wash away some of the worst handicaps of her incongruous past.[27]

An even fuller retreat from the philosophy of "dauntless optimism" is a woman's descent into some form of mental illness, the pejorative for which is "madness," a kind of polar opposition to Traill's "cheerfulness." I should note that I am not concerned here with demonstrating actual clinical forms of mental illness, but rather seek to discover those images of women that suggest varying degrees of psychological "incongruity," to borrow a phrase from Campbell, with the myth of "dauntless optimism," from temporary feelings of depression to severe mental breakdowns classified as "insanity." Traill's ability to remain positive stems in large part from her textual philosophy of "adaptation/adoption," a philosophy that contains an interesting paradox. On the one hand, she maintains a panoramic vision of future prosperity in the backwoods of Canada (as a means of personal and cultural inspiration to "dauntless optimism"): for example, everywhere she goes, she looks for the "charms of civilization" which she knew in her home place, such as "open fields, pleasant farms, and fine flourishing orchards, with green pastures, where abundance of

27 For more examples of women looking back Home, see also Ebbers 8; Gilead *passim*; Hiemstra *passim*; Holmes *passim*; Middleton 18; and Strange 135, 228–29.

cattle were grazing" (54). On the other hand, she simultaneously narrows her focus to the ocular minutia required by the "hobby" of botany, ostensibly as a means of adapting her vision of herself as a British gentlewoman to the present and often untenable situation of life beyond the margins of "civilization," but also as a defence mechanism against the "monotony in the long and unbroken line of woods, which insensibly inspires a feeling of gloom almost touching on sadness" (63). In this way does Traill both maintain her sense of enthusiasm about the cultural importance of participation in land settlement and avoid becoming overwhelmed by "the gloom of the wood" (70) – avoid, that is, "getting bushed." Given that the word "gloom" not only means "darkness; obscurity" but also "melancholy; despondency" (*OEED*), Traill's ocular avoidance of her rather claustrophobic surroundings suggests a fear of psychological weakness, something to which other emigrants become easy prey.

In contrast to her sister, we might say that Moodie "can't see the forest for the trees": that is, bogged down by the often terrifying present reality of life in a new place, Moodie is unable to wholly sustain an optimistic vision of the future. Indeed, a defining moment for the author comes while still on board ship when, after judging that Gross Isle "looks a perfect paradise at this distance," she is advised by the captain, "Don't be too sanguine, Mrs. Moodie; many things look well at a distance which are bad enough when near" (28). Given that "sanguine" means "optimistic; confident" (*OEED*), the captain's advice has repercussions for Moodie's ability to uphold Traill's long-range and idyllic settlement vision. Unlike Traill, Moodie most certainly enters fully (physically and psychologically) into the bush, a place in which she experiences both the terrors of settlement life and the spiritual peace of a close association with the natural world. Much has been made of how certain character sketches in Moodie's text relate to and reveal certain aspects of the author's own experiences, and perhaps one of the most important self-reflexive characters is Brian, the Still-Hunter, who is described as being "moody," "sour, morose, queer," and "as mad as a March hare!" (176, 175). As Helen Buss points out, Brian, amongst other things, "represents the terror of being 'bushed'" (*Mapping* 91), a reality that Moodie herself experiences on at least a couple of occasions. Although their specific circumstances are distinct, Brian is an explicit example of the madness, or "cabin-fever," which can result when a person is exposed

to the extreme isolation of bush life and Moodie's immediate affinity for this man becomes a measure of her own faltering psychological stability (*Roughing* 182–87). As Traill well knew, Moodie certainly had a personality characterized by something less than "dauntless optimism": in a reflective mood after her sister's death, Traill wrote of Moodie that "her facility for rhyme was great and her imagination vivid and romantic, tinged with gloom and grandeur.… As is often found in persons of genius, she was often elated and often depressed, easily excited by passing events, unable to control emotions caused by either pain or pleasure" (qtd. in Gray 337).

For the memoir author who is also writing as a daughter/grand-daughter, representing female madness is a way of staying true to the reality of the difficult conditions of homesteading life, but it might also be a way of documenting some sense of personal loss in terms of a mother's psychological presence. As Faragher suggests, one of the things that "women believed and expected of themselves" was the need to be "faithful and ever-present mothers" (174), so that by exposing what might be termed as "'failed mother' narratives," including "stories of those mothers who go crazy" (Brandt 162), we again manage to get to, as suggested in the final epigraph to this chapter, "the other side of a well-known tale." The spectre of "madness" is invoked again and again in contemporary settlement literature, usually as a warning to those who might not possess an appropriately "pioneering" character, one adaptable to the specific conditions of prairie isolation. In the June 18, 1913, edition of the *Moose Jaw Evening Times*, for example, Barbara Wylie writes,

> [W]e are told that Canada is a woman's paradise. It is nothing of the kind. A woman's life in Canada is extremely hard, and lonely, and it is because of their loneliness that the asylums there are being filled with women, who are driven mad by the loneliness. They are caged in a "shack" often miles from any populated district. Turn your back on Canada." (qtd. in Rasmussen et al. 22)

Similarly, Elizabeth Mitchell's 1915 *Impressions of Early Twentieth Century Prairie Communities* included mention of the effects of "cabin fever":

> The prairie madness is perfectly recognized and very common still.… A woman alone in the house all day may find the silence deadly; in the wheat-farming stage there may not even be a beast about the place. Her husband may be tired at night, and unwilling to "hitch up" and drive her out "for a whimsy"; or the husband may be willing and sympathetic, but she may grow shy and diffident, and not care to make the effort to tidy herself up and go to see a neighbour – any neighbour, just to break the monotony. Then fancies come, and suspicions, and queer ways, and at last the young Mounted Policeman comes to the door, and carries her away to the terrible vast "Sanatorium" that hangs above the Saskatchewan. There is still that kind of loneliness on the prairie. (150–51)[28]

Certainly the geography of homesteading on the Canadian prairies was widely recognized as a direct cause of human isolation, for the land survey system that parcelled the prairies into 160-acre quarter-sections inevitably resulted in farms being widely spaced apart.[29] The psychological effect of this system is clearly gendered, as seen in Eliane Leslau Silverman's comment that "the staff at the mental hospital at Ponoka had a label, back in those years, for the women they admitted. They called them 'prairie women'" ("Women" 95).

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28 The prairie woman's "grow[ing] shy and diffident" as a symbol of her psychological retreat from "dauntless optimism" is also seen in Frederick Philip Grove's *Fruits of the Earth* (1933) when Ruth says to her husband, "Look what this life has made of me. When I am to talk to any one but the children, I am nervous. Rather than go to town and show myself, I stay at home, day in day out, year in and year out" (111). Similarly, in *The Silent Song of Mary Eleanor*, Marjorie Campbell says of her mother's response to the prospect of entertaining guests in her home that she "lost her nerve": "That entire year in which she had never seen another woman had left her diffident and self-conscious, embarrassed because she had so little to offer. She needed all the gallant reassurance father could muster to restore her poise and her innate love of people" (44).

