

How Does Her Garden Grow? The Garden Topos and Trope
in Canadian Women's Writing

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Abstract

This study offers additional nuance to the garden topos and trope within nineteenth- and twentieth-century Canadian women's writing and extends the critical discussion of landscape and the garden as archetype in Canadian literature. This dissertation cross-fertilizes literary analysis with garden theory, using the work of such garden historians as John Dixon Hunt, Mark Francis, and Randolph Hester. The argument emphasizes that gardens in literature, like their actual counterparts, are an art of milieu, reflective of their socio-physical contexts. Both real and textual gardens are rhetorical: their content and formal features invite interpretation. A textual garden performs similarly to an actual garden by providing a spatial frame; a means of naturalization; a vivid exemplar of growth, fertility and beauty; a mediation of the artificial and the natural; a space of paradox; and a site of social performance.

The specific focus of this study is "domestic gardens": gardens that are intimate, immediate to the home, and part of daily life. Chapter one separates the garden from archetypal models by studying the garden as an actual place (specifically, the backwoods kitchen garden) described in the works of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill. Chapter two examines how the garden influences Moodie's and Traill's writing of the "transplanted" female emigrant. Chapter three presents the bower as an important precursor to the domestic garden through Gabrielle Roy's *Enchantment and Sorrow* (1984) and "Garden in the Wind" (1975). Through the bower, Roy mediates the female artist's ambivalence toward home in her pursuit of independence. Chapter four explores Carol Shields' sanctification of the domestic in her fiction through the concept of paradise as both an ideal setting and a mode of being. Chapter five provides a "garden tour" of the

poetry of Lorna Crozier, culminating in the garden as a model for the text itself and for the genre of palimpsest. For these writers, literal and figurative gardens are ways of “planting” their characters and personae, “plotting” their narratives, mediating social conventions, and providing an interpretative lens through which readers may perceive the texts as a whole.

Résumé

Cette thèse répond aux études, toujours fort appréciées par les chercheurs en littérature canadienne, qui perçoivent le jardin en tant qu'archétype et descripteur du paysage. Elle apporte d'importantes nuances aux topos et tropes du jardin dans l'écriture féminine canadienne aux dix-neuvième et vingtième siècles. Pour ce faire, la présente étude emploie une approche pluridisciplinaire inspirée des travaux de plusieurs historiens du jardin, dont John Dixon Hunt, Mark Francis et Randolph Hester. Cette approche combine l'analyse littéraire et la théorie du jardin et postule que les jardins de la littérature, tout comme leurs équivalents réels, sont un art du milieu et reflètent leurs contextes socio-physiques. Les jardins, autant textuels que réels, sont rhétoriques. Leur contenu et leurs traits formels convient à l'interprétation. En plus d'associer le jardin à la croissance, la fertilité et la beauté, l'étude se penche également sur comment le jardin textuel accomplit des fonctions similaires aux jardins réels en offrant un cadre spatial, un moyen de naturalisation, une médiation entre le naturel et l'artificiel, un espace de paradoxe et un lieu de performance sociale.

La présente étude porte particulièrement sur les «jardins domestiques», c'est-à-dire les jardins intimes, adjacents au foyer domestique et partie prenante de la vie quotidienne. Le premier chapitre sépare le jardin des modèles archétypaux en étudiant le jardin (et en particulier le jardin de l'arrière-pays) en tant qu'espace réel dans les écrits de Susanna Moodie et de Catharine Parr Traill. Le deuxième chapitre examine comment le jardin influence l'écriture de l'émigrante «transplantée» chez Moodie et Traill. Le troisième chapitre analyse la chaumière en tant que précurseur du jardin domestique dans *La détresse et l'enchantement* (1984) et «Un jardin au bout du monde» (1975) de

Gabrielle Roy. A travers la chaumière, Roy négocie l'ambivalence de l'artiste féminine à l'égard du foyer dans sa quête d'indépendance. Le quatrième chapitre explore la sanctification de la sphère domestique dans la fiction de Carol Shields à travers le concept du paradis en tant que mode de vie et de lieu idéal. Le dernier chapitre offre un «tour de jardin» de la poésie de Lorna Crozier où le jardin sert de modèle pour le texte lui-même et pour le palimpseste. Pour les auteurs examinés dans cette thèse, les jardins, à la fois réels et figurés, servent à «enraciner» les personnages et *personae*, à tracer la narration, à négocier les conventions sociales et à fournir un cadre d'interprétation permettant au lecteur d'apprécier le texte dans son ensemble.

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Introduction

In the field of Canadian literary criticism, the garden plays a prominent figurative role in terms of defining a distinctly Canadian imagination. Northrop Frye's foundational text *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (1971) encapsulates the oppositional struggle between nature (the wilderness) and civilization (the garden) that Frye contends is intrinsic and "organic" to Canadian writers' sensibilities (219).¹ In his promotion of the value and unique qualities of Canadian literature, Frye argues that the Canadian imagination is isolated from other influences (mainly British and American culture and literary traditions), taking its own form from the surrounding environment, which, in turn, becomes mythologized through its "rooted" writers (i).² The "bush garden" assumes an archetypal role in Frye's description of the national canon, but clearly the wilderness and larger environment are his utmost concern. In the context of Frye's study and Margaret Atwood's *Survival*, thematic, archetypal gardens are central, whereas actual garden terrain, ironically enough, is viewed as incongruent and maladaptive in relation to the all-encompassing wilderness: "Nature the Divine Mother hardly functions at all; like God she may be believed in but not experienced directly, and she's not much help with the vegetable garden" (Atwood, *Survival* 51).

¹ Frye admits in his preface that the image of the bush garden "has been pilfered from Margaret Atwood's *Journals of Susanna Moodie*, a book unusually rich in suggestive phrases defining a Canadian sensibility" (x).

² In the context of Frye's argument, the "bush garden" image is distinctly Canadian, suggestive of the physical and psychological frontiers of an unsettled landscape and a society separated from Great Britain and the United States: "The mystique of Canadianism was specifically the cultural accompaniment of Confederation and the imperialistic mood that followed it. But it came so suddenly after the pioneer period that it was still full of wilderness. To feel 'Canadian' was to feel part of a no-man's land. . . . In the United States one could choose to move out to the frontier or to retreat from it back to the seaboard. . . . In the Canadas . . . the frontier was all around one, a part and a condition of one's whole imaginative being" (220).

The thematic interpretations of Canadian literature that began in the 1960s have long since been relegated to the unfashionable and deemed restrictive and insufficient in the eyes of academics. The “bush garden of Canadian letters,” as John Moss refers to it, systemizes the canon according to national traits, “obscuring rather than enhancing the luminescence of individual works” (23).³ Thus, despite its initial and intimate association with the creation of the Canadian literary imagination, the “bush garden” is no longer centrally rooted in critics’ minds. Nevertheless, when it comes to studies of the garden in Canadian literature, scholars reveal the lingering influence of Frye’s mythologizing model by reading the garden as archetype, particularly the archetype of paradise and its relation to the larger landscape.

Garden-related criticism in the field of Canadian literature emphasizes the notion of paradise, and tends to examine it in terms of writers’ figurative perceptions and renderings of the Canadian landscape, society, and national identity. It is important to distinguish that studies of paradise in the Canadian literary context are not schematized around national traits, such as Frye’s model of the bush garden, but rather speak to a larger literary history within and outside the North American context. Whereas Frye sees a severed, isolated Canadian imagination, scholars of Canada’s stories of paradise promote instead a “transplanting” of literary forms and traditions.⁴ In *The Lovely*

³ Frank Davey supplies another famous denouncement of thematic criticism in his essay “Surviving the Paraphrase” in which he urges Canadian literary scholars to pursue rigorous study of the formal aspects of texts.

⁴ In her study of the Canadian long poem, Wanda Campbell argues that the “‘garden’ in imaginative literature is an enormously ‘fertile’ area of study because of the many analogies it suggests, analogies between gardening and the transplantation of literary forms, . . . between historical reality and a long and varied tradition of ‘Edenic’ literature” (2). D. M. R. Bentley takes a similar approach in his ecological model when he notes that “writers more bent on stressing the independence of Canadian writing from British sources . . . have tended to forsake the root-stem-branch metaphor in favour of less connective, and

Treachery of Words, Robert Kroetsch writes, “one meta-narrative . . . has asserted itself persistently in the New World context—and that is the myth of the new world, the garden story. The dream of Eden” (31-32). Echoing Kroetsch’s claim through an ecological approach, D. M. R. Bentley argues that the one poem that has had a profound impact on the shaping of Canadian texts and particularly that of settlement writing is John Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost*:

Milton’s epic is the quintessential English poem of transplantation and adaptation.

As it opens, Satan and his followers are faced with the task of assessing, exploring, and accommodating themselves to an environment that must have appeared to many unhappy exiles and emigrants to Canada to resemble their new home in its extremes of heat and cold, its gloomy sublimity, and its overall unpleasantness. (*The*

Gay]Grey Moose 123)⁵

The archetypal story of the garden, that is the loss and recuperation of paradise, inspires writers to the point that the garden becomes a recurring topos and trope in Canadian literature.⁶ In turn, the garden and particularly the archetype of paradise appeal to critics

also more (North) American-oriented formulations,” such as “transplanting” and “adaptation” (*The Gay]Grey Moose* 18).

⁵ Bentley notes that the archetype of paradise is applied either to the wilderness or to settlement society (the “hinterland” and “baseland” orientations according to Bentley’s terms) depending on the writer’s particular point of view and value scheme: “Was [the European] presence positive or negative for the country’s native peoples and natural environments? Were the British in Canada creating an Edenic realm or destroying one?” (*The Gay]Grey Moose* 163-64).

⁶ M. H. Abrams defines “topos” within his larger discussion of “motif” and “theme.” Pointing to such motifs as the “loathly lady” or the ubi sunt motif, Abrams states that a “motif is a conspicuous element, such as a type of incident, device, reference, or formula, which occurs frequently in works of literature”; he later adds, “An older term for recurrent poetic concepts or formulas is the topos (Greek for ‘a commonplace’)” (*A Glossary* 169). Although Abrams makes note of the Greek translation, he does not further clarify that “topos” has an historical connotation of “place.” In contrast to Abrams, Mieke Bal

as effective means of expressing some of the early “roots” and subsequent growth of the Canadian literary imagination, which, they argue, is preoccupied with understanding the larger environment and society’s relationship to that landscape. In-depth studies of the garden in Canadian literature include Dennis Duffy’s *Gardens, Covenants, Exiles*, which explores edenic visions of nineteenth-century Loyalist visions of Upper Canada; Wanda Campbell’s doctoral dissertation “The ‘Bildungsgedicht’ as Garden in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Canadian Long Poems,” which demonstrates how “the topos of the garden with its varied implications of planting, progress, and paradise” aids poets in their paralleling of an individual’s maturation and formation with the larger society and its communal growth and development (iii); and Karen Clavelle’s 2005 doctoral dissertation, “Imagine the Prairies. The Garden in Poet-Depression Prairie Fiction,” in which Clavelle traces edenic visions of the prairie landscape. As evidence in these works, Canadian literary critics defer frequently to the archetype of paradise; however, additional literal and figurative aspects of gardens demand further exploration and nuance. Herein lies the rationale for this current study.

That is, while Canadian literary critics focus on the meta-narrative of paradise and figurative applications of the garden on a larger environmental scale, the garden—and I speak, here, not just of a garden topos and trope used to articulate an eden-like landscape

provides a more detailed definition of the spatial aspect of topos when she describes the term as “a fixed combination” of space and event (96-97). Alternatively, when critics discuss the garden “trope,” they emphasize the garden’s figurative applications. Abrams defines “tropes,” or “figures of thought,” as instances “in which words or phrases are used in a way that effects a conspicuous change in what we take to be their standard [or literal] meaning” (*A Glossary* 96). Tropes are “‘turns’” or “‘conversions’” of meaning, such as metaphor, simile, and synecdoche (Abrams, *A Glossary* 96). Because the garden denotes place, the garden topos and trope operate in close relation, with topos implying attentiveness to place and its associations, and trope not necessarily needing to emphasize a particular place, but rather the figurative aspects of thought.

or new society, but of the garden as a relatively more immediate domestic terrain that functions on both literal and figurative levels—is often overlooked or deemed inconsequential in terms of writers’ strategies and social critique. In response to the popularity of the paradise archetype, my project brings alternative uses of the garden topos and trope (including but not restricted to the paradise motif) into the fold of garden-related criticism in Canadian literature. Specifically, my strategy is to cross-fertilize literary criticism with garden theory and historical analysis in order to generate a further appreciation of the roles that gardens play in literature in both a literal and figurative sense. The gardens that I examine operate as either subtle or more explicit strategies for writers focussed on elucidating the intimate, gendered, domestic experiences of quotidian life. Writers’ various incorporations of the garden into their texts are not, therefore, always in deference to long-standing archetypes. Instead, I argue that the writers studied in this project turn to the garden throughout their *oeuvre* not simply to invoke certain ideas that spring readily to readers’ minds with the mention of the garden or paradise, but rather to address more particularly the ideologies that operate behind those ideals, as the writers negotiate issues of gender and home. In order to provide further nuance to the garden topos and trope within Canadian literature, my project explores how the garden operates on multiple levels simultaneously—both in the text and at the level of the text.

To this end, I examine the garden through a five-tiered approach articulated through the five chapters of this study. Thematic and archetypal readings of the garden trope have a prominent place in the field, particularly for nineteenth-century texts; therefore, in order to separate the garden from this line of criticism, I examine the garden first as an actual place shaped by aesthetics and the environment and subsequently described in words during the settlement period. Second, I address notions of literary

“transplanting” by examining the garden as a popular figurative device that influences a writer’s use of language and space according to the specific nineteenth-century historical and gendered context. Third, I study the garden as a central component of genre to reveal how even when gardens are highly conventional in form and function, they continue to serve as a malleable ideal being at once profoundly associated with readers’ generic expectations, while at the same time offering a subtle mediation of social upheaval and change during the early decades of the twentieth century. Fourth, I turn to the symbol of paradise not as a way of addressing the “new world,” but rather in its application to an unexpected place—the fictional settings of the mid-twentieth century and a related ideal mode of being. In this way, the archetype of paradise acquires a somewhat radical new purpose in conjunction with contemporary associations and related feminist concerns. Finally, I examine the garden as a model for the text itself, thereby foregrounding formal possibilities and the strategic undermining of the garden as an ideal through a writer’s post-modern approach and attentiveness to language. All five chapters relate the garden to the specific concerns of the writers whom I examine, take into account the writers’ particular socio-historical, gendered contexts as a shaping influence, and respond to critical interpretations of the writers’ works by casting light on alternative ways of reading the garden. My chronological treatment of the garden enables me to depart from archetypal readings at the onset of my project and to demonstrate the diversity of the garden topos and trope through a variety of periods, thereby working to prepare critical groundwork for a renewed appreciation of the dynamic presence and numerous functions of gardens as they appear in a range of Canadian literary texts.

Like their literary counterparts who examine the garden topos and trope, garden theorists and historians speak about the garden in idealized terms, yet they also provide

further insight into a garden's formal features and effects, as well as the politics that operate in and through a garden's content and design.⁷ First, it is important to note that garden critics bestow upon the garden special status as a both a unique place and an art form. Demonstrating this tendency toward idealization, Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka observes that the garden is intimately associated with the human need for a sense of home, identity, and intimacy, as "human beings seek to anchor home in nature's groundwork: a 'field,' or a 'garden'" (11); an individual "dwells in his/her home but keeps his/her roots in the soil of the earth" (14). Here, the garden supersedes the home with its more permanent and "natural" implication of "roots," an aspect of the garden ideal that appeals readily to Canadian writers and critics when attempting to generate a "paradisal" claim of Canadian identity and home.⁸ Garden historian John Dixon Hunt similarly idealizes the garden, stressing the etymology of the word and its suggestion of a structure of enclosure:

⁷ The garden theorists and historians whom I enlist for my project include prominent scholars in the fields of garden history, philosophy, and literature. For example, Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka is the founder and president of The World Institute for Advanced Phenomenological Research and Learning at the University of California. Theorizing garden space, Tymieniecka served as editor for a special garden issue of *Analecta Husserliana*. In terms of garden historians, I draw prominently on John Dixon Hunt, who is a professor and former Chair in the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. With an interdisciplinary background in English literature and the visual arts, Hunt is an internationally renowned garden historian, having published multiple books and articles on the topic of garden design and having been awarded the Chevalier Des Artes et Lettres by the Cultural Ministry of France in 2000 for his contribution to the study of landscape architecture. In addition, I draw upon Mark Francis and Randolph T. Hester (professors of landscape architecture based at the Universities of California in Davis and Berkeley respectively) who serve as editors of, and contributors to, an interdisciplinary text on the garden's multiple roles and functions—*The Meaning of Gardens: Idea, Place, and Action*, which is a collection of papers from the Meanings of the Garden Conference (University of California, Davis, May 1987) and published by MIT Press.

⁸ In arguing for the importance of the paradise motif in prairie fiction, Clavelle uses the garden's implication of "roots" and spatial enclosure as a way of presenting the garden's significant figurative role in relation to the larger landscape: "People work on the land, but they work in the garden. To be 'on' implies separation, or 'detachment from' . . . ; to be 'in' implies enclosure, belonging to, 'attachment to.' . . . To be on the land is to be not-rooted to it; to put down roots is to change the relationship" (21).

The etymology strongly hints at the fashion in which the garden summarizes many activities, all of which share a basic human need for protective reassurance. The word *garden* itself puts down its etymological roots to words for enclosure and has in its turn spawned many derivatives. It comes from the same root as the Old English *geard* (= fence), Indo-European *gher* (= fence), and *ghort* (= enclosure). (*Greater Perfections* 20)

According to Tymieniecka, the garden is a deeply personal, unique form of expression:

Personal character, disposition, taste in enjoyment, and beyond that our aspirations for beauty, for free expression, for manifesting in the world those of our inward dispositions that no words can express, and, what is more, our inward inclinations, whims, fantasies, nostalgia, desires, in short, the most intimate pulsations of our subliminal self, are all developed in the garden. (15)

Clearly, Tymieniecka offers a highly idealized vision of the garden as an expressive form that not only “roots” an individual in his or her home, but also manifests the “most intimate pulsations” of the human disposition and spirit. Tymieniecka’s claim of the personal nature of garden expression is in keeping with other critics’ conceptualizations of the garden. In *The Meaning of Gardens: Idea, Place, and Action*, Mark Francis and Randolph T. Hester argue that gardens serve as analogues of the human subject: “Gardens are mirrors of ourselves, reflections of sensual and personal experience. By making gardens, using or admiring them, and dreaming of them, we create our own idealized order of nature and culture” (2).⁹ As for the garden’s unique expressive ability,

⁹ This comparison recalls the famous adage of Thomas Fuller who expresses the intimate relationship between the gardener and the garden in 1732: “‘As is the Gardener, so is the Garden’” (qtd. in Hunt and Willis 2).

Tymieniecka even goes as far as to suggest that gardening communicates aspects of an individual that “no words can express.” The claim that the garden succeeds, where words fail, may be difficult for literary scholars to accept, but Tymieniecka’s statement speaks to the expressive, artistic value garden theorists and historians contend is integral to garden design or gardening work in general.

Although there is a tendency even among garden scholars to idealize the garden as an art form of incredibly intimate expression, garden critics also point to the garden as a complex mediation of social values and ideologies. Hunt theorizes that gardens offer profound expressions reflective of their socio-physical contexts. Hunt believes that gardens serve “as expressions or representations of a culture’s position vis-à-vis nature” (*Gardens* 299). A garden is a cultural expression of nature and the human subject’s position within it. But even more intriguing than this mediating role with nature, is the fact that, as Hunt explains, gardens are an art of milieu:

Each phase of garden art is culturally specific, determined by . . . ideas and events few of which are explicitly horticultural or architectural: they may be political, social, economic, religious. But because . . . gardens go one stage further than the cultural landscape of second nature¹⁰ in representing the extent and significance of control over their environment, gardens may arguably offer a more refined, more acute, and more intricate expression of human experience. This expression will be both conscious and unconscious. . . . (*Gardens* 9)

¹⁰ Hunt’s use of the term “second nature” alludes to Cicero’s hierarchy of nature in *De natura deorum*. Surveying the various ways humans have improved upon and benefited from nature, Cicero writes, “Total dominion over the produce of the earth lies in our hands. We put plains and mountains to good use; rivers and lakes belong to us; we sow cereals and plant trees; we irrigate our lands to fertilize them. We fortify river-banks, and straighten or divert the courses of rivers. In short, by the work of our hands we strive to create a sort of second nature within the world of nature” (102-03).

In his definition, Hunt recognizes the “culturally specific” aspects of gardens, aspects that suggest gardens are “rooted” in ideology and social convention, and not just in plants or soil. Gardens do not serve solely as an art form for the exclusive use of an individual’s expression and desires, as social values imbue the very make-up of a garden.¹¹ Because, as Hunt argues, the gardener’s art is “both conscious and unconscious,” gardens point to the anxieties, desires, and tensions that underlie, or are readily apparent in, the gardener as an individual and social being. Furthermore, if gardening is an art of milieu, then it is also an art that is forever in process. A gardener’s desires and personal expression respond to his or her changeable socio-physical surroundings—all of which contribute to and constitute a garden’s content and form.¹²

In promoting the profound and expressive potential of gardens, garden critics highlight what they interpret as the uniqueness of this artistic media in comparison to other forms of artistry. Clearly, just as Tymieniecka believes gardens communicate in

¹¹ Arguing that gardens reflect their socio-historical contexts and ideals, Edward Casey observes, “The medieval garden in its closed-in, world apart character was suited for melancholy and reflective moods” (168). In a similar approach, Hunt and Willis contrast the politics behind the emergence of the English landscape garden of the eighteenth century, in which the individual was to wander freely, with the politics behind formal French designs that were best viewed from above the garden. With their “determination to reject French authority in the arts and in politics,” English designers developed their own English garden, and “pleas for less contrived scenery” became “an endorsement of liberty and tolerance against tyranny and oppression. Democracy against autocracy” (8).

¹² Hunt’s research focusses mainly on England’s garden history during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (which I draw upon in chapters one and two). Garden historians working specifically in the Canadian context argue similarly that throughout Canada’s history, the form and content of gardens reflect the socio-physical milieu of Canadian society during particular periods of development and/or upheaval. In *Rhetoric and Roses: A History of Canadian Gardening 1900-1930*, Edwinna Von Baeyer argues that Canadian gardens communicate and advance particular social values and ideologies: “The garden has long been characterized as a refuge from the world, a re-creation of paradise. But twentieth-century garden promoters created rather public refuges, noisy with rhetoric” (176). Von Bayer points to the CPR railway station gardens cultivated during the early decades of the twentieth century as one example of gardens cultivated for social persuasion and commercial interest, as these gardens demonstrated the fertility of the western prairies in the hope of attracting settlers (14).

ways that “no words” can, Hunt endorses a traditional hierarchy of landscape manipulation that posits the art of the garden at the pinnacle.¹³ But even as garden theorists promote gardens as unique forms of expression, paradoxically, they formulate comparisons between gardens and literature in order to defend the garden’s status as art—its “readability” and invitation to interpretation. The affinity garden critics see as existing between gardens and texts works to elevate gardens as an ideal and complex art form. For example, garden historians note that in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England when gardening was in its zenith, gardening was considered a high art form, as equally capable of communicating ideas to garden viewers as that of a written text or painting. Indeed, garden scholars continually reference Horace Walpole (1717-97), who wrote, “Poetry, Painting, and Gardening, or the science of Landscape, will forever by men of Taste be deemed Three Sisters, or the *Three New Graces* who dress and adorn Nature” (qtd. in Hunt and Willis 11).¹⁴ Before I turn to the gendered implications of this statement, I want first to explicate it in terms of the relationship between the two of the three “sister arts” that most interest me—that of poetry (or literature) and gardening. Walpole’s statement addresses a common argument put forth by garden scholars: that is, gardens are legible structures and function as complex rhetorical devices, offering both literal and figurative signification. For instance, in *The Poetics of Gardens*—a work that analyzes gardens across cultures and time periods and does not restrict itself to Walpole’s

¹³ The title of Hunt’s books on gardening theory, *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory*, alludes to Francis Bacon’s essay “Of Gardens” in which Bacon argues that gardens are the paramount of human creativity and design: “when ages grow to civility and elegancy, men come to build stately, sooner than to garden finely; as if gardening were the greater perfection” (Bacon 7).

¹⁴ Walpole’s statement is an extension of Horace’s supposition of the affinity between the art of poetry and painting in his epistle “The Art of Poetry” (*Ars poetica*).

specific gardening context of eighteenth-century England—Charles W. Moore, William J. Mitchell, and William Turnbull argue,

Gardens are rhetorical landscapes. They are made of the same materials as all the rest, just as the rhetorician's words are those given by the language, but they are composed to instruct and move and delight. . . . We can read gardens for content, and we can analyze the devices of structure and figure and trope by means of which they achieve their effects. . . . We may read a text for its metaphoric and metonymic content, for rhyme and meter, or for narrative structure. Each way of reading reveals different aspects of the text's form and meaning. So it is with gardens. (49-50)

An obvious example of a highly legible garden is that of the emblematic garden, which was popular in England during the eighteenth century. As Stephanie Ross explains in *What Gardens Mean*, emblematic gardens are a complex integration of landscape, sculpture, architecture, and written inscriptions: "A number of these gardens are laid out as a circuit. The visitor strolls along a path which brings him past a series of monuments, scenes, and vistas. The viewer's experience is carefully controlled. Benches and inscriptions indicate special points of interest—striking views or sculptural or architectural ensembles with complex charged meanings" (51).¹⁵

¹⁵ Pointing to examples of emblematic gardens, Ross notes that Alexander Pope's Twickenham garden (which Pope created beginning in 1719), and Lord Cobham's garden estate at Stowe (also from the early eighteenth century) offer highly legible designs. In the open terrain of his garden, Pope incorporated statues of Classical figures and inscribed quotations from his favourite ancient works in architectural features; in contrast, his grotto with its stream and decorated walls and ceilings (covered in mirrors and shells that Pope had gathered from his travels and from friends) implied a more personal, contemplative space (Ross 56-57). In terms of the estate at Stowe, Ross points to the Elysian fields, a part of the garden designed in the 1730s, as communicating a political commentary through its three temples: The Temple of Ancient Virtue, the Temple of Modern Virtue, and the Temple of British Worthies (59). While the Temple of Ancient Virtue contains statues of great philosophers such as Socrates and Homer, the Temple of Modern Virtue was originally designed as a ruin. Downhill from these temples is the Temple of British Worthies, containing the busts of notable British statesmen, philosophers, scientists, but omitting Queen Anne (with whom Lord

Because the garden functions as a kind of readable “text,” then it follows that “inscribed” within its structure and content are not only archetypal ideals of paradise, but also values and ideologies pertaining to the social context in and from which the garden takes its form. Indeed, Walpole’s statement about the three “sister arts” speaks to his own eighteenth-century English milieu in which the most notable practitioners of these three arts are men, particularly when it comes to the profession of garden designer. The three sister arts are personified as women, and the acts of dressing and adorning are clearly directed at an equally personified and feminized “Nature,” who requires arrangement and embellishment. Nature as property is controlled by male authority, just as the three feminine figures of poetry, painting, and gardening are directed by male artists. Deciphering the ideologies that operate through the socio-cultural product that is a garden and related discourse, such as Walpole’s figurative trope, Carole Fabricant argues in “Binding and Dressing Nature’s Loose Tresses: The Ideology of Augustan Landscape Design” that the descriptions of landscape gardens during the eighteenth century that are composed by both garden designers and poets “are not merely commonplaces or figures of speech (though through repeated usage they may have come to be these as well) but statements about how power was conceived and wielded during this period. There is little doubt as to who was the master, who the obedient and submissive servant” (113).

Clearly, garden critics turn to literature as a way not just of promoting gardens as an art, but also of interpreting the garden as an artifact of its socio-physical milieu imbued

Cobham had fallen out of favour). Clearly, Stowe’s design makes an ironic statement about the relative virtues and worthiness of its celebrated figures: “The juxtaposition of Gothic and classical styles creates the visual pun between a ruined temple and ruined virtue. But the very topography of the garden contributes to the meaning as well, for the British worthies are placed downhill, looking up to their ancient predecessors” (Ross 60).

with ideologies and “the profound interconnections between aesthetic, economic, and sexual forms of possession” (Fabricant 117). When it comes to addressing literature on its own terms, however, garden theorists and historians curtail their praise for what they perceive as literature’s admirable but limited conveyance of the garden’s effects.

Gardening and writing may be related as “sister arts,” but they are also distinct media that function in different ways.¹⁶ In keeping with the supposition that gardens are analogues for the human consciousness, garden critics, such as Hunt, point to the garden’s role in literature mainly as a means of characterization; gardens act as “indicator[s] of character, moral position, or social nuance” (*Greater Perfections* 176). Just as exotic plants in actual seventeenth-century gardens “declared the status and ingenuity of the garden’s owner” (Hunt, “*Paragone in Paradise*” 61), the fictitious Pemberly estate in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* enables Elizabeth Bennet to reassess Mr. Darcy’s status as gentleman (Hunt, *Greater Perfections* 176).¹⁷ Related to characterization is the fact that gardens described in literature also facilitate a high degree of readability. Through gardens, writers communicate the evolving behaviours, actions, and subjective responses of their characters and personae. In other words, what other media, such as painting, fail

¹⁶ One of the most noted differences between gardens and literature seems to be the garden’s ever-changing nature and emphasis on process. Ross notes, “a garden is never a finished work, since it is always growing, dying, changing” (19). While in material terms this statement may seem correct since a published text is relatively more complete and finished, writers are known to emulate this type of continual creativity. For example, Kroetsch creates an “organic” model of his poetic process in his various publications of long poems that began as a life-long project, and give a sense of an ongoing, ever-growing, impermanent form that carries through several of his works until its completion: *The Ledger* (1975), *Seed Catalogue* (1977), *Field Notes* (1981), and *Completed Field Notes: The Long Poems of Robert Kroetsch* (1989).

¹⁷ Literary critics similarly explore the garden’s role in characterization. In his study of gardens in Victorian literature, for example, Michael Waters writes, “the garden also occurs as an internal or internalised landscape—a spatial or aesthetic analogue of consciousness, for example—that serves to articulate a range of subjective and intrapersonal experiences and concerns” (280).

to accomplish where literature succeeds lies in the conveyance of “processes of growth, of movement, and of mental association” (*Greater Perfections* 172).

Despite the apparent affinity between writing and gardening, Hunt’s disciplinary perspective leads him to place limitations on gardens that appear in written form.

According to Hunt, “[w]ords do not cope well if at all with celebrating the formal effects of gardens, the mix of vegetation and built items, the passage of light, and the visual effects of seasons” (*Greater Perfections* 171). Hunt applies his critical model of an actual garden directly to literature, the result being that the actual garden remains privileged in its overall ability to serve as an art of milieu and a formal, structured space: “Poetry may vouch for a garden’s plentitude; yet conveying a sense of the site as a theatre or conspectus of the world is not one of its conspicuous strengths, though again it gestures toward the ‘garden of the world’ on the slightest of excuses” (Hunt, *Greater Perfections* 171). For Hunt, the garden experienced through words alone is inadequate in its presentation of formal features and the related imaginative leap to metaphoric musings. In this light, the experience of being in an actual garden, as opposed to reading about one, is a more tangible experience capable of granting individuals an understanding or overview of the world and surrounding socio-physical environment. Clearly from his architectural perspective, Hunt circumscribes the experience of gardens described in words.¹⁸ However, by cross-fertilizing garden theory with literary criticism, I expand

¹⁸ Obviously, a scholar’s own disciplinary inclinations (whether they are toward the garden history and design, or toward literature, such as my own research) lead to a privileging of that artistic medium. Not surprisingly, then, when Hunt defines gardens as an art of milieu, he downplays the importance of formal features: gardens are “culturally specific, determined by . . . ideas and events few of which are explicitly horticultural or architectural” (*Gardens* 9). But when it comes to gardens in literature, however, Hunt reasserts these previous two categories, noting that words “do not cope well if at all with celebrating the formal effects” (*Greater Perfections* 171).

upon how critics conceive of gardens that exist not only “in” words, but also are constructed “of” words. In doing so, gardens in literature reveal themselves to be functioning on multiple levels simultaneously and, therefore, lend themselves to literal, figurative, and even formal possibilities in terms of the effects experienced by the reader and the meaning these “gardens” convey. Moreover, the garden in literature is not restricted solely to archetypal associations, but rather, like its sisterly counterpart of the garden itself, operates as an art of milieu, mediating individual desires and social conventions.

While Hunt argues that gardens in literature do not communicate effectively a garden’s formal features—namely, the relationship between built structures and vegetation, and the theatrical aspects—I argue that writers turn to the garden precisely to explore and create these kinds of formal effects and conceptual relationships, and not simply to gesture always towards the “garden” of the world, or to simplified archetypes. When authors are “gardeners,” they not only use gardens as concrete places, or settings, in their texts, but also employ figurative “gardening” techniques. By this “gardening” strategy I mean that writers use the garden figuratively to “plot” their narratives,¹⁹ to express certain processes through the language of the garden, and to “plant” and frame spatially their characters and personae during key scenes. Furthermore, because gardens are an art of milieu, the literal and figurative gardens that appear in literature often communicate specific ideals and ideologies, providing a space of critical commentary on

¹⁹ In the context of this study, the verb “to plot” has a clear double entendre. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, with respect to a writer’s craft, “to plot” means “[t]o devise the plot or story of (a literary work)” (“Plot”). In the sense of garden work, the verb also suggests “[t]o make a plan of (something to be laid out, constructed, or made as a . . . garden . . .)” (“Plot”). In this study, I also engage in the work of “plotting,” or tracking, the changes in the writers’ varied approaches to the garden.

the larger issues at work in the text. Thus, in contrast to Hunt and other garden theorists who contemplate actual gardens as legible “texts” open to interpretation, I explore the inverse: text-as-garden. In the context of my project, therefore, formal, physical features of a real garden—such as the overall design, architecture, and plants—transform in the “garden” of the text into formal *textual* features and their effects—such as figurative language, spatial frames, generic conventions, and other literary devices.²⁰

In Canadian literature, both male and female writers incorporate the garden as a topos and trope in their works; I choose, however, to examine the garden as particularly appealing to women writers in their negotiations of gender paradigms, and women’s situation within, and perceptions of, the domestic realm.²¹ My focus is on the literal and

²⁰ Jorge Luis Borges’ short story “The Garden of Forking Paths” provides an example of how formal devices generate text-as-garden. In Borges’ short story, minimal details of setting and characterization, the continual digressions of narrative, and the gradual revealing of information create a veritable labyrinth through which readers wind their way, back and forth, before the story or “garden” as a whole makes sense, as suggested by the story’s protagonist:

Almost instantly, I understood: ‘the garden of forking paths’ was the chaotic novel; the phrase ‘the various futures (not to all)’ suggested to me the forking in time, not in space. A broad rereading of the work confirmed the theory. In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives . . . ; in the fiction of Ts’ui Pên, he chooses—simultaneously—all of them. (434)

Just as Hunt argues that actual gardens offer a perception of the world through its formal features, Borges’ garden analogy for the plot and formal effects of his story provides readers with alternate ways of perceiving through the confusing, winding path of the narrative (Hunt, *Greater Perfections* 171). In the context of Canadian literature, Carol Shields employs a similar structural device, that of the maze, in her novel *Larry’s Party*. In the article “Treading the Maze of *Larry’s Party*,” Dee Goertz writes specifically of how “Shields uses maze symbolism both ironically and sincerely on two overlapping levels: as a game that the reader and the author play together, and as a quest for meaning that the characters engage in” (234). Besides “verbal and visual images of the maze,” Shields uses the maze as a narrative structure: “The complex path of the story line, maze-like in its dead ends and doublings back for meaning, illustrates the author’s search for pattern and meaning” (234).

²¹ When scholars invoke the meta-narrative of paradise, they refer to the Adamic “naming” of Canadian society and identity by its authors. See D. G. Jones’ *Butterfly on Rock* for his discussion of the exiled, sleeping, and dreaming Adam figure in Canadian literature (15), or Bentley’s suggestion that Canada’s “Adam” poets did not always experience “an entirely happy fit between words and things” (*The Gay Grey* 124). While the gendered implications of this “Adam” model are not always addressed, this critical gesturing toward “Adam” reveals that male writers frequently use a garden motif in their works, whether it is for an explicit process of “naming” or not. For example, both Jones and Bentley point to A. M. Klein’s “nth Adam taking a green inventory / in a world but scarcely uttered” in his poem “Portrait of the Poet as Landscape” (Klein 135-36). Other male authors who use a garden motif prominently in their writing include E. J. Pratt, Robert Kroetsch, and Patrick Lane.

figurative gardens women writers use as they explore the social conventions and personal desires at work in the domestic space of quotidian experience. It is important to note that in their discussions of the garden as an art, most garden historians speak specifically of large-scale gardens that are designed by professionals, not the “garden-variety” terrain cultivated and used by the home’s inhabitants in accordance with their quotidian lives. In contrast, my focus is on these immediate (proximate to the home) and spatially modest gardens tended for both practical and aesthetic reasons. Garden scholars present mixed views of gardens cultivated for the pragmatic and aesthetic purposes of daily living. For instance, Ross argues, “Gardening does not flourish today [in the twentieth century]. While a great many Americans claim gardening as a hobby, few garden in the manner of the eighteenth century. We do not consider gardening a high art, and artists do not make major statements in this medium” (xiii). While “gardening today is not a full-fledged sister to painting and poetry” in Ross’ opinion (192), other garden theorists contend that great significance and personal expression find a creative outlet in gardens, gardens that I would like to categorize generally under the term “domestic” gardens. By domestic gardens, I mean gardens that are situated in close proximity to the home. In addition, these gardens play a vital role in terms of the work and expression that take place with respect to daily living and include a number of kinds of gardens, such as kitchen gardens, flower gardens, container gardens (such as window boxes and patio gardens), and even suburban lawns. As Francis and Hester suggest, “The garden is . . . a source of action requiring intimate and direct involvement. We cannot dig, plant, trim, water, or harvest with detached passivity” (6). Far from being uninformative or irrelevant, domestic gardens perpetuate many of the ideals associated with garden art, as they reveal social values and that which is familiar and profoundly personal. Because these terrains are

“domestic,” they are “of the household” or “at home” and directly related to “what concerns oneself” (“Domestic”). This necessary, personal involvement implies that a domestic garden is comfortable in that is “indigenous,” “home-grown,” or “home-made” (“Domestic”). A site associated with daily work, living, and dwelling, then, a domestic garden is “an everyday place. . . . We experience it through the kitchen window or on fall Saturday mornings raking leaves” (Francis and Hester 4).

Clearly, a domestic garden connotes certain ideals of familiarity and comfort suggested through its close association with house and home. In literature, this ideal acquires a level of fluidity particularly when it becomes a recurring garden motif that operates within a single text or across a writer’s entire *oeuvre*. In the texts that I study, the domestic garden ideal is highly portable in terms of both time and space; it is a dynamic ideal that influences the construction of both literal and figurative gardens that the writers and their characters dismantle, reconstruct, substitute, or inter-change with other locales. These features of comfort, portability, intimacy, and daily routine both align and distinguish the domestic garden as an ideal from an original maternal home, which is fixed in time and a specific place.²² Domestic gardens may be “an everyday place” of the quotidian, but routine and commonplace experiences do not preclude social relevance—a factor that holds particular significance for women writers who “garden” in the construction of their texts.

²² While I argue that domestic gardens operate as a convention and an ideal in literary works, garden theorists approach gardens more as specific cultural artifacts. Ross gives a definition of gardens as unique, individual terrains: “Gardens can’t be notated, moved, forged, or replicated because they are ever-changing and because they are site-specific. Replicating a given garden in a new location cannot succeed even if exactly the same plants are placed in exactly the same array. The views and vistas from each spot would necessarily be altered in the duplicate garden, and these are an essential part of the overall aesthetic effect” (Ross 19). In contrast, by using a fluid understanding of the domestic garden as an ideal and recurring motif and trope to which writers respond in various ways, I am able not only to examine specific garden settings, but also to trace the trajectory of the larger garden trope within a text, highlighting the repetitions and alterations of its role and meaning.

At the level in and of the text, women writers embrace the garden not just for its idyllic associations, but precisely because of its mediating qualities, and this particular approach is in keeping with the in-between, boundary quality many garden theorists ascribe to the garden. As an art of milieu that allows for “creative collaboration” with nature (Hunt, *Gardens* 299), a garden operates as both a physical and conceptual space of the *in-between*, combining both culture and nature in a model of milieu and paradox. In his study of place, Edward Casey notes the inherent paradox that is a garden: “Even if I am not yet in the wilderness in a garden I am in the presence of things that live and grow, often on their own schedule” (154). If Hunt similarly asserts that, because of its organic nature, a garden is “ever-changing at best, at worst destined from its very inception for dilapidation and ruin” (“*Paragone in Paradise*” 55), it follows, then, that gardens cannot simply be sites of human domination and control, but rather are hybridized and mutable—a “*mixture of culture and nature*” (“*Paragone in Paradise*” 58, my emphasis).

While Casey and Hunt emphasize the garden’s position as an art of the “in-between” that mediates both socio-cultural and natural properties, the garden also plays a mediating role between the private and the public. Even the most domestic of gardens (immediately adjacent to the home, private, and profoundly personal) has a public presence and visibility. Francis and Hester argue, for instance, that gardens do not merely serve as private retreats but rather participate in the “collective experience”: “Gardens are part of the larger visual landscape and offer the unique opportunity for people visually to participate in others’ private space. As part of this larger landscape, the garden communicates personal values to nearby residents and passersby. In turn, neighbors and

visitors attach value to the private worlds of others” (Francis and Hester 14).²³ Reflecting this movement away from strictly private domain, Casey provides a provocative description of the garden as liminal space that encapsulates the paradoxical position of being “at home” in the garden. If readers pay attention to the gendered implications of his statement, Casey reveals indirectly some of the potential dilemmas of literal and figurative garden terrain for women writers and their domestically situated characters who work in the garden:

When I stand in a garden, I find myself in a scene intermediate between the completely constructed and the frankly wild. For I am then in between a monument (e.g., a house) and a boundary (that of the property in which the garden is located). I have edged out of domestic enclosure and am moving toward exposed fields of uncultivated land. In getting myself into this cultivated but not fully constructed scene, I have decommissioned myself with respect to familial and professional duties. I have become marginal, halfway between the sacred and the profane, yet somehow gained a very special place to be. (154)

Challenging boundaries is part of the paradox of the garden. Casey’s detachment from domestic, familial work distinguishes him, however, from the potentially alternative experience of the women characters (in the texts that I examine) who perceive the garden as a place of domestic responsibility. For Casey, the special, in-between quality of the garden is its ability to free the individual from the quotidian, giving him distance from his normal activity and roles. He “edge[s] out of domestic enclosure” and “decommission[s]” himself from familial duties. In terms of Casey’s definition, the

²³ Throughout my study I have chosen to retain the American and British spellings of words as they appear in the quotations from my secondary sources, such as Francis and Hester’s use of the word “neighbors” in this instance. In my own prose, however, I spell according to the rules of Canadian English.

female characters and personae whom I examine occupy a decidedly domestic role in the in-between space of the garden; they are afforded neither the same level of freedom in this paradoxical space, nor the luxury of an entirely “decommissioned” perspective and experience.

Clearly, women’s role in, and strong association with, the garden becomes an influential factor in feminist scholars’ various interpretations of the garden. For example, Naomi Guttman’s dissertation on the idealization of the garden in American women’s writing leads to a presentation of the garden as an enclosed, imaginative space of escape, disassociated from the real in order to uphold its appeal as an archetypal site of combined nature and aesthetic beauty, rather than of quotidian, gendered limitations.²⁴ In the texts that I examine, however, the writers use the garden as an in-between space, taking advantage of its paradoxical position between and incorporation of opposites—nature/culture, private/public—even as they enclose their female characters and personae within the gender paradigms associated with the garden and the domestic. Where the paradoxical, mediating quality is used to full advantage, however, is at the level *of* the text. Here, on the issue of political influence and social visibility for the woman who expresses herself through gardening, the arguments regarding actual and textually-based gardens diverge, as gardens in literature are “cultivated” within the public domain of readers and scholars, thereby foregrounding the garden’s expressive and political

²⁴ Because of this aspect of spatial and ideological enclosure, feminist scholars, such as Guttman, posit gardens as idealized havens disconnected from the burdens of reality. In her dissertation on spirituality and women’s garden writing, Guttman contends that in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American women’s writing, the garden is an exceptional retreat, offering “a space beyond the confines of domestic responsibilities and patriarchal scrutiny”; here, the garden becomes “the privileged and contented space of childhood—the time before womanhood and its burdens” (70).

applications in the name of gender-related agency.²⁵ Gardens do not have to be situated in an idealized “beyond” in order to be an attractive, liberating space for women. On the contrary, these terrains, particularly when they assume a figurative role at the level of the text, afford women (both the authors and their characters) an indisputable presence and voice even as the territory maintains its association with the domestic.

In his discussion of paradox and the garden, Hunt writes that gardens are “places where both social convention and its unlooked-for or secretly plotted transgressions are equally at home” (*Greater Perfections* 176). Hunt’s phrase “at home” serves merely as a descriptor for the garden’s accommodation of opposites; but in the context of my argument for the text-as-garden, the phrase “at home” carries even greater implications in terms of women’s writing and the construction of gender and quotidian experience. If a woman writer’s text is “at home,” it suggests that the text is contained by, and communicates, domestic paradigms and traditional norms of femininity associated with

²⁵ While I contend that the writers in my study create gardens in and of the text that assume a public presence and/or role of social critique, other historical studies of women’s garden culture place limitations on women’s gardening agency. In their feminist re-readings of nineteenth-century flower gardens, Susan Groag Bell and Jacqueline Labbe argue separately that because women “are culturally accustomed to being enclosed, female writers can actually find more freedom within the garden” (Labbe 39). Despite these claims of empowerment, however, Bell and Labbe each concludes that women’s garden-related agency is ultimately divorced from communal involvement—from real social agency and participation. Just as Bell laments in the final sentence of her essay, “Alas! the flower gardens of women . . . live mostly in their letters, in their garden notebooks, in their botanical paintings, and in their embroideries” (481), Labbe concedes that the garden fostered merely personal power because women were “accorded no such space in the political arena” (54). In *Lilies of the Hearth*, a history of women’s relationship to gardening and plants, Jennifer Bennett offers a similar conclusion when discussing women’s garden-related embroidery work from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to Bennett, women’s embroidery makes only a subtle mark on the public, political milieu, thereby perpetuating continued associations of the feminine with merely decorative, private concerns: “Few women had any influence on changes in government, yet repercussions of the most exalted events appeared even on handkerchiefs and pillowcases. One could make a quiet political statement by choosing one’s botanical themes carefully” (121). For all the subtle agency women derive from the liminal space of the garden, Labbe, Bell, and Bennett cast feminine “gardening” influence (in the public realm) as drastically confined—a characterization that seems predicated upon women’s domestic roots and garden associations.

the selfless nurturing of others.²⁶ In light of the perceived relationship between women's traditional submission and their position within the domestic, the supposedly enclosed nature of the domestic garden where women are kept "at home" helps to explain feminist critics' arguments to move beyond cultivated nature as a model for writing and instead look to the wilderness as a more appropriate, figurative articulation of women's uncontained, unexpressed desires.²⁷

Because both social conventions and transgressions "are equally at home" in the garden, then the statement that a woman writer is "at home" in her text-as-garden carries a double *entendre*: not only is the text constructed through domestic paradigms that constitute women's quotidian experience, but also the text allows the woman writer to feel confident and comfortable, or "at home," in her subtle examination, questioning, or overt challenge to gender norms. According to Kerstin W. Shands, spatial metaphors play a central role in feminist discourse and shed light on feminists' frequent privileging of the open, vast wilderness over the more constrained space of the garden: "feminism, in its exploration of geographical and discursive terrains, employs an imagery of spaces, boundaries, circles, and cycles, as well as imagery of movement within or out of limited

²⁶ One only has to think of Virginia Woolf's famous discussion of the Angel of the House in the nineteenth century in order to appreciate perceptions of the detrimental effects of women's private domain and prescribed social roles. Woolf's Angel is the feminine phantom of decorum and concession who hinders Woolf's writing in "Professions for Women": "[The Angel] was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. . . . —in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others" (51). Being "at home" for Woolf's Angel means a passive acceptance of social conventions: feminine self-denial, servitude, and lack of real socio-political agency under patriarchy.

²⁷ Here, I am thinking specifically of the "wilderness" theories of Elaine Showalter and Hélène Cixous that work to subvert the physical, cultural, political, and linguistic containment of women. Wanting not to be forever "at home," Showalter proposes a "wild zone" of female culture: "Spatially it stands as an area which is literally no-man's-land, a place forbidden to men. . . . Experientially it stands for aspects of the female life-style which are outside of and unlike those of men" (200). Similar to this inarticulate female "wild zone" that exists beyond male-centred language and culture is Cixous' "dark continent" of feminine difference in her theory of *l'écriture féminine* (1096): "Now women return from afar, from always: from 'without,' from the heath where witches are kept alive; from below, from beyond 'culture'" (1092).

spaces in ways that recall those of our foremother Eve, as seen in . . . her disobedient steps outside the Garden of Eden” (1). The in-between, paradoxical nature of the garden appeals to women writers as both a place and as a figurative model for their expression, as the garden allows them to engage with gender conventions from a dual position. For example, Casey highlights gardens as liminal spaces, spaces which we occupy, and through which we move:

Even when strictly self-contained and accorded quasi-sacred status, however, gardens remain *liminal* phenomena. They are liminal just insofar as they are at the threshold between a series of things: between a building (domestic or institutional) and circumambient nature; between dwelling-as-residing and dwelling-as-wandering; between sky and ground, horizon and path; and between standing stock-still and running. Even if we pause from time to time, for the most part we *perambulate* in gardens. *Perambulate* as a transitive verb means to inspect the boundaries of a place. . . . But in the case of gardens *the place itself is a boundary*. To perambulate here is not restricted to going *around* a place but includes walking *through* it (thus rejoining the literal meaning of “per-ambulate”).

(155)

Clearly, the ability to “perambulate” within the garden, as Casey theorizes it, makes the garden a promising model for women writers who wish to be both “at home” in their recognition of the domestic and in their transgressions against it. In both a literal and figurative sense, gardens are boundaries that provide, paradoxically enough, containment within the familiar appeal of traditional ideals (related to the garden, the domestic, and to gender), while also affording writers the freedom to explore and test these ideological parameters and social conventions. In reformulating the garden as a model for the text,

rather than merely as an actual place, however, I argue that Canadian women writers' "garden" work takes full advantage of the garden's suggestion of productive marginal space, and at the same time grants women's "garden" expression socio-political relevance and visibility.

To summarize, my project examines both the literal and figurative uses of gardens in Canadian women's writing and how the garden mediates gender conventions, domestic paradigms, and the problematic desires of characters and personae. In addition to considering the archetype of paradise and the related ideas of innocence and falls into experience, I draw upon garden theorists' contentions that the garden is an art of milieu and a liminal space that enables a productive marginality on the part of the gardener, whether it be a character who gardens in the text, or the author who "cultivates" her text. The gardens that I examine relate specifically, therefore, to the writers' socio-historical, gendered concerns and, when applicable, their feminist mandates. I have chosen writers who reveal in their work a preoccupation with women's experiences and changing domestic roles during particular periods of social upheaval or ideological transition. These writers include Susanna Moodie (1803-85) and Catharine Parr Traill (1802-99), who describe their experiences as female settlers in Upper Canada during the nineteenth century; Gabrielle Roy (1909-83), who writes of her own experience as an aspiring woman writer during the first half of the twentieth century just prior to World War II; Carol Shields (1935-2003), who traces in her fiction the social conventions of women's lives throughout the twentieth century from a feminist perspective born out of the 1960s and 1970s; and finally Lorna Crozier (1948 -), who interrogates myth, language, and social taboos through her feminist, postmodern poetic vision. These writers are by no means "representative" of particular time periods, but rather highly informative because

of their enduring interest in gender conventions and domestic paradigms, and their consistent literal and figurative use of the garden throughout their writing careers (as opposed to producing only a single garden-related work).²⁸ My project posits the domestic garden as a gendered ideal that these writers perpetuate, negotiate, intelligently celebrate, or turn over and misuse in order to question the very ideologies evoked by such an ideal. Because I argue that gardens operate simultaneously on multiple levels in and of the text, my chapters focus, therefore, not only on the literal gardens and gardeners depicted by these writers, but also on how these authors work as “gardeners” to “cultivate” and “plot” their writing through the trope of the garden in order to achieve significant formal features and textual effects. In order to appreciate the writers’ diverse approaches to literary “gardening,” I examine a variety of genres including early settlement writing (autobiographical narratives and didactic texts), autobiography, short stories, novels, and poetry. Through my chronological examination of the garden topos and trope in my selection of writers, I reveal how the domestic garden operates as an influential ideal during different periods of time and in diverse genres. These writers approach their expression as a means of recreating, leaving, returning to, or disrupting from within, the place and idea that is the combined concern of home and garden.

In chapter one, I introduce Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill as literary foremothers and writers of the garden in Canadian literature. Their writing of nineteenth-century British landscape aesthetics and garden ideals signals a prominent arrival of the

²⁸ In the interest of time, I limit the number of writers whom I examine. There are, of course, other female authors who also fit my dual criteria of a) incorporating the garden topos and trope frequently and prominently in a number of their works throughout their career, and b) demonstrating an interest in gender politics and the domestic. These writers include among others L. M. Montgomery, P. K. Page, and Margaret Atwood. The five writers whom I have chosen for the focus of my study lend themselves to an examination of the garden as a site of boundary and transition, as these writers contemplate arrivals to, departures from, returns to, and disruptions from within their domestic gardens.

garden topos and trope in Canadian literary history and criticism. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which Moodie's and Traill's writing of the garden is interpreted by literary scholars through such archetypes as paradise, the wilderness, and themes of domination. Then, I distinguish the nature (the content and structure) of Moodie's and Traill's actual kitchen gardens, which they plant in the backwoods and describe in their published and private writing. I contend that as pioneers who transplant garden aesthetics, pragmatics, and ideals to Upper Canada, Moodie and Traill become, by necessity, gardeners of accommodation and milieu in keeping with the socio-physical surroundings and realities of their wilderness-settler environment.

After having discussed Moodie's and Traill's actual kitchen gardens as described in their writing, I examine in chapter two how gardens figure in and influence the writing produced by Moodie and Traill. Examining the language of the garden that was popular in England during the nineteenth century in discourse concerning "cultivated" women of an educated, refined social background, I suggest that Moodie and Traill not only employ this garden rhetoric in their writing, but also adapt it to reflect their experience as "transplanted" middle-class women who are "hardened-off" in their difficult pioneer experience. In addition to this figurative language, Moodie and Traill also use the garden as a "plot" in which to situate their characters and own personae in order to express the shifting gender domains and paradoxical experiences of "cultivated" women pioneers.

Following my exploration of the arrival and transplanting of the garden as both a literal place and figurative trope in the works of Moodie and Traill, in chapter three I turn to an experience of uprooting and departure through Gabrielle Roy's writing of the woman artist's journey of self-discovery and independence. Tracing the bower as an important ancestral relative to the topos and trope of the domestic garden, I argue that

Roy not only presents the garden as integral to women's domestic-situated expression in her fiction, but also creates domestic-styled bowers in both her short story "Garden in the Wind" and her autobiography *Enchantment and Sorrow* in order to mediate her own ambivalence as an artist coming to her vocation and having to leave behind domestic responsibilities in order to realize the freedom to pursue her craft. Thus, in her writing of actual gardens that are significant in the early years of her life, Roy incorporates the bower genre. In cultivating stylized, literary visions of these gardens, Roy negotiates the problematic feelings of the female artist with respect to her relationship with the domestic and offers a sense of familiarity and reassurance despite the transition in gender roles.

In chapter four, I examine Carol Shields' use of the archetypal quest for paradise and the symbol of paradise to shape her domestic-focussed novels. If Roy depicts troubled departures away from the domestic garden for her female characters, then Shields works to express a significant return to the domestic by suggesting that within this dynamic realm, journeys toward fulfillment are possible. I contend that a significant part of Shields' feminist mandate is to celebrate the domestic in a discerning manner as a potential "paradise"—a setting of quotidian life, and a symbol of ultimate personal fulfillment. Shields provides intelligent nuance in her use of the paradise trope by using garden settings to initiate a dialogue between superficial and genuine forms of "paradisal" fulfillment. Thus, in addition to drawing on the supreme archetype of the garden, paradise itself, Shields invites readers to interrogate the "nature" of the domestic by highlighting its sometimes deceptive or theatrical qualities through the garden trope and the garden's spatial capacity for staging "scenes."

In chapter five, I turn to the garden poems of Lorna Crozier. Whereas the other writers subscribe to the domestic garden as an ideal in terms of its familiarity, comfort,

stability, and personal quality, Crozier works to undermine the garden, defamiliarizing (or “denaturalizing”) the garden trope in her poems in order to expose social conventions. I trace the progression of four stages in Crozier’s evolving garden poetics, as Crozier effectively “turns” on the garden trope itself in various ways throughout her career. After examining how Crozier eventually relates the art of writing with the act of gardening in terms of processes of disruption and transformation, I focus at length on Crozier’s collection *A Saving Grace: The Collected Poems of Mrs. Bentley*, in which Crozier creates a denaturalized, palimpsest model of the garden as text.

Together, these close analyses of textual gardens lead to three main insights. First, if readers and critics alike push beyond thematic and archetypal approaches to the garden in Canadian literature, then other formal and ideological applications come to light. The garden appeals as an ideal to both writers and readers, but that ideal is by no means simplified or static, as it is imbued with ideology and an author’s critical mediation. Second, like its sisterly counterpart (an actual garden), a textual garden is an art of milieu. In the contexts of the writers whom I study, shifting gender paradigms form a central, constitutive part of their different “gardening” milieus. Furthermore, the kinds of gardens (that is their form and content) are reflective of the socio-physical environments, time frames, and literary traditions in and of which these authors write. Third, just as an actual garden offers a sensitive, critical expression of the human subject’s relationship to and experience in nature, a textual garden can potentially be endowed with a similar kind of exceptional status, serving as an interpretive lens through which readers perceive and reflect upon the text as a whole. Just as gardens can be “read,” textual gardens invite careful consideration of the garden’s overall “design,” its larger significance, and the reader’s own interpretive experience. Thus, writing that is

profoundly inspired by the garden reveals itself to be a mode of expression in its acute combination of both content and form.

Chapter One

“[T]ransplanted into our gardens”: Susanna Moodie, Catharine Parr Traill, and the Backwoods Kitchen Garden

In the spring of 1839, Susanna Moodie, a middle-class British emigrant, finds herself living alone in the backwoods of Upper Canada, her husband John employed by the militia at the time to pay for the family’s financial debts. Writing a wedding anniversary letter to her absent husband, Moodie recounts how there are court writs against their cattle, and how the children are “rather ragged and bare” without proper clothing (“Susanna Moodie to John Moodie” 140). Despite the desperate situation, Moodie includes an imperative request of her own: “You must send me a pair of Indian Rubber shoes, [*sic*] to garden in for I am without” (“Susanna Moodie to John Moodie” 141). Having also emigrated in 1832, Moodie’s sister Catharine Parr Traill shares her sister’s sentiment: a garden is indispensable. In Traill’s *The Canadian Settler’s Guide*¹ (1855), readers learn practical gardening tips before they are educated in the essential task of making bread.² Gardens are central to Moodie’s and Traill’s daily lives; yet critics ignore this aspect of the sisters’ domestic environs even when their scholarship focusses

¹ *The Canadian Settler’s Guide* appears first in 1854 under the title *The Female Emigrant’s Guide, and Hints on Canadian Housekeeping*. *The Canadian Settler’s Guide* (2nd edition) appears to be the most recognizable, as McClelland and Stewart reprinted this edition in 1969 for their New Canadian Library series, which I use for the purposes of this project.

² While the original order of *The Canadian Settler’s Guide* showcases gardening in the opening sections, Traill’s hand-written revisions (circa 1880) for a new edition of her book (which were never implemented or published) reveal that she intended to adjust the sequence of the material. In a note to her publisher Traill writes, “I am inclined to think that the pages which were arranged at the beginning of the book on gardening would be better placed further on—I am so tired or I would have entirely rearranged the matter. I must leave it entirely to the discretion of your editor” (*Canadian Settler’s Revisions*). Despite Traill’s request for a revised arrangement, she maintains the garden’s importance by outlining a new table of contents that contains the headings “The Vegetable Garden” and “On Gardening: the use and value of a garden” (*Canadian Settler’s Revisions*).

on landscape and landscape aesthetics.³ Whereas the majority of critics tend to discuss Moodie's and Traill's relationship to the larger landscape, or the wilderness, I argue for the centrality of the garden to their daily lives and to their expression of the female emigrant experience. As actual sites they describe in their writing, Moodie's and Traill's gardens follow complex trajectories, revealing the sisters' changing garden aesthetics as they negotiate between themselves and their immediate, personal surroundings. As products of a combination of British gardening aesthetics, garden pragmatics, and the wilderness-settler environment, Moodie's and Traill's gardens serve as significant reflections of the Strickland sisters' own physical and cultural transplanting to Upper Canada.

1. The Garden in Relation to the Canadian Literary Landscape

For the most part, criticism on Moodie and Traill features the environment on a grand scale, while scholars characterize the garden—and I speak, here, of the garden as a relatively more immediate and tangible domestic terrain—as inconsequential, lacking dynamic aesthetic expression and the facility for social critique. Critics of Moodie and Traill do not figure gardens prominently in their scholarship and often judge these domestic terrains as inadequate means of responding to the Upper Canadian landscape. Academic interest resides primarily with the physical and intellectual processing of the wilderness at large. This line of criticism is clearly shaped by Margaret Atwood's highly

³ Notable studies on Moodie's and Traill's treatments of landscape include those by Margaret Atwood, Edward H. Dahl, Michael Peterman, Rosemary Sullivan, and Clara Thomas. I deal particularly with those critics who form conclusions about, or refer to, gardens within their landscape-focussed arguments.

literary, figurative vision in her collection *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*.⁴ In her book, Atwood creates a poetic interpretation of Moodie's pioneer garden, a nightmarish vision where animalistic plants resist a productive harvest. Atwood's poem "Dream 1: The Bush Garden" demonstrates how the wilderness often overrides garden terrain in critical perception. Moreover, because of the subsequent influence of Atwood's poetry on readings of Moodie and Traill, critics overlook important distinctions between different kinds of gardens. In other words, their interpretations of actual gardens (as described in the Strickland sisters' writing) are conflated with Atwood's bush garden image. In Atwood's poem, Moodie's hands come "away red and wet" after picking strawberries in her garden, and she declares, "I should have known / anything planted here / would come up blood" (*The Journals of Susanna Moodie* 34). With Atwood's Moodie persona trying to impose a structured garden upon an unruly wilderness, the bush garden becomes a symbol for all that Northrop Frye believes is intrinsic to the Canadian literary imagination. In *The Bush Garden*, Frye puts forth a predominant Canadian wilderness myth structured by "a physical or psychological 'frontier'" (225). According to Frye, this "garrison mentality" encapsulates society's polarization against the wilderness, which is perceived as a "huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting" (225). In this battle against nature, Moodie is a soldiering force, "a British army of occupation in herself, a one-woman garrison" (Frye 237), and Traill exhibits "a somewhat selective approach to the subject [of nature] reminiscent of Miss Muffet" (Frye 244). While Frye renders Moodie masculine, he posits Traill's domestic-centred literary response as mere nursery-rhyme musings, inconsequential to Canadian culture. The irony

⁴ Susan Johnston argues, "So powerful is Atwood's reconstruction that not only most interpretations of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, but many independent discussions of *Roughing It in the Bush* as well, have succumbed to its lure" (28).

here is that while Frye disengages Canadian literature from the British tradition through his organic model of writers being “rooted” in their environment (i), he systematically denies Moodie’s and Traill’s garden-related responses that undeniably stem in part from their British origins and Upper Canadian setting.

The foremost topic of garden discussion with regard to Moodie and Traill, and to nineteenth-century Canadian literature in general, relates not to actual gardens, but to an idealized concept of paradise. In the various interpretations of this meta-narrative, the “new world” presents itself in the minds of its writers as a veritable Eden or, alternatively, as a wilderness ready to be settled and transformed into a potential paradise. Writer and critic Robert Kroetsch observes, “In a new place, and in its literature, the Adamic impulse to give name asserts itself. . . . Writers in a new place conceive of themselves profoundly as namers. They name in order to give focus and definition. . . . They name to create boundaries. They name to establish identity. Canadian writing is the writing down of a new place” (*Lovely Treachery* 41). Part of this “Adamic impulse” involves the idealization and justification of the settlement process by naming it in a certain manner through an explicit paradise motif. According to Edward H. Dahl, the consistent use of paradise metaphors by the Strickland sisters evokes an impression of an ideal rural state as “wilderness plus industry yields a garden or paradise” through a religiously sanctioned reclaiming of the land (42). W. H. New contends that “European visual codes” for the land as communicated by nineteenth-century writers like Moodie and Traill further appropriation during the settlement period, as the process of “differentiating between a paradisaal earthly garden and a savage earthly wilderness determines that there exists a ‘natural right’ to territorial expansion” (22). In *The Backwoods of Canada*, Traill articulates this paradisaal vision as expressed to her by a fellow settler when musing on the

difficult work in establishing a backwoods home: “‘Depend upon it, my dear, your Canadian farm will seem to you a perfect paradise by the time it is all under cultivation; and you will look upon it with the more pleasure and pride from the consciousness that it was once a forest wild, which, by the effects of industry and well-applied means, has changed to fruitful fields’” (*Backwoods* 92). Moodie presents a similar view when departing from Grosse Isle in *Roughing It in the Bush*: “Cradled in the arms of the St. Lawrence, and basking in the bright rays of the morning sun, the island and its sister group looked like a second Eden just emerged from the waters of chaos” (27). The two statements by Traill and Moodie belie a colonial rhetoric intricately related to a paradise motif. In these passages Traill’s and Moodie’s purpose is not to relate quotidian, personal experience, but rather to enter into a nation-building project as they name the “Canadian farm” and landscape in accordance with an idealized, naturalized view of their British settlement society. In the context of settlement writing, Traill and Moodie are by no means idiosyncratic in their use of this sacred garden motif.⁵

While paradise comparisons are a significant aspect of Moodie’s and Traill’s writing in terms of their British imperialistic visions, critics’ emphasis on this aspect of the garden topos and trope persists in directing readers’ attentions “outward”—in other words, away from these women’s actual gardens and day-to-day immediate domestic environments and toward societal concerns on a grand scale, such as the settlement of the wilderness through the promotion of an agrarian economy and a land-based genteel society. Clearly, Moodie and Traill communicate an idealized political vision of the “paradise” of Upper Canada as a fledgling colony, yet they also construct, according to

⁵ Focussing on loyalist writing, Dennis Duffy argues, for example, in *Gardens, Covenants, Exiles* that author William Kirby (1817-1906) characterizes Upper Canada in *The Golden Dog* as “the embattled paradise” (37) threatened by the rebellious forces of revolutionary, imperialistic Americans.

different criteria, garden ideals that relate to their particular experiences as women pioneers planting actual gardens shaped by British aesthetics and backwoods realities. Within Moodie's and Traill's writing, the garden operates on literal and figurative levels simultaneously, which often results in slippage with respect to critics' assessments of the sisters' backwoods gardens.

One relevant and notable exception to wilderness-centred criticism and analysis of the paradise motif is Wanda Ruth Campbell's doctoral dissertation "The 'Bildungsgedicht' as Garden in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Canadian Long Poems" in which Campbell parallels the growth of the individual with the growth of the community through a garden topos and trope. While a central preoccupation of Campbell's discussion is various paradise metaphors as applied to the Canadian landscape, she addresses also alternative levels of the garden by examining the transplanting of aesthetic and literary forms. Campbell's focus on the long poem genre excludes Moodie's and Traill's fiction, autobiographical writing, and didactic texts from her study, but her approach is relevant to my particular project, as the Strickland sisters' gardens merit further attention as socio-cultural and aesthetic indicators of their nineteenth-century milieu and female emigrant experience. My challenge here, then, is twofold: first, to locate Moodie's and Traill's actual gardens as described in their writing in order to understand the changing trajectory of their garden ideals; and second, to determine the ways in which their experiences as gardeners extend to their rhetoric as writers, whose central concern is the depiction of the "cultivated" and cultivating female settler.

Reacting against thematic interpretations of Moodie's and Traill's writing, some critics consider how the language of landscape reveals particular social, aesthetic, and

political codes; often in these studies, however, gardens continue to be overlooked while critics favour the larger landscape. Susan Glickman's *The Picturesque and the Sublime* contends that eighteenth-century aesthetic conventions,⁶ rather than repulsion for the wilderness, inform Moodie's response to the landscape of Upper Canada. For Glickman, Moodie's Romantic aesthetics and sensibility prompt her to interpret and describe the scenery at large in particular ways and only at particular moments: "But as apprehension of the sublime is acknowledged to occur in moments of private meditation, and not of intense activity, it is hardly surprising that when [Moodie] represents herself as hard at work on her farm, we get little or no natural description" (62). When leisurely sailing down the St. Lawrence near the coast of Grosse Isle, an awestruck Moodie draws upon the language of the sublime and incorporates the term explicitly:

The previous day had been dark and stormy; and a heavy fog had concealed the mountain chain, which forms the stupendous background to this sublime view, entirely from our sight. As the clouds rolled away from their grey, bald brows, and cast into denser shadow the vast forest belt that girdled them round, they loomed like mighty giants—Titans of the earth, in all their rugged and awful beauty—a thrill of wonder and delight pervaded my mind. The spectacle floated dimly on my

⁶ Glickman derives her definition of the sublime from Edmond Burke's *An Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1775) in which Burke attributes the sublime with causing feelings of pain, terror, awe, and astonishment. Objects of the sublime are "vast in their dimensions," "rugged and negligent," "dark and gloomy," and "solid and massive" (Burke 140). As for the picturesque, Glickman stresses the artistic aspect of this term: "The result, seen throughout eighteenth-century literature, was poetry organized according to techniques of painterly composition. For example, the poem is represented as seeing a 'prospect,' and describes it from foreground to middle ground to distance in an orderly progression of images" (Glickman 9). Glickman discusses the picturesque in terms of viewing the landscape, but for the purposes of this project it is important to note that in the context of gardening design, the picturesque signals not only "the arrangement of a garden so as to make a pretty picture," but also the aesthetic features of "irregular and rugged beauty" ("Picturesque").

sight—my eyes were blinded with tears—blinded with the excess of beauty.

(*Roughing It* 17)

The deep shadows, the vast forest, and the rugged texture of the scene that Moodie observes point to her sensitivity to the sublime. The landscape inspires in Moodie high emotion and suffuses her with awe. Through her study of Moodie's attraction to the sublime, Glickman dispels garrison-minded interpretations, yet she persists in examining Moodie in relation to the most dominant setting—the wilderness or distant prospect—and in the process overlooks the immediate, personal foreground of this pioneer woman. According to Glickman, Moodie's farm "simply forms the *background* to labour. A half-starved nursing mother, digging potatoes, has little occasion for transcendent communion with nature!" (62, my emphasis).

If scholars emphasize Moodie's preoccupation with the larger landscape, then, conversely, they deem Traill as too confined by the domestic. Marian Fowler argues that Traill creates a woman's version of a garrison against the wilderness through her scientific, orderly response to nature and her rigid home environment. Traill's "tight, bright little domestic circle" (Fowler 81) is responsible for Traill's defective response to the wilderness, which is her failure to open herself to the awe-inspiring sublime. Echoing Fowler, Gaile McGregor argues that Traill's predominant image of the backwoods is that of the "cheerful, and homely kitchen-garden" (42). Here, Traill wills the wilderness into something safe, useable, and recognizable. Clearly, critics dismiss Moodie's and Traill's domestic gardens as irrelevant to their landscape aesthetics (Glickman, Frye), and they suggest that the garden is an indisputable means of dominating the wilderness, of remaining safely polarized against the environment (Fowler, McGregor). The sublime, the picturesque, and the garrison mentality function clearly as aesthetic and intellectual

ways of processing the wilderness, but gardens form as well some of the most complex sites of human interaction with, and understanding of, the natural and social world.

While the predominant line of criticism on the Strickland sisters examines these pioneer women in relation to the larger landscape, a more recent feminist line of scholarship attempts to resituate Moodie and Traill. Moving away from notions of struggle and domination, Helen Buss and Heather Murray shed light on the writing of women pioneers, arguing that women's experiences differ significantly from those of their male counterparts. Women assume an intimate, intermediary role between feminized nature (with which women identify) and culture (in which women participate).⁷ Buss suggests that women settlers do not adopt a garrison mentality because of their gendered connection to the land and related creative activities, such as nurturing children, painting, and writing about the environment.⁸ Similar to Buss, Murray sets aside the garrison model as a masculine construct in her thesis of a landscape continuum, and it is within Murray's concept of the "pseudo-wilderness" specifically, that I wish to position Moodie's and Traill's gardens. According to Murray, the "pseudo-wilderness" is a marginal, middle ground (75) and includes a range of locales—the backwoods, a farm, or a camp. These places offer midpoints from which women are able to negotiate socio-cultural values and gender roles. Thus, in this middle ground of culture and nature that forms their gardens, Moodie and Traill realize a productive marginality, allowing them to reshape both their transplanted British garden aesthetics and their understanding of a

⁷ In her essay, Buss sees nineteenth-century women writers "react to the strangeness of the Canadian landscape by merging their own identity, in some imaginative way, with the new land" (126).

⁸ Buss does not include gardening in her list of environment-related activities, even though it is primarily women who undertake this task. For an analysis of women pioneers' gardens in an American context, Annette Kolodny's *The Land before Her* presents gardening as the foremost example of women's direct engagement with their wilderness surroundings.

woman's place within the garden through their accommodation of the quotidian demands and realities of pioneer life.

Turning away from Moodie's and Traill's perceptions of the larger landscape and instead locating the more intimate terrain of their actual gardens as described in their writing, I undertake a critical shift that reveals interspaces of feminine creativity, where these women settlers process their desire for domestic comfort and familiarity amidst unfamiliar ground. Because gardens reveal observable interactions between individuals and their socio-physical environments, Moodie's and Traill's gardens need to be re-examined as highly expressive realms, not mere potato patches. As nineteenth-century writers, Moodie and Traill tend to reflect at length on the visual prospects of the larger landscape and do not grant their garden-related passages the same quantity of description. Nevertheless, despite this imbalance, Moodie's and Traill's gardens have a consistent and telling presence within their writing that should not be set aside by critics as inconsequential descriptors of the mundane. In direct contrast to Glickman's statement that nature on Moodie's farm "simply forms the *background* to labour" (62, my emphasis), Moodie and Traill situate and display their gardens prominently in their *front* yards, as Traill reveals during her first spring in the backwoods: "I am anxiously looking forward to the spring, that I may get a garden laid out in front of the house; as I mean to cultivate some of the native fruits and flowers" (*Backwoods* 103). Traill's backwoods garden is an intricate composite of "native fruits and flowers," British aesthetics and plants, and pioneer pragmatics.⁹ Moreover, her backwoods garden, like that of her sister,

⁹ I use the term "backwoods garden" as an alternative to avoid conflation with Atwood's and Frye's "bush garden." Unlike the oppositional, grotesque, and highly literary "bush garden" of animalistic plants that first sprouted from Atwood's fertile imagination and critical perception, the "backwoods garden" is an actual garden formed in and through the Upper Canadian surroundings and described in words.

is for all intents and purposes, a kitchen garden planted and tended to supply the culinary and domestic needs of her family. In terms of the picturesque and the sublime, a kitchen garden seems an unromantic territory of necessity and work. Utility-based and not typically sites of profound expressive potential or social critique, kitchen gardens are central to Moodie's and Traill's quotidian realities of backwoods living; these sisters choose, however, to write about these domestic terrains and sometimes in a highly self-conscious manner, thereby complicating the kitchen garden's role. Reflecting on garden writing from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Rachel Crawford highlights the ambiguous, in-between position of the kitchen garden particularly when a gardener presents it in a written form, such as a manual:

as a didactic text the kitchen garden manual opens with the assumption that the speaker occupies a public forum; yet it presumes, as the etymology of the word "garden" suggests, a guarded and secluded space, one which is shielded from the eye of the passerby and which shuts out the external prospect. As readers of the kitchen-garden manual we peer through the chink in the wall or the break in the hedge into our neighbour's yard. The allure in each case, so unlike the indifferent gaze over the wide prospect . . . , is the allure of the bounded, the excluded, the voyeuristic gaze. (*Poetry, Enclosure* 184)

When I place Traill's kitchen garden instruction in *The Canadian Settler's Guide* in the context of Crawford's observations, Traill clearly straddles private and public domains, presenting her domestic environs through a forum of instruction and commentary. In writing about their backwoods kitchen gardens not only in the form of a manual (in Traill's case) but also in their published works in general, Traill and Moodie position these gardens, therefore, as intermediary terrains that facilitate both private and public

reflections. Thus, for Traill and Moodie the kitchen garden is central to their expressive lives, not just as gardeners, but also as writers.