29 That the geography of isolation is culturally imposed is clear when looking at "other" patterns of settlement. For example, Emily Ferguson notes the difference of the "communistic" system of settlement adopted by the group of people who comprised the "Doukhobor village of Vosnesenia": as she states: "[T]here are some very apparent benefits in this Doukhobor method, too. The people are not isolated on lonely steadings miles and miles from any one. This loneliness is undoubtedly the greatest trial our settlers have to endure" (*Janey* 48).

That North American settlement was an arduous process, placing great psychological and physical demands upon individuals, especially women, is an oft-repeated assertion, but I would like to leave room for Ann Leger Anderson's suggestion that "this psychological dimension of oppression needs study.… Allowed to be 'emotional,' to express feelings more freely than men, some women did just that, and were perceived as being 'on the verge of insanity,' but these expressions of confinement, isolation, and despair acted as a catharsis" ("Saskatchewan" 76). While I would assert that the Ruthian image of the female emigrant (as represented by Traill) does not necessarily "allow" women "to be 'emotional,'" I also want to borrow from Anderson here and stress (similar to my discussion of crying and the act of looking back) that women's narrative deviations from the myth of "dauntless optimism" should not be read as evidence of their failure to commit to the settlement project; rather, women's "expressions of confinement, isolation, and despair" become a necessary and "cathartic" part of the whole and complex process of female survival. "Madness," then, whatever form it takes, becomes one of the experiences through which the memoirist is able to complicate the Pioneer Woman image. When Barbara (Hunter) Anderson chooses to write about the effects of prairie isolation on the settler woman, she does so in a chapter of *Two White Oxen: A Perspective of Early Saskatoon 1874–1905* (1972) titled "Storm Bound," which is written very dramatically, reading almost like fiction, with her mother and father referred to by their first names, Margaret and William. Anderson's narrative certainly displays an eclectic array of narrative styles anyway, but one wonders what it is about this particular remembrance that might have motivated the author's recourse to the fictional mode. The story begins with a traditional image of prairie fiction; however, very quickly Anderson moves into a rather unorthodox – physical, although not psychological – positioning of her female character:

> Snow! Snow! Snow! Its glistening whiteness reached away to the horizon, with nothing to break the monotony of its rigid waves on the whole expanse of vision.
>
> From her point of observation on the top of her shanty home with its adjacent outbuildings and hay stack, there was no sign of

> other habitation. A wave of intense loneliness swept through the whole being of Mrs. Margaret Hunter as with a sigh, that was almost a sob, she murmured, "Oh, why left I my hame – why, oh why, did I ever consent to come to this wilderness." (94)

The author's mother goes to visit her husband, who is busy working in the stable, and the author recreates their dialogue as follows: having been asked about her outdoor presence, Margaret Hunter replies,

> "Yes, I wanted a breath of fresh air, and oh, how I long for a change; how I hate the monotony of this shut-in winter time; no chance to see a face but our own, it is so long since I've seen anyone," she continued.
>
> "Feeling a bit blue are ye?" her husband asked. "I'd think you would be content with all our nice smart children to see and hear every day, and me having my Sundays at home and not having to leave you and them to go to work as I used to do back in Ontario. Just think! living in our own house, on our own land, and being my own boss. Isn't that worth something – don't you think?'"

It is interesting that, while Margaret Hunter merely suggests the desire for a temporary change of scenery and condition, her husband responds by first diminishing her emotional distress as mere "blueness," then questioning the legitimacy of her sense of isolation on the basis of the presence of children and a husband, before defending the decision to emigrate to the prairies by using the typical masculinist images of propagandists ("living in our own house, on our own land"), which lead to the announcement of the chief masculine motivation ("and being my own boss"). Therein lies the problem, which Margaret Hunter recognizes when she replies by saying, "Oh, yes that's all very well, for you get out to see folks sometimes." As the author continues her less than stoic portrayal of her mother, Margaret says, "'I suppose it will be summer before I can go anywhere and then I won't want to go likely,' said Margaret chokingly, as the loneliness overcame her" (95). In response to his wife's enunciation of her distress, William Hunter suggests that the two of them go alone, leaving

the children to care for the family farm and each other, to Saskatoon for a meeting of "the Central Saskatchewan Agricultural Society" (98), to which proposition Margaret Hunter finally agrees. While her husband is in the meeting and Margaret is visiting a friend in town, a "blizzard" begins, but "the ladies were enjoying the evening together, unheeding the snow that was coming down heavily when their husbands returned from the meeting" (99). For a brief moment in time, then, the author's mother enjoys complete self-absorption in the warm circle of female community, but anxiety soon sets in as the parents' journey home to the children is delayed by the poor weather conditions. They have to wait for one whole day; then, with the temperature registered at "48 below!" (100), they head home. Upon their return, when they have assurance that all the children all well, Margaret Hunter is able once again to see clear to the optimistic side of her life on the prairies: "After the children were in bed and asleep, Margaret said to her husband, 'This little sod house is the dearest spot on earth to me'" (102).

Beulah Baldwin alludes to "cabin fever" in *The Long Trail* when she writes about her family's less than ideal living conditions in northern Alberta, overlooking the Smoky and Peace rivers, during the winter months of 1916–17:

> It was the middle of December when Dad moved us into a wooden shack close to where our tent had been. The weather had turned very cold, with strong winds coming off the river threatening to lift the tent from its platform. With the baby expected in a few weeks, we needed a better space. The shack, hastily built, was without insulation except for tar paper on the inside. This made it look dark and gloomy, especially with a thick layer of frost covering the windows, but at least we could now move in some of our furniture. (188–89)

Despite the set-up for a Moodie episode, though, Baldwin comments on the fact that her mother does not lose her equanimity in such surroundings:

> I can not imagine how my mother kept her sanity during those long, cold, winter months ahead – cooped up, everything jammed

> in together, along with two active children and a new baby born in January. When the temperature dipped to thirty and forty below, we must have been confined to the bed, as the floor was freezing cold. The worst feature of the tent, according to Mother, was a dripping ceiling during sudden thaws. (189)

A few pages (and a couple of years) later, however, after the family had built a new cabin and started to make minimal economic progress, Baldwin shares a scene with her readers that shows the ill effects upon her mother of a life of toil and successive winters being cooped up:

> We children had no idea how worn and depressed Mother had become. But it was not until Grandma and Edward left that a feeling of restless dissatisfaction engulfed my Mother. We returned home from school one wintery day to discover that Mother had left, taking Warren and Marjory with her. Dad said that she needed a rest and had gone to be with Grandma in Calgary. In response to our questioning, Dad told us in a cross voice that we were too young to understand. We were frightened, and when Junior cried in the night I crawled into bed with my brothers and, although we shed a few tears, we were soon asleep.
>
> Our days were mostly bleak and dreary during that time. Not only did we need our mother, we also missed our brother and baby sister. To make matters worse, our good-natured father became morose and harsh, expecting us to cook and do many of Mother's tasks. He even spanked Carlton for not sweeping the rug properly. We hated this task, as clouds of dust filled the air while we swept. Mother was probably away for only a few weeks, but it seemed a long time to us. I was shocked to discover years later, when she tried to explain why she changed her mind and came back, that she had intended to leave for good. If we children had known she had intended staying away, we would have been devastated. (221)

Baldwin's own sense of personal loss as daughter-author is apparent in this scene, and yet it is clearly important to her to document her mother's momentary incoherence with the myth of "dauntless optimism." What brings Olive Freeland back is that one of the children she takes with her, Warren, suffers from a bout of "tonsillitis," which "saved her from making a terrible mistake. When he became delirious from a high fever and she thought she was going to lose him, she realized how much she needed her family" (221). That, and the letter that she receives from one of the sons she leaves behind, saying that "if she was not back soon we would all be as thin as stove pipes," makes her realize her crucial role in the immediate survival of her family, and so she returns, writes Baldwin, thus "setting our world aright again." In a bittersweet retrospective moment at the end of this scene, Baldwin provides her reader with her enduring memory of her mother, one which seems to me to hover in the gap between ideal and real:

> Looking back, I often picture Mother sewing by the fire, the soft lamplight making a golden halo of her hair. For years she had dressed us from the trousseau she had hardly worn. With four pregnancies in six years, she had not much use for lovely garments. (221–22)

Another factor of women's lives that caused emotional distress is the fact that, especially in the early years of homesteading, women often found themselves left alone for a variety of reasons: indeed, as Nanci Langford asserts regarding her study of prairie women,

> One of the unexpected outcomes of this research was to discover the extent to which women lived and worked alone on prairie farms and ranches throughout the settlement period. Popular imagery of the homesteading couple describes them working side by side in the fields or the barn, or getting together frequently throughout the work day to consult and support each other and share meals together. While this did happen for most of the women and men in the group studied, it cannot be considered a consistent way of

> life for first generation homesteading couples. The frequency of men's absences away from the homestead, and often for long periods of time, is astonishing. ("First Generation" 73)

Marjorie Grace Johannson confirms this reality in *The Pink House on the Hill* (1986) when she notes that

> Lack of money, for many newcomers made it necessary for men and even young boys to leave their homes and families a few months of the year they tried to get work on the railroads, in logging camps, or any job where they could earn money to purchase the necessities of life. While the men were away, women and children were left to face the hardships, loneliness and difficulties of every day living on a new homestead. (92–93)

Left alone with her new baby in a cabin on a homestead in the Peace River country in 1929, Ida Scharf Hopkins struggles with the spectre of "madness" when her husband has to work elsewhere in order to supplement the often tenuous farm family economy: as she writes in *To the Peace River Country and On* (1973),

> In the later part of summer Bill got a chance to work at a small sawmill in Sunset Prairie, about thirty miles away. It meant of course that I would have to stay alone with our baby, but we needed the money. For the first time I realized our complete isolation. There was no one within at least four miles, and no roads through the bush, just trails. We had built on the bank of the river, actually at the top of a cliff, or what was called a "cutbank" above an old trail used in the Klondike days called "White Mans Crossing". The river was cold and clear, and the source of our water but it was a long piece down. The hill sloped up from the back of the house, so no matter which way I looked it was either side hill or trees. Very pretty, but I soon discovered very lonely.

> A roving band of Indian ponies soon discovered our haystacks and moved in. Our pole fence was no match for their cunning. During the day I could cope with them, but they soon learned to come at night. I listened for the crack of poles and ran out with sticks, stones, and curses to try and chase them away. In the day time I dressed the baby up, put her in a box to keep her warm, and started in to try and repair the fence with haywire, pliers, and nails. The hay was very precious to us because it was the winter supply for the horses. Night after night it was the same routine. Some times the horses won; sometimes I won.
>
> It was nearly a month before Bill got home again. By this time I was nearly "stir crazy". I don't know whether it was more from loneliness or anger at the horses. Anyway he came back with more new ideas. (29–30)

Hopkins's use of the phrase "stir crazy" and her reluctance to attribute that form of distress to simply the spectre of "loneliness" potentially makes less severe what probably was a frightening experience, a reality that begins to leak through Hopkins's generally cheerful surface narrative with her final comment about her husband returning with "more new ideas," a comment that holds her husband accountable for having provided some less than stellar experiences up to this point. However, one of the "new ideas" proves valuable for Hopkins's emotional survival: referring to a male neighbour, she writes,

> He had married and was coming back, so now Mr. Bedell was moving his wife and three boys back to his own homestead in the Little Buffalo Valley. Land next to him had been closed to homesteading, but was about to open up. It was not so isolated and the soil was good. We would have neighbours. They planned on mutual help. Bill would help him clear land, etc. in return for the use of machinery we didn't have. His wife and I were already good friends and each liked the idea of having a 'woman neighbour.' There was no school as yet so I was to start the boys on school

> work. We made our decision. We abandoned the first homestead and gambled on the new land. (30)

Nevertheless, with her husband finding it necessary to take work "at the mill in the winter" (35), Hopkins again experiences isolation and loneliness:

> The days in the winter were very short. It was dark until nearly ten in the morning and by four in the afternoon. One time I ran out of coal oil for the lamps when I was alone. I had to get everything done in the daylight hours and then spend the rest of the time in the darkness. I tried opening the stove door, it helped but it was impossible to read or do any handwork. Even though I was warm and comfortable and had lots to eat, the nights were a million years long. The darkness and the deadly silence nearly got to me. At the end of the week when Bill got home and brought the oil I don't know if I was more glad to see him or the five gallon can of coal oil. (36)

The force of Hopkins's suggestion that "the darkness and the deadly silence nearly got to me" is blunted when she, very typically, finishes with the re-instatement of a cheerful surface narrative by ending the passage with a joke.