2. Nineteenth-Century Landscape and Garden Ideals

When Moodie and Traill immigrated to Upper Canada, they brought with them specific garden ideals, mainly the picturesque aesthetics of the English landscape garden. In Britain, the landscape garden had its beginnings in the early 1700s and was prompted by a fashionable desire “to leave, or at least *appear to leave*, nature in an unenclosed and unaltered condition” with the home and estate being oriented outward toward the environment (Casey 164). As the father of the English landscape garden, Lancelot Brown (c. 1715-83) and his successor Humphrey Repton (1752-1818) showcased the features of the larger landscape within, and beyond, a landowner’s immediate property, making the entire scene appear “natural.” According to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, “natural” is something “[e]xisting in, or formed by, nature”; in other words “not artificially made, formed or constructed” (“Natural”). With the objective of “renaturing . . . nature” (Casey 164), English landscape designers worked to create “continuity between estate and nature such that the two could be said to blend indistinguishably at their respective edges” (Casey 166). Garden critic Roger Turner notes that “Capability” Brown’s designs captured the “special character of each locality” by paying particular attention to the natural topography of the land (78).¹⁰ Brown accomplished this “natural” harmony through a variety of design strategies, one of which was the sunken fence or

¹⁰ Brown’s nickname, “Capability,” derived from the fact that he “alerted his clients and their friends to the natural capabilities of the countryside” (Hunt and Willis 31).

“ha-ha.”¹¹ Rather than using fences or hedges as boundaries that would appear artificial by disturbing the flow of the terrain by signalling agricultural use, Brown incorporated the ha-ha into the park’s terrain: “Brown’s sunk fences are normally placed so that they lie at right-angles to the line of sight; in this way one looks straight over the ditch and not along it. Furthermore, these sunk fences always run along the contours; never against them which would look most awkward” (Turner 80). Other design strategies used to evoke a “natural” scene included serpentine paths and roads; the creation of curve-shaped, as opposed to angular, lakes that “give no exact impression of their size or form” (Turner 82); and the use of indigenous trees, so that “nothing appeared horticultural about his landscape gardens” (Turner 83).

Although garden historians regard Brown as the father of the English landscape garden, Repton was also central to its development, and he had a far-reaching impact throughout the early and mid-nineteenth century—the period in which Moodie and Traill were exposed to popular landscape aesthetics. In contrast to Brown, Repton encouraged more formal ornamentation around the home through the creation of a “pleasure-ground” (Repton, *The Art* 143) of shrubs and flowers to accommodate human activity, as Repton believed that the “leading feature in the good taste of modern times is the just sense of general utility” (*The Art* 67). Repton’s use of ornamentation for convenience meant that the less picturesque elements of an estate, such as the kitchen garden, could be relocated close to the home for improved access without jeopardizing a natural appearance.

Despite alterations for convenience, though, Repton strove to maintain an expanse of

¹¹ Garden historians Laurence Fleming and Alan Gore speculate the sunken fence “has become known to us as a HaHa, perhaps because those who observed it said ‘Aha,’ while those who did not caused their friends to say ‘HaHa’ when they fell into it. Horace Walpole, son of the first Prime Minister, said that the common people called them Ha!Ha’s! ‘to express their surprise at finding a sudden and unperceived check to their walk’” (89).

property that had a visual impact with numerous picturesque prospects, and he suggested, “the flower-garden except where it is annexed to the house, should not be visible from the roads or general walks about the place” (*The Art* 144). Repton wanted to display the landowner’s property in an idealistic, pure manner, stating, “an ugly barn, a ploughed field, or an obtrusive object which disgraces the scenery of a park, . . . robs the mind of the pleasure derived from appropriation, or the unity and continuity of *unmixed* property” (*The Art* 61, my emphasis). Clearly, in the context of the English landscape garden movement, the concept of “natural” remained highly subjective—dictated by particular aesthetics that were the subject of much debate.¹² Moreover, garden historian Brent Elliott notes that in the quest for the expansive, seemingly natural landscape garden, “[e]vidences of human industry and impact on the landscape were reduced” (21), which meant in some extreme cases that “entire villages [were] moved by Act of Parliament because the landowners wanted to incorporate their sites into the landscape garden” (21-22). Elliott points to Oliver Goldsmith’s poem *The Deserted Village* (1770), which was “inspired by the removal of the village Nuneham Courtenay to allow the expansion of the landscape garden” (22), as an example of protest against the excessive measures taken by landowners in the pursuit of a “natural” landscape aesthetic. Goldsmith’s poem prompted, of course, the poetic response from his grandnephew, also named Oliver Goldsmith, who wrote *The Rising Village: A Poem* (1825), which expresses a guarded hope for the dispossessed British lower classes and their need for land and new

¹² Brown’s design aesthetics did not go unchallenged. Vocal opponents of Brown, Sir Uvedale Price (1747-1829) and Richard Payne Knight (1750-1824) argued for the addition of further vegetation to counter Brown’s sweeping and, in their opinion, monotonous terrain. In his poetic treatise *The Landscape, A Didactic Poem* (1794) Knight describes Brown as a figure of destruction, “whose innovating hand / First dealt thy curses o’er this fertile land” (301-02; bk. 1), creating a landscape that seemed barren and, worst of all, artificial: “Oft when I’ve seen some lonely mansion stand, / Fresh from th’ improver’s desolating hand, / ’Midst shaven lawns, that far around it creep / In one eternal undulating sweep” (1-4; bk. 2).

communities in the Canadian colony. Ironically, then, these “natural” terrains stemmed from designs that required a vast amount of human industry, carefully planned cultivation, and, startlingly enough, political influence.

If readers consider the features of the English landscape garden—its orientation to the larger environment, its stretches of lawn with groupings of trees, its undulating paths, its picturesque ornamentation around the home, and its creation of numerous visual prospects—they detect in Moodie’s and Traill’s writing a familiarity with, and preference for, the English landscape garden, rather than the newly settled tracts of land in Upper Canada. When Moodie recalls visiting Reydon Hall, her childhood home, before she began her trans-Atlantic voyage, her description reveals her attraction to a particular English landscape: “The glory of May was upon the earth—of an English May. The woods were bursting into leaf, the meadows and hedge-rows were flushed with flowers. . . . I went to take a last look at the old Hall, . . . to wander once more beneath the shade of its venerable oaks—to rest once more upon the velvet sward that carpeted their roots” (*Roughing It* 64-65). Moodie’s description of Reydon Hall’s environs suggests a picturesque aesthetic that partakes in the features of an English landscape garden: her experience of nature extends beyond the garden’s edges as she comments on the foliage of the woods; she revels in the symbolically charged English oaks; she is able to “wander” throughout Reydon’s estate, reflecting the movement that was encouraged in the English landscape garden; and she recalls how this natural setting awakened within her “a language unknown to common minds; and that language [was] *Poetry*” (*Roughing It* 65). As a mercantile, middle-class family, the Stricklands did not possess a grand estate typical of the aristocracy’s landscape parks, but as Charlotte Gray notes in her biography of Moodie and Traill, the manor did have “rambling grounds” and “extensive

lawns dotted with old sycamore trees” (10). In *Sketches from Nature; or, Hints to Juvenile Naturalists* (1830), Traill recounts the cultivated surroundings in which Reydon Hall was situated: “some pretty wild, woody lanes . . . skirted the park and grounds of a nobleman, whose land lay contiguous to our own estate” (134). In addition, Traill’s father was particularly attuned to aesthetic concerns, as made apparent in Traill’s description of the garden root-house:

This root-house . . . was a shed in a secluded part of the garden . . . and which papa had taken in hand to beautify, and render a very pretty and ornamental object, by planting . . . ivy on either side of the door-way, which he had turned into a gothic arch. The windows were latticed, and a screen of evergreens and flowering shrubs planted round, greatly improved the appearance of the place. (*Sketches from Nature* 5-6)

In contrast to this English scenery, Upper Canada fails to replicate for Moodie and Traill their ideal cultivated landscape garden with all of its picturesque variety and visual stimulation. Moodie writes, “A new clearing reminds one of a large turnip field. . . . Often, for miles on stretch, there is scarcely a tree or bush to relieve the blank monotony of these ugly, uncouth partitions of land, beyond charred stumps and rank weed” (*Life in the Clearings* 296). This “blank monotony” is incongruent with Moodie’s aesthetic sensibilities where variety is essential.¹³ Traill expresses similar disappointment when she uses picturesque aesthetics as the standard by which to judge newly settled properties in the colony: “But, in my opinion, much less is done with the romantic situation than might be effected if good taste were exercised in the buildings, and on the disposal of the

¹³ A varied prospect is central to the picturesque qualities of the English landscape garden, as Repton acknowledges, “The eye, or rather the mind, is never long delighted with that which it surveys without effort at a single glance” (*The Art* 117).

ground. How lovely would such a spot be rendered in England or Scotland. Nature here has done all, and man but little, excepting sticking up some ugly wooden cottages, as mean as they are tasteless” (*Backwoods* 19). Traill’s comments clearly belie her refined middle-class perspective and her familiarity with picturesque gardening aesthetics. The labourers’ “mean” and “tasteless” cottages do not conform to that which Traill is accustomed: “pretty villas” (*Backwoods* 19) or the ivy-adorned root-house embellished by her father.

According to F. K. Stanzel, Moodie and Traill do not have “innocent” eyes, but rather a “predetermined” (97) vision, as their writing strives not only to compose the landscape, but also to convey “the cultivation of the appropriate feeling when confronted with sublime or picturesque nature” (106). Stanzel’s use of the term “cultivation” is key, here, as he creates a parallel between the composed landscapes and the women themselves—women whose education, cultural refinement, and trained eyes for nineteenth-century aesthetics all suggest that they are as capable of being “cultivated” as the surrounding territory they view. Because of its association with tillage and labour upon the land, “cultivation” implies in a figurative sense that individuals themselves are organic, shaped by outside influences and their own designs with the aim of self-improvement, just as one “bestow[s] attention upon (a plant) so as to promote its growth” (“Cultivate”). In discussing landscape aesthetics and the cultivation of Moodie’s and Traill’s own perspectives, however, Stanzel does not fully explore the connotations of this land-related term, nor the possible gendered tensions at the time between the male designers who were in a position to manipulate the greater landscape, and the women who were conditioned to perceive and respond to the scenery in particular ways.

Moreover, Stanzel stresses landscape, rather than garden, in his discussion of the English landscape garden.

Taking issue with historical studies of the English landscape garden, Susan Groag Bell argues that women are left virtually invisible in so far as they were active gardeners during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The English landscape garden's purpose was, in part, to display the male landowner's aesthetic taste and his "wealth and political power" (Bell 472), a fact that not only highlights men's privileged relationship with landscape gardens, but also points indirectly to women's seemingly nonexistent role in this particular period of garden history.¹⁴ Bell argues that articles, diaries, and letters make evident that women's "flower gardens blossomed throughout the century even as the celebrated innovation of the landscape park was being shaped under male authority" (479). Dorothy Wordsworth serves as an example of a woman revealing herself (in her *Grasmere Journals* [1800-03]) to be an active, daily gardener, rather than merely a feminine observer of the landscape. Wordsworth's garden is not on the grand scale of a landscape park, but Bell concludes that the garden remains a vital part of Wordsworth's daily, Romantic sensibility.¹⁵ In her garden, Wordsworth communes with nature, plants lemon-thyme "by moonlight" (Wordsworth 8), and listens to Coleridge read *Christabel*

¹⁴ In the case of Repton, his landscape garden designs worked to confirm the social status and wealth of the male landowner, as made evident by his proposal for Blaise Castle (1795-96): "This is the first instance in which I have been consulted where all improvement must depend upon the axe, and tho' fully aware of the common objection to cutting down trees, yet, it is only by the bold use of that instrument that the wonders of Blaise Castle can be properly displayed" (Repton, "From the 'Red Book'" 362-63).

¹⁵ In using the family name "Wordsworth" to refer to Dorothy Wordsworth (just as I have used "Moodie" and "Traill" to refer to Susanna and Catharine, rather than to John and Thomas), I may cause some confusion as critics tend to use family names to refer to male writers and include first names when referring to female writers. My mention of "Wordsworth" calls forth immediately the Romantic poet William Wordsworth, not his sister, Dorothy Wordsworth, the diarist. I feel, however, that in order to re-evaluate the gendered experiences and writing of these women writers and gardeners, it is necessary to confer the status of a last name reference.

until 3:30 a.m. in the “still, clear moonshine of the garden” (Wordsworth 19). Moreover, Wordsworth describes herself as an educated gardener who has “read Mr [*sic*] Knight’s Landscape” (14), the didactic poem by English landscape designer Richard Payne Knight; and she boasts that her modest cottage garden attracts the attention of the more affluent seekers of picturesque nature: “A coroneted Landau went by when we were sitting upon the sodded wall. The ladies (evidently Tourists) turned an eye of interest upon our little garden & cottage” (9). Flower gardens may have occupied a marginal place within English landscape garden designs, yet women gardeners saw themselves as participating in, and emulating aspects of, this picturesque aesthetic.

As members of the middle-class educated in picturesque aesthetics and gender propriety, Moodie and Traill partake in women’s gardening culture and in their writing convey a keen interest in the treatment of terrain immediately surrounding the home. In accord with Bell’s argument, their private letters illuminate not only their intense interest in gardening, but also their lifetime pursuit of this activity. Indeed, in one letter, Moodie admits, “I never *tried* to draw a landscape in my life, but I will send you two flower sketches, one of our *Wild Marsh Iris*, the other is a Rose that grew at my Cottage door” (“To Allen Ransome” 253). Writing to a female friend, Moodie remembers the abundance of flowers at her childhood home in England and her clearly feminized gardening activity: “I always recall our large gardens at home, with a sad regret, and the want of flowers is to me a sad privation, very hard to be borne. . . . In my old house, which was of stone every window was full of flowers, and I tended them with a mother’s care” (“To Anna Ricketson” 248). In Upper Canada, flowers may not be in abundance but they remain a treasured part of Moodie’s garden as made evident by the fact that a pressed cutting of *campanula* with the note “taken from Aunt Moodie’s house in

Belleville” are part of the Traill Family Collection in the National Archives in Ottawa (see fig.1). Throughout the various decades of Traill’s life, Traill’s private writings reveal a highly active gardener and part of a larger gardening community. In her personal correspondence to relatives and friends, such as her longtime friend Ellen Dunlop, Traill comments frequently on the state of her garden. In a letter addressed “My Dearest Ellen,” Traill laments her garden’s less than productive season: “It has been a fine season for the wheat but the potatoes are suffering and the turnips, and oats for [want] of rain—we have not potatoes for the table which is a great privation” (Letter to Ellen Dunlop [Summer 1865]). In addition to these recurring reports on her garden’s progress, Traill uses her correspondence as a means of obtaining, sharing, and requesting seeds from across the Atlantic Ocean and within Canada. The Traill Family Collection at the National Archives contains seeds sent in tiny, folded paper enclosures that are hand-labeled as “feathered columbine” and “mixed violets yellow and white” with a note attached that reads, “found in envelope from Agnes Strickland and Granddaughter of Tom’s sent to CPT in ’96” (see fig. 2). In a letter, Thomas Traill mentions receiving seeds from abroad: “We also got a box of most valuable garden seeds from Mr. Bridges out of Lord Kinnaid’s garden in the Casse of Gowrie. Sowing them has occupied me and the girls fully and they have a very nice flower garden” (Letter to Frances Stewart). In addition to these trans-Atlantic seed exchanges, Traill forms a network of gardeners within Upper Canada. A letter to Ellen Dunlop (dated 1860) reveals that their friendship facilitates extensive plant and seed sharing:

This reminds me my dear about the seeds—give them to any of *your friends they are all mine too*; if it be not too late for sowing should there be more than you need to use, or keep them yourself for another year they will I think grow as they were

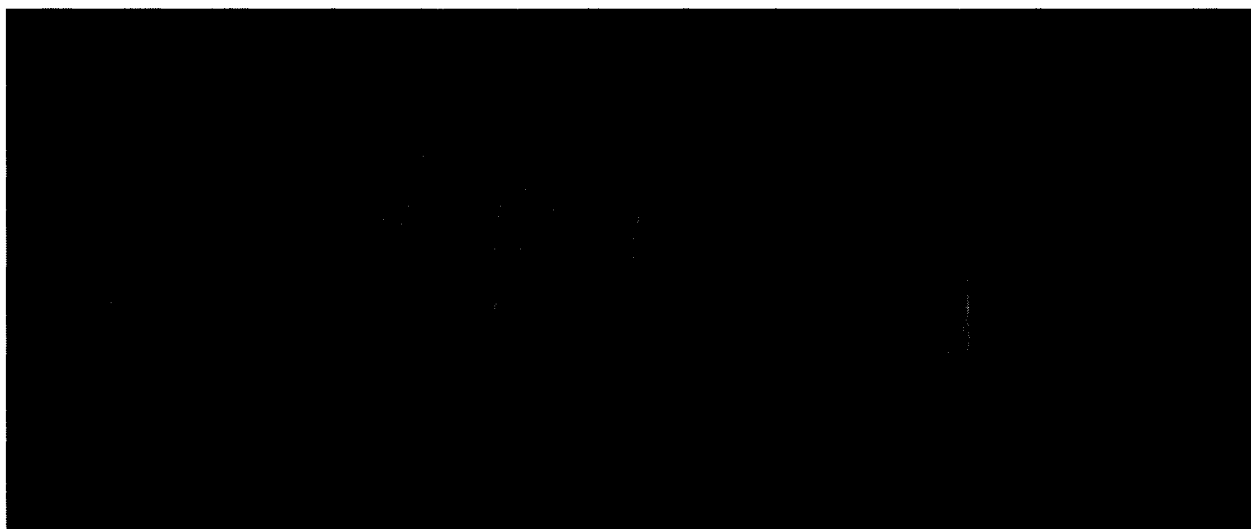
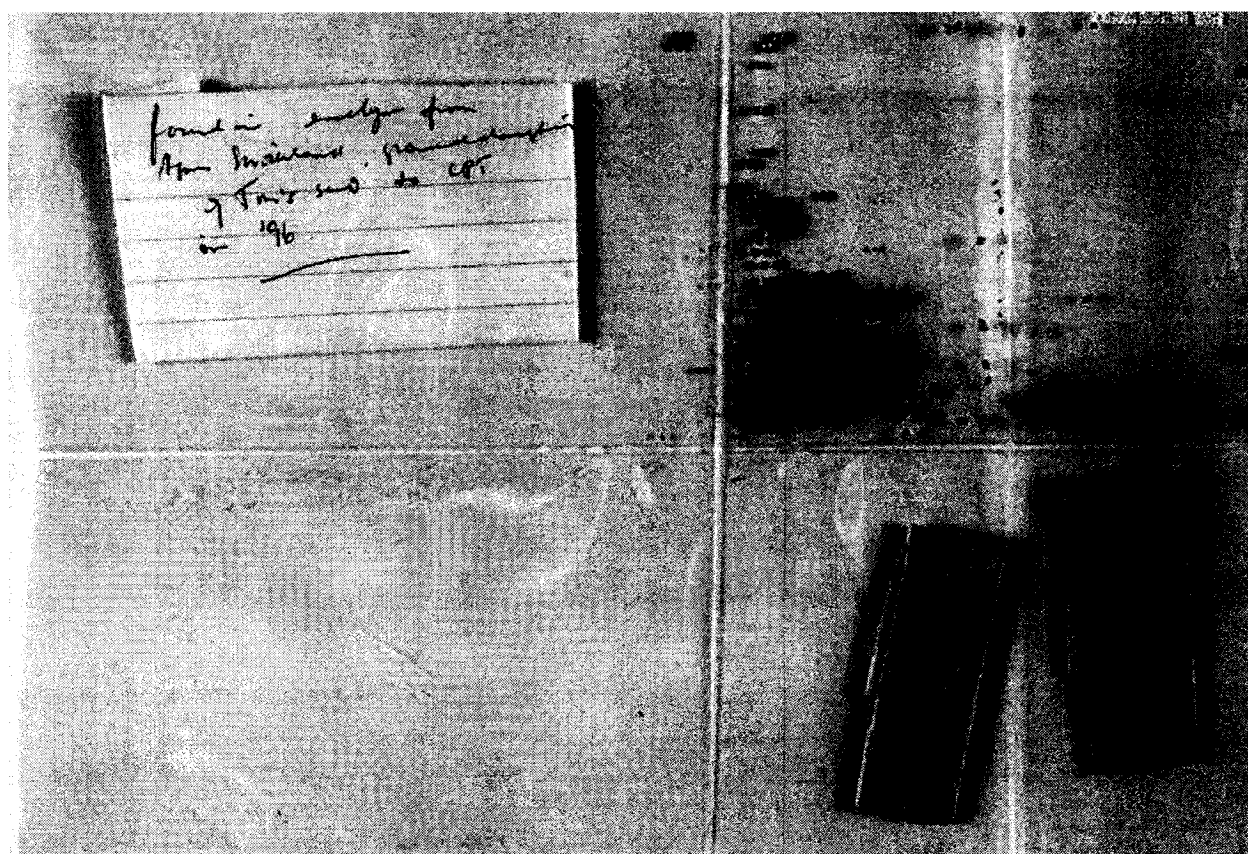


Fig.1. Dried campanula (blue bells) from Susanna Moodie's garden in Belleville (Traill, Memorabilia: Dried Flowers and Seeds). Library and Archives Canada/Traill Family Collection, Container 8, File 22/e006079201.



e005176478

Fig. 2. Violet and columbine seeds and accompanying handwritten notes (Traill, Memorabilia: Dried Flowers and Seeds). Library and Archives Canada/Traill Family Collection, Container 8, File 22/e005176478.

new last fall. . . . I shall beg from you my dear when you can give it a sweet violet and a slip of scarlet geranium if any of these we stuck in the boxes last year have struck. I know that you will spare me a small one for Kate. My dear lavender is alive and some slips seem growing too. All M^{rs} Stricklands scarlet geraniums were killed by the frost which she greatly regrets being very fond of them. (“To Ellen Dunlop” 146)

During the next two decades, Traill dispenses gardening advice to her adult children, setting aside plants for her daughter Annie Atwood to decorate her newly renovated home¹⁶ and mailing pips in November 1882 to her son William Traill and his young family in Saskatchewan:

I enclose some pips of the Snow-apple from my garden – I do not know if apples will bear your winters – if the plants come up and thrive you might get grafts. . . . I am so glad that you can raise good vegetables – I make great use of mine especially in soups – with very little meat I can make good dinners. . . . Does Harriette love flowers? – If I send garden seeds soon, you will get them in the spring in time for sowing. (“To William Traill” 223-24)

The journal entry and letters quoted above span from 1837 to 1882, indicating Traill’s lifelong passion for gardening. Indeed, in a letter dated 1890 and addressed to her son, Traill laments her declining health at the age of eighty-eight and longs with dejection to join her daughter “K” in the garden: “Your sister K looks better now and is busy all day in the garden, while I do nothing and am of no use to anyone” (“To William Traill” 335).

¹⁶ In a letter to her daughter, Traill writes, “I will take up, and lay by . . . Canadian creeper, and clematis to plant at the pillars, of the veranda and I have some nice white spruce and some shrubs for the garden if you come in time to get them. A plot of them planted together would be nice and grow better than solitary as they shelter each other and are less trouble to take care of” (“To Annie Atwood” 201).

In addition to the evidence of gardening in Moodie's and Traill's private writings, their published works, such as Traill's *Pearls and Pebbles*, reveal an early interest in flower gardening and picturesque aesthetics. Traill praises the gardening experience of her childhood as a blend of the picturesque and the domestic. Remembering the "unfenced . . . upland pastures" (*Pearls* 6) near her Suffolk home, Traill relates how she and her sisters planted a flower garden near a stream. The young girls gardened according to their Romantic sensibilities, nineteenth-century landscape aesthetics, and domestic gender roles:

The garden was laid out right daintily. The beds were planted with double daisies and many garden bulbs and flowers discarded or begged from the gardener's parterres. A hollow in the bank was fashioned into a grotto,¹⁷ which we lined with moss and decorated with dry striped snailshells and bright stones.

Our garden tools were of the rudest—our trowel a rusty iron ladle, our spade a broken-bladed carving knife, and we daily watered the flowers from a battered tin teapot and a leaky japanned mug. (*Pearls* 7)

This garden is a simple childhood creation, but it nevertheless reveals the Strickland sisters' familiarity with popular gardening aesthetics, as their miniature garden and fashionable grotto are "natural," formed in and from the surrounding stream bank. Furthermore, the sisters partake in suitably delicate feminine gardening activity: they plant flowers, use shells and stones to decorate the grotto, and tend their garden in a gender-appropriate way by using well-worn kitchen utensils—items that position the

¹⁷ The Strickland sisters' interest in grottoes is very much in keeping with proper feminine gardening activity for the time period. Garden historian Yvonne Cuthbertson notes, "Grottoes were . . . a popular feature of the eighteenth-century Romantic period, and well-to-do ladies spent many hours decorating them with vast amounts and varieties of seashells" (78).

Strickland girls and their future role as nurturers in their expected feminine domain of the home. These young woodland gardeners are domestic-minded, and Traill writes in her *Narratives of Nature* that the sisters even furnished their “sylvan dwellings” (128), as the grottos “were intended to represent the country-houses and villas of [their] rag dolls or [their] paper dolls” (129).

As much as Moodie and Traill perceive picturesque-style floral and grotto gardening to be educative and gender-appropriate activities for young women, they also convey, prior to their immigration to Upper Canada, an appreciation for the pragmatic as part of their garden ideals. After Thomas Strickland’s near-bankruptcy and subsequent death in 1818, the Strickland family’s financial restraints made it increasingly difficult to maintain appearances of gentility among the elite of Suffolk society. As Gray notes, life at Reydon Hall was quickly downsized: “Cooks, maids and gardeners all disappeared. . . . The family tended the vegetable garden, and went out less and less” (16). In a letter to her sister Sarah in 1889, Traill presents her mother as a model of domestic responsibility who tends to the less aesthetically appealing aspects of the garden—the vegetables. Traill replicates this practical approach in her Westove home in Upper Canada: “we have a comfortable couch on [the veranda] where I can be and read or work and rest when tired with working in the garden among the vegetables which I generally see to myself *as the dear old mother used to do*. I am very much like dear Mother in many of my ways” (“To Sarah Gwilym” 319). But even before the family’s financial straits, Traill’s childhood was rooted in the pragmatic; she worked in the garden at the early age of seven, “cutting the decayed flowers of the purple thrift . . . for which [she] was to receive . . . the important sum of threepence” to pay for food for her pet animals (*Sketches from Nature*

1). In *Narratives of Nature*, Traill recounts in detail the seasonal gardening tasks that she and her siblings were “hired” to complete under their father’s direction:

In the spring there were borders to weed or seedlings to transplant, and tobacco plants to top. In the summer there was fruit to gather for home-made wine, for which we received one penny per peck; ripe seeds to collect, such as lettuce, radish, celery, parsley, cabbage, garden cress, with many other vegetables and pot-herbs; for all which a regular agreement was entered into, and a bargain made as to the price, before we commenced operations.

In the winter season, when working in the garden was not practicable, we earned a little weekly stipend by cutting the leaves of the tobacco which had been cured in the autumn. . . . (134)

Practical garden labour was an essential part of Traill’s childhood education and foundational to her experiences in, and writing of, the backwoods. In her early writing career in England, Traill lays the groundwork for practical-minded aesthetics in preparation for emigration. In *The Young Immigrants, or Pictures of Canada Calculated to Amuse and Instruct the Minds of Youth* (1826), Traill promotes sensible gardening: the young Richard Clarence gathers hardy vegetable and flower seeds prior to his departure from England (26). As for his sister Agnes, the “flower-borders in the garden are to be [her] peculiar charge” in order to recreate the family’s English “Roselands” home in Upper Canada (113). Through the example of Agnes, who becomes a dependable backwoods gardener, Traill establishes her interest in adaptable cultivation, and these concerns prove pivotal to life in Upper Canada where gardening is not only a necessity, but also a labour-intensive, daily occupation that clearly shapes her garden writing.

3. Backwoods Gardeners of Accommodation

If gardening was familiar, however, while turning the soil in their backwoods gardens, Moodie and Traill realize they are working within an unfamiliar and demanding environment. During her first spring in the backwoods, Traill acknowledges her unfamiliar situation:

Our garden at present has nothing to boast of, being merely a spot of ground enclosed with a rough unsightly fence of split rails to keep the cattle from destroying the vegetables. Another spring, I hope to have a nice fence and a portion of the ground devoted to flowers. This spring there is so much pressing work to be done on the land in clearing for the crops, that I do not like to urge my claims on behalf of a pretty garden. (*Backwoods* 122)

The privileging of landscape over flower garden concurs with the preferences of landscape garden designers, but here the urgency of clearing the wilderness for crops points to the significantly altered context of Traill's gardening desires. While the need for subsistence is a key factor in the Strickland sisters' situation, their desire for progress hinges upon the philosophy of the "four stages theory" of civilization's development. As Campbell discusses in the context of early Canadian settlement writing, the four stages theory suggests that society progresses from the hunting-gathering stage, to the pastoral, to agricultural, and ultimately to the commercial, but "[o]nly with the arrival of the agricultural stage [can] sufficient leisure be found to cultivate the more sophisticated activities of science and art" (9-10). The Strickland sisters' desire to "improve" the wilderness through horticulture legitimizes their ownership of the land that the Native communities have seemingly "neglected." The process of appropriation via gardening is not, however, a straightforward task, but rather one of complex translation.

Because gardens reflect the socio-physical context in and of which they are formed, Hunt contends that garden designs and aesthetics, particularly those that derive inspiration from other historical contexts, usually undergo a process of cultural and physical translation. To demonstrate this process of garden translation, Hunt points to England during the eighteenth century and the interest at that time in ancient Rome and Classical art:

But a country like England had its own indigenous architectural forms, let alone its own distinct landscapes where (it could be argued) neoclassical buildings did not necessarily sit too happily. . . . So when writers or architects translated the classical languages of their models, they were obliged at least to address the question of how [these Classical sources] would function in England and in English. (Hunt, *Gardens* 10)

Artistically and physically dynamic forms, gardens are adaptable and capable of being translated into new physical and cultural settings through the use of local materials and the layering of new signification. In terms of Moodie's and Traill's Upper Canadian situation, their gardening ideals from England call for profound translations in order to accommodate timely settlement, provide sustenance, and grow successfully within the surrounding wilderness-settler environment. Out of necessity, their picturesque-inspired ideals are translated into backwoods kitchen gardens, context specific creations composed of strange flora and growing within different physical and social conditions.

With a pressing pioneer need for practicality and the ultimate objective of establishing an agricultural society, the Strickland sisters' backwoods kitchen gardens develop via numerous acts of concession. While Traill initially laments her lack of flowers in 1832, *The Canadian Settler's Guide* of 1855 reveals an evident shift in how

Traill views the garden. In the guide, the practical uses of edible plants and vegetables receive the majority of Traill's attention. Rather than focussing on what gardeners may desire, Traill instructs her readers on what is indispensable:

Rhubarbs should always find a place in your garden; a cool, shady place and rich soil is best: throw on the bed in the Fall a good supply of long dung. . . .

A bed of Carraways should also find a place in your garden; it is always useful, and the seeds sell well, besides being valuable as a cattle medicine. (*Canadian Settler's* 49)

The phrases "should always find," "it is always useful," and "is essential" indicate a garden designed to meet a settler's basic needs. For Traill, particular plants are imperative for survival and in order to ensure the viability of the garden, she provides detailed instructions on how to plant various vegetables. With reference to Traill's *The Backwoods of Canada* and *The Canadian Settler's Guide*, Clara Thomas argues in "Happily Ever After: Canadian Women in Fiction and Fact" that Traill develops an extremely practical perspective. Traill is an "instructress of prospective emigrants" (Thomas 47) who creates "patterns for living for other Canadian women" (Thomas 45)—patterns which include competency in a practical garden. Thomas adds that Traill's "calm expository prose" reflects Traill's didactic character as she provides concise yet detailed descriptions of domestic life (47). Thomas concentrates on Traill, the writer, devising a persona of the capable female emigrant wife—the Mrs. Beeton or Fanny Farmer of the north (46) who presents her "early Canadian situation as a 'Robin Crusoe' sort of life" (45)—but it is also important, I believe, to recognize that in these particular sections of garden instruction in *The Canadian Settler's Guide*, Traill writes as a gardener

and author of a garden manual.¹⁸ Traill promotes successful gardeners by providing her readers with basic growing instructions and alerting them to potential problems, as surely authors of garden books tend to do.¹⁹ Traill admits in her preface, “I aimed at no beauty of style. [*The Canadian Settler’s Guide*] was not written with the intention of amusing, but simply of instructing and advising. . . . I therefore preferred collating my instruction into the more homely but satisfactory form of a Manual of Canadian housewifery, well contented to abandon the paths of literary fame, if I could render a solid benefit to those of my own sex” (xviii). In discussing tomato culture, for instance, Traill describes what type of soil should be used, when the plants should be sown, how far apart they should be planted, the best figuration for planting beds in order to insure sufficient sun exposure, and how to prevent fly infestations through a “light dressing of wood ashes” (*Canadian Settler’s* 133). Traill writes from practical experience and her handwritten revisions to her manual (circa 1880) demonstrate a gardener who, in the subsequent twenty-five years following the original publication of *The Canadian Settler’s Guide*, acquires further knowledge, as she relays this more detailed information to her readers. For example, where the original *Canadian Settler’s Guide* informs readers to plant beans any time in May, Traill’s handwritten revisions provide more specific instructions with an added note in the margins: “not earlier than 10 or 20 of May” (*Canadian Settler’s* Revisions).

¹⁸ Thomas’ allusion to Robin Crusoe derives from T. D. MacLulich’s original comparison in his essay “Crusoe in the Backwoods: A Canadian Fable?” In his essay, MacLulich examines the parallels Traill creates in *The Backwoods of Canada* between her pioneer persona and Daniel Defoe’s famous hero.

¹⁹ This practical approach can be seen, for instance, in the model Traill uses for her botanical texts: Gilbert White’s *The Natural History of Selbourne* (Gray 288). In addition to his interest in the picturesque and botanical descriptions, White gives practical, detailed gardening advice. For example, when recounting the drought-ridden summer of 1781, White makes suggestions for the protection of fruit trees from the heat: “This may prove a hint to assiduous gardeners to fence and shelter their wall-trees with mats or boards, as they may easily do” (151). This foundational perspective is brought to bear upon Traill’s writing of the domestic challenges of the backwoods.

Ultimately, this focus on the garden, rather than on literary style and effect, during these extensive and detailed sections of her manual reveals the clear importance and centrality of the garden to Traill.

In Traill's view, the backwoods kitchen garden is economically essential and grants immense purpose to a woman pioneer's work. The garden is one of the "most necessary appendages to a farm-house" because it "produces as large an amount of valuable crop as any part of a farm" (*Canadian Settler's* 58). The garden sustains the family and provides a means of goods-exchange with the local Chippewa Natives: "The squaws came frequently to get pork and flour from me, and garden vegetables, in exchange for fish, venison, or baskets. . . . They are fond of . . . any vegetable; sometimes they will follow me into the garden, and beg 'onion,' or 'herb,' to put in soup: potatoes they never refuse" (Traill, *Forest and Other Gleanings* 150). The tremendous economic role of the kitchen garden elevates women's gardening activity and de-marginalizes women's garden terrain—a transition that, in Traill's estimation, many husbands and wives may initially resist. In *The Canadian Settler's Guide*, Traill relates that settlers do not always privilege the backwoods kitchen garden, as clearing the land seems to be, particularly in the minds of male settlers, more pressing and worthy of their intensive labour. For Traill, however, the garden is vital to a family's welfare:

In Canada where the heavy labour of felling trees and cultivating the ground falls to the lot of men, who have for some years enough to do to clear ground to support the family and raise means towards paying instalments [*sic*] on the land, little leisure is left for the garden and orchard: the consequence is that these most necessary appendages to a farm-house are either totally neglected or left to the management of

women and children. That there is a miserable want of foresight in this, there can be no doubt. (*Canadian Settler's* 57-58)

Describing backwoods gardening activity as “leisure” in order to make it appealing to her readers, Traill intuitively anticipates that there will be apprehension on the part of female emigrants who may perceive this type of gardening as unrefined and unbecoming. In response, Traill upholds the value and even flattering nature of the work: “In the early years of our infant settlement . . . all the ladies worked in their gardens, raised their own vegetables, and flowers, and reared the fruit trees. . . . They felt this work as no disgrace to them, but took pride and pleasure in the success of their labours” (*Canadian Settler's* 59). Traill describes an appealing, manageable gardening scenario for the British public; but in a private letter dated April 1853, the intensity and time-consuming nature of the work is readily apparent: “The girls have been very busy working in their gardens. The boys ploughing and sowing. [Thomas] Traill has been helping in digging and tomorrow all that can will be out in the garden planting early potatoes” (“To Frances Stewart” 78). In the day-to-day reality of the backwoods, the garden is a site not of leisure, but of constant toil.

The practical kitchen garden is indispensable; yet for Traill, who grew up surrounded by picturesque uses of greenery, the aesthetic acquires an equally pivotal role in allowing women to cultivate a sense of home and belonging in the backwoods. Focussing on dualisms in Traill’s texts, Elizabeth Thompson argues, “The tensions between the picturesque and the mundane, between the beautiful and the practical, between a long-range perspective and a closer scrutiny, and between the ideal world and the real world dominate all aspects of Traill’s backwoods writing” (40). According to Thompson, Traill confronts these gardening tensions by “justif[ying] her beautification

projects with a practical dimension,” such as the time Traill lists the aesthetic attributes on one hand, and the practical benefits on the other, when giving advice on the construction of a verandah (49). The tensions that Thompson describes are present in Traill’s writing, but in the context of garden theory that posits gardens as art of milieu, Traill’s kitchen garden tends toward hybridization, rather than remaining strictly grounded in dualisms and opposition. Through an adaptive approach that takes into account settlement surroundings, Traill integrates her aesthetic desires with issues of practicality. The aesthetic becomes essential rather than superfluous, then, just as that which is practical acquires an aesthetic quality:

I am the more particular in pointing out to you how you may improve the outside of your dwelling, because the log-house is rough and unsightly; and I know well that your comfort and cheerfulness of mind will be increased by the care you are led to bestow upon your new home in endeavouring to ornament it and render it more agreeable to the eye. . . .

I write from my own experience. I too have felt all the painful regrets incidental to a long separation from my native land and my beloved early home. I have experienced all that you who read this book can ever feel, and perhaps far more than you will ever have cause for feeling. (*Canadian Settler’s* 16)

Ornamentation is vital if the backwoods home is to be a place where both children and women settlers gravitate, but Traill’s utmost concern is with the women, the primary gardeners. In the passage quoted above, the usually optimistic Traill briefly alludes to her own “painful regrets” that resulted from her separation from England and hints at her own trials as a female emigrant. Traill’s warning speaks directly to the importance of creating an aesthetically pleasing garden-embowered home if women settlers want to feel genuine

attachment to the new settlement. A backwoods garden beautifies the home, demands difficult labour, and facilitates increased economic prosperity—all of which are essential factors in enabling a woman pioneer to create a sense of purpose and belonging. In nineteenth-century England, writers and intellectuals, including John Ruskin and his famous essay “Of Queens’ Gardens” (1865), contend that gardens naturalize and beautify women’s domestic role in England as the “path of a good woman is indeed strewn with flowers; but they rise up behind her steps, not before them” (Ruskin 91). In the backwoods of Upper Canada, however, Traill implies that the garden serves a somewhat different and more urgent function: to naturalize—via a woman’s own agency and volition—that which is initially perceived to be alien and unfamiliar:

How much pleasanter is the aspect of a house surrounded by a garden, nicely weeded and kept, than the desolate chip-yard, unrelieved by any green tree or flower. . . . What cheerful feelings can such a barren spot excite; what home affections can it nourish in the heart of the emigrant wife? Even though she may have to labour to rear it with her own hands, let her plant a garden. (*Canadian Settler’s* 55-56)

The cultivation of a backwoods garden serves not merely to affirm the domestic feminine role, but rather to nourish—both physically and emotionally—the *enduring* emigrant wife who comes to appreciate and admire the difficult labour of “her own hands” as an integrated part of her garden aesthetic.

As a hybridized setting, Moodie’s kitchen garden reflects also the reality of a less cultivated, more labour-intensive environment than that to which this educated British woman is accustomed. After a three-year sojourn in the bush, Moodie reveals that her garden is not a place of leisure and beauty, but rather a site of difficult adaptation: “I

loved . . . my own dear little garden, with its rugged snake-fence which I had helped Jenny to place with my own hands, and which I had assisted the faithful woman in cultivating for the last three years, where I had so often braved the tormenting mosquitoes, black flies, and intense heat, to provide vegetables for the use of the family” (*Roughing It* 507-08). Moodie attributes tender, diminutive affection to her “dear little garden” through which she processes her immediate environment by learning to work successfully under difficult conditions. The zig-zagging snake fence made of split rails requires heavy lifting and assembly—no easy task, as Moodie feels the need to emphasize that she built it with her “own hands.” Furthermore, this backwoods garden is one created in the elements, through the “torment” of insects and intense summer heat. Despite or perhaps because of the labour involved, the garden’s utilitarian value generates for Moodie that sense of “comfort and cheerfulness of mind” to which Traill refers when discussing the importance of gardening for pioneer women (Traill, *Canadian Settler’s* 16). When John Moodie is absent from home, for example, Moodie relies on her garden for her family’s welfare after the crop fails: “We [Moodie and her servant Jenny] therefore confined our attention to the garden, which, as usual, was very productive, and with milk, fresh butter, and eggs, supplied the simple wants of our family” (*Roughing It* 495). The vegetable plot demands intense manual labour, and Moodie’s change in circumstance enables her to re-evaluate the beauty of the basic features of her environment: “I have contemplated a well-hoed ridge of potatoes on that bush farm, with as much delight as in years long past I had experienced in examining a fine painting in some well-appointed drawing-room” (*Roughing It* 375). Moodie’s vegetable garden is not as picturesque as the garden of her original home in England, yet after three years in

Upper Canada, Moodie appreciates an aesthetic that is necessarily based on the practical and rooted in her environment.²⁰

In Moodie's and Traill's writing, there exists an emerging awareness that their gardens are context specific creations that must take into account the features of the Upper Canadian woods. In her discussion of Atwood's and Margaret Laurence's recreations of Moodie and Traill in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* and *The Diviners*, respectively, Fiona Sparrow argues that gardens should be "suited to their localities" (34), a fact that, Sparrow believes, sometimes eluded the pioneering Strickland sisters. Sparrow concludes, "People should take changes of soil and climate into account when they order their lives and their gardens. The real Susanna Moodie no less than Atwood's recreation of her found this hard to do" (35). Admittedly, in their longing for a familiar picturesque garden, Moodie and Traill attempt to impose their imported, foreign landscape aesthetics upon the terrain of the Upper Canadian woods. The dissonance between their settlement desires and the forest vegetation requires flexibility, however. Traill's accommodating vision enables her, for example, to incorporate tree stumps into the garden—a feature that cannot be extracted and does not adhere to her ideal aesthetic. Traill recommends using these remnants of the forest as a type of trellis: "The wild vine planted at the foot of some dead and unsightly tree, will cover it with its luxuriant growth, and convert that which would otherwise have been an unseemly object into one of great ornament" (*Canadian Settler's* 15). Traill dislikes tree stumps that mar the flow of cleared terrain, yet she works to find useful, pleasing ways of incorporating them into the design. Just as tree stumps cannot be easily uprooted, heavy rocks prove difficult to

²⁰ Moodie mentions that "[t]he summer of '35" (approximately three years after her emigration from England) was "the first time [she] had ever tried [her] hand at field-labour" (*Roughing It* 373).

dispense with in Traill's kitchen garden. Traill writes that the stones "must either remain a blot on the fair features of the garden plot, or be rolled away by the strong arm of the men, aided by the lever" (*Canadian Settler's* 55). Traill encourages the incorporation of rocks into the garden space through a number of strategies: using the stones to build the lower portion of the garden fence; creating "the effect of rockwork" by piling them in "large heaps"; constructing a plant-embowered seat from the blocks of granite and limestone; or arranging the stones as a kind of planter in which to grow wild cucumbers, orange gourds, and wild clematis (*Canadian Settler's* 55).²¹ Traill desires a "natural" appearance, but her objective can only be achieved by using the components of her environment. Both the features of the forest and the evidence of its destruction remain ever-present within her backwoods garden.

4. The Ambiguous Boundary between the Cultivated and the Wild

As gardeners of accommodation, not domination, Moodie and Traill acclimatize their skills and aesthetic visions to respond to the physical realities of their circumstances. Moodie and Traill create gardens that are permeable to their surrounding wilderness environment, a fact that subsequently pushes them to re-evaluate the hierarchy of the "cultivated" versus the "wild" when it comes to plants and garden boundaries. In *Roughing It in the Bush*, Moodie demonstrates her willingness to reflect on the less

²¹ In her handwritten revisions to her *Canadian Settler's Guide*, Traill describes another way of incorporating stumps into the garden. The additional instructions suggest that her practical aesthetics are an ongoing project, continually finding new forms of expression and adaptation. Traill recommends placing poles around the base of the stump and tying them together at the top. Large stones rolled around the stump "form a sort of circular wall," which is then filled with "rubbish, turf, and clods of earth with a good deep topping up of mould" in order to plant wild clematis, grape vine, seeds of morning glory, dwarf phlox, or "any small flowery creeper" (*Canadian Settler's Revisions*).

“cultured” features of her environment when she gathers dandelions during the potato harvest:

Few of our colonists are acquainted with the many uses to which this neglected but most valuable plant may be applied. . . . the time will come when this hardy weed, with its golden flowers and curious seed-vessels, which form a constant plaything to the little children . . . will be transplanted into our gardens, and tended with due care.

The dandelion . . . makes an excellent salad, quite equal to endive, and is more hardy and requires less care. (377)

Moodie’s dandelion alters from being a “neglected,” unknown plant and “hardy weed” to being an array of “golden flowers” capable of exciting the interest of children. Providing advice on transplanting, Moodie elevates the dandelion through its newly acquired cultivated status; yet Moodie forms her estimation of the dandelion not because it is cultivated, but rather because this plant requires “*less care*” (my emphasis). Similar to endive, the dandelion is in fact hardier and demands less time and attention from an already busy backwoods gardener. The dandelion grows readily both within and beyond a garden, and it is the plant’s natural abundance and prolific growth—its “wildness”—that Moodie clearly appreciates.

Like her sister, Traill is willing to re-evaluate that which is “wild” through an accommodating vision. McGregor asserts that Traill enacts a strict “domestication strategy” by ignoring that which is “alien” or “threatening” in her environment, and instead concentrating exclusively on what can be “controlled, manipulated, used” (41). In the summer of 1834, however, Traill reveals that her garden is neither entirely contained, nor controlled, but instead permeable. Traill recounts the sudden presence of a plant

within her garden: “Last week I noticed a succulent plant that made its appearance on a dry sandy path in my garden; it seems to me a variety of the hour-blowing mesembryanthium. It has increased so rapidly that it already covers a large space; the branches converging from the center and sending forth shoots from every joint” (*Backwoods* 169). Traill has been informed that this plant is “troublesome” (*Backwoods* 169), and it grows rapidly and inconveniently in the middle of her garden path, yet she does not remove it. Instead, Traill observes its structure and gathers seeds in order to understand its prolific growth. When Traill discovers this alien plant growing in her garden, readers witness Traill encountering the wilderness, albeit on a smaller scale than that of the sublime, panoramic vision for which McGregor and other critics argue. While Traill tolerates the unruly plant, gardening-related texts situated in nineteenth-century England reveal a relatively more manicured aesthetic. Jane Loudon—the wife of John Claudius Loudon, a famous garden designer—provides instructions in her 1840 garden manual *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies* on the proper maintenance of garden paths to ensure convenience and access: “Weeds may be prevented from growing on gravel walks by watering the walks with salt and water. The salt will also kill the weeds already there, and, if these are large, they should, of course, be hoed up and raked off” (142). Traill’s *Cot and Cradle Stories* (a collection of children’s stories) contains similar references to the importance of tidy, well-kept paths as part of the Strickland family’s garden aesthetic in early nineteenth-century England. In “The Five Little Gardeners,” Traill writes about the five Strickland sisters’ gardening efforts as young girls when their father gives them “a piece of ground . . . just outside the garden wall” to cultivate because, as Traill reports, “the gardener was very cross at them when they plucked flowers out of the garden borders or made litters on the walks” (54). In the story, the

eldest sister, Agnes, aspires to a trim, well-kept aesthetic when she creates a dividing path between her plot and that of her sister Sara, covering the ground with white sand to keep “the path neat and nice if it rained ever so hard” (55). In contrast to these examples of tidy garden paths within a British context, Traill chooses not to dominate her irregular terrain in Upper Canada, but rather to open herself to the more perplexing aspects of the wilderness that form her garden.

Traill’s acceptance of the unfamiliar and her rejection of insularity are particularly evident in her renovations to her garden fence. During her first spring (1833), Traill’s garden is surrounded by a split rail fence (*Backwoods* 122), which is then replaced by a wattled fence of “two half circular wings [that] sweep off from the entrance to each side of the house,” a structure that, in Traill’s view, is “much more picturesque . . . than those . . . of split timber” (*Backwoods* 224). Traill writes, “Along this little enclosure I have begun planting a sort of flowery hedge with some of the native shrubs that abound in our woods and lake-shores” (*Backwoods* 224). Traill’s garden renovations do not end here, however, as she finally replaces the wattled fence, which only lasts three years, with a fence made entirely of transplanted wild plants: “I collected wild gooseberry bushes, currants, bush honey suckles, hawthorns, wild cherry and plum trees . . . and planted them within side [*sic*] my fence, to make a living fence, when the other should have decayed” (*Canadian Settler’s* 59). Traill boasts, “It was the admiration of all my neighbours, and many came to look at ‘Mrs. Traill’s fence’” (*Canadian Settler’s* 59). As proprietors, both Thomas Traill and John Moodie name their settlements after their original family estates in Scotland; but here, Traill acquires a more profound association with the territory of the

garden because of her own labour and creativity in designing this “living fence.”²² An enclosed garden implies a domesticated plot of ground garrisoned off from an unfamiliar, threatening wilderness. Indeed, Traill’s two half-circular wings of her second garden fence renovation suggest Fowler’s vision of a tight domestic circle with Traill’s home situated in the centre. Continually modifying her enclosure and ultimately creating a paradoxical living fence—more permanent than decaying rails, yet ever-changing in its spontaneous growth—Traill demonstrates a dynamic garden aesthetic that is anything but insular. The organic fence is reminiscent of English hedgerows and plays into Traill’s desire for a natural-styled garden, yet Traill translates her inherited garden aesthetics into her Upper Canada setting. Traill constructs the fence from transplanted wild plants, thereby incorporating her garden into the larger environment—where the bush fence creates an ambiguous boundary between the cultivated and the wild.

Moodie’s and Traill’s backwoods gardens are truly permeable, consisting not merely of familiar picturesque aesthetics, but also of strange plants, unsightly tree stumps, and tormenting black flies. Their garden boundaries, in particular, do not simply give the appearance of openness, but instead reveal an ongoing mediation with their environment. Their gardens are accommodating by necessity, and although this openness seems to echo the source of their inspiration—the aesthetics of the seemingly natural English landscape garden—in actual fact, their backwoods gardens are more extensive translations of their original ideal. The “natural” English landscape garden with its expansion toward, and

²² In her biography of Moodie and Traill, Gray mentions how both husbands name their Upper Canadian settlements in homage to their family estates in England. Thomas Traill calls his log house in the bush “Westove”—the title of the Traill family estate near the small town of Kirkwall (44). John Moodie names his first Cobourg settlement and the family’s second residence in the backwoods “Melsetter” to reflect the family seat in the “Isle of Hoy in the Orkneys” (30). With their ancestral homes heavily mortgaged and their unenviable position as half-pay officers, Thomas Traill and John Moodie demonstrate through their naming of their settlements their shared hope that immigration to the colony will restore their financial status.

visual annexation of, the larger environment was, ironically, rather insular in its design and purpose, as Brown and Repton strove to create the illusion of a world unto itself through the “unity and continuity of *unmixed* property” (Repton, *The Art* 61, my emphasis). In the Strickland sisters’ Upper Canadian environment, however, the appearance of highly composed, pure terrain is *not* a straightforward option. Their gardens are an art of milieu, which means that the unfamiliar—whether it be the growth and destruction of native vegetation, Moodie’s and Traill’s daily immigrant experiences and desires, and the proximity of the “cultivated” and the “wild”—all take root in the hybridized, complicated terrain of their gardens. Transplanting the picturesque and their practical experience into a vastly different “new world” setting, Moodie and Traill demonstrate that their backwoods gardens are far more attuned and adaptive to the Upper Canadian wilderness than previously argued by critics. The violent duality of Atwood’s bush garden constructs a Moodie persona whose original cultivated perceptions are displaced and useless. In “Dream 1: The Bush Garden,” the result is an image of utter dejection: Moodie standing in a failed garden “gone to seed” where both plant and settler “come up blood” (Atwood, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* 34). Both Atwood’s disassembling bush garden and Frye’s organic model of Canadian literature minimize the importance of British garden aesthetics in an effort to promote a distinct tradition “rooted in Canada” and reflective of a “vegetable . . . imagination” (Frye i). But in the context of my study, I form a different conclusion. Instead of feeling “broken / in upon by branches, roots, tendrils, the dark” as the settlers do in “The Planters” (Atwood, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* 17), the Strickland sisters create a relatively open blend of wild vegetation, backwoods necessity, and picturesque aesthetics. Their garden visions stem directly from this intricate mixture.

Chapter Two

When Authors are Gardeners: Moodie's and Traill's Language of Cultivation

Throughout their published works, private letters, and journals, Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill reveal the socio-historical and personal significance of gardens within England and Upper Canada. While critics' thematic interpretations have allowed these backwoods kitchen gardens to remain unscrutinized, critics apprehend correctly that the garden's role within Moodie's and Traill's writing is more than that of a place and activity in which the Strickland sisters participate on a daily basis. Besides being an actual place, the garden operates on multiple levels in their writing. The garden acts as a literary trope and topos from which they draw rhetorical strategies, particularly the language of cultivation and the "garden plot." Together, Moodie's and Traill's use of a garden trope and topos generate ideological, spatially sensitive narrations of the female emigrant's experience.

Through the expression "garden plot," I emphasize Moodie's and Traill's writing of place and their particular use of the garden topos as a means of situating or containing their characters during key moments in their narratives focussed on gender conventions or social transgressions. In its literary applications, "plot" refers to how "events and actions . . . are rendered and ordered toward achieving particular artistic and emotional effects" (Abrams, *A Glossary*). Actions and events are the means by which characters "exhibit their moral and dispositional qualities," suggesting that "[p]lot and character are therefore interdependent critical concepts" (Abrams, *A Glossary* 224). In the context of this study, it is important to distinguish Moodie and Traill as writers who use the garden as a "plot" rather than as a "design," because "plot" is more suggestive (in a figurative sense) of a

small or moderate-sized piece of ground (such as a vegetable plot), as opposed to a landscape design formulated on a grand scale by a professional. I contend that because the figurative applications of the language of the garden were so popular within the Stricklands' historical milieu, nineteenth-century readers would understand garden space, or the "garden plot," in literature as a topos, or commonplace. In her definition of topos, Mieke Bal points to the relationship between integrated spaces and events as "well-known, stereotypical combinations: declarations of love by moonlight on a balcony, high-flown reveries on a mountain-top, a rendezvous in an inn, ghostly appearances among ruins" (96). For Moodie and Traill, the garden "plot" serves as a recurring topos in their works, as the events and behaviours that take place within the garden position their characters both spatially and ideologically, foregrounding their refined natures and, alternatively, their transgressions.

For the Strickland sisters, writing and gardening are inextricably linked in a number of ways. In practical terms, Traill writes not just to promote gardening to the public, but also to facilitate her own garden. In a letter to her son William in 1882, Traill reveals the tremendous material and personal value she bestows on the garden: "I get some things from Vick of Rochester and write for his Illustrated Magazine and he sends me seeds – for my pay – I have sent him \$15 – subscriptions for his Magazine since last May" ("To William Traill" 224). Paid in seeds for her writing, Traill implements her garden by any means possible; yet for all her practical-mindedness, Traill's understanding of the garden is not always so sensible, particularly when it relates to her artistic and personal musings. When Traill approaches the garden as a creative writer, she views and responds to the garden as a highly imaginative space. Traill delights in garden-related

reverie when she writes a personal exposition entitled “On Dreams” in her private journal:

I rarely dream unpleasant dreams often of rare gardens and especially of new and superbly colored flowers. I enjoy a renewal of youth in my dreams. I am never aged or infirm and all my friends are young. There is always a difference in the position of the plants, rooms, houses, gardens, trees, for though I often dream of home, it is never exactly the same as the reality in position of objects.

(Traill, Journal)

Traill’s subconscious focus on private enclosed spaces and cultivated nature, a focus which includes romantic encounters in the idyllic space of a garden,¹ suggests that the garden is a central component of her personal and artistic sensibilities. Even more compelling in terms of Traill-the-writer’s relationship to the garden is Traill’s short story “The Five Little Gardeners” in *Cot and Cradle Stories* that makes an explicit connection between how each Strickland sister creates a garden and how she lives and, in relevant cases, writes. In the story, a ten-year-old Agnes Strickland plants a well-ordered geometric garden, and in the editor’s note, Mary Agnes Fitzgibbon² writes, “Agnes

¹ In her journal, Traill recounts the specific details of one garden-situated dream with an idealized setting, symbolic imagery, and a disappointing conclusion:

In early life I was engaged to a gentleman of graceful person and literary tastes but who was unfortunate and unhappy. I dreamed one night that we were walking in the home garden with other young people when F.H.—plucked roses and gave to several of the ladies of the party—but to myself he gave no rose and I asked him for a bud. He hastily snatched one of the flowers and then rudely thrust it into my hand. I took the rose but to my sorrow I perceived that a canker worm had eaten into its heart while my finger was bleeding from the piercing of a thorn. I pondered over the dream after awakened and it saddened me for a few minutes. (Journal)

² Mary Agnes Fitzgibbon was a granddaughter of Susanna and John Moodie, making Catharine Parr Traill her great-aunt. Fitzgibbon assisted Traill in preparing the manuscript for *Cot and Cradle Stories* and also wrote the introduction to Traill’s *Pearls and Pebbles, or Notes of an Old Naturalist*. As a young girl, Fitzgibbon also assisted her mother Agnes Fitzgibbon with the hand-tinting of the lithographs for Traill’s *Canadian Wild Flowers* (Gray 295).

revealed her character in the methodical plan of her garden. Authoress of the Royal biographies, many poems, historical tales and several novels, she accomplished an enormous amount of work” (60). In contrast to Agnes, four-year-old Katie (or Catharine) chooses wild flowers from the meadows for her childhood garden, which foreshadows “the valuable work she had done in bringing our Canadian *flora* to the knowledge of the world” (61). The youngest sister Susie (or Susanna) “[gets] an old trowel from the garden-house, and [sets] to work to dig a great hole in the ground” with her sister Katie assisting her in her efforts to make the hole “bigger and deeper” (59). In her concluding note, Fitzgibbon theorizes why Susie chooses to dig, rather than to plant, as Fitzgibbon makes a figurative connection with Moodie’s adult life as a writer:

Susie, who was possessed of the greatest of all gifts, the priceless gift of true genius, was ever questioning the reason of things, ever digging deep into the well of the knowledge of life, ever seeking for the treasure of truth, and finding it in increasing beauty and wealth in the Book of Life. Generous, enthusiastic, a brilliant conversationalist, a true poet, and a graphic writer, Canadian literature owes much to her influence and her pen. (61)

Fitzgibbon’s concluding note suggests that when authors such as the Strickland sisters are gardeners, their creative work in the garden parallels and influences their literary visions and artistic strategies. Agnes gardens and writes in a highly organized and productive way; Catharine traverses the spatial boundaries of the garden just as she brings new knowledge to light through her botanical texts; and Susanna digs and disrupts her terrain just as she questions the world around her through her thought-provoking approach as a writer. While Fitzgibbon makes a passing comparison between gardeners and writers, I address more extensively how the nineteenth-century British gardening milieu influences

Moodie's and Traill's communication of gendered and class-related values through the language of gardens and cultivation that was popular at the time. Moreover, in transporting this tradition of gendered, garden-related discourse to Upper Canada and encountering actual backwoods gardens that are incongruent with the refined and refining British landscape ideals, Moodie and Traill revise their garden trope and topos in terms of their use of figurative language and approach to characterization in order to capture the experience of emigration.

In the Strickland sisters' writing, garden-related language and metaphors of cultivation are prominent formal features as this figurative language communicates popular nineteenth-century conventions relating to women's education, social refinement, and physical beauty. In keeping with these conventions, Moodie's and Traill's Suffolk upbringing entailed seasonal garden duties, the study of botany, and plant-related artistic activities. As a result, gardens are a central tenet of Moodie's and Traill's works. The unfamiliar, liminal space of their backwoods gardens meant, however, a readjustment of this figurative garden vision and considerable revisions to their domestic-centred understandings of femininity. Moodie and Traill use their writing, therefore, to craft both their desire for gender and class continuity as British-born women, and their experience of change and adaptation as Upper Canadian pioneers. The metaphors at the centre of this paradoxical situation are that of "cultivation," "transplanting," and the related process of "hardening-off"—activities they undertake in their actual gardens and apply figuratively to their own circumstances, as they employ a rhetoric that stems directly and deviates from this original discursive context.

1. Women and the Language of “Cultivation”

During Moodie’s and Traill’s particular period of history, “cultivation” signals not just the tending of a garden, but rather the nurturing of feminine beauty, grace, intellect, and polite manners. In particular, women’s physical beauty and feminine delicacy generate a close affinity between women and gardens. From public texts to private journals, women of the nineteenth century write and perform their gender. For example, Jane Loudon’s amateur gardening guide, *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies*, promotes gardening for the female members of the refined classes by reducing the unseemliness of dirt and easing the rigours of outdoor manual labour. In mediating these tensions, Loudon’s book employs a gendered, garden-based rhetoric that promotes the kind of refinement and beauty desired by the garden’s female custodians despite the commonness of daily garden chores, such as digging or weeding. According to Loudon, gardening is a suitably delicate activity as long as the proper provisions are taken, such as the use of leather gloves, an iron “tramp” to strengthen women’s shoes, and a “lady’s spade,” that is “sufficiently slender for a lady’s hand to grasp” (9). In addition, the title page illustration depicts a mother and child delicately at ease—poised, rather than hard at work, in the flower-embowered garden (see fig. 1). With the inclusion of slender tools suited to tiny hands and feet, this illustrated scene is especially becoming to young ladies, as the woman figure, adorned with flowers in her dress pockets and hair, appears to be as cultivated as her garden. While Loudon promotes feminine refinement via the garden, she recognizes that not all types of gardening are suitable forms of recreation for “cultivated” women. For Loudon, vegetable gardening is a questionable feminine activity as it lacks the aesthetic qualities of flower gardening and suggests a labour-intensive, utility-related task. Kitchen gardens are obviously not considered by Loudon to be



Fig. 1. Nineteenth-century illustration of a woman gardener, title page from Jane Loudon, *Instructions in Gardening for Ladies* (London: Murray, 1840). Rare Books and Special Collections Division, McGill University Libraries, Montreal, Canada.

picturesque, as Loudon suggests that “there should always be a convenient, and, if possible, partially concealed, road for servants to bring in vegetables” (137).

Furthermore, Loudon anticipates that because vegetable gardening is usually delegated to the domestic help, women of refinement may have some misgivings about partaking in this part of the garden: “Whatever the doubts may be entertained as to the practicability of a lady attending to the culture of culinary vegetables and fruit-trees, none can exist respecting her management of the flower-garden, as that is pre-eminently a woman’s department” (244).

While Loudon’s gardening manual provides an example of a public discourse of gendered propriety in and through the garden, Dorothy Wordsworth’s private journal reveals similarly her construction of herself as an entirely feminine gardener. When Bell points to Wordsworth as an example of a woman gardener in the early 1800s, she notes the daily enthusiasm and Romantic aspect with which Wordsworth characterizes her gardening activity. Readers should not overlook, however, Wordsworth’s additional, subtle heeding of gender constraints when she composes herself in her journal.

Wordsworth’s garden may partake of the picturesque aspects of the English landscape garden, but more importantly, it conveys a sense of her own “cultivated,” delicate femininity. Although Wordsworth admits to weeding, a more laborious gardening activity, she usually stresses her flower gardening, while distancing herself from the less ladylike tasks and attributing these to her hired help: “I worked in the garden & planted flowers. . . . Sate [*sic*] under the trees after dinner till tea time. John Fisher stuck the peas, Molly weeded & washed” (7). When Wordsworth mentions performing tasks other than tending her flowers, she includes the names of her garden help or other family members who assist her, thereby tempering her involvement in less delicate gardening activities.

For instance, Wordsworth writes in May 1800, “After dinner Aggy weeded onions & carrots—I helped for a little” (2); and in March 1802, she writes, “I have set Molly on to clear the garden a little, & I myself have helped. I transplanted some snowdrops” (74). In addition to recording the activity of the garden, Wordsworth uses the genre of the journal and the kind of self-reflection it affords to write her daily assumptions with respect to class and her feminine disposition. One of the most telling passages that points to Wordsworth’s belief in her delicate nature and inability to perform arduous gardening-related activity is when she purchases some flowers and must transport them home: “Went to the Blind man’s for plants. I got such a load that I was obliged to leave my Basket in the Road & send Molly for it” (6). Clearly, the commonness of some daily garden chores, such as digging or carrying heavy loads, undermines the desired refinement that Wordsworth perceives the garden as offering. Gardeners such as Loudon and Wordsworth disclose the pressing need to maintain a sense of decorum and gendered appropriateness when working within, rather than merely observing, the garden.

During the nineteenth century, the rhetoric of “cultivated” femininity was not limited to gardening, however, as the language of the garden entered into other discussions of women’s social role and general education. In many ways, women had to appear as cultivated and refined as the gardens they explored, but did not necessarily labour within:

Ladies in polite society enjoyed a leisured, though monotonous existence, their days consisting of sketching, embroidery, walking in the gardens, visiting their children in the nursery, drinking tea. . . . The minds of some of these ladies were as elegant as the clothes they wore, a phenomenon brought about by conversation

and reading so that they could converse easily with their husbands and gentlemen of their acquaintance. (Cuthbertson 69-70)

As Cuthbertson summarizes, garden-related culture extends beyond the terrain of actual gardens and into women's general pursuit of a socially desired achievement of floral femininity. In her discussion of floral femininity during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, former *Harrowsmith* editor Jennifer Bennett notes that women immersed themselves in plants and all things plant-related. According to Bennett, women "dressed in flowers, talked about flowers and fashioned flowers from all kinds of materials. They were even named for flowers: Daphnes, Hazels, Camellias, Irises, . . . and Violets occupied Victorian cradles. Older names such as Rose and Flora experienced revivals" (93). Creating crocheted flowers from wool (Bennett 95), making skeletonized or phantom flowers from calcium chloride (Bennett 96), tending wardian cases (Bennett 98), and using Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's floral code to communicate secret messages of affection (Bennett 100) were all activities women participated in as means of expressing their delicacy, refinement, desirable feminine nature, and social status.

As cultivated women, Moodie and Traill participate in this popular notion of floral femininity and plant-related culture. In *Roughing It in the Bush*, Moodie paints botanicals (181) and "mak[es] acquaintance with every wild flower" (163). In addition to her avid study of botany and the creation of her herbarium, Traill mentions tending ferns in her wardian case and making table mats by weaving together Indian grasses (*Pearls* 65, 133). Moodie and Traill pursue this culture of floral femininity through observable activities, yet they also let this culture imbue their writing in rhetorical ways, as they express women's delicate and decorative nature. While lower-class female emigrants aspire to a refined appearance because, as Moodie observes, it is "quite fashionable to be *delicate*"

(*Life in the Clearings* 61), Moodie depicts an example of true “cultivation” in *Flora Lyndsay; or, Passages in an Eventful Life* (1854), a fictional autobiography that traces the Moodies’ decision and preparation to emigrate. Moodie captures this “cultivated,” floral feminine character not just through her protagonist’s name, but also through her physically fragile constitution and cultured status.³ The delicate, youthful, aspects of the figure or goddess “Flora” are clearly appropriate to Moodie’s Flora Lyndsay, a middle-class woman and writer unaccustomed to difficult manual labour. But Flora also appears somewhat useless; she is physically unsuited for life in the backwoods, and ill-prepared for her trans-Atlantic journey, suggesting that refinement has to be context specific. Flora purchases the wrong attire, holds false notions of her new home, and wastes money. When Captain Kitson enters Flora’s pretty cottage and asks Flora to confirm the rumours of her emigration, he exposes Flora’s normal routine and character and her drastically unprepared state for her new life across the Atlantic:

“People are all wise in their own eyes. But what is Canada to you my dear? A fine settler’s wife you will make; nervous and delicate, half the time confined to your bed with some complaint or other. And then, when you are well, the whole blessed day is wasted in reading and writing, and coddling up the baby. I tell you that sort of business will not answer in a rough country like Canada. . . . I know that the country won’t suit you,—no, nor you won’t suit the country.” (*Flora Lyndsay* 15)

³ Bennett notes that the name “Flora” derives from a sensual Roman goddess of flowers, but “by the Victorian era, she had become a sort of comfortable great-aunt figure, and her name was given to countless baby girls. Flora’s extended reign brought her—her revels and erotica left behind—into an age when she was considered decorative but useless” (26).

Flora's delicate femininity is an intrinsic part of her identity and status as an educated, middle-class woman who remains mostly indoors. Her impending journey across the Atlantic causes gender-related tensions, as Flora's gentle, fragile nature seems ill-equipped for the "rough" surroundings and difficult labour of the backwoods. Clearly, Moodie presents Flora's *nature* through an emphasis on her character's physical constitution and temperate English home; Flora's *delicacy*, however, stems mainly from her social status and upbringing.

In addition to promoting floral femininity with its physical and cultural trappings, conduct books of the period applied gardening (both the actual work and its figurative associations) to discussions of women's formal education. Indeed, when Captain Kitson refers to Flora's preoccupation with reading and writing, he signals Flora's status as a "cultivated" or educated woman not suited to manual labour. According to Moodie, the women of Upper Canada boast erroneously of their own refined feminine natures because in contrast to Moodie's and Traill's (or Flora Lyndsay's) own refinement, these physically attractive yet poorly educated lower-class female emigrants need to be "improved by *cultivation*" (*Roughing It* 218, my emphasis). These women are in need of "a little mental culture," and they remind Moodie of neglected gardens—"choice flowers half buried in weeds" (*Roughing It* 218). Moodie's language of cultivation is typical of nineteenth-century writers' varied advice to women, particularly within conduct books. For example, Labbe points to Hannah More (1745-1833), a conservative-minded educator who worked to maintain proper gendered spheres for men and women, as an example of an author who was inspired by this popular garden rhetoric. Using examples from More's

conduct books,⁴ Labbe contends (through her own wording) that More believes women must first “[submit] to being garden[ed]”—to being properly educated and supervised by their mothers, before “those women may ‘garden,’ may exercise discretion and perception” (45). Thus, although as “garden[er]s,” women embodied a decorative role, women’s potentially active role as “garden[er]s” reveals “More’s apparent objective of educating women out of a helpless kind of delicacy and into usefulness” via self-directed educational pursuits and refined behaviour (Labbe 44). In the essay “Of Queens’ Gardens,” John Ruskin presents a comparable organic model of girlhood, arguing that while a boy is “chisel[ed] . . . into shape” (83) until he becomes a man who is “*always* hardened” (77) by society, a girl “grows as a flower does” (83), naturally and delicately in her male-prescribed, male-protected familial domain. Part of this “natural” growth involves turning young girls loose in the library to cultivate their minds (Ruskin 84). Interestingly, even radical reformers of women’s education use the popular language of cultivation and the site of the garden as means of staging women’s formative years and the need for additional independence. In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft prioritizes “the cultivation of the understanding” (105) and lists “[g]ardening, experimental philosophy, and literature” (170) as important subjects for young women to pursue. For her, the desired ends of young women’s gardening involvement are not delicacy and comportment, but rather freedom of spirit and invigorating exercise:

With what disgust have I heard sensible women . . . speak of the wearisome
confinement, which they endured at school. Not allowed, perhaps, to step out of

⁴ Labbe refers mainly to More’s *Essays on Various Subjects, Principally Designed for Young Ladies* (1777) and *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education with a View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent Among Women of Rank and Fortune* (1799).

one broad walk in a superb garden, and obliged to pace with steady deportment stupidly backwards and forwards, holding up their heads and turning out their toes, with shoulders braced back, instead of bounding, as Nature directs to complete her own design, in the various attitudes so conducive to health. (281)

Here, a personified and feminized “Nature” renders acceptable an alternative education of “bounding” activity, rather than composed propriety.

In keeping with the popular, educative use of garden rhetoric, the writings of More and Wollstonecraft demonstrate how the garden—its language and setting—is a common feature among the differing approaches to women’s education during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Certainly, Moodie and Traill reveal their own acquiescence to this garden-inspired rhetoric when depicting children’s developing intellect and character. Both sisters endorse gardening formally in their published works as an idealized, practical pursuit and a necessary part of a young girl’s upbringing. Warning mothers against the evils of parties for young girls, Moodie advises that nature and the garden, in particular, are vital to the proper, daily upbringing of children:

But observation has convinced me that I was in error; that these parties operate like a forcing bed upon young plants, with this difference, that they bring to maturity the seeds of evil, instead of those of goodness and virtue, and that a child accustomed to the heated atmosphere of pleasure, is not likely in maturer years to enjoy the pure air and domestic avocations of home. . . . The garden or the green field is the best place for children. . . . (*Life in the Clearings* 328-29)

Social gatherings beyond the safe confines of home are artificial in nature, acting as “forcing beds”⁵ that foster corrupted growth—an excessive love of finery and vanity that prevent women from appreciating the “pure air” of their domestic environs and related gender roles. Moodie further endorses the garden’s cultivating influence in her narrative “Rachel Wilde, Or, Trifles from the Burthen of a Life” in which the wayward and undomesticated Rachel “Wilde” and her sister Dorothea are charged with the responsibility of tending the flower borders—a task that leaves the girls “innocently employed” and with “joy in their eyes, and health in their cheeks” (101). In “Rachel Wilde,” Moodie praises the garden not just for the physical benefits, but also as a resource for moral instruction. Rachel learns the dangerous consequences of vanity when she and her sister Dorothea hang signs of poetry around the stems of their flowers: “the gardener Lodge, discovered the huge labels, hanging from the stems of the poor drooping flowers; crushed beneath the weight of flattery, which bowed their simple beauties to the earth; and which like the human flowers to whom the same treatment is applied, sadly marred their native charms” (103). Here, the garden seems the more esteemed educator, as Moodie raises concerns over the potential excesses of poetry. According to Moodie, the garden and associated “natural” home environment form the best milieu where young girls can be properly cultivated for their domestic responsibilities.

Similarly to her sister, Traill commends the garden as a place of discipline and education, particularly for the more refined classes of society. Traill relates the story of the young boy Alfred and his middle-class, garden-inspired education in the children’s book *Little Down; or, The History of a Field-Mouse* (1822). Alfred’s mother, Mrs.

⁵ Forcing beds are specifically designed terrain (often enclosed to trap heat) that gardeners use “[t]o hasten by artificial means the maturity of (plants, fruit, etc.)” (“Force”).

Clifford, instructs her son in empathy and the humane treatment of nature's creatures through the setting of the family garden. The frontispiece situates the teaching of this moral lesson from within the home, while the prominent window in the immediate background provides a portal to the larger outside world—the rolling English hills in the distance, and the more formal flower beds and garden that surround this cultivated and “cultivating” home. Both the illustration of the picture window and the embedded narrative of Downy the mouse, as told by Mrs. Clifford, frame the centrality of the garden to Alfred's maturation and “cultivation.”