In the case of one memoir, a physical disability might partly be read as an outward manifestation of a psychological disability (or at least disinclination) to adapt to the homesteading project, and partly as a manifestation of the emotional incapacitation that occurs as a result of conditions of extreme isolation. In *Of Us and the Oxen*, Sarah Roberts does not scruple to mention the frequently debilitating migraine headaches that force her to withdraw periodically from participation in her family's undertaking. From the beginning, the fifty-four-year-old Roberts makes clear her disaffection for the isolated conditions of land settlement, especially as she is the only woman in her family of five who emigrate to Canada. Her dismay regarding her situation is exacerbated by the fact that she finds herself, especially during the winters, "constantly confined" (65) within her modest sod home. She openly confronts the inherent inequality of the traditional division of labour along gender lines

when she points out the key difference between her own and her husband's physical – and hence, psychological – condition. Reflecting on a visit from her daughter and grand-daughter, she writes:

> Alice's visit during the summer meant more to me than I could ever tell. The distance between us and our dear ones never afterward seemed to me so great. And then it was worth so much to me to have a companion in my work. Papa almost always had one of the boys with him – indeed, he hardly ever worked alone – and if by chance they were all away for a few hours, he plainly showed the depression that comes from loneliness; but I worked by myself most of the time. (125–26)

This reflection on the psychological demands of being alone for great lengths of time relates to the headaches from which she suffers throughout her homesteading experience. In fact, towards the end of her memoir, Roberts provides an interesting anecdote that illustrates a complex relationship between her headaches and the extreme isolation that is part of her homesteading experience. However, before she goes into the anecdote itself, she provides the following qualification:

> Now, because this story doesn't put me in a very favorable light, and because I want to be fair, even to myself, I will preface it by telling of conditions which perhaps might be thought of as extenuating circumstances, even if they did not excuse my conduct.
>
> All through these years on the homestead I had had the same dreadful headaches that I had had all my life, but I think they were even more severe than they had previously been and lasted longer, for they usually kept me in bed for two days and unfitted me for any work for at least one more. Of course, at these times, Papa and the boys had to do the housework. (249)

There is at least the possibility here that Roberts's worsening headaches upon her arrival in Alberta, and upon her discovery of the emotional distress caused

by the sometimes extreme conditions of isolation, have a psychological component. Certainly her distaste for her domestic routine (made evident elsewhere in the text) gets addressed through these headaches when the male members of the family pitch in "to do the housework." The headaches do not, however, prevent the men from having to leave Roberts alone at times, for, as she confesses:

> As I look back, I know that there was never a time when I was sick that they did not insist that someone stay with me. It was not due to their negligence that someone did not always do this, but was due entirely to my insistence that they go to do their outside work. Of course, I dreaded unspeakably the long weary day alone with no one to speak to or to do a thing for me, but I knew how much work there was to be done and that they could never do it all, no matter how hard they worked.

All of this detail about her headaches and her seemingly self-sacrificing nature ultimately leads to the anecdote Roberts wants to relate about an "episode" she experiences, one that puts her far beyond the Traill typology:

> It was while I was in the throes of one of these headaches that the episode which I am about to describe took place. At the end of the second day, I became very restless and began to wonder why Papa and Brockway did not come, for they were later than usual. They told me afterward, when I would listen, that they had stayed to finish up a particular piece of work. Time dragged along, and night was at hand, yet still they delayed, until it seemed to me that I would go frantic if I had to stay alone another minute. Then, just before the "break" came, I heard them drive into the yard and thought that again the agony that I had endured so many times was past. (249–50)

This experience of "perverse endurance," however, is not the end of the tale for, when the men come inside it is only to inform Roberts that she will be left

alone again as they "must make a trip over to the store yet that night" (250). As the author goes on to describe her intense reaction to once again being left alone, she explicitly admits her emotional/psychological incoherence with "cheerfully adaptive" ideals of settler women:

> The minutes dragged by. It was cold, and I was not only sick, but was timid, as I always was at night when alone. Indeed, even when I was well, it took all my nerve to stay alone at night in that little sod house on the prairie so far away from everyone that no matter what my need might be I could not summon help; and now I was sick and worn out with two days of loneliness and intense pain. I could not understand why they did not come, for it seemed to me that they had been gone long enough to have made the trip twice, and the old fear that they might have lost the trail and be wandering around trying to find it, added to the terrors of a situation with which, in my weakness, I was unable to cope.
>
> I am sure that there are many heroic women who would have thought that an experience which was testing me to the breaking point was a light thing, and all I can say for myself when things reached this juncture is that my nerves just got the better of me. I lay there with my head throbbing and fear chilling my heart; waiting, listening, and longing, while all sorts of crazy notions flitted through my brain.

Given all of the set-up for this anecdote, including her giving the qualification of having a very bad headache at the time of this event, the reader might well expect that what she is showing regret for is her faltering resolve; her inability to adapt to the necessary circumstances of her family's homesteading life. However, as it turns out, the behaviour that she apologizes for and that she attributes to "intense pain" is the anger she feels (and expresses internally) against her menfolk before they return from their trip. When the men finally return home, she diffuses her anger – restores her equanimity – by engaging in a comical act that seems to embody "madness," but which really is a parody

of what she has already dramatically experienced, as well as being an act of revenge:

> Papa said, "Sarah, where are you going?"
>
> "I'm going outdoors and stand on my head in a snowdrift," I replied.
>
> "Why, Sade," he said, "I believe you're crazy."
>
> "I go you one better. I don't believe it, I *know* it," and I marched out of the house, while Papa and Brockway sank down into their chairs, with their arms lying limply at their sides, and with complete helplessness and hopelessness expressed in their faces and attitudes. And it was no wonder.
>
> When I was out of the house, I went to the west side, where the drifts were piled high. I broke the crust, kneeled down, and stuck my head into the snow as far as I could without smothering. I held it there until it felt frozen, and so did the rest of me for that matter. When I came back into the house Papa and Brockway were sitting exactly as they were when I went out. I believe that neither of them had moved a muscle. (251)

In the spectre of her "madness," the men are as incapacitated as she had been while they were gone. She turns the tables, leaving them inside while she, finally, gets "out of the house," then when she returns things are changed:

> We all learned something from this experience. I learned among other things, that the best cure for a headache is to put your brains into cold storage, and that the same treatment will allay violent, unreasoning anger; and we all learned that it was not well for me to be alone at such times. Always thereafter, someone stayed with me when I was sick. (252)

Some memoirists found less dramatic coping strategies in times of emotional distress. In a chapter of *It Could Have Been Worse: The Autobiography of a Pioneer* (1980) – significantly titled "Chinking" – Peggy Holmes recreates a less-than-

satisfying visit she and her husband once made to a neighbouring farm in northern Alberta in the 1920s, a farm where they were going to "board" their chickens for the winter:

> Apart from the relief of getting our chickens looked after, this visit didn't lift my spirits at all. Mrs. Sergonne had been a school teacher and had married a farmer. She was "bushed," had let herself go, and was hopelessly depressed.
>
> Her opening remark was, "Move your chair from the wall. The bed bugs are very bad – I can't keep them down." I did some fast footwork.
>
> She pulled on a cigarette that hung loosely in her sagging mouth. "Take advice from me girl. Get out before it gets you!"
> It was no use sobbing all the way home. The tears would have frozen on my face. (106)

The representation of this visit directly precedes a confession to her readers that Holmes herself struggles with her new life in Canada: "During this time I was getting mail from home telling me about the family parties, theatres, etc. Still suffering from homesickness these letters did little to comfort me" (107–8). However, later in her memoir Holmes makes it clear that she possesses more resolve than the Mrs. Sergonnes of the world and that, although she will certainly experience moments of incongruity with settlement life, nevertheless she is able to devise creative ways to dissipate the psychological ill-effects of living isolated in the bush. For example, as she rather humourously writes,

> One sunny afternoon we had to pick up some supplies from our local store a few miles away, so Harry hitched up the wagon and I climbed up beside him. Skin and Grief plodded along the track and all was peaceful. It was a glorious day – the sort they sang about later in *Oklahoma! – Oh What a Beautiful Mornin', Oh what a Beautiful Day*. In my hazy dream world at that time I was thinking of *Come to Kew in Lilac Time*.