These stories of childhood lessons in and through the garden are of course highly class-conscious. Traill's “A Garden Party” from *Cot and Cradle Stories* relates, for example, the issue of class distinction and “cultivated” behaviour for the middle-class Strickland sisters.⁶ In the story, the youngest sisters “[run] wild” during a lapse in supervision because of the absence of their eldest sister and mother and their father's confinement to the sickroom. The girls take to playing with “a rustic lad” (63) named Jonathan Spilling (nicknamed “Punch”) because they “[have] no playmates of [their] own class” (62). The Strickland girls allow Jonathan to eat the fruit from Mr. Strickland's prized gooseberry bush as payment for his entertainment and gifts, but eventually the young girls are bid out of the garden by their angered father in punishment “for stealing the fruit and for playing with the cow-boy Punch” (66). Clearly, within both Moodie's and Traill's educative stories for children, the garden not only provides ideological parameters for the communication of gendered and class-related propriety, but also (and paradoxically so) green space where social codes can be tested.

⁶ Traill's “A Garden Party” explores similar implications of class and social transgressions as that of Katherine Mansfield's short story “The Garden Party” (1922).

The garden-inspired discourse of educators and conduct book authors demonstrates a clear political purpose: to generate paradigms of ideal cultivated status, and especially a naturalized vision of domestic femininity. A cultivated woman's self-directed usefulness is not wholly intended for her benefit, but rather for the benefit of a potential suitor who values qualities of self-regulation and "cultivation" in a prospective wife, as she focusses her energies on familial concerns. Michael Waters argues that the garden upholds women's married position as *Angel in the House*. According to Waters, the constructions of women within gardens in Victorian literature serves "to beautify, sanctify, and naturalize" (241) women's domestic role: the women exhibit "an 'instinctive' love of gardens and a 'native' affinity with the plants they nurture" (Waters 242); they play an invaluable "supervisory" (243) role directing hired gardeners and making decisions; and they frequently serve as "ornamental icon or spectacle" (245) to "naturalize their position" (245) in the garden and as object of the gaze of a "privileged male observer" (245). This icon of a naturalized feminine domesticity is, of course, most visible in "Of Queens' Gardens" in which Ruskin informs his female readers to "be no more housewives, but queens" of their domains and gardens in their maternal nurturing and sweet ordering of their familial lives (88). Ruskin delineates the masculine public sphere from the feminine private domain, suggesting that while men foster supreme intellect, work in the public realm, and defend the home from the hostile outside world, women create beauty and acquire knowledge that is not "foundational and progressive," but "general and accomplished for daily . . . use" (82). This model of garden-inspired housewifery is clearly evident within Traill's "The Five Little Gardeners." In the story, the second eldest sister Sara plants a practical yet sensually appealing garden of "straight beds" filled with herbs and flowers, such as lemon-thyme, marjoram, parsley, savory,

lavender, and wallflowers (56-57). When the old gardener sees the garden, he declares with a laugh, “‘Well, Miss Sara, you’ll make a rare good housewife for some good husband one of these days’” (57). For Traill, the rhetoric of women’s cultivation and the girls’ garden-situated activities create a children’s story where “natural” processes and space serve to construct and delineate models of femininity for her young readers.

2. The Settler Experience of “Transplanting” and “Hardening-off”

Moodie’s and Traill’s early immersion in the gendered and class-related discourse of cultivated floral femininity from the nineteenth century situates their writing and characterizes their approach to gender even within the unfamiliar social context of Upper Canada. There, the Strickland sisters find themselves in an unfamiliar society where distinctions of status are disregarded; hence, the sisters reassert the “uncultivated” characteristics of their inferiors as a way to maintain their superior social status in their transplanted milieu. Whereas Moodie attributes plant-like characteristics to the educated members of society, she distinguishes the lower-class, less-refined settlers with weed or non-plant comparisons. The elderly mother of the Yankee settler Old Joe H—, Moodie’s first disagreeable and lower-class neighbour in *Roughing It in the Bush*, lacks mental cultivation, beauty, refinement, or the potential for moral and emotional growth: “I felt for the desolated old creature—the tears rushed to my eyes; but there was not moisture in hers. No rain from the heart could filter through that iron soil” (145). Being soil, not flower, Uncle Joe’s mother seems as rough and unwelcoming as the uncultivated terrain of Upper Canada. The experience of being “transplanted” to the new colony allows also for a redefining of the individual, especially in terms of his or her traversal of class distinctions and assertion of a new status by association or pure stubborn will. Moodie’s

servant who chooses not “to *demane* hersel’ by scrubbing a floor,” strives for this cultivated “nature” by becoming what Moodie calls a “scion of the aristocracy”—a forced graft, as opposed to a natural descendent or offshoot (*Life in the Clearings* 63).

In bringing this tradition of plant-related rhetoric to the backwoods and continuing to employ it there, Moodie and Traill nonetheless demonstrate a need to revise their discourse for their new situation. Because their backwoods gardens and Upper Canadian milieu differ so drastically from the picturesque, refined, and refining English landscapes and culture to which they are accustomed, they adapt their garden-related language accordingly to account for new emigrant experiences. Milking cows, fighting house fires, and ploughing fields are quite incongruent with the “queenly” (to use Ruskin’s phrase) tasks of beautifying a home, illustrating botanicals, pressing plants, and tending flowers. Moodie and Traill re-examine their understanding of femininity, therefore, as they adapt the language of delicate floral femininity to alternative stories of women’s “education” and experience, which arise not through moral instruction, reading, or composure, but rather through unseemly rigorous work and the unrefined circumstances of a mixed, uncultured society. Consequently, the rhetoric of “transplanting” and “hardening-off” form a compelling extension of this familiar class-conscious and gender-related discourse. The actual process of transplanting denotes a crossing of boundaries and spaces as the verb “to transplant” means “[t]o remove (a plant) from one place or soil and plant it in another” (“Transplant”). Central to the success of this gardening endeavour is a period of “hardening-off,” a process that Traill outlines in detail in *The Canadian Settler’s Guide* when instructing her readers on how to acclimatize wild plants accustomed to the woods to grow successfully within the garden. The gardening term “hardening-off” denotes the movement of plants from indoors to harsher outdoor

conditions as plants are rendered “hardy, robust, or capable of endurance” by “inur[ing] plants to cold by gradually reducing the temperature of a hot-bed or forcing-house by increasing the time of exposure to wind and sunlight” (“Hardening-off”). Although transplanting and hardening-off are integral to Moodie’s and Traill’s actual backwoods gardening, these gardening processes acquire additional, highly figurative dimensions, as Moodie and Traill draw repeatedly on these metaphors to account for and naturalize the shifting gender domains, physical repercussions, and ambiguous class distinctions that result from their exposure to the backwoods experience.

In *The Canadian Settler’s Guide*, Traill establishes an implicit yet sustained comparison between the activity of transplanting plants and that of transplanting British female emigrants to Upper Canada. Traill does not state the relationship directly within her guide, yet she structures her descriptions and uses figurative language to form an undeniable parallel. For Traill, the variously cultivated female emigrants acquire the additional experience of being transplanted and the related process of hardening-off, which entails an all-encompassing adaptation (in skills, habits, and occupations) and adjustment (in attitude, perspective, and physical appearance) on the part of the female settlers. The formative experience of transplanting applies to all female settlers, whether the woman is the wife of an officer, gentleman, labourer, or mechanic. Although Traill believes that “wives and daughters of small farmers and of the working class, should feel the difficulties of a settler’s life far less keenly than any other” because they are “enured from childhood to toil” (5), she still anticipates that these less “cultivated” women will experience their own difficult rooting in their new situation:

At first the strangeness of all things around them, the loss of familiar faces and familiar objects, and the want of all their little household conveniences, are

sensibly felt; and these little things make them uncomfortable and peevish: but a little reasoning with themselves would show that such inconveniences belong to the nature of their new position, and that a little time will do away with the evil they complain of. (5)

The description of women's adaptation to new surroundings and the use of the word "enured" resonate with a later passage in *The Canadian Settler's Guide* in which Traill outlines the transplanting of plants into the garden:

The reason why the native plants often fail to grow and thrive when removed to the garden, [*sic*] arises from the change in the soil and situation: to remove a plant from deep shade and light rich soil, to sunshine and common earth, without any attention to their previous habits, is hardly reasonable. A fine leaf mould, water, and shelter should be afforded til [*sic*] the tender stranger has become inured to its change of soil and position. . . . (77)

Traill's recurring use of the word "enured" (or "inured") creates a parallel between women and plants: both must adjust in similar ways as they contend with being removed from congenial surroundings (family, friends, and comfortable homes in the case of the women; or deep shade and rich soil in the case of the plants) and acclimatize themselves to alternative conditions (a wilderness homestead, or the open elements and a less-appealing ground of garden soil). Traill orchestrates this implied comparison early on in *The Canadian Settler's Guide* by focussing initially on the women's transplanting within the opening pages of her text and then moving into her gardening manual section and presenting a carefully worded and extensive comment on the importance of the actual transplanting for plants.

While Traill creates an implied comparison, the transplanting metaphor becomes explicit beyond the pages of the guide, as this rhetoric permeates much of Traill's and Moodie's Upper Canadian texts. The cultivation metaphors enable both Moodie and Traill to prolong a sense of being "at home" in their new surroundings through a continuation of a familiar discourse characterized through plants and gardening. Alternatively, the metaphors of transplanting and hardening-off allow Moodie and Traill to render conventional their perceived transgressions against the traditional nineteenth-century paradigms of domestic, cultivated femininity. In a mixed society where other settlers question pedigree, Moodie and Traill do not simply emphasize the uncultivated and fraudulent natures of the various self-aggrandizing members of the lower class as a way of contrasting and applauding their own cultivated status. Instead, the sisters reflect upon an experience of profound transplanting that demands an adaptation of their original refined natures and values. In Upper Canada there is a noticeable shift in societal expectations and self-definition; if settlers do not respond to these unfamiliar circumstances, they fail to thrive or to take root in their new soil. In *Roughing It in the Bush*, Moodie recounts numerous failed transplants, most notably that of Jeanie Burns.⁷ Moodie characterizes Jeanie as the "daughter of a respectable shoemaker, who gained a comfortable living by his trade in a small town of Ayrshire" (*Roughing It* 119). When Jeanie emigrates from England to join her fiancé Willie Robertson, she discovers that in his impatience and ambition, Willie married another woman who had a "good lot of land in the rear of his farm" (*Roughing It* 124). Jeanie lacks resiliency and is bedridden for

⁷ The sketch "Jeanie Burns" was not included in the original publication of *Roughing It in the Bush* in 1852. "Since 'Jeanie Burns' was clearly meant by Susanna to be included"—an intention signalled by Moodie in a letter to her publisher (Richard Bentley)—Carl Ballstadt incorporates this sketch in his critical edition (Ballstadt xlix).

weeks, the “the colour . . . fade[s] from her cheeks” (*Roughing It* 126).⁸ Ultimately, Jeanie dies of heartache. Her feminine delicacy cannot withstand the harsh “climate” of neglect and romantic betrayal that follows her uprooting from England: “Puir Jeanie! she held out during the simmer, but when the fall came, she just withered awa’ like a flower, nipped by the early frost, and this day we laid her in the earth” (127-28). As delicate, “floral” creatures, middle-class female emigrants, such as Jeanie Burns, who are used to “a comfortable living” (*Roughing It* 119) seem particularly ill-suited for life in the backwoods. Moodie highlights the physical transformation of the hardening-off process as especially severe, as young women are soon transfigured by their environment and lose the delicacy of their complexions:

The Canadian women, while they retain the bloom and freshness of youth, are exceedingly pretty; but these charms soon fade, owing, perhaps, to the fierce extremes of their climate, or the withering effect of the dry metallic air of stoves, and their going too early into company and being exposed . . . to the noxious influence of late hours, and the sudden change from heated rooms to the cold, biting, bitter winter blast. (*Roughing It* 217)

Clearly, in Moodie’s opinion, the harsh physical and emotional conditions of the backwoods produce unappealing effects on otherwise delicate, “floral” femininity as “the glowing tint of the Albion rose pales before the withering influence of late hours and stove-heat” (*Roughing It* 218).

⁸ In the New Canadian Library version of the Jeanie Burns sketch (which appears in *Life in the Clearings*), this particular passage contains alternative diction that re-emphasizes the floral motif of the narrative, as the change in the young woman’s complexion is described as “the rose had faded off her cheek” (236). The New Canadian Library edition of *Life in the Clearings* is an abridged reprint of the first edition of Moodie’s work from 1853. Both versions of the sketch foreshadow the change in Jeanie’s health and fortune through a floral metaphor of transplanting: “Happiness is not a flower of long growth in this world; it requires the dew and sunlight of heaven to nourish it, and it soon withers, removed from its native skies” (*Roughing It* 120).

Moodie counts herself among the refined women who become physically hardened when she recalls her family's departure from the bush. Although Moodie works to maintain her "cultivated" status and appearance within her writing, paradoxes disrupt her self-characterization. When John Moodie procures a sheriff's position in Belleville and the family leaves the bush, readers expect that Moodie will be pleased by her return to a more cultivated, civilized environment. Moodie is so "inured to [her] change of soil and position" (*Canadian Settler's* 38), however, that she feels she is no longer suited for the now unfamiliar town environment. Moodie's self-image reflects the final result of the hardening-off she describes in relation to Canadian female emigrants: "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" (*Roughing It* 501). This self-portrait appears near the conclusion of the sketch, yet earlier in this departure sequence, Moodie contextualizes the extent of her physical transformation and its social implications. Preparing to leave the bush, Moodie worries about the possible change in situation for her daughter Addie (or Agnes), whom, for a period of time, Moodie sends to live with a wealthy neighbour during Moodie's convalescence in the backwoods:

Mrs. H---, whose husband was wealthy, was a generous, warm-hearted girl of eighteen. Lovely in person, and fascinating in manners, and still too young to have any idea of forming the character of a child, she dressed the little creature expensively; and, by constantly praising her personal appearance, gave her an idea of her own importance which it took many years to eradicate.

It is a great error to suffer a child, who has been trained in the hard school of poverty and self-denial, to be *transplanted suddenly into the hot-bed of wealth and luxury*. (*Roughing It* 492, my emphasis)

Moodie obviously fears that in being transplanted into an alien position of wealth and finery, her daughter will no longer be suited to Moodie's adopted domain—which is a world of “useful occupation, . . . scanty means and plain clothing” (*Roughing It* 492).

Like Moodie, Traill communicates the female emigrant's difficult traversal of distinct societal and gendered contexts and expectations in spatial and garden-inspired terms. In readying women for the unrefined physical and social circumstances of the backwoods, Traill believes husbands play an integral, informative role in ensuring a successful transplanting as their wives' education has not prepared them for the task at hand. Traill's “Female Trials in the Bush” demonstrates the centrality of the transplanting motif to the Strickland sisters' transgressions against cultivated femininity and reformulations of a woman's sphere of influence and activity. Traill's reflections on women's proper domestic sphere as a “natural” and sheltering domain echo Ruskin's delineation of the “Queen's garden”:

It is generally allowed that woman is by nature and habit more strongly attached to home and all those domestic ties and associations that form her sources of happiness, than man. She is accustomed to limit her enjoyments within a narrow circle; she scarcely receives the same pleasures that man does from travelling and exchange of place; her little world is *home*, it is or should be her sphere of actions. . . (80)

Whereas the man moves freely and confidently in the public realm, the woman encounters a more limited experience being situated within the home; her very happiness

seems predicated upon this domestic role. Traill's descriptor of a "narrow circle" foreshadows, however, the unprepared state of the female emigrant whose sphere of influence and experience is about to be drastically expanded and revised. "[T]otally unfitted by habits, education and inclination, without due warning of the actual trials she is destined to encounter" ("Female Trials" 81), the female emigrant is, in Traill's view, destined for a failed transplanting to Upper Canada because of a too severe hardening-off experience. In this context, the husband possesses no longer the beautiful and beautifying Queen of the garden: "The wife finds she has been deceived, and becomes fretful, listless and discontented; and the husband, when too late, discovers that he has transplanted a tender exotic, to perish beneath the withering influence of an ungenial atmosphere, without benefiting by its sweetness or beauty" ("Female Trials" 81).

In cases where the female emigrant adapts to her new climate of domestic labour, privation, and loss of refinement, Traill foresees a successful transplanting and an altered, more hardened, state of femininity. Recounting another woman's experience, Traill recalls how this lady of "some fortune" was romanced by her fiancé to emigrate after being given the impression that she would become "the queen of the village of which he gave her so glowing a picture" ("Female Trials" 82). Unfortunately, misfortune weighs down on the young couple and the new wife finds herself transformed by poverty and manual labour:

[A]ll her costly clothing went by degrees, all her pretty ornaments and little household business were disposed of piece-meal, to supply their daily wants. . . . Though to some persons it might appear a trifling evil, there was nothing in all her sad reverse of condition that seemed so much to annoy my poor friend as the discolouring of her beautiful hands; she would often sigh as she looked down on

them and say, “I used to be so vain of them, and never thought to employ them in menial offices. . . .” (“Female Trials” 83)

Clearly, the paradigm of the cultivated woman who is delicate, educated, and beautiful does not possess the same relevancy in Upper Canada as in England. Traill’s experience, observations, and framing of this transition reveal a dramatic readjustment in notions of feminine appearance, influence, and gender domain, as transplanting is a process female emigrants experience acutely in terms of re-contextualizing their notions of gender.

3. Alternative Critical Models of Heroines, Mending Baskets, and Botany

Plant and garden-related metaphors pervade Moodie’s and Traill’s writing and reflect their revised understanding of women’s “cultivation,” the physical effects of the environment, ambiguous class distinctions, and disrupted gender domains. Although this transplanting motif is integral to the Stricklands’ self-definitions and gender discourse, critics have until recently overlooked this recurring figurative language, preferring instead to create their own metaphors to describe the sisters’ written accounts of settler life. Apart from recent botany-related criticism, which I will discuss momentarily, critics are generally of two schools of thought when reflecting on Moodie’s and Traill’s transformation into pioneer women: the first—which includes such scholars as Elizabeth Thompson, T. D. MacLulich, D. M. R. Bentley, and Virginia Watson Rouslin—argues that the Strickland sisters embrace the freedoms afforded by their new social milieu, and consequently reject any constraining notions of femininity. In contrast, the second school, which is demonstrated by Misao Dean’s and Marian Fowler’s scholarship, suggests that the sisters adhere to gender and class norms and therefore assimilate their unconventional pioneer lives into a preexisting British model of cultured respectability.

In terms of the first school of thought, Thompson argues that Moodie's and Traill's works depict the creation of a new feminine ideal that redefines domestic, maternal roles. This ideal is the pioneer woman: "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" (Thompson 4). Thompson credits Traill, in particular, with addressing this gender revision in a tangible and public way, as Traill transforms the "English lady" into a pioneer "heroine":

Starting with a familiar figure and pose, [Traill] shows how the English lady—a figure common in the fiction and non-fiction of the nineteenth century—is circumscribed by social class, by social history, by the demands of precedent and propriety. Once this lady, the well-educated and cultivated gentlewoman . . . arrives in the backwoods, a process of redefinition begins . . . to suit the exigencies, realities, and demands of backwoods society. (58)

Thompson believes that the environment is at the core of the Strickland sisters' transformation into successful, hardy pioneers. MacLulich, Bentley, and Rouslin echo Thompson's argument for dramatic gender revisions in the context of new social dynamics. MacLulich's discussion of Traill's Crusoe-like stance as a resourceful settler in the wilderness speaks to Bentley's suggestion that their departure from England, their crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, and their arrival in Upper Canada enable female emigrants to dismantle their socio-cultural apparatus, which is never to be reassembled in its original form: "Yet a form of Herculean heroism was achieved by several female emigrants to Canada, including . . . Moodie herself—women who, by performing such traditionally masculine labours . . . blurred the conventional distinctions between the sexes" (Bentley, "Breaking the 'Cake of Custom'" 95-96). Similarly, Rouslin contends,

“On the borders of the frontier, no-one really had the time or the patience for insisting upon the correct jobs for women. . . . Adapting was . . . the prerequisite in such harsh circumstances” (329). Clearly, these critics applaud what they view as the liberation of female emigrants. Upper Canada is a promised land of near feminist potential where women “could exercise their individuality”; discover “the freedom of expression and self-development”; and above all, cast away the restrictions of cultivated femininity with “more room to grow in a natural direction” (Rouslin 326).

A woman who grows “naturally” is unfettered by the cultivating, engendering processes of British society; but for Dean, the key spokesperson for the second line of critical approach, gender cannot be conceived “as an artificial limitation upon a pre-existent self which may be thrown off almost at will by daring individual women” (9). Using Judith Butler’s theory of gender performance, Dean formulates an alternative interpretation of the female emigrant experience: Moodie and Traill do not grow in a “natural direction,” but rather practice their gender consistently and struggle to naturalize pioneer femininity as they “mend the gap between inner self and outward practice” (Dean 28). According to Dean, *The Canadian Settler’s Guide* serves as a discursive and “ideological mending basket” (12) for the maintenance of proper femininity, as manual labour must be declassed, de-masculinized, and realigned with the traditional, inherent feminine virtues of duty, modesty, frugality, self-regulation, and refinement (24). Dean’s description of Traill’s guide resonates with Fowler’s own textile metaphor illustrating how the Stricklands took cover under the embroidered tent of their “sheltering shawls” “cut from conventional patterns of female behaviour” (Fowler 7). Interestingly, both critics’ metaphors are in keeping with Atwood’s *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* and her poetic motif of sewing. In the epigraph to the collection, Atwood’s Moodie persona

mentions cutting the photo of herself with her “sewing scissors” (n. pag.) and begins the opening poem, “Disembarking at Quebec,” by describing “the incongruent pink of [her] shawl” (11). These critics’ figurative models are applicable and appropriate to their arguments, but the Strickland sisters’ own metaphors are predominantly those of cultivation, transplanting, hardening-off, and withering.

Recently critics have begun to turn to the Stricklands’ interest in plants in general, and to Traill’s interest in botany in particular, as appropriate and informative metaphors for the sisters’ pioneer experiences and gendered, class perspectives. Lisa Stefaniak’s 2001 article “Botanical Gleanings: Susan Fenimore Cooper, Catharine Parr Traill, and Representations of Flora” and Margaret Steffler and Neil Steffler’s 2004 article “‘If We Would Read It Aright’: Traill’s ‘Ladder to Heaven’” contend that through reading Traill’s botanical works, readers discern her nineteenth-century gender values. According to Stefaniak, Traill is clearly rooted in the “amateur world of women’s domestic botany” (238) and her alignment with this conservative tradition leads her to “reinforc[e] rather than negotiat[e] the limits of culturally sanctioned femininity” (239). Thus, Traill’s “way of reading and writing the nonhuman environment . . . mirror[s] the cyclically repetitive, detailed, elaborate, and familiar order of domestic routine” (239) that includes issues of middle-class gender propriety and the pioneer need for utility. Similarly to Stefaniak, the Stefflers argue that Traill’s specific botanical references carry socio-cultural significance beyond their scientific application. Through their interdisciplinary perspective of biology and post-colonial theory, the Stefflers emphasize Traill’s tensions as a naturalist wanting to protect the Upper Canadian wilderness environment: “Closely intertwined, the plant of the garden and the plant of the text often describe a literal colonization of the landscape or environment that reflects the writer’s own colonized condition and colonizing activities”

(127). For the Stefflers, Traill's descriptions of plants reveal their function as "indicator species," which help scientists (or readers of Traill) to decipher the environmental conditions of an ecosystem, and in Traill's case, "the position of the individual woman, not only with respect to her home and family, but also within the larger cultural and domestic context of nineteenth-century Ontario society" (135). In writing about specific native and introduced species of plants, such as Sweet Cicely and Carpetweed, Traill attempts to root herself in her new home by acknowledging her colonizing power as a British settler and her colonized position as a woman (Steffler and Steffler 138-40).⁹ Clearly Stefaniak and the Stefflers are interested in Traill's botanical role as a "floral godmother" (*Backwoods* 104), naming and describing the natural environment through writing imbued with colonial and gender ideologies. According to the Stefflers, "Traill's language [in her botanical works especially] encourages readers to 'read' nature as a type of text. Her vocabulary invites us to approach the 'volume of Nature' as we do the written word, treating each 'plant, flower, and tree' as a single page making up a complete work" (123).

My interest in Traill and Moodie both complements and diverges from these botany-centred readings, however, by focussing on the figuration of the processes of feminine adaptation. Instead of examining how Traill reads nature and plants, I focus on the inverse: how both sisters—not just Traill, the botanist—interpret and write the woman settler through garden-related rhetoric. I push beyond individual descriptions of flora, and instead reveal the linguistic and spatial aspects of a garden-inspired rhetoric that

⁹ The Stefflers note that Traill compares the Sweet Cicely of Upper Canada to English parsley, and although she "nostalgically yearn[s] for English 'tastes,' on almost every occasion Traill is inquisitive about the practical properties of potential plants in Canada" (137). In the case of Carpetweed—which "is believed by many to have originated in the tropics, specifically South America, and is thus an introduced species in Canada" (139)—the Stefflers argue that Traill discusses the resilience of the plant in a figurative sense that "seems to reflect her own evolution and adaptation" (140).

structures and communicates predominant gender paradigms while also exploring the inescapable paradox of the cultivated female emigrant. Presenting Moodie and Traill as comfortable or “at home” in their writing in both their confirmation of, and their divergence from, “cultivated” femininity, I assume a middle ground, therefore, between the two opposing arguments—one for radical gender freedoms and the other for continued gender constraints. Furthermore, I argue that in Moodie’s and Traill’s case it is essential to see these authors as “gardeners” (in addition to their role as amateur botanists) in order to examine a parallel that Traill’s grandniece puts forth in *Cot and Cradle Stories* when summarizing the Strickland sisters’ gardens and writing achievements. When authors such as Moodie and Traill are “gardeners,” they not only participate in the language of cultivation popular at the time, but also structure and spatially frame their stories by “planting” either themselves or other female characters through a garden trope and topos.

4. Garden “Plots” for the Female Emigrant

When Moodie recounts emigrant failures, she tells the story of the writer and scholar Dr. Huskins who fails to thrive in Upper Canada and is only planted in the Upper Canadian earth upon his premature, depression-related death. Dr. Huskins suffers from isolation, poverty, alcoholism, and loneliness as his “mental superiority” is “pronounced as folly and madness” by those lower-class settlers who appreciate only practical pursuits (*Life in the Clearings* 66):

A new country, where all are rushing eagerly forward in order to secure the common necessities of life, is not a favourable soil in which to nourish the bright fancies and delusive dreams of the poem. Dr. Huskins perceived his error too late,

when he no longer retained the means to remove to a more favourable spot. . . . He withdrew himself from society, and passed the remainder of his days in a solitary, comfortless, log hut on the borders of the wilderness. Here he drooped and died. . . .

(*Life in the Clearings* 67)

Dr. Huskins embodies intelligence, romance, and poetry, but these refined English attributes are displaced in the less cultured, social climate of Upper Canada. Whereas Dr. Huskins “drooped and died” in his adherence to his cultured way of life and consolation through alcohol, Moodie educates herself in manual labour to counter the criticism of her lower-class neighbours who comment disparagingly, “‘Oh, yes; she can write, but she can do nothing else’” (*Roughing It* 216). Her adaptability is made apparent not just by Moodie’s account, but by how others respond to her. Recounting the demise of Dr. Huskins, Moodie juxtaposes this doctor and poet’s experience with her own endurance as a more thoroughly transplanted woman. Dr. Huskins provides a foil for Moodie: where he fails to become a part of Upper Canada’s unrefined, mixed society and instead chooses to isolate himself, Moodie appears eventually to be no different from her fellow settlers to the point that her writer’s status seems irrelevant or unrecognizable (or at least she leads her readers to believe so). Although visitors and friends expect a refined artist, they are struck by Moodie’s ordinariness. Says a young Irish friend, “‘I like Mrs. M----, because she is in every respect like other people; and I should not have taken her for a blue-stocking at all’” (*Life in the Clearings* 66). Clearly, where Dr. Huskins fails as a settler, Moodie succeeds. But surely her transplanting depends upon more than her humble appearance and concealed status as a writer. If Dr. Huskins’ person and poetry do not find “a favourable soil” (*Life in the Clearings* 67) in the backwoods, do Moodie and Traill achieve successful adaptations in their approach as writers? Surely yes, because the

Strickland sisters foster purpose and relevancy for both their “planted” characters and for their role as writers in their adoption and manipulation of genres appropriate for a new country and its demands.

In addition to the garden trope—the language of cultivation and figuration of transplanting—Moodie’s and Traill’s garden topos influences more profoundly the larger structure and shape of their writing. If writers can be “gardeners” then Traill and Moodie “plant” their texts, and specifically their female personae, in strategic ways. In their writing, the garden becomes at key moments a spatial frame for their characters and narratives. By the term spatial frame I mean that the garden acts both spatially and ideologically to structure and advance narratives that, for the Strickland sisters, have gendered significance.¹⁰ Specifically, boundaries play a figurative and rhetorical role in terms of directing readers’ attention toward and preparing them for shifts in gendered and domestic paradigms. Garden enclosures and borders in Moodie’s and Traill’s stories, such as Moodie’s snake fence, are more than simply features of the environment; instead, these structures when read within the context of the sisters’ settlement narratives mediate conceptually and spatially the effects of transplantation on cultivated femininity. Like their actual backwoods gardens, then, their writing serves a particular purpose, or *telos*, as an intermediary zone. Their texts reveal and expand the boundaries of women’s cultivated character and domestic situation by constructing a familiar ideological and

¹⁰ Bal notes, “The expectation that a clearly marked space will function as the frame of a suitable event may . . . be disappointed”; conversely, “information concerning space is often repeated, to stress the stability of the frame, as opposed to the transitory nature of the events which occur within it” (97). Despite the “fixed combination” (Bal 97) of space, events, and commonly related associations, a topos can be manipulated. In the context of Moodie’s and Traill’s writing, the sisters use the garden topos in two divergent manners: as a stabilizing space through which they reiterate gender conventions; and as a frame for their characters’ trespasses against social propriety, which serves to highlight the fact that both the garden and the individuals within it are dynamic and operating within an altered socio-physical context.

spatial framework for their readers. In turn, this framework aids the exploration of clear transgressions against gender domains and behaviours.

According to critics of place (Casey, Potteiger, and Purinton), boundaries facilitate complex exchanges between the highly relative positions of inside and outside. Boundaries hold the potential to create ambiguity in and for the human subject who shifts perspectives or moves between established and dynamic spaces. As Edward Casey writes,

The border-line itself, complicated by conjunctures and openings, is much more than a line. A glance at a blueprint design for an ordinary house demonstrates the many points at which inside and outside meet, not only at doorways and windows but also at corners and even at solid walls. Through such open or opaque points of transition, possibilities of coming and going in and out are projected or ruled out. In the constitution of these possibilities, the lived body is centrally at stake. (123)

In terms of landscape design, boundaries play a significant role in delineating a subject's movement and directing his or her interpretation of the surrounding environment. In *Landscape Narratives: Design Practices for Telling Stories*, Matthew Potteiger and Jamie Purinton address boundaries as both physical and conceptual devices that structure a subject's experience of a landscape. Potteiger and Purinton see gardens and miniature gardens especially as veritable microcosms of the world that present a particular vision through a clearly "structured" space:

The gates, walls, streets, and fences that form the boundaries of these miniature worlds frame the interpretative space for the story to be told. . . . Miniature gardens often share the desire to re-create what has been lost or to redefine the world within

controlled bounds. In relation to the miniature, humans become giants who can move and mold the small pieces of a created world. (169)

If landscape critics see the landscape as both a site of, and framework for narrative, then surely writers such as Moodie and Traill find the framing dynamic of a garden topos a significant spatial and rhetorical device to communicate their stories and redefine the boundaries of an idealized vision of gender. For Moodie and Traill, the garden operates not simply as a source of figurative language that is popular for their time period, but rather as a fundamental “plotting” device that aids them in structuring their stories. The frame of a garden topos enables Moodie and Traill to accommodate their nineteenth-century readers’ gendered concerns through the creation of comfortable, recognizable “boundaries” of conventional femininity, while also staging transformations to these paradigms through the spatial, ideological framing of their discussion.

As a paradoxical text that both conforms to, and transgresses from, nineteenth-century gender paradigms, *The Canadian Settler’s Guide* destabilizes femininity by allowing the language of cultivation to push beyond the boundaries of the domestic sphere and the gender norms of social refinement, feminine delicacy, and sweet ordering. Traill achieves this transgression through a garden topos that serves both to extend her argument as a whole for women’s adaptation, and to frame one particular narrative of highly discordant transgression through a spatially sensitive discourse. According to Dean, Traill’s guide operates much like a conduct book, “conform[ing] to the decorum of genre” (22) by addressing female readers, promoting a domestic model, and offering moral instruction along with recipes. What is surprising and incongruent about Traill’s lessons in proper, “cultivated” feminine conduct, however, is the fact that Traill writes this text not just for the most educated or culturally refined, but for “all classes, and more

particularly for the wives and daughters of the small farmers, and part of it is also addressed to the wives of the labourers and mechanics” (Traill xviii). Explicitly addressing several classes of women, *The Canadian Settler’s Guide* claims to work overtly as a social leveler and it does in fact outline the manual labour that all women pioneers will have to undertake. Yet despite this explicit gesturing toward a broad audience, Traill employs a subtle rhetorical strategy to ready in particular her more refined, more literary emigrant readers for the situation at hand. Traill states, “I preferred collating my instruction into the more homely but satisfactory form of a Manual of Canadian housewifery, well contented to abandon the paths of literary fame” (xviii). As a mostly didactic work, the text instructs efficiently and effectively. Traill positions herself clearly as a practical teacher, yet this gardener is also a writer and she works to persuade her readers at times through a literary use of narrative and language at key points in her manual.¹¹ Her guide may be a “homely” manual, yet rhetorically she crafts a vision that works to enure her readers gradually to the abrupt changes they will undoubtedly encounter as women settlers. Traill’s “cultivation” rhetoric and the larger framing device of a garden topos expose not only Traill’s own middle-class milieu, but also her writer’s perspective in her desire to accommodate in a persuasive, symbolic manner a revised sphere of work and responsibility for women settlers. Through the development of her argument that draws upon the language of gardening and the rhetoric of enclosures and boundaries that are garden-based or garden-related, Traill appeals to women’s cultivated,

¹¹ In chapter one, I emphasized Traill’s handling of sections of her guide as that a writer of a garden manual, who concentrates on providing detailed instructions in a straightforward manner. Now, in turning to Traill’s “literary” approach within *The Canadian Settler’s Guide*, I focus on her evident attention to form, her use of narrative as a means of representation that operates in figurative ways, and her use of language.

idealized self-perceptions yet also challenges the parameters of spatially defined femininity.

Despite the predominance of practical advice on gardening and cooking in *The Canadian Settler's Guide*, there are more stylized moments within the text that work to develop Traill's argument for women's "transplanting" through spatial frames that appear in the form of comforting enclosures of homes and gardens. In setting up her subtle comparison of female settlers to transplanted plants, Traill begins her guide by gradually accommodating what she anticipates will be her readers' resistance to a dramatically altered domestic, feminine sphere. Although Traill tells her readers, "There should therefore be no wavering on their part; no yielding to prejudices and pride. Old things are passed away," Traill also appreciates that there is apprehension (*Canadian Settler's* 4). A garden topos that draws heavily on notions of enclosure enters her text as a way of framing her discussion. For example, in response to settlers' misgivings, Traill creates a sympathetic and detailed picture of the female emigrant's former English home:

Woman, whose nature is to love home and to cling to all home ties and associations, cannot be torn from that spot that is the little centre of joy and peace and comfort to her, without many painful regrets. . . . In the new land it is still present to her mental eye, and years after she has formed another home for herself she can still recal [*sic*] the bowery land, the daisied meadow, the moss-grown well, the simple hawthorn hedge that bound the garden-plot, the woodbine porch, the thatched roof and narrow casement window of her early home. (*Canadian Settler's* 12-13)

This sentimental description exudes a sense of shelter as Traill creates veritable rooms within rooms, moving from the bowery countryside of England, to the garden hedge, to the porch, to the bedroom window. When Traill outlines the "unnatural," unfeminine

duties of pioneering that situate the women outside a conventional domestic sphere as they remember it, Traill returns to similar imagery of enclosure in order to maintain a sense of comforting consistency despite the obvious changes in domain and activity. For example, when instructing women to oversee the planting of the orchards, Traill anticipates her readers' objections to the unfeminine nature of the work: "My female readers will say, these directions are all very well, but this is men's work; we women having nothing to do with nurseries except in the house" (*Canadian Settler's* 57). Traill's subsequent comment that she "learned to graft from a Canadian *lady* in her own *parlour*" (*Canadian Settler's* 62, my emphasis) reasserts the supposed delicate quality of the work and situates orchard gardening within women's traditional domestic domain, as tree grafting becomes an indoor activity, worthy of being executed in the best room of the house.

Key moments, such as this incident of parlour grafting, prompt Dean to assert that the traditional ideology of domesticity is "iterated and reiterated in the *Guide*, and the femininity of manual and productive labour asserted with obsessive vigour" (22). Admittedly, Traill controls and orders her argument according to nineteenth-century gender norms. To young middle-class women for whom "false pride . . . stand[s] in their way of acquiring practical household knowledge," Traill appeals to their maternal natures and continued familial responsibilities: "The greatest heroine in life is she who knowing her duty, resolves not only to do it, but to do it to the best of her abilities, with heart and mind bent upon the work" (*Canadian Settler's* 4). While initially Traill appeases her readers through a motif of comforting and familiar enclosure, later on in *The Canadian Settler's Guide*—following the extensive instruction on gardening and cooking—she uses the garden topos again but in a different way. That is, in structuring her narrative of

female adaptation regarding a woman harvesting a crop, Traill incorporates undeniable paradox. The appearance of this brief narrative amidst the instructional content of the guide signals Traill's need to impress upon her readers the harsh realities of pioneer life. It is a scene Traill could not have related during the opening sections of *The Canadian Settler's Guide* when Traill enures her readers gradually for her instruction on manual labour, enclosing her arguments within a comforting, consistent presentation of femininity as they understand it from their original English milieu. Indeed, the earlier imagery of enclosure followed by the extensive instructional content of the book, which outlines the actual work these women settlers will have to undertake, prepares Traill's readers for this subsequent, alternative presentation of the female subject's spatial and gendered experiences in the backwoods.