> It's strange what this life does to one. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, I let out a bloodcurdling scream. The horses were terrified and bolted as fast as they could go. Using all his strength, Harry tried to pull them up, but no way would they stop. They were going hell bent for leather after such an experience.
>
> The wagon box was somewhat rickety and I was rocked out of my screaming jag. But I really did feel much better. Finally Harry won the day and Skin and Grief slowed up, panting and foaming. "For God's sake, whatever was the matter?" Harry asked.
>
> "Nothing, nothing at all," I replied. "I just felt the urge to scream."
>
> "Well, if you ever get that urge again, go behind the barn and do it – and let me know beforehand or you'll scare the livestock to death." (135–36)

For one brief moment, the joy of the "glorious day" farming in Canada is disrupted by memories of life back Home, causing Holmes to resort to a unique form of self-expression. As she continues, such "mad" behaviour, while ultimately productive, could have negative consequences in a less-isolated environment:

> I did this many times and, believe me, it relieves tension. I am sure Freud would have suggested other therapeutic methods, but I can assure you that a jolly good scream behind the barn really helped! I had to curb myself later when we lived in the city. Even one scream in the garage behind closed doors would probably have been followed by police sirens and a visit from the arms of the law. (136)

The good-humoured approach can only get you so far, though, and Holmes goes on to admit to a more serious and more poignant bout of "madness" later in her text, one that requires a more spirited cure:

> Busy as I was, I always looked forward to news from home. Letters came telling me about weekends on Harry's houseboat,

> the *Ariadne*, yachting parties on the River Humber, and family gatherings. It was all meant to cheer me up, but my family's well-meaning efforts often plunged me into the depth of despair and homesickness. Homesickness is worse than seasickness. I've had them both! Seasickness stops when you step off the boat; I could hardly step off the land.
>
> This was particularly hard on Harry. He tried to cheer me up in many ways. But I hit a low that summer; I even got past the screaming behind the barn point. I would saddle Mignon and urge her into her fastest gallop. Riding was not as exciting in the bush country as it had been dashing over the uncluttered ranges east of Calgary, but it was one way to blow my low spirits to the four winds, and I would return telling myself how lucky I was to have my own horse – and who wanted to go boating anyway? (147)[30]

As seen from the above examples, many of the memoirists display moments of "trouble and suffering" endured as part of their experiences of homesteading life. Some of the women overcome these bouts of "madness" easily, while others struggle throughout the process of "adaptation" to the new life. Despite the warnings of contemporary writers, however, none of the women represented in the memoirs gathered here end their narratives unable to overcome their psychological/emotional incoherence. None of them end up like the woman whose story is told in Campbell's *The Silent Song of Mary Eleanor*, wherein the author's father remembers "one particularly unfortunate woman" (58) who arrived in the west all "lovely pink and white and golden" and who soon became "faded and worn," with the inevitable result that "her romance ended in a mental institution, still on the prairies with the wind she couldn't bear" (59). Rather, the endings here are quite a bit more mundane, more real, once again in rejection of the either/or-isms of success or failure that inevitably accompanied the Traill/Moodie dichotomy. From propaganda materials to prairie fiction, the final act in the land settlement drama, as seen in Traill's text, is most

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30 For more examples of female madness, especially as a result of extreme isolation, see also Bannert 78; Clark 53–55; Hewson 2–4, 80–82; and Schultz 58–59.

often a re-affirmation of commitment to the homesteading project and a re-assertion of the narrative of "dauntless optimism." If we accept the end of Traill's story as represented within the confines of *The Backwoods*, then we might fairly easily understand why T.D. MacLulich wrote in 1976 that the two sisters' texts represent "the complementary halves of a single fable," as seen in their two very different endings:

> One sister finds a likely piece of land, realizes the necessity of swallowing her pride and changing her ways, and settles down to help her husband start a farm; she lives happily ever after. The other sister finds an equally likely piece of land, but refuses to change her behaviour and ideas and is continually dissatisfied at having to do menial labour; finally she and her husband leave the farm, failures, and finish their lives as a minor official and his embittered wife in a small provincial town, far from the bustling capital. (118)

While MacLulich's summation is painfully simplistic, nevertheless it does manage to capture the respective tones sounded by Traill's and Moodie's narrative endings. Given the epistolary format of Traill's *Backwoods*, and the fact that the text was published only three years after the author arrived in Canada, the reader is not really provided with a full ending to the settlement story, so that it must necessarily be concluded that Traill's cheerful enthusiasm will inevitably carry her family on to some level of success. Indeed, as the author assures the recipient of her last letter, "our chief difficulties are now over, at least we hope so, and we trust soon to enjoy the comforts of a cleared farm" (250). Here we see Traill ever faithful to the cultural mythology in which settlement success was inevitable if only the emigrant was willing to work hard and persevere against all odds.

In Moodie's text, there is no linear adherence to the philosophy of "dauntless optimism," no climactic moment when the author is able to declare "the comforts of a cleared farm" as a result of years of stint and save. In fact, Moodie's text runs precisely counter to the linear model, illustrating as it does an endless cycle of hopes followed by disappointments. In a telling moment in a chapter titled "The Walk to Dummer," when Moodie and her friends discover that

their pilgrimage has gone astray of the trodden path and that they must turn back, she encapsulates the prevailing tone of her own immigrant experience in the following reflection: "What effect must that tremendous failure produce upon the human mind, when at the end of life's unretraceable journey, the traveller finds that he has fallen upon the wrong track through every stage, and instead of arriving at a land of blissful promise, sinks for ever into the gulf of despair!" (456). Moodie's awareness of her family's ultimate failure at land settlement inspires her to an act of self-preservation that most decidedly contradicts the Ruthian image of female behaviour: she writes a letter to the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir George Arthur, asking for help, with the end result that her husband is offered "the situation of sheriff of the V – district" (475). At the end of her story, we see the author's physical and psychological emergence from the bush, her body carrying the visible signs of her "perverse endurance" of settlement life: as she describes her less than romantic ending,

> For seven years I had lived out of the world entirely; my person had been rendered coarse by hard work and exposure to the weather. I looked double the age I really was, and my hair was already thickly sprinkled with grey. I clung to my solitude. I did not like to be dragged from it to mingle in gay scenes, in a busy town, and with gaily-dressed people. I was no longer fit for the world; I had lost all relish for the pursuits and pleasures which are so essential to its votaries; I was contented to live and die in obscurity. (476)

Not exactly a glowing recommendation of settlement life.