Despite Traill's reiteration of cultured, domesticated femininity in earlier sections of *The Canadian Settler's Guide*, she accommodates paradox and disruption of gender norms when she retells an anecdote later on in her text of a woman who harvests the corn crop single-handedly. Immediately prior to the narrative, Traill outlines instructions for the culture of Indian corn and makes a passing comment about women's involvement in this labour: "Some cross-plough, but I do not think this is very often practiced. Women and children take great part in the culture of the corn-crop, especially in the bush-farms, where the roots and stumps obstruct the plough, and the hoe alone can be made use of. Pumpkins are usually planted along with Indian-corn" (112). Traill concludes her detailed instruction, and then turns to her harvest narrative. Through references to garden enclosures both at the onset and within the telling of this story, Traill works to frame and reframe ideologically the story of this woman pioneer's decidedly unfeminine work. When Traill commences her narrative she situates her pioneer subject clearly within the

domestic domain of cultivated femininity. Traill describes the pioneer as an officer's wife, "a young woman who had never been accustomed to any other work than such light labour as the most delicate female may take pleasure in, such as the culture of flowers, and making pastry and preserves, and such matters" (114). When the female servant, husband, and man-servant all fall ill with fever, the woman takes to the corn fields to harvest the crop, noticing that the corn is "just ripe" but that "the fence [is] not very secure, and the hogs of a settler about half a mile off, came through [*sic*] the woods and destroyed the corn" (114). With the crop in danger of being ruined completely through a faulty fence, the emigrant wife must move beyond her usual sphere of "delicate" domestic work. The female pioneer sets out with her baby in arms to harvest the crop, and "fortunately [the field is] close at hand, just beside the garden" (115). The garden reference creates a sense of reassurance that the woman is not straying far from her usual "cultivated" domain. Nevertheless, the woman harvester works beside and outside the garden, and this de-framing of her work and gender leads to a paradoxical reversal of the public/outside versus private/inside model of masculinity and femininity. The garden fence serves both spatial and rhetorical purposes as Traill directs and persuades her readers toward an acceptance of transgression in gender norms. With her baby seated nearby, the "cultivated" woman works the fields in the hot afternoon:

She soon became interested in the work, and though her soft hands, unused to rough labour, were blistered and chafed, in a few hours she had stripped the cobs from a large portion of the corn, and thrown them into heaps, running back from time to time to speak to her baby, and amuse him by rolling towards him the big yellow golden pumpkins, with which in a short time she had effectually fenced him round,

while the little fellow, shouting with joy, patted and slapped the cool rind of the orange-coloured fruit. . . .

Between gathering the corn, playing with the baby, and going to visit her sick husband, she had enough to do. . . .

In after years she has often with honest pride related to her children, how she gathered in the first Indian corn crop that was raised on their bush farm. Possibly this very circumstance gave a tone of energy and manly independence of spirit to her children, which will mark them in their progress in after life. (115)

Traill does not reconcile entirely this woman's "energy and manly independence of spirit" with her initial delicate femininity. The woman traverses both physical and ideological boundaries, resulting in a paradoxical position. This woman is both maternal—in caring for her child and sick husband—and paternal—in her harvesting of the crop and "mark[ing]" her children with a tone of masculine independence. When Traill positions this woman harvester, she readjusts the feminine sphere, pushing outward into the masculine domain that demands a forthright engagement with a hostile world as the mother is the new protector of her home. Traill reframes her pioneer subject, and in turn, allows this woman to redefine gender boundaries and relationships through an ambiguous spatial position. The woman "fence[s] [her son] round" with pumpkins; she is his maternal protector, while she herself remains outside this enclosure, and outside the home and garden, setting a "manly" example by working in the field.

Traill's corn/pumpkin harvest story with its openness to paradox through the spatial, ideological framing technique of her garden topos has even inspired contemporary poet Robert Kroetsch to unearth further these contradictions in his poem "Pumpkin: A Love Poem." Reflecting Traill's narrative of the mother surrounding her baby boy with

pumpkins while harvesting the fields, Kroetsch's poem blurs the binaries of female and male, inside and outside, cultivated and wild, as the speaker of the poem carves through a pumpkin with ambiguous sexual imagery to see the female pioneering ancestor outside:

Inside the pumpkin I am able

Just barely able to unzip

And she, outside walking

In her garden sees

My magnificent unfallen

Nature my recovered ancestry

Of borders bravely crossed

And husbandry triumphant (27)

When Kroetsch's speaker "unzips" himself (that is, his trousers) and the seeds of his pumpkin through his erotic transgressions, he asserts his manhood. Alternatively, he also unzips and exposes the paradox at the root of Traill's anecdote. Like Traill, Kroetsch crosses and confuses gender boundaries, creating a vision that is simultaneously masculine and feminine for the pumpkin-enclosed speaker. The garden plots and boundaries in *The Canadian Settler's Guide* work as conceptual and spatial frames that invite readers (and even poets) to question the gender paradigms that structure and contain their world. Where the woman in Kroetsch's poem responds with both surprise and passive pleasure at the speaker's antics—"What are you doing in my / pumpkin she says, and I / muffled sticky humped" (27)—Traill and her settler character create actively the energy and paradox of the scene. Thus, while Traill reassures her readers at

the onset of her text with references to comforting enclosures, the inclusion of this garden-inspired narrative of gender transgression further into her book opens readers to the possibility of an altered feminine sphere and the realities of their Upper Canadian “transplanting.” Through the shaping influence of a garden topos, Traill’s guide progresses then from symbolic imagery of comforting enclosed spaces—the bower of England, the window casement, the refined parlour—to unstable, permeable boundaries, where the ideological paradigms and domains of gender cannot be easily or consistently sustained in light of pioneer practices.

Like Traill and her use of a garden frame, Moodie structures her narratives through a garden topos that accommodates her own paradoxical nature as a transplanted, cultivated woman who is “hardened-off” in her proximity to the lower classes. Through this ideologically imbued frame, Moodie shapes her narratives in subtle yet purposeful ways and “plants” herself as a character.¹² There exists a general consensus among critics that Moodie generates tension through a dual role within *Roughing It in the Bush* by positioning herself as a writer who relates retrospectively Susanna’s experiences as a naïve, recently emigrated settler. Dermot McCarthy notes that despite the autobiographical elements of *Roughing It in the Bush*, Moodie composes her text through “a number of devices of the kind found in imaginative literature” including changes in time, foreshadowing, and character sketch (8). McCarthy believes the subsequent “tension between fact and fiction” enables Moodie to develop an ironic stance, “as Moodie mocks her own naivete [*sic*] and romanticism” as a character in her text (8). On a similar note, Gillian Witlock argues, “the Moodie sketches discredit and question their

¹² To avoid confusion, I use “Moodie” to refer to the author of the text, and “Susanna” to refer to the character Moodie creates through her writing.

own narrator and, in some cases, offer a number of different narrators,” resulting in a “complex textual interchange between the retrospective narrator and her inexperienced younger self” (39). Clearly in fashioning herself as a character in *Roughing It in the Bush*, Moodie uses an ironic, dual perspective to create a dynamic self-characterization. I add to this line of criticism by suggesting that as part of this strategy, Moodie uses the rhetoric of *commonplace*—the topos of the garden—to mediate and signal to her reading public (an audience well-versed in the popular nineteenth-century language of gender and class cultivation and the separate spheres of gender domains) the changes in her character. Critics argue for the importance of landscape in their discussions of Moodie’s self-construction, yet their analysis persists in focussing on the elevated language of landscape aesthetics and the descriptions of the larger prospect. For example, Susan Johnston pays particular attention to Moodie’s nineteenth-century aesthetics and landscape paradigms: how the “phenomenal world . . . eludes [Moodie’s] control” and how “this subversion is consciously related” in *Roughing It in the Bush* (30). While Moodie’s presentation of herself as Susanna enables her to explore her character’s personal growth and revised preferences for nineteenth-century landscape aesthetics, Johnston concludes that “the perceptual paradigms of the Moodie character are only superficially altered” (34-35) as aesthetics remain intertwined with settling the land and economic concerns. Moodie never extends her questioning to the point that the wilderness becomes an independent entity over which human society loses control and which consequently invades Susanna’s subjectivity as in Atwood’s poetic interpretation (Johnston 42-43).

Although Moodie’s understanding of landscape paradigms does not unravel entirely or become irrelevant, I argue that in terms of using the garden to mediate the gender and class propriety of her character, Moodie constructs narratives that allow for

subtle, yet undeniable transgressions that cause more than superficial disruption. While it is difficult to ascertain the public response to Moodie's text at the time of its publication, if contemporary readers can judge by Agnes Strickland's extreme reaction and embarrassment at her pioneering sister's self-depiction and her characterization of other refined emigrants, such as Tom Wilson, then Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* relates moments of truly troublesome behaviour. While Moodie's garden-related narratives speak directly to Susanna's ambiguous "cultivated" character and social transgressions within *Roughing It in the Bush*, it is important to note that her book as a whole caused much outrage and discomfort for Agnes when it was first published and made available to proper British society. In her biography, Gray notes that when *Roughing It in the Bush* was first made available in England, Moodie's sister Agnes, who was circling among aristocratic society as a successful royal biographer, was shocked and outraged by the book's depiction of Moodie's involvement with mixed classes and her engagement in "tasks that no lady would be interested in, let alone perform" (214). Gray notes that Agnes was so mortified that she even wrote to Moodie in Belleville, demanding that the dedication to Agnes in *Roughing It in the Bush* be omitted from all future editions (214). Indeed, in a letter addressed to Moodie (dated May 23, 1852), Agnes writes, "I had the prudence to commit the whole four volumes to the flames . . . that might have proved a scorpion to myself" (Strickland). Agnes proceeds to express embarrassment and unease with the content of her younger sister's book, particularly in terms of Moodie's unflattering characterization of socially respected acquaintances: "I drank tea with your friends the Thompsons. . . . They enquired very kindly after you, so did Lydia and Susan Wales. . . . What they will say about Tom Wales, alias Wilson¹³ I don't know"

¹³ Tom Wilson is an emigrant and friend of John and Susanna Moodie whom they meet upon their arrival in

(Strickland). Clearly, Moodie explores elements of impropriety, middle-class emigrant failure, and the socially mixed dynamic of the colony, but perhaps the most intriguing aspect of her approach is that Moodie refuses to shield herself as a character from these less-than-appealing features and effects of emigration.

When Moodie pursues the discrepancies in her own character, she employs at key moments a garden topos to frame her narrative, Susanna's actions, and the shifting boundaries of propriety for Susanna as middle-class woman. In these particular narratives, the garden provides Moodie with the means to create a spatial discourse that communicates her middle-class feminine persona's unconventional experiences and actions in a mixed community, where human society, not nature, challenges and somewhat undermines what could otherwise be a more refined or flattering self-portrait. As a boundary territory and conceptual space that incorporates both the "cultivated" and the "wild" features of the environment on a number of levels from the literal (actual plants), to the figurative (classes of people), to the conceptual (gender paradigms), the garden topos lends itself to Moodie's negotiation of Susanna's behavioural transgressions within the unusual circumstances of colonial settlement. Moodie inserts herself as a character into this ambiguous space in order both to expose and to temper her problematic intimacy with other less-appealing members of her community. In doing so, the frame of the garden enables Moodie to dramatize and mediate the subsequent impact on her character's "cultivated" feminine identity. The two narrated episodes that best demonstrate Moodie's use of the garden in this manner are Susanna's discovery of the

Upper Canada. Moodie relates how Tom arrived in the colony months prior to her emigration, but unfortunately he fails miserably in all his efforts to establish himself and returns to England.

dog Chowder's burial in her pea patch and Susanna's lengthy encounter with Malcolm Ramsay who takes up residence in her backwoods home and garden.

In Moodie's garden-situated and ideologically framed stories, Susanna's transgressions as a cultivated woman progress from mild and amusing to destabilizing and unbecoming. As a refined nineteenth-century woman and writer, Moodie perceives gardens as sites of aesthetics, convenience, social activity, and decorum. These garden-related convictions serve as significant frames, therefore, when Moodie creates garden scenes that lack consistent boundaries and yield to undesirable human trespasses against Susanna's property and understanding of cultivated feminine conduct. In other words, the boundary territory that is Susanna's backwoods kitchen garden operates as a space of class propriety and "cultivated" gender performance, but the garden's diverse intruders and custodians undermine her promotion of these social values. In the narrative of Chowder's demise and burial in the kitchen garden, Moodie begins relating the incident by indicating a level of decorum in keeping with a visit among middle-class women, as Susanna's friend Emilia shares in the civilized, polite ritual of tea and a walk in the garden. What Susanna is not aware of, however, is the fact that her servant John has killed Emilia's dog, and the two women discover the evidence of the crime during a polite walk and spoken exchange in Susanna's garden. Rather than censuring the egregious act, Susanna becomes complicit with the crime and her lower-class servant's offensive actions when the animal's body appears among the peas:

After tea, Emilia requested to look at the garden; and I, perfectly unconscious that it contained the remains of the murdered Chowder, led the way. Mrs. ----, whilst gathering a handful of fine green peas, suddenly stooped, and looking earnestly at the ground, called to me,

“Come here, Susanna, and tell me what has been buried here. It looks like the tail of a dog.”

She might have added, “of my dog.” Murder, it seems, will out. By some strange chance, the grave that covered the mortal remains of Chowder had been disturbed, and the black tail of the dog was sticking out.

“What can it be?” said I, with an air of perfect innocence. “Shall I call Jenny, and dig it up?”

“Oh, no, my dear; it has a shocking smell, but it does look very much like Chowder’s tail.”

“Impossible! How could it come among my peas?”

“True. Besides, I saw Chowder, with my own eyes, yesterday. . . .”

“Indeed! I am glad to hear it. How these mosquitoes sting. Shall we go back to the house?” (*Roughing It* 423)

Susanna gives a performance and “air of perfect innocence,” but surmises fully that the dog buried in her garden is Chowder. Obviously Susanna is initially ignorant of the contents of her garden, but when her friend discovers the improperly interred animal’s remains, Susanna feigns incredulity at the possibility of a dog being buried among her peas without her knowledge. For the benefit of her friend, Susanna acts as a cultivated woman, proper in manners and conduct and, therefore, innocent of such wrong-doings against a fellow settler’s property. Susanna must appear in control of her person and garden territory. Shocked at the unearthed tail, Susanna offers to have the mysterious body dug up (by a servant) and later seems unaffected by the strangeness of the situation when she turns her attention to the insects and the need to return indoors for self-preservation on at least two levels: to alleviate her physical discomfort and to maintain

her appearance of propriety. Readers appreciate, however, that the Susanna who speaks in dialogue with her friend Emilia and creates a performance of perfect innocence, differs from Moodie who narrates the tale, admitting in an aside to the awkward reality of the situation: “Murder, it seems, will out.” This tale of poor Chowder’s demise seems to amuse Moodie in her retelling of it. The fact that her Susanna character seems completely unscathed by John’s burying of a decomposing animal in her vegetable garden—a garden that feeds her family and over which Susanna is supposed to hold dominion—suggests that Moodie’s writing and self-construction do not always uphold a refined nature or distinctions of class. After having criticized Old Satan’s family’s abuse of and disrespect for her property in the earlier sketch “Our First Settlement, and the Borrowing System,”¹⁴ Susanna is now party to the mistreatment of her own neighbour. The irony is not lost on Moodie the writer; indeed it is orchestrated by her. Moodie’s clear amusement with the Chowder incident concurs with and extends an earlier scene of laughter regarding John’s violent intentions towards Emilia’s thieving cat, Master Tom,¹⁵ suggesting that although the garden is typically a space of cultivated femininity and class conformity (as demonstrated in a number of texts by the Strickland sisters), the garden can also operate as a site of transgression for its middle-class custodians. As a writer,

¹⁴ During Moodie’s unpacking, a young girl enters the Moodie home and with “a forward, impudent carriage, and a pert, flippant voice, stand[s] upon one of the trunks, and survey[s] all [the] proceedings in the most impertinent manner” (*Roughing It* 86). Moodie appreciates neither the unannounced, intrusive nature of this visit, nor the transformation of her private domain into common property and spectacle. For the duration of Moodie’s stay within this first home, she must endure the young woman’s family who constantly borrow various items from the Moodies and either return the property in bad repair or not at all.

¹⁵ When John mentions the cat’s “depredations in the potato-pot” during its nightly thieving from the Moodies, Moodie recalls her character’s response: “I could not help laughing, but I begged John by no means to annoy Emilia by hurting her cat” (*Roughing It* 421).

Moodie uses this boundary space, then, to explore the impact of a proximate, socially mixed community on the appearance of propriety and actual conduct.

The incident of Chowder's demise is a brief and amusing anecdote; the garden topos is even more instrumental and extensive in *Roughing It in the Bush*, however, when Moodie uses the garden not only to frame and structure the sketch of Malcolm Ramsay, but also to position her character Susanna within the somewhat ambiguous paradigms of "cultivated" femininity. With a particular focus on the tension between Moodie's status as a writer and her narrated role as a wife and mother, Dean notes that Moodie uses narrative framing techniques throughout her *oeuvre* as a strategy of modest self-construction and ideal gender performance. Dean argues "the stereotype of feminine self-effacement" coupled with the "numerous tales within tales" (37) allow Moodie to create texts that downplay her public role as author and assert her maternal, domestic qualities as she shies away from telling (or even appearing in) her own story and instead recounts the stories of others. According to Dean, *Flora Lyndsay* is an example of the "miracle of [Moodie's] distancing techniques" (37). Embedded within Moodie's novel is the fictional story of Noah Cotton, which the protagonist composes during her Atlantic crossing:

Susanna Moodie writes a story of Flora Lyndsay; partway through this story, Flora writes a story of Noah Cotton; partway through this story, the voice of Flora disappears as Noah Cotton tells his own story; and partway through this story, Cotton's mother takes over to tell her own story in the first person. Thus Moodie's life is relegated to forming a frame narrative to the book *Flora Lyndsay*; the voice of the writer and her narrator, Flora, completely disappear from a work which is seemingly autobiographical. (Dean 37)

Dean sees this framing technique of self-effacement at work on a smaller scale in the Malcolm Ramsay sketch, arguing that Moodie and her retrospective narrating voice disappear from a supposedly autobiographical text as a secondary character creates his own dialogue and narrates his own story (38). Clearly, the story-within-a-story frame presents itself throughout Moodie's work and serves a particular purpose to assist Moodie in hiding her somewhat unseemly blue-stockings through modest femininity.

Moodie's use of embedded narratives is not her only framing strategy, however, as a different frame—the frame of the garden plot—works to structure Moodie's narratives both spatially and ideologically in a way that subtly redirects readers' attention onto the character of Susanna even when the narrative focus appears to be elsewhere. With regard to the Malcolm Ramsay sketch, in particular, Susanna does not disappear entirely from the narrative, despite Dean's argument for feminine self-effacement. Instead, the Malcolm Ramsay story continues to focus readers' attention indirectly onto Susanna. Through her writing of the physical and ideological space of the garden, Moodie presents Susanna as witnessing in others and experiencing for herself moments of gender transgression. The garden-framed narrative illustrates, therefore, Moodie's desire to guard Susanna's property and gendered propriety, while also exploring Susanna's permeability to uncouth social forces that breach the many "boundaries" of her home and cultivated decorum.

As in Traill's narration of the corn-harvester faced with a feverish husband and a broken garden fence in *The Canadian Settler's Guide*, when Moodie recounts Malcolm Ramsay's appearance in the spring of 1836, she mentions that her husband John is ill in bed and that her garden fence is in bad repair. During this time of Susanna's personal weakness and domestic permeability, Malcolm Ramsay—an unwelcome, passing

acquaintance of John Moodie—arrives at the Moodies' door to spend the night.

Nicknamed the “*little stumpy man*” by the Moodies' daughter Katie (*Roughing It* 405), Ramsay is as unpleasant and uncultivated in his behaviour as the tree stumps that form unattractive blots upon the landscape and prevent construction and agricultural progress. Similarly to the way in which Moodie describes the sudden, unwelcome intrusion of the young girl at the family's first homestead, Moodie introduces Malcolm Ramsay as a man lacking in respect for others' privacy, as he not only announces his presence with a “violent knocking at the door” (*Roughing It* 388), but also presumes to enter the family's parlour without a proper invitation or introduction: “I immediately went into the parlour, where Moodie was lying upon a bed near the stove, to deliver the stranger's message; but before I could say a word, he dashed in after me, and going up to the bed, held out his broad coarse hand, with, ‘How are you, Mr. Moodie? You see I have accepted your kind invitation sooner than either you or I expected . . .’” (*Roughing It* 389). Unfortunately for the Moodie family, Ramsay establishes himself comfortably within their home and stays for nine months.

In the story, Susanna dislikes Ramsay immediately, and her ongoing observations of him with respect to her garden reveal the intimate impact this man has on her domestic sphere and person as his cultivation of her garden coincides with a disruption in her sense of middle-class propriety and privacy. Susanna's initial assessment of Ramsay reveals her clear social bias and prejudice: “I had taken him for a mechanic, for his dirty, slovenly appearance; and his physiognomy was so unpleasant that I did not credit his assertion that he was a friend of my husband” (*Roughing It* 388). Indolent and unwilling to work at clearing the land, a task suited to masculine fortitude, Ramsay turns to Susanna's garden

on the pretense of appearing useful, as he repairs the fence and plants vegetable seeds.

Susanna feels Ramsay's intrusion acutely within her garden and home:

“At any rate,” said he, “we shall no longer be starved on bad flour and potatoes. We shall have peas, and beans, and beets, and carrots, and cabbage in abundance; besides the plot I have reserved for cucumbers and melons.”

“Ah,” thought I, “does he, indeed, mean to stay with us until the melons are ripe?” and my heart died within me, for he not only was a great additional expense, but he robbed us of all privacy, as our very parlour was converted into a bed-room for his accommodation. (*Roughing It* 396)

Ramsay's desire for an improved diet and his decision “to make garden” (*Roughing It* 396) suggest his intention to prolong his stay, veritably rooting himself into the family and into Susanna's feminine sphere. The garden serves as a spatial expression of the undesired duration and influence of Ramsay's presence. Furthermore, Susanna cannot reconcile Ramsay's rough, inactive personality with his aptitude for gardening—a task Susanna equates with her own sense of refinement, feminine work, and self-worth:

I procured the necessary seeds, and watched with no small surprise the industry with which our strange visitor commenced operations. He repaired the broken fence, dug the ground with the greatest of care, and laid it out with a skill and neatness of which I had believed him perfectly incapable. In less than three weeks, the whole plot presented a very pleasing prospect, and he was really elated by his success. (*Roughing It* 396)

Ramsay's “industry,” “greatest care” to detail, “skill and neatness,” and above all his ability to create “a very pleasing prospect” through his garden aesthetics are all cultivating, nurturing activities that Susanna associates with herself—an educated, refined

British woman—and not with Ramsay—a slovenly, disrespectful man with an “uncultured” appearance and mode of conduct. The speed and ease with which Ramsay undertakes the garden work both surprise and undermine Susanna’s own sense of feminine agency and achievement, which for her has been a difficult process of adaptation, braving black flies, heat, and deprivation. Thus, Ramsay acts as a type of foil to Susanna—both are gardeners, avid readers, storytellers, and domestically situated individuals following a similar daily routine.¹⁶

Susanna cannot categorize Ramsay easily as “cultivated” or “wild,” and the ease with which he accepts his ambiguous status counters Susanna’s own difficult adjustment to the socio-physical environment of the backwoods. As Michael Peterman argues, Ramsay’s continual rebuking of Susanna for her shortcomings and conservatism disrupts Susanna’s vision of herself: “Ramsay cleverly [keeps] her off balance by teasing her about her ‘methodical’ and prudish values . . . , and she [can] see how, under the circumstances, she [may] appear somewhat narrow-minded to him. As a woman proud of her liberal and open-minded values, such criticism [is] surely galling” (95-96). After struggling to learn how to milk a cow and feeling proud of her humble accomplishments, Susanna feels unduly chided, as Ramsay watches and insults her abilities, all the while

¹⁶ Critics such as Carl F. Klinck, Carol Shields, and Michael Peterman discuss Moodie’s use of secondary characters, and Ramsay in particular, as a way for Moodie to foreground her own character. While these critics focus on physical description and behaviour as key components of Moodie’s approach to characterization, they do not consider Moodie’s use of intimate space and framing, as I do, in this regard. For example, Klinck writes, “The amusing imperfect people around [Moodie] were ‘touched up’ to be foils, revealing the central figure who could bear comparison with impunity” (475-76). With respect to Ramsay, Shields contends that Moodie’s “self-contradicting” description “suggests sexuality, and this impression is strengthened as Mrs. Moodie circles around Malcolm, drawing sometimes closer, sometimes further away” (*Susanna Moodie* 29). Peterman believes that Ramsay’s confession to murder and squandering of money make Ramsay an example of “gentility gone vicious” with the “New World merely provid[ing] a playground for his vices and indulgences” (95). As for Ramsay’s relationship with Moodie, Peterman argues that Moodie has a particular and troubling fascination with this man: “He remained both an unsolved mystery and a kind of insistent affront, an unsettled account in her psyche that was intimately connected with her personal testing in the backwoods” (97).

enjoying the more enviable, “cultivating” task of reading a book: “‘You are a shocking bad milker.’ . . . ‘More shame for you! A farmer’s wife, and afraid of a cow! Why these little children would laugh at you!’” (*Roughing It* 397). As an officer’s wife struggling to become a successful “farmer’s wife,” Susanna witnesses all her struggles and adaptations undermined by Ramsay’s criticisms. Carol Shields argues that Ramsay’s presence is so disruptive that he affects not only the character of Susanna within the story, but also Moodie (the writer) at the level of the story, as Moodie’s writing deviates somewhat from its normal flow: “The chapter about him is even more fragmented than her usual writing; she jumps from episode to episode in her frustration with him” (*Susanna Moodie* 29). Within her sketches, Moodie works to craft an admirable, public persona of a cultivated yet adaptable woman pioneer. As an unconventional figure and foil, Ramsay invites readers to gauge Susanna’s accomplishments and her sometimes questionable behaviour. The spatial, ideological frame of the garden enables Moodie as a writer, therefore, to develop Ramsay’s character through strategic positioning, and to temper her own character’s (Susanna’s) gendered and cultured transgressions. Moodie employs the garden topos in an ironic way, then, by de-masculinizing Ramsay and thereby rendering less disagreeable Susanna’s own backwoods transformation. The garden topos communicates the shifting, permeable spheres of refined gendered behaviour and class politics for the duration of this specific sketch.

Despite Ramsay’s disruption and undermining of Susanna, Susanna proves resilient as a character through Moodie’s counter constructions of Ramsay and his questionable masculinity. Susanna may brace herself against Ramsay’s criticisms, but Moodie embraces his presence in her text and through the garden topos specifically, by using this discursive domain of femininity as a means of undermining the “little stumpy

man's" status and thereby promoting her character's own successful transplanting. Within the sketch, then, there operates a complex interplay of, and distinguishing between, voices as Moodie creates a self-conscious stance, narrating this episode retrospectively while still capturing the emotions and responses of her character in the moment.¹⁷ Moodie recalls Ramsay as being "elated" with his gardening activity, but Susanna says nothing in terms of praise to her new helpmate within the temporal setting of the story (*Roughing It* 396). Moodie remembers being surprised and silently impressed with Ramsay's cultivation of a "very pleasing prospect" (*Roughing It* 396). Although Moodie now compliments his gardening skills in her sketch, she continues to temper Ramsay's success by mentioning that he decided to garden only after the hired man, Jacob, resigned, leaving Ramsay to feel "ashamed of sitting in the house doing nothing," while John Moodie undertook all the farming work (*Roughing It* 396). As a writer, Moodie wants to foreground the tension between Susanna and Ramsay and hence, describes the relationship as one of "deep-rooted antipathy" (*Roughing It* 390).

Relatively to her husband, Susanna feels Ramsay's intrusion the most, as he usually situates himself in her domestic domain as a lazy, ungentlemanly figure. Ramsay spends the first fortnight in bed: "our guest did nothing but lie upon the bed, and read, and smoke, and drink whiskey-and-water from morning until night" (*Roughing It* 392). In addition, Ramsay accompanies but does not assist Susanna during her strenuous chores: "it was with the greatest of difficulty that [John] Moodie could get [Ramsay] to do anything beyond bringing a few pails of water from the swamp for the use of the house. . . . He has often passed me carrying water up from the lake without offering to relieve me

¹⁷ Moodie opens this sketch in an act of recollection, addressing her readers explicitly as a writer: "Before I dismiss for ever the troubles and sorrows of 1836, I would fain introduce to the notice of my readers some of the odd characters with whom we became acquainted during that period" (*Roughing It* 387).

of the burden” (*Roughing It* 393). As a writer, Moodie situates Ramsay unequivocally indoors in the feminine domestic domain, thereby repelling his criticisms of ineptitude and promoting her own character’s efficiency:

The season for putting in the potatoes had now arrived. Malcolm volunteered to cut the sets, which was easy work that could be done in the house, and over which he could lounge and smoke; but [John] told him that he must take his share in the field, that I had already sets enough saved to plant half-an-acre, and would have more prepared by the time they were required. (*Roughing It* 402)

Furthermore, Moodie contrasts Ramsay’s behaviour with that of John Moodie in spatial terms—specifically the garden versus the field—as a way of implying that Ramsay refuses to function within the proper, expected domain of masculine labour: “Moodie was busy under-bushing for a fall fallow. Malcolm spent much of his time in the garden, or lounging about the house. I had baked an eel-pie for dinner. . . . Malcolm had cleaned some green-peas and washed the first young potatoes we had drawn that season, with his own hands” (*Roughing It* 404). Moodie’s concluding phrase “with his own hands” carries a clear sarcastic tone that resonates with her own character’s struggles to become accustomed to manual labour, such as the time Susanna builds the garden snake fence. Previous to this dinner preparation scene, there is an exchange between Susanna and Ramsay when Ramsay voices his dislike for working in the field and complains that the hoe blisters his hands, to which Susanna responds, ““You are terribly disfigured by the black-flies. But [John] Moodie suffers just as much, and says nothing”” (*Roughing It* 402). Thus, although Ramsay and Susanna are similar in many respects, Moodie claims the space of her text by subtly yet continually highlighting her own character’s self-

sufficiency and willingness to work, while Ramsay is content not to labour, constantly imposing upon the family's goodwill.

As a writer, Moodie works to cultivate an admirable, adaptable version of femininity within her text, but the less controllable dynamics of her experience persist in destabilizing the character of Susanna. Like the dead dog planted among the peas, Ramsay's intrusion into the garden and Susanna's personal domain suggests that in the backwoods, forces traverse easily the ideological and spatially expressed boundaries of respectability. However much Susanna dislikes her encounter with Ramsay, he is part of her garden just as he is part of Moodie's text, and both Susanna and Moodie find it impossible to close themselves off completely to his presence and influence. As a writer, therefore, Moodie uses Ramsay to expose and mediate some of her own character's unrefined behaviour within a socially mixed and permeable setting. Although Susanna partakes in unbecoming, unfeminine manual labour, Moodie indirectly praises her character's perseverance through the contrast of her industry to Ramsay's unhelpful attitude and effeminate concern for his physical condition. Through the frame of the garden and Susanna's and Ramsay's similar yet divergent relationships to this cultivating terrain, therefore, Moodie works to reveal the indecorous, unrefined circumstances of the backwoods, going as far as to show her character laughing impolitely at the comical antics of her jumpy, molasses-dribbling neighbour Mr. Crowe:

[Ramsay] saw the intense difficulty I had to keep my gravity, and was determined to make me laugh out. So, coming slyly behind my chair, he whispered in my ear, with the gravity of a judge, "Mrs. Moodie, that must have been the very chap who first jumped Jim Crowe."

This appeal obliged me to run from the table. [John] Moodie was astonished at my rudeness; and Malcolm, as he resumed his seat, made the matter worse by saying, "I wonder what is the matter with Mrs. Moodie; she is certainly very hysterical this afternoon."

The potatoes were planted, and the season of strawberries, green peas, and young potatoes come, but still Malcolm remained our constant guest. He had grown so indolent, and gave himself so many airs, that [John] Moodie was heartily sick of his company. . . . (*Roughing It* 403)

Instead of pursuing self-effacement and respectability for her middle-class character, Moodie uses the scene to draw attention to her persona. Moodie's sketch invites comparison between Ramsay and Susanna, highlighting the frequent lapses not only in gender behaviour, but also class conduct and relations. Susanna's social impropriety shocks her husband, as her peculiar dynamic with Ramsay reveals a loss of self-control. As Shields argues, "These personal exchanges between Malcolm and Mrs. Moodie are a real departure from her usual pattern; she is neither the shrewd interviewer nor the unseen observer, but a participating human being who has let her persona slip" (*Susanna Moodie* 30). Susanna may embarrass herself in this scene, but I contend that Moodie as author remains decidedly in control of her sketch by juxtaposing her character's lapse in decorum with a return to the garden frame. The description of the growth of the garden coincides with Ramsay's growing, highly inappropriate, and ill-mannered sense of settled, domestic comfort as he transplants himself into the Moodie home through the garden terrain: "The potatoes were planted, and the season of strawberries, green-peas, and young potatoes come, but still Malcolm remained our constant guest" (*Roughing It* 403). Whereas Susanna opens herself to censure momentarily through her rude outburst

at Jim Crowe and then quickly excuses herself from the table, Ramsay's objectionable behaviour is prolonged (measured through the subsequent description of the garden season) and relatively more distasteful as his indolent, fraudulent "air" of refinement is undermined at every turn by his very nature and appearance. For the purposes of the sketch, then, the garden plot provides Moodie's readers with a familiar ideological and spatial context. Subsequently, the frame of the garden facilitates Moodie's paradoxical construction of Susanna, as Moodie examines the contradictions and absurdities of the gendered discourse of refined, middle-class propriety and delicacy when expressed within an alternative social milieu.

In *The Canadian Settler's Guide* and *Roughing It in the Bush*, Traill and Moodie use the enclosed, ideological space and boundaries of the garden as a means of distinguishing their private, "cultivated" domains and female characters from the disagreeable surroundings of lower-class settlers and the unconventional demands of pioneer life. Whereas critics such as Fowler and Dean read Moodie's and Traill's writing under the category of "feminine texts" (Dean 36) in terms of the conscious self-effacement or unwavering reiteration of gendered ideology, I argue that while clearly situated in a traditional nineteenth-century discourse of cultivated femininity, the Strickland sisters draw readers' attention to an inescapable sense of paradox when it comes to the shifting boundaries of the transplanted woman pioneer. Moodie and Traill are clearly actual gardeners, but they approach the garden also and alternatively as literary writers and, specifically, as women writers concerned with crafting a scene and communicating a narrative in which all elements work toward a desired end, or *telos*. For the Strickland sisters, gardens function on different levels simultaneously. The boundaries of Traill's and Moodie's domestic spaces—the homes and especially the

gardens—are continually breached by others not only at the level of plot and incident, but also on the level of the ideological parameters set forth in their narratives through the figurative language of “cultivation.” Enacting transgressions against the boundaries of middle-class propriety and feminine decorum through the garden’s familiar frame enables Traill and Moodie to temper their own variations on their gender-focussed themes and subjects. For Traill and Moodie, being “at home” in their texts means, then, both using the gendered discourse of nineteenth-century Britain from which their “cultivated” vision stems, and digressing subtly from that tradition in order to explore their own paradoxical, transplanted characters. As writers, they design highly figurative and rhetorical “gardens” with particular narrative and political objectives in mind. The trespasses against or beyond the spatial and ideological boundaries of this gendered domain serve as catalysts for Moodie’s and Traill’s examinations of the ruptures in proper and “propertied” feminine behaviour as espoused by both themselves and their society.

Chapter Three

“Then a living house”: Gabrielle Roy and the Domestication of the Bower

“A Chinese proverb says, If you want a day of happiness, buy a bottle of wine and get drunk; if you want a week of happiness, get married; if you want a whole life of happiness, plant a garden. There’s some truth in that, don’t you think?”

(Roy, “Letter to Bernadette Roy” 40)

Just as Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill employ images of transplanting to communicate the pioneer woman’s difficult transition to an unfamiliar land, Gabrielle Roy frequently turns to gardens and plant motifs to express both the exiled and changing natures of many of her characters. In Roy’s collection of stories *Street of Riches*, for instance, the protagonist’s francophone mother reflects on her transplanted life in Manitoba and declares ardently her need for contact with distant relatives in Quebec: “‘Without the past, what are we . . . ? . . . Severed plants half alive!’” (71). In the context of this exploration of experiences of cultural and personal uprooting, gardens are readily visible, idyllic terrains in Roy’s *oeuvre*, as Roy expresses a lasting enchantment with the world. This ideal vision does not preclude Roy, however, from using gardens to reflect the complexities and evolutions of adult experience. But whereas Moodie and Traill construct the female emigrant experience using the language of cultivation that was popular during their particular historical milieu, Roy creates highly literary renderings of the garden. The most compelling of Roy’s figurative depictions in terms of exploring the uprooted, domestic situation of her female characters is her use of the bower genre and her adaptation of its conventions in order to depict the problematic position of the displaced woman artist figure.

Roy's use of the bower not only departs from the various literal and figurative gardens I have examined thus far, but also points to the bower as a significant precursor to my notion of the domestic garden. For instance, Atwood's image of the bush garden (a poetic interpretation of Moodie's garden in the backwoods) and Northrop Frye's subsequent, archetypal use of this same image (as a model of the polarized Canadian imagination) contrast decidedly with Moodie's and Traill's written accounts of the accommodating, hybridized terrains of their actual kitchen gardens. Deviating from the bush garden and kitchen garden in their specifically Canadian context, Roy's bower stems from a long literary tradition and its generic conventions. The bower, as I shall demonstrate, operates not simply as a place, but also as a part of a particular genre of story-telling. Thus, in accordance with readers' expectations, the bower functions as a highly stylized garden enclosure or flowery abode, acquiring symbolic value during the quest and life journey of a character or persona.

Roy's description of a garden as integral to "a whole life of happiness" (quoted above) resonates with the very shape and content of two of her later works: her autobiography *Enchantment and Sorrow*, in which a garden motif traces Roy's maturation as a young French Canadian woman and the cultivation of her artistic expression; and her short story "Garden in the Wind," in which the dying immigrant Marta Yaramko contemplates the meaning of her existence through the comforting terrain of her prairie garden. Within the safety and beauty of their gardens, the young Gabrielle¹ and the aging Marta experience moments of profound introspection and transformation; indeed, these gardens are not simply cultivated earth, but rather pivotal *bowers* that construct and

¹ To avoid confusion, I will use the first name "Gabrielle" to refer to the fully developed character who Roy (the author) creates in order to tell her life's story in *Enchantment and Sorrow*.

validate their role as women artists. But as much as Roy's gardens provide vital space for Gabrielle's and Marta's expression, these gardens also work to contain and to limit, revealing the problematic demands of femininity and its rooted-ness in the domestic. Roy's twentieth-century literary bowers, and particularly her bower in *Enchantment and Sorrow*, reveal the shifting boundaries of women's personal space and expression, as well as Roy's own difficult negotiation of these changes. In her bowers, Roy combines the familiarity of the domestic, as a space of routine and gender paradigms, with the transitional quality of the bower, as a space of transformation and brief encounter. Through this combination of the quotidian and the extraordinary, Roy facilitates and eases the transition for women artists moving from silence to voice. Thus, through her domestic garden enclosures and re-working of bower conventions, Roy reveals and tests the limits of female artistry.

1. Roy's Gender Politics of Space, Enclosure, and Gardens

In Roy's *oeuvre*, enclosure and entrapment (in which gardens play a part) are significant themes, particularly when Roy explores the urban and domestic worlds, and the lives of her male and female characters. According to Paula Gilbert Lewis, "[t]here exists . . . a profound influence of environment—defined as one's physical and, at times, social milieu—upon all Royan characters. . . . Whatever the surrounding location may be, there is a close rapport and even a communion between the individual and exterior space" ("Female Spirals" 71). This communion between space and character is not always beneficial. In Roy's depictions of the modern, urban world as a place of alienation, both Roy's male and female characters are delimited by their environments, but the women appear especially confined by their circumstances and gender. Lewis argues that Roy's

men possess a linear mobility that allows them to escape, albeit momentarily, from the oppression of the city. Conversely, the women are forever contained within circular patterns, “caught in the round” of “female structures of motherhood, crowds, and hereditary misery” (“Female Spirals” 75). The freedom and movement of the female characters are markedly restricted as these women are impeded by domestic responsibilities and biology—a dilemma that Lori Saint-Martin explores at length in *La voyageuse et la prisonnière*.² In *The Cashier*, for example, a terminally ill Alexandre Chenevert travels to the countryside for a two-week respite. His wife Eugénie does not accompany him, however, but instead visits their daughter in Sherbrooke. Largely associated with the home, Eugénie seems physically incapacitated by her female body because of severe menopausal symptoms (*Cashier* 82), whereas Alexandre finds his mobility largely unaffected for key portions of the novel.³ Similarly, at the conclusion of *The Tin Flute*, Azarius Lacasse, the patriarch of the Lacasse family, makes a bleak escape from the poverty of Montreal when he departs on the train for war, while his wife Rose-Anna can only glimpse the railway tracks from her window, compelled to remain behind at home having just given birth to her twelfth child. Roy’s male characters may be trapped literally and figuratively by their modern urban existence,⁴ but the women appear doubly contained—both within the city and within their gendered sphere.⁵

² In keeping with francophone scholarship on Roy, I have made the deliberate decision to use the French capitalization style for titles.

³ After Eugénie urges Alexandre not to discuss her particular female “illness,” he reflects “that men and women. . . [are] irreparably severed from each other by the conditions of their sex, and that, all in all, women’s inflictions [are] perhaps more burdensome” (92).

⁴ *The Cashier* serves as an example of men’s extreme imprisonment and alienation in the modern city. Alexandre is a nameless “little man in cage number two” (28) at his job at the bank. He lacks words to

Roy's circumscription of women's plots to the demands of marriage, child-rearing, and domestic duty prompts a number of critics to comment on not only Roy's strong interest in the feminine condition, but also her retreat from an overtly feminist vision that challenges the status quo. Phyllis Grosskurth contends, "Roy possesses a mother's-eye view of the world. The area of action in which her characters move is limited and conditioned both spatially and psychologically by the imposition such a focus places upon them" (7). Similarly, Lewis suggests that Roy is not a feminist, but rather a traditionalist or feminine humanist writer because her adult women characters rarely "relinquish their maternal and familial roles" ("Feminism" 29).⁶ Many of Roy's women characters remain confined to marriage and family-centred plots, prompting Lewis to conclude that in the "novels and collections of short stories, [Roy] create[s] traditional women, trapped in the predetermined destiny and apparently resigned to or voluntarily accepting their fate" (*Literary Vision* 95).

Roy may portray her female characters as entrapped, but her sensitivity to the difficulties of their gender also urges critics to re-examine Roy's work and her awakening feminist consciousness. Drawing on Rachel Blau DuPlessis's discussion of male-centred ideologies and narrative structures in *Writing beyond the Ending*, Saint-Martin argues that

express his "captive soul" (21) and cannot find his sense of identity in his mechanical, anonymous world (25, 38).

⁵ This pattern of female containment is not restricted to Roy's urban novels as the rural settings both isolate and delimit women. For example, Phyllis Grosskurth notes that in *Where Nests the Water Hen*, the chapter entitled "Luzina takes a Holiday" suggests an irony about women's lack of enjoyment and freedom as the purpose of Luzina's annual vacation to Sainte Rose du Lac is to give birth (10).

⁶ Lewis does not explicitly define "feminine humanist," but suggests that the term refers to Roy's "deep preoccupation with female characters [and] her sensitivity to their problems" coupled with "more of a general humanism, a deep sensitivity for women, men, and children, and all of nature" ("Feminism" 29).

Roy's texts reveal the gender limitations of romance narratives. Conventional marriage plots (such as that of the pregnant and unwed Florentine in *The Tin Flute*) are exposed as "une forme d'enfermement" (*La voyageuse* 108). In Roy's later works, Saint-Martin perceives a break with tradition, however, as Roy attempts to write beyond prescribed plots. Daughters break away from their mothers and pursue other experiences: "Tous les livres sur l'enseignante et la femme-cr  atrice ouvrent ce 'chemin de libert  '"—which means the domestic prisoner becomes "l'aspirante voyageuse" (*La voyageuse* 110). Even Lewis, who categorizes Roy as a traditional writer, admits that Roy "clearly did not whole-heartedly support a woman who sacrificed her own life for others" (*Literary Vision* 95). Roy's problematic depictions of women's circumstances prompt scholars to reconsider this author's critical vision. In "Gabrielle Roy as Feminist: Re-reading the Critical Myths," for example, Agnes Whitfield argues that labeling Roy a "traditionalist" is confining in and of itself. Whitfield notes that while Roy's female characters may appear conventional, Roy herself was not: "In 1937, despite family opposition, [Roy] forsook the security of a traditional [teaching] position near her home in Manitoba, for the uncertainties of pre-war Europe where she eventually abandoned her dramatic ambitions for the equally precarious career of female journalist" (20). Although Whitfield does not presume to recast Roy as a feminist, she hopes that feminist perspectives will shed further light on Roy's seemingly traditional female plots and characters.

Whitfield suggests that Roy and her texts can be considered "feminist in the broad sense of the word" (20) for a variety of reasons.⁷ But it is Whitfield's reading of "spatial

⁷ In her search for indications of a feminist politics, Whitfield points to Roy's interest in particular genres, such as "the more personal, autobiographical, in short, more feminine type of writing which she, herself, most wanted to explore" (27); Roy's thematic interest in spectacle and the appearance of the "other" (27); the "inferior status of Roy's fictional men" (25); and Roy's concern for women's sexual equality (22).

tensions” (26) with respect to gender that holds particular significance in terms of Roy’s recurring depiction and use of gardens:

Many critics emphasize the fascination that Gabrielle Roy’s characters feel for “the open road” and their conflicting, homeward-bound search for security. . . .

Although these tensions have been related to universal themes, such as man’s conflicting desire for security and liberty, for the warmth of intimacy and the exhilaration of exploration, they may also reflect Gabrielle Roy’s conception of the particular constraints of the female experience. (26)

In response to Whitfield’s observation regarding Roy’s characters’ conflicting desires for exploration and a settled home life, I believe that Roy’s works contain another spatial tension. As much as Roy examines women’s entrapment within the home and their need to escape, she expresses also the paradoxical desire for a secure, private retreat designated for the pursuit of feminine expression that manifests itself within Roy’s motif of enclosure, and in particular, the garden. The thematic critics who focus on universals, rather than on the specifics of gender, to whom Whitfield refers, are of particular relevance here, as they provide early and influential readings of the garden in Roy’s writing. Hugo McPherson’s 1959 article “The Garden and the Cage” and E. D. Blodgett’s 1980 article “Gardens at the World’s End or Gone West in French” associate a sense of idealism and even nostalgia with Roy’s fictional garden motif as it relates to man’s perspectives on his past and present condition. For both McPherson and Blodgett, Roy’s gardens speak to the polarized experience of both the Everyman and the French Canadian on the western prairie in their longing for an idyllic past, and their recognition of the uncertainty or decline of their present situations. Neither critic takes notice of the politics of gender with respect to the garden. In McPherson’s case, “[t]he values of the

garden, childhood, innocence, and the past, array themselves against the forces of the city, adulthood, 'experience,' and the present" (49). McPherson's reading of Roy's "innocent" gardens is a persistent interpretation carried forward by more recent scholars. In *Le cycle manitoban de Gabrielle Roy*, Carole J. Harvey describes Roy's gardens as special domains of childhood: "Le jardin de l'enfance est présenté comme le cadre spatio-temporel par excellence de l'âge de l'innocence, où même les mauvaises expériences se font vite oublier" (179). Alternatively, but in a similar interpretive vein, Blodgett argues that Roy's gardens reflect central themes of Western Francophone literature—mainly the idealization of the frontier, nature, and the *voyageur*, or *coureur du bois* (115-16). For all these critics, Roy's profound veneration of the garden is intimately connected to the pastoral tradition (particularly through Roy's use of idyll) and the related sense of loss, as "[t]here can be no return to the garden" (McPherson 55). Roy's gardens occupy a space between the desire for the past and the hope for an improved future—"between the subjunctive mood of the way things might have been and the optative of how one would like them to be" (Blodgett 114).

The connection between Roy's gardens and the pastoral is indeed integral to Roy's writing. Throughout the retrospective narratives in *Street of Riches*, garden imagery composes the simple, peaceful rural existence of the young Christine. Rue Deschambault is a pristine garden, "still unencumbered by any sidewalk, as virginal as a country path stretching through thickets of wild roses" (1). McPherson and Blodgett relate universal themes in Roy's works to the departure from the garden, the journey beyond its confines, and the desire to return. In terms of the specifics of Roy's narratives, however, women and especially female artists are the most prominent inhabitants of her gardens. Moreover, whereas McPherson and Blodgett suggest that in keeping with the

pastoral tradition, the archetypal return to the garden is impossible because maturity, change, and the future are all discovered through journeys beyond the garden's confines, Roy's female protagonists make pivotal returns to their gardens. These garden visits and, in some cases, continued occupancy are not static or regressive, but rather transformational. Roy's garden enclosures can be read, therefore, not just as the ideal place for the Everyman, the Western French Canadian, or the child, but as uniquely feminine terrain, in that these spaces capture not only the "confines of female experience" (as Whitfield describes it), but also the complicated, outward growth of women's artistic agency.

Roy's sensitivity to the development of her female subjects within and beyond the home prompts Roy to create gardens that demonstrate conformity to, and restrained dissension from, women's familial roles. The use of the garden as an enclosing space for her female characters aligns Roy with what Kerstin W. Shands perceives as a central feature of the history of feminist discourse: spatial metaphors. According to Shands, in both literature and feminist theory a predominant pattern in gender construction is that "women characters are found to be outsiders, . . . locked into tarnished enclosures, colonized, or romantically imprisoned" (1). The garden is, of course, an infamous enclosure for the submissive, chaste withdrawal of feminine subjects. Pointing to the Medieval garden or *hortus conclusus*, where fortified walls safely enclose a virginal female inhabitant, Eleanor Perényi argues that historically, the garden has contained women's freedom and their bodies, operating as a kind of green and growing "chastity belt" (263). Inside this "flower-filled feminine ghetto," women's physical nature is restricted, their agency minimized (Perényi 263). Like the delicate flowers they tend in their gardens, women are aestheticized and their work discounted, as "[f]lowers are of all

the plants the least menacing and the most useless” (Perényi 261). Contained spaces imbued with idealism and innocence, Roy’s gardens are not sites of overt gender transgression; Roy’s questioning of women’s restricted lives is inconspicuous, as she does not lay bare gender constructs. Instead, Roy works to “naturalize” and mediate women’s emerging agency. For Roy, then, the garden is a strategic paradox: it is both private in its enclosure of female subjects (within her texts), and public in the staging of gender through the literary conventions of the bower that are either adhered to, or purposely revised (at the level of the text).

Critics tend to idealize the innocence of Roy’s gardens and these spaces’ prevailing connection with childhood and the past (Blodgett, McPherson); but these enclosures can also stifle and place demands on Roy’s characters. In terms of Roy’s depiction of childhood, Harvey writes, “Mais pour peu que le jardin devienne trop sécurisant, il risqué d’étouffer l’individualité de l’enfant et son esprit d’aventure” (179). In *Street of Riches*, for example, a young Christine yearns to explore beyond the garden, pumping her swing high up into the air above the garden gate and wall in order to see the unknown: “When I was high enough in the sky, I was happy, but each time the swing sank back, I found myself in a minute garden, shut in on all sides” (22). Here, the garden offers only an imprisoning innocence; outside exists a spacious, informative world of experience, unknown horizons, and intriguing neighbours. Roy does not confine her gardens to the expression of childhood innocence, however, as she makes critical connections between gardens and women’s domestic-centred lives. In “My Almighty Grandmother” in *The Road Past Altamont*, Christine’s declining grandmother associates her independence and value through her domestic ability. In speaking of her flowers, this elderly woman derives pleasure from making “plenty of them grow” (14), but the garden

is also her daily, domestic “business”—reflecting a life that she declares is ““a mountain made of housework . . .”” (15). Similarly in *Street of Riches*, Christine observes that her mother rises early every morning “to go out in summer at the sun’s first rays to care for her flowers” (142), only to be exhausted in the evening after a day consumed by activities: “She put me in mind of those flowers, so living by day which at night so sadly hang their heads” (143). Gardens demand permanent residence, continual care, and attention—conditions that preclude mobility and adventures beyond the domestic realm. In *The Hidden Mountain*, for example, the somewhat atypical, domesticated gold miner Gédéon feels isolated in his northern cabin and unable to join the other exploring men because he must tend to his garden: “So great was the torment of his yearning to see other men that the poor old fellow was often on the verge of setting forth in his homemade craft. But . . . were he to leave, and were it not to rain during his absence, would his tiny vegetable patch on its barely cleared soil survive without water?” (4). Tellingly, in the far reaches of the north that beckon to adventure-seekers, the only other visible cultivators in *The Hidden Mountain* are the nuns who reside at the enclosed northern mission at Fort Renunciation: “Then, from the miniature convent behind the flowers, there emerged a nun in her spreading gray habit, her white headdress flapping against her face. At a sort of half trot she was on her way to the garden” (20-21). Far from disrupting the status quo, then, Roy’s gardens reflect, rather than challenge, the gendered limitations placed on the characters’ movement and daily lives because of their domestic role and/or familial duties. As with Roy’s childhood gardens, a type of innocence—albeit a more troubling type—prevails within Roy’s adult gardens as these are sites not of open transgression, but of containment, reflecting women’s continued physical and social enclosure.⁸

⁸ Roy’s male characters, such as Gédéon the gold miner in *The Hidden Mountain*, tend to cultivate mostly

Gardens may reflect women's "innocent," domestic-bound existence in Roy's writing, but these spaces can also recast gender within a new, more formidable light, where femininity is dynamic, malleable, and active. Roy's close examination of the terrain and parameters of the garden connects Roy, the "traditionalist" or "feminine humanist," to use Lewis' terms, with Second Wave feminism. According to Shands, while First Wave feminists from the nineteenth century reveal a preoccupation with metaphors of division (public versus private spheres), Second Wave feminists of the early twentieth century through to the 1960s and 1970s focus particularly on confinement and escape imagery. For Virginia Woolf, Simone De Beauvoir, and Betty Friedan, the "scrutiny of rooms and enclosures" is central to their writing (Shands 13). These Second Wave feminists express overt concerns regarding the spatial restrictions of gender, and Roy's subtle yet critical use of the garden achieves a similar end. The ever-growing yet stable enclosures of Roy's gardens generate terrains where Roy's oppositional themes of security, confinement, and dormancy cross-fertilize with exploration, freedom, and fecundity. Roy may construct gardens through an idealization of the past and her use of the pastoral mode, but she refuses to forfeit their potential for transformation in the present. Roy's idealized gardens are not transgressive, but their alignment with

vegetables instead of flowers, suggesting that their garden work is largely utility-based, rather than aesthetic. Gédéon may be contained by his garden and domestic responsibility, yet he remains a figure of some independence, as he has no family to care for, excepting Pierre Cadorai during Pierre's temporary sojourn as a pseudo-family member. In *The Hidden Mountain*, the artist-protagonist Pierre travels north to paint; when he sees the stunted vegetation of the landscape, "the lovely garden Gédéon [has] cherished in its tiny clearing [takes] on its true value" (13). Later on in his quest, Pierre tends an abandoned vegetable garden by an isolated cabin, but his actions and interest are mainly for practical purposes. Pierre views his garden labour as part of an economic exchange; however, his artwork holds a more tenable value: "The vegetables tempted him. So he took the liberty of gathering some. . . . In repayment he spaded a small area along the edge of the dwarfed and bushy forest; he spent half a day weeding the almost smothered patch. And, fearing this was not enough return for a few lettuces and one cabbage, he made a quick sketch of the place. . . . He pinned it to the door" (65).

innocence, safety, and feminine enclosure is not always as straightforward as it may first appear. In Roy's fiction and autobiography, therefore, gardens facilitate a subtle opening out through the domestic-centred growth, maturation, and mobility of her female artist figures, creating a comforting image of change within constancy.

If Roy is a feminist "in the broad sense of the word" as Whitfield contends (20), and if Roy's extensive use of enclosure motifs is indicative of a subtle, awakening feminist consciousness that reflects her Second Wave milieu during the first half of the twentieth century, then Roy's gardens reveal a profound sensitivity to women's problematic desire for agency and artistic expression within the prescribed confines of their gendered existences. Although men make brief appearances as pragmatic gardeners in Roy's works,⁹ gardens provide Roy's female characters in particular with venues for expression and havens of retreat. For many of Roy's female characters, the desire to garden is an intense one, but also one that is often misunderstood or dismissed by male characters. In *Street of Riches*, Christine's Aunt Thérésina has a "real passion . . . for geraniums" (100). Despite her severe, debilitating asthma, and the foreshortened growing season in Manitoba, the Aunt insists on gardening:

And she was still overjoyed to be alive when the month of June came round and she could set her geraniums out in the open. My uncle would offer to do this task for her. He pointed out to her that by going close to the still damp, cool soil, she would lay herself open to aggravating her malady. But, protected by three or four sweaters, a small trowel in her hand, one fine day my aunt would emerge to set out her plants. (100)

⁹ In addition to Gédéon's and Pierre's gardening work, Christine's father in *Street of Riches* tends to the family's garden for mostly pragmatic reasons: he discusses "rosebushes, apple trees, and asparagus" with the neighbour (2), and acquaints himself with each individual strawberry (113).

Aunt Thérésina yearns for a warm climate and temperate garden of her own—a longing that her husband “‘the Dreamer’” fails to fulfill until the last months of her life, as his numerous business plans take priority, ironically moving the couple further and further north to Edmonton despite his promise to relocate south to California (103). Similarly, Christine’s father does not appreciate the purpose and desire behind the women settlers’ decision to plant red geranium beds in the newly settled Ukrainian colony of Dunrea, Saskatchewan: “The women even set out flowers along the paths that led from the houses to the little privies; and it seems that Papa had laughed at this excess of adornment. Papa . . . was a serious man, and his first concern was to look after the crops” (*Street of Riches* 76). Christine’s father views cultivation for purely economic benefit; the steadfastness of the women’s desire to garden and plant flowers points, however, to the centrality of gardening to their expression and daily lives.

Roy’s gardens function clearly in a dual capacity: Roy associates these terrains not only with women’s stasis—their lives determined by “‘a mountain made of housework . . .’”—but also with women’s desire for aesthetic expression even within the confines of the quotidian (*The Road Past* 15). Nowhere is the paradoxical nature of Roy’s gardens—their role as prison and refuge—more apparent than in the extraordinary bowers she describes at length for her female artist figures who pursue artistic quests and independent endeavours within the established parameters of their domestic milieus. In her autobiography *Enchantment and Sorrow* and her short story “Garden in the Wind,” Roy composes two garden enclosures, or bowers, that house female artist figures: Gabrielle, a young woman coming into her own as a writer in England, and Marta Yaramko, a Ukrainian immigrant who lives and gardens in northern Alberta. As highly literary, idealized terrains shaped by bower conventions, Gabrielle’s and Marta’s gardens provide

space for introspection, creative freedom, and confidence-in-artistry to grow.¹⁰ Roy departs from traditional bower scenes, however, in that she chooses to domesticate these enclosures through their stylized presentations. As a result, the women's safe containment is two-fold: these artists are naturalized not just by greenery, but also by their decidedly domestic settings and associated roles.

The apparent novelty of the woman artist, then, and the need to naturalize her find their complicated expression in what Roy envisions as idealized, domestic bowers, where gender norms are not radically questioned but surprisingly reinforced. Roy avoids open transgressions of gender paradigms, and instead uses her bowers to protect and shield the tentative female artist, subtly revealing gender limitations and women's placement within the habitual settings of home and family. Arguing that "the garden is . . . a vehicle for reassurance" (34), Ian L. McHarg believes that together the intimacy and familiarity of a garden maintain a pre-existing order: "In the home, furniture, memorabilia, and books provide a familiar and reassuring environment. . . . Affirmation of values is linked to reassurance. I believe that the garden combines both explicit and implicit statements of affirmation. Perhaps the most dominant statement is that nature is benign" (34). In Roy's case, the garden's "benign" contents extend to and include Roy's women artists, as Roy's bowers offer reassurance by shaping familiar, family-oriented scenes and recognizable feminine subjects in a natural setting (in other words, domestic-situated). Roy naturalizes the novelty of the woman artist through the containment of the garden, accommodating

¹⁰ Gabrielle's and Marta's bowers are clearly distinct from the other kinds of gardens—flower beds, window planters—that Roy depicts in her works. Gardening is part of Roy's female characters' seasonal work and aesthetic pleasure in their quotidian lives, as demonstrated by Gabrielle's mother in *Enchantment and Sorrow*: "Whatever worries or sorrows Maman had, as soon as summer came she'd drop everything to gather up the geraniums and fuchsias that had spent winter on the windowsills and plant them in the earth around the house" (31). In contrast, Roy infuses her bowers with extraordinary status as she uses them to contemplate pivotal moments of transition and transformation for her women artists and their expression.

this female figure's non-conformity—that is, her capacity for private introspection, her desire for creative agency, and her departure from domestic preoccupations.

2. The Literary Genre of the Bower

In *Enchantment and Sorrow* and “Garden in the Wind,” Roy departs from typical bower conventions by choosing to domesticate the bower through the incorporation of gender paradigms—specifically, familial relationships, feminine virtue, and the self-less nurturing of others. According to its generic tradition, the bower serves an essential role in inspiring a male figure, normally a poet, to realize his artistic potential. Writers characterize the bower typically as a site of repose, a brief respite where an artist has time to reflect and bring his artistic vision and confidence to fruition. Indeed, the very word “bower” signifies an enclosure. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, a bower is a “dwelling, habitation, abode,” and can imply a variety of locales, such as “an idealized abode, not realized in any actual dwelling,” or “a fancy rustic cottage or country residence” (“Bower”). A bower is largely associated with nature and figures as a “place closed in or overarched with branches of trees, shrubs, or other plants; a shady recess, leafy covert, arbour” (“Bower”). As “an idealized abode,” the bower in Roy’s *Enchantment and Sorrow*—which appears in the form of the Century Cottage garden in England—fulfills readers’ conventional expectations. When a young Gabrielle stumbles across Century Cottage, the dwelling is surrounded by a magnificent garden: “it seemed . . . buried in a tangled profusion of flowers. I walked up a path winding this way and that, perhaps as dictated by the flowers themselves in their determination to grow and spread where it suited them” (306). Similarly, in “Garden in the Wind,” Marta’s bower is an extraordinary dwelling place adorned by nature. Roy’s narrator describes her first

glimpse of Marta's garden-embowered home surrounded by the prairies: "The road, straight for so long, at last bends slightly. . . . Then a living house. And in the same moment, flowers. A mass of flaming colours that strike your eye, seize your heart. . . . I saw before me, under the enormous sky, . . . this little garden fairly bursting with flowers" (124-25).

In addition to these notions of an ideal, nature-adorned enclosure, a bower refers more specifically to an inner room, or a "lady's private apartment" or "boudoir" ("Bower"). Fulfilling this interior aspect of the bower's definition, the natural vibrancy of the exterior of Century Cottage extends into Gabrielle's "inviting country bedroom," as the mantel is decorated with Scottish heather and other dried flowers, and the large windows open to the downs (*Enchantment* 307). Marie-Linda Lord notes that throughout *Enchantment and Sorrow*, Roy uses as many as seventeen bedrooms to mark "des temps forts de son évolution psychologique" (99) and to arrange memories aesthetically and spatially (101). Of all these bedrooms, I argue that the bedroom at Century Cottage is paramount because of its situation within the extraordinary garden and its facilitation of Gabrielle's ultimate transformation into a writer whose sudden flourish of creativity reflects the very nature of her fertile surroundings. Similarly, in keeping with the multifaceted aspects of the indoor-outdoor bower setting, Roy extends Marta's prairie garden into this farm wife's kitchen, which incorporates nature in the décor. In Marta's kitchen, the walls are painted "delphinium blue"; dried poppy heads hang from the low ceiling beams; and the tablecloth, which showcases "big red flowers on a blue and yellow background," decorates the kitchen table (165). Whereas Gabrielle works on her writer's craft in her Century Cottage bedroom every morning, Marta performs her daily domestic

art in her garden and kitchen.¹¹ Clearly, Gabrielle's and Marta's bowers meld the exterior world of nature with the interior of the domestic, creating rather fanciful floral abodes.

In addition to its designation as an inner, naturally adorned room, the bower, or "boudoir," carries erotic connotations. Rachel Crawford notes that the bower's conventional depiction as an enclosed, pleasurable, natural scene derives from the combination of two idealized concepts of place: the *locus amoenus* (pleasant or pleasure ground) and the *hortus conclusus* (enclosed garden) ("Troping the Subject" 258-59). While the classical *locus amoenus* implies "murmuring breezes, birdsong, shady trees, sweet-smelling flowers, and clear-running brooks or fountains," the Christian tradition of the *hortus conclusus* "provide[s] an allegory for the inviolate body of the Virgin Mary" ("Troping the Subject" 258). This "identification of the female body with the enclosed space" of pleasing, reposeful landscape results in a highly erotic, natural dwelling ("Troping the Subject" 259). Outlining the gendered features of bower scenes, Crawford observes that the enclosure is often "occupied by a female character or object, or is instilled with some feminine principle (for example the nurturing power of nature)" ("Troping the Subject" 261). This female character occupies a secondary role, and a solitary male takes center stage. His entrance into the bower constitutes part of his journey toward self-realization; the bower is merely a stop along his way. Therefore, in addition to the *locus amoenus* and *hortus conclusus*, the romance epic furnishes the bower tradition with "the figure of the lone knight/hero whose dynastic quest is punctuated by

¹¹ Roy also features Marta in the upstairs bedroom that overlooks the garden, but in contrast to the artful, nature-inspired kitchen, Roy gives Marta's bedroom few descriptive details. It becomes instead, as I shall later demonstrate, a more ominous kind of bower. Marta's first and final entrance into her bedroom takes place when she prepares for death: "She climbed the remaining steps. She changed the linen, lay down on the bed and, her eyes on the ceiling, experienced again the feel of the vast, living sky she had just seen. 'Why, oh why, did I have my life?' asked Marta" (166). Separated from her garden and daily work, Marta becomes an enclosed figure of a different sort, as she withdraws from her role as an artist and assumes the position of the dying woman confined to her sick room.

digressive interludes of embowered, sexualized encounters with maids, sorceresses, or divine female figures” (Crawford, *Poetry, Enclosure* 226). Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* serves as an early example of the bower’s romance narrative in which the knight Guyon encounters both the Bower of Bliss and the Island of Phaedria. Patricia Parker reads these bowers as ambiguous middle-ground for the male hero’s transition.

Phaedria’s “sequestered spot, deep in the shady quiet of the dale, offers ease to both ear and eye, respite from ‘noyse of armes’” (Parker 372), yet also threatens the progress of Guyon’s quest, suggesting that this bower is “an image of the appeal and of the dangers of repose” (Parker 374).

As the bower tradition evolves through the centuries, the knight/hero figure appeals to male poets’ reflections on their own journeys toward *artistic* self-realization, making the writing of the bower “highly conventional in that its primary reference is not to gardens but to the world of poetry” (Crawford, *Poetry, Enclosure* 226). In these imaginative quests for artistic vision, the private and oftentimes erotic setting of the bower’s “boudoir” facilitates a heterosexual encounter between the male artist and his female muse—a union where the “traditional analogy for conceptual productivity is provided by sexual reproduction” (Crawford, “Troping the Subject” 261). In keeping with the *hortus conclusus* that identifies the female body as the enclosed garden, the female muse takes the form of either a woman, or the “lap of nature”—both are suitable ground for the demonstration of masculine potency (Crawford, “Troping the Subject” 261). The erotic, inspirational appeal of the bower does not, however, always elicit the same response from male writers: Andrew Marvell’s poem, “The Garden,” illustrates what Crawford outlines as the male artist’s privileged, solitary possession of his garden enclosure. With Eve banished from this alternative paradise, Marvell’s speaker revels in

his “happy garden-state,” as Nature is a clear erotic substitute (57). The “luscious clusters” of vine (35), the “curious peach” (37) and ensnaring flowers constitute a lush, seductive atmosphere (35-40). The male speaker’s imagination is fresh and fertile, reflecting the very fecundity of his surroundings, as he forms “a green thought in a green shade” (Marvell 48). While Marvell’s speaker indulges in his bower, other male poets, notably those from the Romantic period, relate problematic visions of this supposedly inspiring terrain. According to Crawford, the bower can also be “a space of dilemma, ambiguity, and frustration in the quest for subjectivity” (“Troping the Subject” 261). William Wordsworth’s bower scene in “Nutting” demonstrates, for example, a difficult rite of passage through Wordsworth’s boyhood discovery of a “virgin scene” (21) and the bower’s final “[d]eformed and sullied” (47) state subsequent to his enraged destruction of it. Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison” captures a mature male subject’s ambivalent response to a bower that does not offer repose, but rather despair and isolation:

Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,
 This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost
 Beauties and feelings, such as would have been
 Most sweet to my remembrance. . . . (1-4)

In this instance, the bower fails to fulfill the desires of the speaker who yearns to wander the countryside with his companions. Creative renewal and inspiration arrive only when the poet imagines himself beyond his idle, despairing, and embowered state. As Michael Raiger argues, the source of poetic fertility springs more from the poet’s mind and spirit than from the bower itself, as the poet “sought communion with both absent friends and

absent nature" (73), and this active "vision has transformed the lime-tree bower from a prison of the senses into a playground for the spirit" (74).

Whether the bower provides a secure, sensual, or problematic environment for the knight/hero or male poet, it remains largely his privileged domain. This veritable garden "boudoir" creates, therefore, a difficult scenario for Roy, who wishes to use the bower as a haven, not a site of exploitation, for her female subjects. The descriptions of Roy's extraordinary, garden-embowered abodes in *Enchantment and Sorrow* and "Garden in the Wind" concur with typical bower settings, but where Roy strays from convention is in her elevation of the status of the female inhabitants. Gabrielle and Marta are not merely decorative fixtures within their bowers, but rather their own artistic, questing subjects. The granting of artistic agency is not a straightforward task for Roy, however, as bower conventions work to restrict the feminine. In this private abode, a woman can both inhabit the bower, and be associated with the bower itself, particularly in terms of her body and its ties to reproductive nature. According to Dorothy Mermin, this paradoxical role creates an impossible situation for the female subject who has "to play two opposing roles at one time—both knight and damsel, both subject and object—and that because she can't do this she is excluded from the worlds her imagination has discovered" (65-66). With conventions catering to artistic male interests, the bower enclosure either excludes or controls the female subject: she is prohibited from entering as an artist, or faces a prescribed role within it as object and muse.¹² In response to the bower's limitations, women writers devise ways appropriate to their socio-historical milieus that enable them to negotiate this gendered terrain. Crawford points to Felicia Hemans as a nineteenth-

¹² Mermin points to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem "The Lost Bower" in which the speaker fails to locate her bower as an example of this gendered exclusion: "It is the loss of a poetic world and a poetic subject, lost because she can't fill both roles that the story requires" (66).

century writer who legitimizes the embowered female as an artist rather than muse by devising heroines who embody the “sexual regulative ideal of the passionless female . . . thus forming an unexpected association between authorial power and the regulated female character” (*Poetry, Enclosure* 244). Whereas Hemans treads carefully within the bower tradition by adhering to her historical ideals of womanly virtue, the contemporary Canadian writer Phyllis Webb infuses her bower poem “Marvell’s Garden” (1956) with a clear feminist vision, as she openly protests the bower’s exclusivity to male artists. Webb’s speaker laments women’s sad erasure from the bower and the denial of this rite of initiation into poetic achievement. Rather than quietly reposing in the shade as Marvell’s speaker does, Webb’s speaker responds with anger in a “hot glade” (6). Webb undermines Marvell’s argument for a paradise of one and instead inserts feminine difference and a vision of “contradiction” (7), revealing “the shade green within the green shade” (8). By the conclusion of the poem, the speaker denies men access to her own “garden” and mourns the gender division that precludes the possibility of exchange.

Unlike Webb’s angry response to the bower tradition, Roy does not defiantly address the gendered hierarchy and exclusion typical of bower scenes. Rather than being a site of explicit feminist reshaping, Roy’s enclosures in *Enchantment and Sorrow* and “Garden in the Wind” are sites of reassurance, affirming gender norms and rendering female artists as benign creatures. Gabrielle’s and Marta’s artistic agency and solitariness are “brought home”—that is, aligned with conventional notions of nurturing femininity and attentive to those aspects of their identities and experiences that spring from their maternal homes and families. Gabrielle’s and Marta’s bowers are, therefore, gender-appropriate according to the fictional and historical contexts of Roy’s literary works, which take place in the mid-twentieth century. Before I turn to *Enchantment and Sorrow*,

it is important to note that despite Roy's extraordinary descriptions of Gabrielle's and Marta's bowers, there are significant differences between them: while Gabrielle is a young artist of words with independence and mobility, Marta is an aging artist of flowers tied to the home. The two bowers and their respective female inhabitants provide a fruitful comparison, therefore, as they allow readers to see a transition in the shifting position and role of the female artist figure, which is dependent on her particular circumstance and time frame as she either begins or ends her journey. In the examples of Gabrielle and Marta, Roy formulates a clear distinction between expression that is merely informed by the domestic (art that responds to, but can move beyond the home) and domestically situated art (art that responds to, and takes place within the home setting). As I shall demonstrate, this difference speaks directly to the woman artist's problematic agency, which is reflected not only in her spatial characterization (beyond, or within the domestic bower), but also in the public extension or private curtailing of her particular mode of expression.

3. The Domestication of the Bower in *Enchantment and Sorrow*

In *Enchantment and Sorrow*, Roy uses the bower as a subtle means of validating her own character's artistry by mediating the tensions Gabrielle encounters as a young woman during the first half of the twentieth century—a woman who longs to circulate freely within the public domain, but needs to account for socio-cultural norms that dictate familial and domestic responsibility. First, within the parameters of the Century Cottage enclosure, Roy defines Gabrielle by familial roles, rather than characterizing her as a completely independent figure. Second, Roy objectifies her character momentarily without jeopardizing this quest for self-development, thereby maintaining a familiar sense

of feminine submission in relation to Gabrielle's more novel artistic agency. And third, Roy presents Gabrielle's resolution to nurture others through her art, thereby curbing the self-centred and seemingly unfeminine nature of Gabrielle's artistic pursuits that take her beyond the home.

Located in Upshire, England, the garden at Century Cottage appears at a pivotal point in Roy's autobiography, providing a much needed refuge and place of maturation during Gabrielle's long, unconventional journey toward self-discovery. Leaving behind her mother and her Manitoba home, travelling to Paris to pursue an acting career, and finally residing in London only to feel dismayed by her lack of dramatic inspiration and the abrupt end of her first love affair, Gabrielle leaves the city of London on a whim and boards the "Green Line" bus that takes urban dwellers out to the countryside. Departing from Trafalgar Square, a physically and psychologically exhausted Gabrielle arrives by chance at a small garden called Century Cottage, which is owned by Esther Perfect and her father, a retired manor gardener. Instilling in Gabrielle a sense of renewal, wholeness, and security, Century Cottage garden is the highly idealized bower of salvation that Crawford describes by offering both "the ground for an initiation into subjectivity" ("Troping the Subject" 261) and "the passageway to a vocation as poet" ("Troping the Subject" 262), or in Gabrielle's case, a writer of fiction. When the young, disillusioned Gabrielle first encounters Century Cottage, Roy represents herself as a questing heroine in need of shelter and rest after an arduous journey. Although Gabrielle happens to come upon the cottage by chance, her entrance into this bower figures as a destined turning point in her experience:

I came to a door of dark wood. I reached for the knocker but as if I'd had enough strength only to bring me as far as this doorstep, I suddenly drooped against the

doorframe. I think I was so tired that tears came to my eyes, so exhausted I felt I was arriving . . . from the agonizing uncertainties I'd been living with so long. . . . This was my last thought before letting my head fall against the door, no longer able to keep my eyes open. (*Enchantment* 306)

The emphasis on Gabrielle's fragile and emotionally vulnerable state draws attention to her typically feminine character; yet her solitary, independent status, as suggested through Roy's multiple use of the pronoun "I," highlights alternatively the unconventional nature of her solitary journey as a woman artist. During her time in Europe, Gabrielle is decidedly removed from the domestic scene that is her maternal Manitoban home of familial duties and financial responsibilities. The cottage bower scene realigns Gabrielle, however, with some of these traditional gender expectations at the same time as it brings her to artistic fruition.