Contemporary literature of western settlement definitely favoured romantic endings. Indeed, the promotional materials created to inspire emigration to the Canadian prairies were entirely predicated on the assumption of inevitable success. As discussed in Chapter Two, the text and images of such materials were visionary, with an eye always to the future and to the achievement of a utopian paradise. Prairie fiction, too, tended towards the romantic ending. For example, in Arthur Stringer's first novel in a trilogy *The Prairie Wife* (1915), the female narrator, a city girl, marries a man named Duncan Argyll McKail, a "Scotch-Canadian" and a "broken-down civil engineer who's

taken up farming in the Northwest" (5). After a series of trials and tribulations, the novel ends on a positive note with Duncan's announcement that farming success is guaranteed; after all, "*The railway's going to come!*" (310). As he goes on to calculate the effect of such news for his wife, "And there'll be a station within a mile of where you stand! And inside of two years this seventeen or eighteen hundred acres of land will be worth forty dollars an acre, easily, and perhaps even fifty. And what that means you can figure out for yourself!" (311). In Douglas Durkin's *The Magpie* (1923), the ending witnesses the hero Craig Forrester rejecting city life and politics by re-assuming the "toggery of romance" (6) and becoming a farmer, like his father before him. The final image of the text strikes the iconic note of prairie optimism: "And in the sky before him as he walked steadily on, the shafts of gold shot to the zenith, flooding the earth with the faint glow of early dawn" (329).[31] Harold Bindloss's 1925 novel *Prairie Gold* ends on a similarly enchanted note, as seen when a newly married and delightedly heroic couple, Hugh and Alice, have joined together to become an "invincible" force on the path to success:

> When he had lighted his pipe he leaned against a wheel and glanced at Alice on the fragrant load of prairie hay. Her skin was brown, her look was tranquilly satisfied, and although she had helped Hugh put up the load he saw she was not tired.
>
> In front, the dark-green wheat rippled in the wind. Where the spiked heads bent, one saw touches of coppery red, and across the summer fallow the oats were going yellow. Soon they would be ripe for harvest, and tall stalks and strong color promised a full bin of "prairie gold." (310–11)

Prairie memoirs written by or about white, English-speaking women who would have been subject to the idealistic expectations of such cultural construc-

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31 Emily Ferguson's description of the "Pit" area of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange interestingly corresponds to Durkin's golden image of wheat farming: "When I was a little girl I heard tell that the rainbow followed the plough. This may be true, but one end of the bow rests on this Pit, and at its foot may be found the proverbial bag of gold" (*Open* 188).

tions, however, tend to give the lie to the narrative of "dauntless optimism" by not fulfilling expectations of inevitable economic success or inevitable personal contentment. As with Traill's *Backwoods*, the "well-known tale" of settlement propaganda often belies a more modest reality. Indeed, the ending of Traill's text is not really the end, for, as her most recent biographer notes, Catharine's family lived a "hand-to-mouth existence" (174) as they moved from home to home and failed at successive attempts to "settle" themselves in the backwoods. Writes Gray, "by mid-century, clearly the tables were turned between the two sisters. Twenty years earlier in the colony's backwoods, Catharine had been the strong, sunny-tempered elder sister who reassured and comforted her sibling," but now "Catharine's visits to Susanna were her only respite from worry" (228). While not usually ending on such an extremely negative note as Moodie's text, the memoirs studied here do work to expose "the other side of a well-known tale" by making clear that "success" is a highly mitigated term. In many of these texts the author so often focuses upon other concerns than strictly agricultural pursuits that the reader forgets the overriding utopian purpose of the homestead project and arrives at the end of the memoir only to discover either the family's dismally pathetic failure or ridiculously modest success. Quite often fathers were the ones to decide, either by choice or fate, how a family's homestead experience was going to end. The untimely death of a husband was a fairly common ending to a family's prairie dreams, one decidedly not accounted for in promotional materials. In Barbara Anderson's *Two White Oxen*, the dream begins to fade for the Hunter family when, eleven years after their arrival in the west, the author's father dies in September of 1894. Although he leaves all of his property to his wife and exacts "a promise from his children to love and respect their Mother as they had done" to that point (154), the effect upon the author's mother is ultimately devastating and it is noted that, afterwards, "Margaret seemed to prepare for her own death though she was but 45 years of age." Although she does live for another forty-five years, Margaret Hunter's life is marked by "years of hardship," "pain and sorrow" (155), as well as comfort and family connection, and is an anticlimactic rejection of the myth of "dauntless optimism" with which her family originally set

out to homestead.[32] In another illustration of the potential for an unromantic ending to the settlement story, in *Crocus and Meadowlark Country: A Story of an Alberta Family* (1963), Georgina Thomson refers to the Eversfield family who immigrate to Canada from England. As she describes Mrs. Eversfield, she "was a quiet, cultured woman and probably had no illusions as to the life she was coming to, but she adapted herself bravely to the hardships, and was friendly with all the neighbors and well-liked by them, however different their backgrounds might be" (104). However, even successful adaptation on a personal level does not keep the sometimes harsh reality of prairie life at bay, for, as Thomson advises,

> [F]rom lack of experience and for other reasons, their homesteading venture did not prove a success, and its end was tragic. May [the daughter] died while still in her 'teens from lack of proper medical attention as well as the hardships in her life, and [Mr. Eversfield] was found dead one day following an apoplectic stroke. The place was sold and Mrs. Eversfield went to live with Alf [her son] and his wife in Calgary. (105)

The Thomsons themselves certainly cannot be said to have failed at homesteading, but even their moderate level of personal success clearly undercuts the hyperbolic visions contained in the myth of "dauntless optimism." After the Thomson children had all left to begin their own lives, the parents were "left on the homestead alone with what hired men they could get," until the decision was made to sell:

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32 Although by 1894 the Hunter family had experienced something less than personal prosperity, the cultural optimism carried on, as Anderson illustrates in her "Appendix C" to her memoir, in which she reproduces a "Reminiscence" written by George W. Grant and published in the "Saskatoon Phoenix, Vol. 1, No. 1, Saskatoon, N.W.T., Friday, October, 17th, 1902": the article begins, "The present prospects of the Saskatoon District are sufficiently encouraging, and the indications of the future prosperity are so decidedly apparent that it makes the founders of the settlement, their historic relationship, and the spirit of heroism which characterize them, a subject of new interest to all concerned" (175).

> Father got tired of hired men. He had done well through the war years when the price of wheat was high, and now with the price of land going up to an unprecedented height, Father, though barely 60, suddenly decided to sell his homestead and the two quarters of C.P.R. land he had owned for some years. How he could bear to part with his cherished quarter-section on which he had filed so proudly, and the horses he loved, I do not know. (274)

Thomson's subtle questioning here of her father's ability to privilege monetary gain over emotional attachment is heightened when she goes on to specifically consider her mother's reaction to the end of their prairie story and to confront male authority in such matters:

> I was not at home when the sale took place. I do not think I could have borne it. Mother did not want to leave the farm. She would have liked Father to build a more modern farmhouse for them and let a hired man and his wife have the old one. Many years later after Mother died I found plans of houses she had designed or cut from magazines, among her papers. But she never questioned Father's judgment and authority, though she was much better educated than he was and in many ways had a better mind. He was "Caesar in his own house," and she was the yielding Victorian wife. I think he soon regretted selling the farm, and always spoke of the homestead years as the happiest in his life.

In contrast to most of the memoirs examined here, in a rare revelatory moment, Myrtle G. Moorhouse writes an ending to her homesteading experience near Swift Current, Saskatchewan, that, although it is far from romantic, nevertheless ultimately documents a sense of personal achievement. As she writes in a chapter of *Buffalo Horn Valley* (1973) titled "Hopes Deferred," the vagaries of prairie farming, especially during the "dirty thirties" (30), could be devastating to one's sense of promise in the future:

> How can I describe the hopes in the spring, only to be sore disappointed later on, year after year, dust storms, horses dying with sleeping sickness, grasshoppers, wire worms, army worms, no money, relief cheques which were a mere pittance and had to be coaxed, begged and wrung out of the authorities.… Cliff would sometimes put in 200 acres of crop, and a three day blow would send the sand flying and cut off the small tender blades. He would walk from window to window crying, with his lungs full of sand that he had breathed in while seeding. (31)

As a result of such devastation, writes Moorhouse, her husband became despondent: he "couldn't take it any longer and he turned to drink." Moorhouse's love for her husband is always evident in her writing, but no reader can miss the bittersweet tone – the deft narrative balance she seeks to achieve between sympathy for her husband's emotional turmoil and a sense of personal abandonment – when relating memories such as this one:

> When our first crop in ten years was showing up, along with fourteen years of debts, he said he was afraid to have a crop, for fear he would drink it all. Then one day, after a big drunk, he just went out to his workshop and shot himself. He left a note so I wouldn't be blamed. He thought he was doing me a favour but poor Cliff, he never knew how hard he made it for me. (32)

Making the decision to continue on the family farm and raise her three young girls alone, Moorhouse ends her memoir by noting the monumental nature of the task she faced, as well as the magnitude of her success:

> Then began the job of untangling fourteen years of debts, paying the most urgent ones, and asking the other people to hold off, until I could get around to them. I must have convinced them, because they took me at my word. The man we bought the land from hadn't received one cent, and he said to me, "I don't know what a woman with three wee girls wants a farm for, but it's yours if you want it,

> no one else will get it, and pay when you can." My sister and her husband helped with my work, and I let them use my machinery and tractor on theirs. In three years I paid off three thousand dollars. I milked a cow and raised cattle and pigs. Once I carried a calf home a mile in twenty-five below zero weather. I finally got every debt paid, and raised my kids, kept them dressed nicely and well fed.

Sometimes a family's prairie dreams ended as a result of a father's economic mismanagement. In Anna Schroeder's memoir of her grandmother *Changes: Anecdotal Tales of Changes in the Life of Anna Born, 1888–1992* (1995), one of grandfather Born's children provides a rather diplomatic explanation for the loss of the family farm:

> Father was a good farmer, and they were getting on quite well. He should have made a success of it, but his heart was too big, and it tended to overrule his common sense. Some of his brothers wanted to buy farms, but could only buy them by borrowing. They needed someone to back their loans.... In the late '20's, as in the '80's, the expectation was that everyone would continue to prosper, and no one would be hurt. The brothers failed to make a go of their farms, the stock-market crashed, the loan organizations which had been encouraged to over-extend their credit got into difficulty, and along with about 1,600 other farmers, Father lost his homestead. (78)

In her selection and placement of anecdotes, Schroeder allows her reader to go beyond diplomacy in understanding the family's lack of success by highlighting the less-than-realistic outlook of her grandfather in direct contrast to the more practical personality of her grandmother. In fact, in some ways she constructs grandfather Born to suit the Moodie version of the land settler. For example, referring to the onset of the Depression, when "grain prices worldwide dropped to an all-time low," Schroeder repeats the following story:

> Wheat was 25c/bushel, barley was useless. That winter there was no point in trying to sell a granary full of barley, because it would not bring enough to cover the cost of shipping it. That meant, however, that there was no money to buy coal for the stove. The fire was dying down, there was no fuel, and Father was sitting with his head in his hands, at wit's end. They had heard that people were burning grain, but he could not bring himself to do it. Mother took the coal scuttle, went and filled it with barley and threw it in the stove. It burned beautifully, and kept the family warm. (79)

After the Borns are forced to sell out, remembers one family member, "Father considered moving into the town of Winkler and living on faith, on whatever the Lord might send them. Mother was not quite so romantic. She thought it would be better if they did something to support themselves." In the end, the Born family moves a couple of times, from small town to small town, and grandfather Born eventually gets represented as a living embodiment of resignation to an unromantic end:

> Father's health had been failing since they left Rosenbach. The situation there had been a devastating blow to him from which he never really recovered. After the move to Gnadenfeld, he was definitely fading. His preaching days were winding down, and he would spend much time lying on the "schlopbenk" brooding. He was 60. (107)

Over time this man becomes "weaker and more lethargic," "quite depressed," and we are told that "he was disappointed in this world, and looking forward to the next." After her husband's death, the more stalwart Anna Born is left with a less-than-ideal ending to her story: "Mother was alone for the first time in her life. And she had no income. Old Age Pensions did not start until age 68 or 70, and there was no such thing as a spousal allowance.… So Mother took in boarders" (115).

For Judy Schultz's grandmother, too, a husband's unrealistic vision resulted in a less-than-utopian ending to prairie life. As the author writes in *Mamie's Children*,

> Gradually, Mamie's family prospered. In the autumn of 1926 they were farming a full section of their own land, plus several rented quarters some distance from the homeplace. By virtue of their position on the edge of the coulee, their bottomland had good topsoil, some of which belonged originally to neighboring farms. Although not every crop was a bumper, Mamie's family had avoided the pitfalls of the monoculture cereal crops by diversifying. (132)

Given this set-up at the beginning of a chapter, the reader cannot help but be intrigued/dismayed when on the next page the expectations of success are thwarted:

> As far as [Mamie] was concerned, her world was unfolding in the best way any country woman could expect. That's why it was such a shock to her when, as she said on those few occasions when she would talk about it, "Everything just started to go to the dogs."
>
> It was the only explanation she ever gave for what happened to them personally in a time when not just they, but their neighbors and the entire southern prairie, especially the area within Palliser's Triangle, would begin to suffer terribly. If the hard times couldn't be erased from her memory, neither did they make their way into her favourite stories.
>
> It was Uncle Ken who had another explanation, one that became as relentlessly familiar on the prairies as the very wind that blew there day after day: "Dad had become a wealthy farmer, but he went into debt." (134)

Eventually the story comes out that Ernest Harris suffered a "personal downfall" (135) through a coincidence of his own land greed, mortgage debt, negative climate conditions, and an unsavoury moneylender. As the debt increased

over the course of two years and her husband began to experience health problems, "Mamie felt as though a permanent cloud was anchored over her head" (137). When the farm is finally taken away from them, Mamie suffers indignity and the loss of everything she held dear:

> In a final insult, Mamie was required to sign a co-covenant. The clerk in the Moose Jaw land titles office explained what it meant: Even though Mamie never legally owned so much as an inch of the land for herself – not a stone around her flower bed nor a shingle on the roof of her beloved house – the co-covenant also signed away her right to remain there in any capacity, just in case she was suddenly inclined to become a squatter.
>
> And so, in the blink of an eye it was over. They lost it all. Mamie's Canadian dream had lasted less than twenty years. (140)

The real end of the story rejects romantic versions of the land settlement story even more thoroughly, as we see when we are told that Mamie and her husband moved north to a new farm located "near a clearing in the bush called Etomami," that the "new farm was somebody's else's failure" and that, although Mamie "stuck it out," "she never liked it" (150–54).

The Depression years, as we have already seen with some of the memoir endings above, were a powerful force in the destruction of the western spirit of "dauntless optimism," as seen in Ida Hopkins's poignant image in *To the Peace* (an image informed by personal understanding) of the abandoned settler's cabin:

> There are many abandoned cabins in the bush, their former owners forced out by regulations, hunger, inability to cope, or straight loneliness.
>
> An empty log cabin is a very living thing to me. I can visualize all too well the life of the people who once lived there. They are monuments to unfulfilled ambitions, and lost hopes. (69)

Hopkins's personal engagement with the myth of "dauntless optimism" begins to fade long before the end of her narrative: as she says, "after seventeen years in the Peace we began to wonder if we wouldn't find life a little easier in a milder climate" (118). Life in the Peace River district has most definitely lost its romantic aspect for Hopkins, who makes a gender distinction in terms of the rewards of settlement life:

> A few consecutive years of early and late snowstorms, letters from those who had left making, "Big Money", and stories of daffodils and crocuses blooming when we were looking at three or four feet of snow, started to get through to us, or rather I should say ME. Bill was still very much the farmer. This was understandable because every inch of ground under cultivation had been created to farm land by his own efforts. Every animal was part of him. Homesteading is very much a family affair but in the final analysis a MAN'S WORLD. (118)

As she continues, homesteading provides no real excitement for the woman settler, no romantic sense of adventure, even in the 1940s: "Much as a women [*sic*] becomes completely involved in the homestead life many of the challenges become repetitive." In contrast to so many of the stories already explored, and as a result of her own dissatisfaction, the Hopkins family "put the homestead up for sale" (119) and eventually hit the road with trailer in tow and with no specific plans for the future. Seventeen years of homesteading labour are thus unceremoniously and unromantically ended in Hopkins's narrative in favour of a decidedly unsettled life moving from province to province and city to city in search of a new place to call Home.

Similar to Hopkins's text, Katherine Magill's *Back o' Baffuf* (1977) contrasts the idealism of rural life with the economic viability of city life. As she writes near the end of her narrative, about eight years after initial settlement, "our time here was coming to an end. An ultimatum had been delivered in the spring. We must meet our back payments on the land" (71–72). Faced with debt which threatens their homestead life, "there was only one solution. Jim must find work, and work as well that paid a fair salary" (72). As

a result, Magill's husband leaves her and the children behind to hold down the farm and goes to Edmonton for summer employment, which eventually becomes fall employment. As game as she might have been at the start of their homesteading adventure, Magill now has to face reality: she comes to the "inevitable" conclusion that, while "summer coping wasn't too bad," "winter coping – if not impossible – would be hazardous." The painful decision is made to move the whole family to Wainwright. In the end, Magill provides a narrative reflection on settlement life that openly rejects the spirit of "dauntless optimism" in favour of something more equivocal:

> … I sat for awhile on the doorstep, and looked around the small clearing, that had encircled so much of my life for the last few years.
>
> We had lived here, deeply, often precariously, and we would never be the same.
>
> Perhaps we would be back, I thought. Perhaps this would just be a time of regrouping, fattening our capital a bit. Personally, I would always, I had no doubt, be ambivalent about this brooding austere land. Perhaps that's what it took to endure a vital and challenging relationship. (73)[33]

Magill's is an apt final image to this chapter for, in the (unromantic) end, the one constant shared by all prairie settlers, no matter the individual circumstances that made out-migration a reality, was that they "would never be the same" again after experiencing the ups and downs of homesteading life. The cultural text of "dauntless optimism" favoured a view of settlement life in which, as the dominating figure of Catharine Parr Traill has long symbolized, "cheerfulness" in the face of adversity becomes a necessary personality corollary to survival. However, by reading women's memoirs for the presence of

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33 For more examples of unromantic endings to the settlement story, see also Baldwin 48–49, 227–30; Campbell 135–43; Ebbers 107–11; Hewson 182–84; Hiemstra 285–88; Holmes 172–90; Inglis 80–81; Johannson 182–90; Nelson 119–20; Parsons 7, 14, 76, 140–44; Raber 58, 65, 169–71; Roberts 259–60; and Strange 262, 286–88.

various "failures and incoherences," we are able to discern the Moodie reality of "perverse endurance" that gives the lie to that culturally designed text as an impossibly romantic vision. However, it should be noted that, as indicated by the forward-facing slash in the title to this chapter, I have not meant to suggest by my use of this latter phrase that settler women who deviate from the "dauntlessly optimistic" script simply encompass the "other" side of some behavioural pairing. On the contrary, to invoke what I am suggesting are representations of "perverse endurance" – such as women crying, looking back, going "mad," and writing beyond romantic endings – is meant to indicate that the experience of settlement life is far more complex than often depicted in our cultural heritage. As Magill suggests, and as Moodie's text affirms, people actually "lived" on the prairie landscape, "deeply, often precariously," and the practical realities of everyday life demanded survival tactics that went far beyond the fever of idealism that so often inspired the decision to emigrate. In writing about "practical realities," the memoirists considered here have risen to the challenge of being true to themselves and to the others whose stories they write, ensuring that their narratives, like Magill and the many settler women who came before her, will "endure."