Grappling with all the uncertainties of her life and her vocation, Gabrielle discovers in the garden-embowered Century Cottage a place of quiet self-reflection and an opportunity to withdraw from the world. This cottage enables transformation, and through the conventions of the bower, Roy stages Gabrielle's initiation as an artist. John Lennox notes that the larger framework of Roy's autobiography works as a fairytale and is filled with archetypal scenes in which Gabrielle "plays" the role of heroine. The Century Cottage bower scene is no exception. In Lennox's reading, the first section "The Governor's Ball" (a ball to which Gabrielle's parents are invited but do not attend when they see the other guests' expensive attire) brings to mind the Prince's ball that Cinderella is barred from attending: "The metaphor of the ball suggests a fairy-tale pattern of usurpation, hardship, initiative, and restoration" (70). In fairytales, the heroine "is marked for greater things; her destiny is strong" (Lennox 71). This sense of

predestination to become a writer, and specifically a *woman writer* tied to the domestic, finds its fullest expression at Century Cottage. The garden envelops Gabrielle instantly upon her arrival: “I must have disappeared . . . among the tall delphiniums, giant hollyhocks, and Canterbury bells” (*Enchantment* 306). Imbued with the magical nature of most bowers, the little back garden filled with herbs and flowers feels almost otherworldly, out of time and space, with the “Canterbury bells bearing more big sumptuous bells than [Gabrielle has] ever seen anywhere else” (*Enchantment* 306). The garden is alive, burgeoning with plants, delicious aromas, and sensations. There is the scent of mint and rosemary from the back corner of the garden; and “the air positively vibrate[s] with the buzzing of insects, the clamour of voices around a banquet table” (*Enchantment* 306). The immense fertility of the place promises a productive imagination. Roy even refers to her recollection of Century Cottage as a “fairy story”; it “was all [she] could possibly desire” (*Enchantment* 309).

But in addition to the lushness and fairytale attributes of Century Cottage, Gabrielle’s enclosure is a domestic setting of quotidian routine and familial ease that facilitates and naturalizes her artistry. Gabrielle’s initiation as a writer comes not from a conventional erotic encounter in the bower that typically suggests “conceptual productivity” (Crawford, “Troping the Subject” 261), but rather from a comforting bedroom, doting parental figures, and childhood memories. While Gabrielle’s flowery bedroom is in keeping with the enclosed setting of the bower genre’s conventions, the familial circumstances are not. Gabrielle’s discovery of her vocation through a domestic-styled bower follows, therefore, the pattern that Whitfield contends is so central to Roy’s writing about women—the oppositional pull of journey and home. Roy’s construction of the bower as a site of innocence and childhood clearly illuminates some of the restrictions

faced by the female artist. With Gabrielle's craft at odds with the more traditional gender norms and domestic responsibilities modeled by her mother Mélina, Roy uses the bower to reconcile these disparate roles. In the company of Esther and "Father Perfect"—the name Gabrielle reverently attributes to Esther's father—Gabrielle realizes a long-desired, idyllic enclosure of family and belonging. Just prior to Gabrielle's arrival at Century Cottage, she has tea at a Tudor-style cottage in the woods, a place that initiates Gabrielle's remembrance of, and return to youthful innocence: "It couldn't be made for living in, I thought, just for playing at living in; the humble little Tudor cottage of Old England on the tins of fine biscuits my mother used to buy when I was a child. . . . The minute I saw it I felt I'd returned to the safety and peace of my early childhood" (*Enchantment* 301). Lennox notes, "The house mirrors an intimate part of Gabrielle's personality in its diminutive role-playing" (76). On her journey toward artistic realization, Gabrielle reverts continually to "playing" the role of child, as Roy the author melds together artistry and the familial setting. In keeping with a return to youthful innocence and familial surroundings, Roy parallels the first morning at Century Cottage—the morning Gabrielle fervently begins to write—with a morning of an earlier time in Manitoba:

When I woke I was perhaps more at peace than I had been since . . . the days of summer holidays at the farm when I'd wake on my first morning in my uncle's house not knowing where I was; then I'd . . . know for certain I was happy again in the house I loved so much, where I'd known only peace and happiness. . . .

With the return of this peaceful feeling so long absent from my life, I discovered just as suddenly a burning urge to write. . . . (*Enchantment* 316)

Through the domestic ease and parallel to her maternal home, Gabrielle is in a significant way “brought home” through Century Cottage and subsequently able to pursue her writing. The virtuous protection of Esther and Father Perfect reinforces Gabrielle’s reclaimed sense of childhood. In this secure and contemplative shelter, the young female artist may safely take root and develop along appropriate gender lines that demand a woman’s familial involvement and domestic presence.

By fashioning Gabrielle’s initiation into her vocation as innocent and embedded in the familial, Roy mediates her protagonist’s vulnerable position as a woman writer whose writing and travel run contrary to familial obligations and a sedentary domestic life. In the autobiography as a whole, the combination of the domestic setting with the bower lends an organic quality and a sense of validation to this crucial self-affirming stage of Gabrielle’s journey. The Upshire bower with its natural imagery and containment of Gabrielle is actually the culmination of Roy’s earlier development of a plant and garden motif that shapes the opening chapters. Throughout Gabrielle’s life journey, her central preoccupation is with her heritage as an exile—her experience of being uprooted, or of uprooting herself. As Vincenza Costantino argues, “Une mobilité spatiale correspondant à une instabilité plus profonde lui rend difficile tout enracinement” (392). The autobiography foregrounds Gabrielle’s sense of exile both as a young Francophone living in the English majority of Manitoba, and as a young woman who chooses to leave her family in order to travel to Europe and follow independent pursuits. Gabrielle’s uprooted nature creates tenuous and problematic bonds between identity and home, particularly as a young woman rejecting familial obligations and a sedentary domestic life. As a young woman attending the English-run Normal School in Winnipeg, Gabrielle finds there is no opportunity for Francophone students to experience “an opening out” or a “blossoming

of the self” (63). Seeking cultural and intellectual stimulation, Gabrielle admits that there is little that reflects, or speaks to her French way of life, which leads “to a kind of withering” and makes her feel that she is “living in some walled enclosure” (109-10). But perhaps the most difficult experience of uprooting for Gabrielle is her departure from both her mother and the familiar confines of home. Gabrielle’s transplanting to France leaves her “timidly” trying to “find [her] feet . . . like some bruised plant in a protective layer of compost” (208). Thus, through garden imagery, Roy works to naturalize Gabrielle’s desire to escape her home and to pursue elsewhere her cultivation as an artist.

Gabrielle’s intense need for education and artistic cultivation beyond the home creates a parallel between her journey and the journeys of Roy’s male characters, who undertake similar independent quests away from their families. In *The Cashier* and *The Hidden Mountain* respectively, Alexandre Chenevert and Pierre Cadorai sever themselves from their homes and embark on solitary quests. What distinguishes Alexandre and Pierre from Gabrielle, however, is the degree and ease of separation between the questing subject and his or her home. Alexandre and Pierre find inspiration in moments of near-complete isolation. These two men find themselves amid not obvious familial surroundings, such as Gabrielle’s Century Cottage, but rather a sparsely populated forest setting and the untouched reaches of the wilderness. Leaving behind his wife Eugénie, who plans to visit their daughter, Alexandre finds his ideal, solitary paradise in the pristine forest of Lac Vert. In many ways, Alexandre’s journey from Montreal to the country is extremely similar to that of Gabrielle. Just as Gabrielle boards the Green Line bus that takes Londoners to the country, a weary Alexandre and his fellow city dwellers travel on the bus in a comparable excursion: “Alexandre had the impression . . . that all of them together were awaiting a return to their native soil. The home they all yearned for—

was it, for the others as for him, merely some small, unknown patch of greenery?" (137). The "home" that Alexandre desires and ultimately finds is, however, quite different from Gabrielle's Century Cottage.

In *The Cashier*, Alexandre takes his respite not in domesticated nature and a familial setting, but in the isolated woods of Lac Vert and a rented cottage, which replicates the exotic, deserted Pacific island paradise for which he longs repeatedly throughout the novel. In his new forest cottage a "feeling of childhood swath[s] Alexandre" (153), and although he senses this place to be "his true dwelling" (160), this is not a familial setting of companionship and domestic routine. Instead, Alexandre imagines living alone in nature as his "heart seized upon that ancient human dream, the dream of Robinson Crusoe!" (163). At Lac Vert, Alexandre has little contact with the owners of the cottage, the trapping and farming family Le Gardeurs. Alexandre is so completely immersed in his solitude that monsieur Le Gardeur even pays a visit to the cottage to "root" Alexandre out of his isolation after madame Le Gardeur expresses concern for his anti-social behaviour as he "had refused to stop off a moment at their house" (165). In keeping with their name, the Le Gardeurs provide a protective, familial component to Alexandre's respite, but Alexandre spends little time with them, preferring instead to remain alone. When Alexandre returns to the city and his family, the wild nature and complete isolation of Lac Vert remain his ideal, and stand in sharp contrast to the domesticated, uninspiring, and artificial urban landscape of "fake brick and fake stone" and garden plots "full of chickens, dwarfs, and Grecian vases made of pottery or concrete" (189). Furthermore, unlike Gabrielle who undergoes a veritable transformation at Century Cottage, Alexandre seems not to have changed as a result of his journey and isolation despite his belief in self-renewal:

[Alexandre] seemed to suffer just as he had before he left. Nor did it seem that he had really put on any weight. Looking at him with compassion—and with a certain irritation, too—[Eugénie] remarked: “It doesn’t appear that your holiday has done you much good. Poor old chap! And the crazy notion of going all by yourself into the woods!” (197)¹³

Similarly to Alexandre, Pierre in *The Hidden Mountain* is a man disconnected from family and home. An artist searching for his vision for more than a decade and travelling alone through the Canadian North, Pierre appreciates that “a hearth and home [are] not for him” (114). A man seemingly without family, Pierre comments toward the conclusion of the novel, “‘I have always had good partners’” (183), yet he distances himself repeatedly from his help-mate friends: “That strange artist’s dream of being alone with his domain, in his interpretation, alone in his creation—had not Pierre achieved it from the very outset?” (174). In addition, while Gabrielle surrounds herself with doting parental figures and the comforts of a homey cottage, Pierre looks for a shelter that reflects his solitariness and facilitates total immersion in his painting. When finding an attic room to rent in Paris, Pierre’s friend Stanislas describes it as “‘a real hole,’” but Pierre seems content with his choice: “Everything was eliminated that could uselessly burden a man. He would have his stove, something to eat. What more did he need?” (162).

Pierre’s source of inspiration is wild nature, and when he finds himself living in the heart of Paris he continues to paint the North, finding little artistic appeal in the

¹³ In addition to his lack of physical improvement, Alexandre also fails to express himself when he attempts to write a letter to a journal to inform his fellow urban dwellers of his inspired experience in the country. At Lac Vert, Alexandre produces only “a series of erasures” (180) and “tag ends of phrases which seemed to trace back directly to his nickel newspaper, to the catch-lines in the streetcar ads” (181).

contained space of Paris's public squares and gardens. Marie-Pierre Andron writes, "La recherche d'intimité avec la matière inspirante est impossible, les squares et les jardins, comme parenthèses dans la frénésie urbaine, sont impossibles. Il ne peut y avoir ni recueillement, ni retrouvailles, ni intimité" (86). For the solitary male artist, his independence is reflected in the uncontained nature that inspires him on his self-focussed quest. In contrast to Pierre's impossible experience of introspection and insufficient connection with the urban surroundings and nature during his time in Paris, a fleeting glimpse of the Tuileries Gardens of Paris from a bus window sparks Gabrielle's revelation regarding her talents: "What I can't forget is that seeing the beautiful garden of Paris . . . made me realize I had a faculty for observation I hadn't really been aware of before, together with an infinite longing to know what to do with it" (*Enchantment* 228). Following this epiphany, Gabrielle experiences a necessary reprieve from her uninspiring acting rehearsals in the Luxembourg Gardens:

With great relief I sat listening to [the old women] talking about everyday things among themselves over their knitting. The more I saw of the theatre, the more I was drawn by people's simple, everyday lives and their everyday language. . . .

Though I didn't realize it, I was approaching what would prove to be the right, the only school for me. (*Enchantment* 231)

In comparison to the wilderness quests of her male characters, Roy presents Gabrielle's journey toward artistic realization in a gender-appropriate manner with enclosed, cultivated nature and family-oriented femininity. Where Gabrielle appreciates the Tuileries pond "with children playing around it" and "the impeccable rows of round-headed chestnut trees" (*Enchantment* 228), Alexandre and Pierre are drawn to that which is wild, solitary, and relatively uncontained. Pierre's art instructor tells him not to paint

the arctic and instead to “see what [he] can do with commonplace subjects” such as houses and public squares (145), but in “study after study there emerg[es] a Paris shivering under an Arctic glow” (*The Hidden* 149). In a way, Pierre paints his “home” or native country, but it is nevertheless a landscape unknown and ultimately unknowable to him. His obsession to capture the wilderness in his art is all-consuming and tragically isolating.¹⁴ Unlike her depiction of the relatively solitary experiences of Alexandre and Pierre, Roy seems compelled to relate her own character, Gabrielle, and her writing to the intimate space of house and home, and by extension, to the domesticated nature of the bower and garden enclosures.

If the pressures of gendered propriety ultimately push Roy to construct her artistry through traditional feminine associations and responsibilities, then the creation of a domestic-styled bower is not without its challenges. As an author, Roy must carefully navigate and revise bower conventions, particularly the erotics of the natural “boudoir,” if she is to initiate an acceptable, even virtuous, feminine artistry, and at last bring the questing woman subject physically and figuratively “home.” In creating a domestic bower within a chaste familial model, Roy minimizes the conventionally erotic aspects of the bower, a difficult task since her character must accommodate a seductive male presence within the space of the garden retreat. When her former lover, Stephen, arrives unexpectedly at Century Cottage, Gabrielle seems in danger of slipping into the object position of female muse confined within a masculine-centred narrative, rather than becoming the burgeoning female artist. Indeed, Roy admits, “Nothing happened to break the spell [of Century Cottage] for several weeks” (332), until Stephen appeared like a

¹⁴ While almost capturing his vision of the northern mountain on his canvas at the conclusion of the novel, Pierre seems to suffer from a heart attack and all his “[f]orms, beloved images, dreams, the witchery, and the colors” along with the hidden mountain “fad[e] away” (186).

questing male hero, travelling “the long way through the forest” and “suffering from the oppressive late-morning heat” (333). In his study of bowers in eighteenth-century fiction, J. David Macey notes that, typically, male intrusions preempt the privacy of these green spaces, as female heroines—retiring to their garden seat—realize that the garden is “far from an absolute retreat” (76). “[C]onventional scenes of discovery” transform the women into objects of amorous male interest (Macey 76) and in turn, draw attention to the “theatrical quality of the bower scene” (Macey 90), suggesting that women’s privacy is “conventional rather than actual” as women must continue to perform according to gender and genre norms as objects of desire (Macey 92). In her autobiography, Roy develops a motif of theatricality in terms of both structure and content, as there is a “constant association between acting and writing” (Lennox 72); this particular focus extends to Roy’s writing of Gabrielle’s gender-related performance within her bower scene and her encounter with Stephen.

Gabrielle occupies an ambiguous position as both a developing artist and an embowered love object; this dual role is not surprising, as Roy is inclined to stage traditional femininity within her bower. With Roy’s desire to naturalize the female artist, the bower must afford reassurance as much as it invites novel female independence. When Stephen enters the bower of Century Cottage, Roy strikes a balance between her own character’s agency and conventional feminine submission. Initially, Stephen’s appearance jeopardizes Gabrielle’s own artistic quest, as Stephen seems to supplant Gabrielle from her own story and to assume the heroic role by repeating her past experience: “As I had done when I first arrived in Upshire, [Stephen] was looking above the doors of the cottages for their names. . . . He came to our gate and paused to rest his laden arms on it” (333). When Stephen arrives as the questing male subject, Gabrielle sits

above in her bedroom window like a conventional embowered female, yet Roy revises this discovery scene by supplying a unique point of view. Maintaining possession of her bower plot, rather than allowing her character to become the object of the male gaze, Roy takes advantage of her heroine's position (gazing down from the bedroom window upon an unsuspecting Stephen) and continues her retrospective first person narration so as to ascertain Stephen's state and express her own subsided feelings for him: "Spying on him from the windows so to speak, I felt none of the pathetic magnetism that had passed between us" (333-34). From her privileged position, then, Gabrielle avoids becoming the love object, minimizes Stephen's seductive power, and maintains her status as the female artist (334). Indeed, in a subsequent scene in the parlour, Gabrielle focuses Stephen's attentions away from romance and onto her own progress as a writer, showing him her royalty cheque from her first publication and allowing him to read her latest manuscript (336).

Despite this mediation of Stephen's intrusion, the erotics of the bower eventually find a place in Roy's narrative. Roy works, nevertheless, to maintain a sense of innocence through the security of her domestic scene. Although initially Roy distances Gabrielle from the role of muse upon Stephen's entrance to the bower, Stephen's "burning, intense way" (336) of looking at Gabrielle prompts the former lovers to leave the Cottage garden and walk through the forest where they become "entwined, clinging to each other as though [they] were the last of our species left together on earth" (338). Roy stages the erotic exchange outside the idyllic shelter and uses the familial setting of Century Cottage to reign in Stephen's presence, reducing the sexualization of Gabrielle and her domestic bower. For example, Esther reminds Stephen "of a beloved Ukrainian great aunt" (334), and during lunch Father Perfect and Esther assess the young couple in

the manner of concerned surrogate parents: “[Father Perfect] and Esther were delighted to find me less alone in the world than I might have seemed, and their eyes kept straying from me to Stephen and from Stephen to me as if to show me they approved of my choice” (335). Here, the erotics of the bower are safely contained within a courtship scenario. As well, by the end of the chapter, Stephen leaves Century Cottage to participate in the impending conflict of World War II, and his departure solidifies Gabrielle’s romantic independence, a status that seems necessary for her individual artistic pursuits.

Roy’s careful containment of the illicit bower, or “boudoir,” scene enables her to foreground domestic, familial obligations and to downplay the unconventional, even immodest, independence of the female artist. The young Gabrielle’s creative outpouring is not the result of a fertile, sexual exchange; instead her writing springs from a domestic model that depends upon the selfless nurturing of others. In his biography of Roy, François Ricard writes that Century Cottage provides Roy with an “exemplary image of what writing is: a shelter from the world; and what it needs: quieted passions, total availability, and obliviousness to all material preoccupations” (*Gabrielle Roy* 174). Roy’s bower is undoubtedly an ideal shelter for Gabrielle as a woman writer, but “total availability” and freedom from “material preoccupations” seem at odds with my argument that Roy domesticates her bower—thereby tying the female artist to daily, familial obligations. With the regeneration of her childhood at Century Cottage, Gabrielle is, of course, able to disengage from domestic duties as she benefits from “the presence of some kindly and protective, discreet and yet utterly devoted figure”—Esther Perfect (Ricard, *Gabrielle Roy* 174). With Esther’s practical help and affection, Gabrielle possesses the freedom to pursue her writing, just as Roy’s male artist, Pierre Cadorai,

immerses himself entirely in his painting through the assistance of his friends. But while Pierre retreats from relationships and daily comforts, finding his inspiration in the uninhabited reaches of the Canadian North and the barest apartment in Paris, Roy situates Gabrielle in a domestic, familial setting, which begs the question: is Roy's construction of her *role* as a woman writer as subtly enclosed within gender paradigms as the terrain of her bower? Gabrielle may be free of immediate, material domestic concerns, but Gabrielle's continued preoccupation with home becomes expressed in other ways, as this female artist assumes an alternative domestic, familial responsibility that functions in the realm of literature.

4. Marta's "Garden in the Wind"

Pivotal to an appreciation of Roy's construction of the female artist and role is Marta Yaramko and her idealized prairie bower in "Garden in the Wind." Catherine Rubinger believes that although Roy's "*Un jardin n'est certes pas le chef-d'oeuvre qu'est Bonheur d'occasion*, . . . il contient la quintessence de son art" (124). Published toward the end of her career, "Garden in the Wind" preoccupied Roy for three decades, as she drafted a number of different versions of this narrative.¹⁵ In the short story, the travelling, nameless narrator, who is a writer and closely aligned with Roy herself, happens upon the practically abandoned Ukrainian settlement of Volhyn in Northern Alberta.¹⁶ The

¹⁵ Ricard notes that as many as four pre-texts to "Garden in the Wind" exist, including "La lune des moissons" (1947), the screenplay "Le plus beau blé du monde" (1950s), an unfinished novel about "Madame Lund" (1950s), and the short story "Le printemps revint à Volhyn," which was revised and re-titled as "Un jardin au bout du monde" (*Gabrielle Roy* 448).

¹⁶ Roy derived her inspiration for "Garden in the Wind" from an actual encounter she had on the prairies during her early work as a journalist. In the article "Turbulent Seekers After Peace," which was originally published in *Bulletin des agriculteurs* in 1942, Roy describes a Doukhobor woman named Masha and her

isolated location is the place of fairytale itself, and indeed the nameless narrator describes it as “what once upon a time tried to be a village” (123). In this outermost, drought-ridden space—the domain of exiles—the narrator discovers an extraordinary yet modest “little garden” on the outskirts of the town (125). With its mass of scarlet poppies, lupines, geraniums, and snapdragons, the garden seems out of place, juxtaposed against, and in spite of, its surroundings, as if “a dream” (125). The otherworldly quality and fecundity of this prairie garden elevate it to the status of magical bower particularly as this garden contains a female figure at its centre. Surrounded by flowers and colours, Marta either works or “sit[s] on a stool right in their midst” with a searching soul, surprising herself with the profound nature of her contemplation (137). The garden is not only a retreat of solitude for Marta’s introspection, but it also facilitates her art, which in this case is not poetry or fiction, but rather the garden itself. This prairie bower is the artistic product and inspiration of its humble creator; Marta “compose[s] her intricate designs with groups of plants” and in this final year lets the flowers grow “according to chance” (137). She may be merely a farmer’s wife, but Marta is an artist whose “dull life [has] had this richer side, a little mad and fanatical” (128).

In many ways, Marta’s garden “bursting with flowers” seems both incongruent with the desolate surroundings and frivolous in terms of the pragmatics of a farming settlement struggling for survival. Nevertheless, Roy instills this garden bower with immense purpose through its capacity for nurturing. Like the domestic-styled bower of Century Cottage, Marta’s garden “dream” is firmly rooted in quotidian life, as this bower

“plethora” of flowers: “To reach her house I had to go miles and miles along rough paths, across a desolate plain. She lives in a region so remote that it seems like the world’s end. Yet she has also spent her life planting flowers” (*Fragile Lights* 41).

creates shelter, provides daily comfort, and facilitates life (125). Marta creates beauty and order amidst desolation, as she brings “a harmony of colours that immediately seemed a home, as much so as the horizon of the clouds. A house in its own place, a flower where it belongs, a tree where one is needed” (150). In her bower, Marta toils daily and carries out her maternal gardening duties. Spotting a newly emerged leaf, Marta “help[s] this birth along” almost like a mid-wife, “brushing away a twig that could hinder it” (127). For Marta, her bower does not simply serve as a site of transition or temporary repose on a journey that takes place predominantly elsewhere; rather, her garden is a site of self-realization that occurs on a continuing basis. Marta has pursued her gardening work and art for thirty years as part of her daily life. Now, as she contends with failing health and physical pain, her garden bower becomes crucial to the expression of her thoughts and growing self-awareness:

She no longer had the strength for heavy tasks. Now she gave herself solely to her little garden, and as she did so her thoughts, like plants well cared for, also sprang free from silence and routine. . . . Sometimes she was astonished to find they were her own. . . . But from whom else could she have had them? Perhaps she had always had them, but locked deep inside her, as indistinct as the flower-to-come in the heart of a dull seed. (128-29)

Clearly, Marta’s garden serves her as an artist in a profoundly personal way and is her privileged domain. Like Marvell’s speaker in “The Garden,” who revels in his solitary green musings, Marta surprises herself with the organic germination of her thoughts, reflected in the growth of each seed. This prairie garden and its creator exhibit a nurturing integrity, however, that benefits not just the individual artist, but rather the

entire immigrant community of Volhyn, Marta's husband, and anyone who encounters this isolated garden on his or her own life journey.

Marta's garden plays a vital role in sustaining what remains of her declining northern Alberta village. The younger generations have abandoned the isolated, rural community, while those left behind, such as Marta's husband Stepan, are full of anger and unproductive despair. In contrast to Marta's diligent care, Stepan gives the wondrous garden merely an "irritated glance" and wanders the untidy farm "scattering to the ends of their land the raging sound of hostile words" (130). Even the Ukrainian church with its "onion-shaped steeple" (123-24) is in a state of decay and neglect, full of spider webs and "the dust of old bouquets of wildflowers" that lie at the feet of the depicted Saints (124). Although other settlers have long since abandoned both the village and their faith, Marta is "the only one in recent times to have cleaned [the church] up at all" (142), as Marta remains steadfast and nurturing, perpetuating her dream for a home and community. As a young woman, Marta urged her family to uproot and travel to the western Canadian prairies, only to recreate their former home. Roy writes, "Not until today, after thirty years of living in Volhyn, did Marta realize that she and old Stepan, perhaps unwittingly, had reproduced almost exactly the atmosphere of the poor farm in their native Volhynia from which they had come" (131). In this now deserted community and barren land, Marta's extraordinary garden supplies a "buoyancy of spirit" (150) and maintains a life-sustaining energy, a living legacy:

From that dear old friend in Codessa, whom she had not been able to visit, alas, for so long, [Marta] had received a rose of India taken from [Lubka's] garden. . . . From this one flower, hung from her ceiling to dry—head down, as it should be—

Marta had been able to recover some three hundred seeds, which had given Volhyn almost as many roses, and each of these in turn had produced hundreds.

Marta lost herself in her calculation of the infinite descendants of a single flower.

(151)

Through the hundreds of roses, these “infinite descendants,” the temporal boundaries of Marta’s garden expand and counter the demise of the village of Volhyn. Critic Nicole Bourbonnais notes that Roy positions Marta’s garden as the preeminent space: “le petit village pitoyable qui n’a pu accéder à l’existence est graduellement supplanté par un site également de dimensions réduites, mais triomphant et euphorique: le jardin multicolore de Martha Yaramko” (369).¹⁷ As a nurturing female artist figure, Marta is attentive to the daily needs and continuity of her garden, home, and community. Just as Marta encourages the “delicately pleated faces” of the poppies to grow in the wind (125), she cleans the neglected church icons, “[their] eyes, dusted clean” (147), and later “dig[s] out of her trunk their old wedding photograph so as to see Stepan’s face” (133), which has now grown dark and inaccessible under a “briar patch” of hair and “tangled eye-brows” (133). Clearly, through her daily and artistic work, Marta nurtures sources of identity and beauty that might otherwise be neglected, forgotten, or lost.

In the emptiness and “savage silence” of northern Alberta, Marta cultivates her garden art and affords it great purpose (131). Yet in addition to her artist role, Marta functions also as an embowered female muse who motivates and inspires others at pivotal moments during their own journeys toward self-realization. Marta and her art solidify

¹⁷ In “Un jardin au bout du monde,” the names of Roy’s protagonist and her husband are “Martha and Stépan Yaramko.” In his English translation, Alan Brown changes the names to “Marta and Stepan Yaramko.” Critics dealing with the French and English texts shift between the variant spellings; however, I have chosen to use “Marta” and “Stepan” in order to be consistent with the published translation.

Roy's dilemma regarding the position and role of the female artist who must be "brought home" but not necessarily remain enclosed within domestic space. The narrator of "Garden in the Wind" is not Marta, but rather a woman writer who begins this story by relating retrospectively her own experience when she was a young, disillusioned writer travelling along an isolated road and being utterly awestruck by Marta's garden. In the opening paragraphs of the story, the writer-narrator describes her encounter with Marta's garden as a critical moment in her life:

In those days I often said to myself: what's the point of this, what's the good of that? Writing was a chore for me. Why bother inventing another story . . . ? Who still believes in stories? And in any case, haven't they all been told? That's what I was thinking that day when, toward evening on that road which seemed to lead me nowhere, I saw in the very emptiness of drought and desolation that surge of splendid flowers. (125)

Barren of creative ideas and artistic purpose, the narrator reflects the very drought and desolation of the isolating landscape surrounding Volhyn and Marta's garden. This young writer ultimately discovers her artistic value and direction through Marta's own example of nurturing femininity and her garden-related expression. In this domestic model of artistic creation, the narrator realizes that in being "brought home,"—appreciating and tending to those otherwise neglected or rejected aspects of one's identity and familial heritage—the artist, and in this particular case the woman artist, gives voice to that which otherwise remains silent. According to Saint-Martin, Roy's pairing of the young writer-narrator with Marta positions women's domestic work as a source of creative agency,

thereby extending the seemingly inconsequential domestic domain to a larger realm of influence:¹⁸

Il est vrai que les pulsions créatrices des femmes ont été longtemps limitées à l'espace domestique; exclues de la sphère publique, les femmes ont oeuvré à l'embellissement du foyer et du jardin où elles se sont vues enfermées. Mais . . . Gabrielle Roy ne privilégie pas le public par rapport au privé; . . . nulle hiérarchie ne s'élève. La quête éperdue de la beauté, l'amoureuse attention accordée à la matière, la solitude qui accompagne forcément toute création véritable, sont les mêmes. . . .
(“Portrait” 517)

Through the example of Marta, Saint-Martin perceives not a closing in, but rather an opening out for the female artist, as “Gabrielle Roy accorde à des activités féminines séculaires une visibilité et un prestige nouveaux” (“Portrait” 519). Obviously, Roy awakens readers’ sympathies and profound admiration for Marta and her artistic garden work. Marta is the preserver of her community’s spirit, attentive to familial bonds, selfless in her nurturing of others and her garden, and steadfast in her expression of the beauty she perceives in the world in a way that others seem, for the most part, unable to emulate.

Roy may grant Marta’s private garden work visibility and prestige as Saint-Martin suggests, but Roy problematizes the position of this entirely home-based woman artist and muse. Roy implies that the embedded nature of both Marta and her artistry within her domestic circumstance and role ultimately means physical and creative limitations for the female artist. Marta seems influential, reaching beyond the confines of her domestic

¹⁸ In a related article, Saint-Martin notes, “Throughout her works, Gabrielle Roy revalorizes traditional female crafts such as making paper flowers, sewing, decorating, and embroidery” (“Gabrielle Roy” 318).

enclosure and time frame through infinite descendants of flowers. Marta is, however, necessarily bound by her condition. She is the isolated wife of an immigrant farmer whose habitual rages deny the value of her work just as his ungenerous spirit prevents her from receiving the medical treatment she so desperately needs, resulting in her inability to continue her gardening. Marta is not an artist destroyed by her own self-absorption in her artistic quest, as in the case of Pierre, who gives himself entirely to his art and leaves nothing of himself for another person. Instead, at the centre of the dilemma of “Garden in the Wind” is the domestically situated and enclosed woman artist, ultimately restricted in her agency.

For the most part, critics commend “Garden in the Wind” in terms of Roy’s depiction of such a formidable yet humble woman and her inspiring artistry. Rubinger argues, for example, that Marta “est une nouvelle création dans la galerie impressionnante des personnages féminins de cet auteur,” as Marta is neither contained within doors, nor burdened at this point in her life with child rearing (124). Similarly, Christine Robinson notes that between the drafts of “Le printemps revint à Volhyn” and the publication of “Un jardin au bout du monde,” Roy eliminates the character of Irina (Marta and Stepan’s adult daughter) and instead “décide de centrer l’histoire sur le portrait de Martha” (65). In their studies of the genesis and numerous pre-texts of “Un jardin au bout du monde,” both Robinson and Sophie Montreuil see a narrowing of focus onto the main female protagonist, her garden, and the associated themes of beauty and creation. Analyzing the pre-texts that begin in 1942 and end with the final published story in 1975, Montreuil argues that the versions move from being “portraits sociaux” to “portraits individuels” (366), as a number of social exchanges are eventually omitted, and Roy concentrates

instead on the woman gardener-artist.¹⁹ Madame Lund, from “Le printemps revint à Volhyn,” is a sociable person and lacks the quiet mood of introspection that comes from Marta’s complete isolation in “Un jardin au bout du monde.” The eventual omission of this communal life adds to the powerful impression Marta makes as an artist. In addition, Montreuil believes that the inclusion of “jardin” in the final version’s title reveals that the garden triumphs over other spaces and thematic preoccupations: “l’élément qui donne son titre au texte final, le jardin, ainsi que le thème qui lui est lié, la création, sont absents de la nouvelle de 1947 et du scénario” (366). To Montreuil’s argument, I would add that the emphasis on the extraordinary nature of Marta’s garden contributes to its status as a bower of critical transformation for both the protagonist and the writer-narrator. The increasing isolation of, and focus on, the main female character do not, however, entirely support Marta’s status as an exceptional, resilient artist. Indeed, the focus on Marta’s solitary state and the vulnerability of her garden reveal, instead, the problematic position of this woman artist.

Roy bestows the status of artist on Marta and venerates the prairie bower, yet Roy also demonstrates the distinctive limitations of this domestically situated woman artist who faces the curtailing of her expressive agency. The final title of Roy’s original French publication “Un jardin au bout du monde” implies a garden not only isolated in the

¹⁹ Montreuil notes that the story entitled “Le printemps revint à Volhyn” focusses on the main character Madame Lund (this name later becomes “Martha Yaramko”), beginning with a springtime trip to Edmonton for medical care and a sojourn of “quelques jours dans la ville de Codessa, logé par diverses connaissances” (370). By the conclusion of the story and the beginning of the autumn season, Madame Lund interacts with various peoples, such as the Natives and trappers who visit the general store with their furs (Montreuil 370). In addition to these social interactions, Madame Lund is also able to place an order for “des graines de fleurs” and “quelques bulbes” when the young boy Dimitri passes by her home, an opportunity that Marta of “Garden in the Wind” no longer seems to have (“Le printemps revint à Volhyn” 6). In the published story, Marta is the sole, isolated source of regeneration for her garden.

extreme, but also existing out of time, at the end of time, or about to enter the past tense.²⁰

The other-worldly or out-of-time quality of Marta's garden operates, in Mikhail Bakhtin's term, as a kind of "historical inversion" (147). In his discussion of the relationship between time and space in literature, Bakhtin argues that in cases of temporal inversion, mythological and artistic modes of thinking situate notions of perfection in the past: "In order to endow any ideal with authenticity, one need only conceive of its once having existed in its 'natural state' in some Golden Age, or perhaps existing in the present but somewhere at the other end of the world, east of the sun and west of the moon" (147-48).

Tended for thirty years, Marta's prairie bower encapsulates the history and experience of her immigration and time on the prairies; it is an authentic and extraordinary expression existing at the ends of the earth. But as a living art subject to the wind and elements and dependent upon its maternal creator who is nearing death herself, the garden's survival is more than precarious. A temporary reprieve arrives when Stepan realizes the value of his wife's work during the last days of her life and not only tidies the farm yard, but also protects the flowers from the frost, as Marta watches from her upstairs bedroom window: "Then, as she pulled the curtain farther back she saw close by the house a big, calloused hand lifting the little paper cones with which the plants had been capped the night before. . . . The whole pile of Codessa newspapers must have gone that way. Now the poor old fellow would have nothing to read in the chill, lonely November days" (173). As an artist, Marta's innovative vision and nurturing capacity inspire even her despairing husband to become a gardener. As Kathleen Madigan observes, "Stépan has stepped out of character in walking onto Martha's sacred ground; rather than dominating his wife by

²⁰ The title of the English translation ("Garden in the Wind") expresses neither the same degree of geographical isolation, nor the out-of-time feeling; it maintains, however, the sense of a position within time and the passing of time.

trying to silence her, he takes on a role of reciprocity in the end, a key ideal of the feminist project” (74). Despite this change in Stepan, however, the story does not conclude in a joyous or triumphant manner, as Marta remains an enclosed figure, dying within her bedroom and separated from her garden. In this way, the terminally ill Marta moves away from her active position as an embowered artist figure and toward the more passive role of isolated muse, framed by the curtains of her bedroom window, watching her garden until she resigns herself to her deathbed.

As an artist, Marta’s sad progression is from expression to silence. Although Stepan is last seen caring for the garden, Marta places a tenuous sense of trust not in her garden, but in the wind to tell her story: “if as [the wind] crossed the land he said something of her life—that would be enough for her: the wind in his loneliness consoling himself in her, and she in his errant spirit” (175). Indeed, the writer-narrator implies in the opening chapter that Marta’s legacy and story (based originally in the garden) will not be sufficient to preserve Marta’s art and memory, as a written account is required: “Her full name: Maria Marta Yaramko. At least on her grave, hidden among the tall wild barley and meadow grass, on the wooden cross that barely rises clear, that’s what is written, letter after shaky letter, as if by a hand that scarcely knew how to write” (126). In the story, Roy positions the garden as the source of Marta’s expression: “for in a sense it *told* the real history of her life” (149, my emphasis). The hand-written revisions on Alan Brown’s typescript of his English translation reveal that originally Brown interpreted this line as “for it was, in a sense, the real history of her life” (Roy, “Exiles” 147), which is in keeping with Roy’s original French passage—“[ce jardin] était en quelque sorte la véritable histoire de sa vie” (“Un jardin au bout” 185). The subtle change from “was” to

“told” shifts the artistic agency away from Marta and onto the garden itself.²¹ The garden is no longer simply the artistic product, but rather becomes the story-teller, and an extremely vulnerable one at that, subject to the wind. Despite the connotative difference, this line is in keeping with a key aspect of Roy’s original story: the isolated prairie garden assumes a tenuous preeminence relative to Marta’s failing status and decline. Thus, while Marta is an inspiring female artist figure of maternal, selfless nurturing, she is also a figure of the past, ultimately denied the freedom, mobility, and agency that Roy implies are necessary for the female artist and the resiliency of her work. Whereas Marta dies alone, enclosed within her home and familial circumstance, the story of Marta’s garden survives not through the garden itself, but rather through the writer-narrator’s brief encounter and inspired re-telling of it. In light of the retrospective past tense that opens the first chapter of the story, the writer-narrator has clearly journeyed beyond this isolated domestic world and found a renewed purpose for her art, as she has become a teller of stories. Robinson notes that the use of this narrator is unusual: “Dans les trois avant-textes et le texte publié, une narratrice extra-homodiégétique apparaît dans le premier chapitre, puis cède la place à une narration à la troisième personne, procédé rarement utilisé dans l’oeuvre royenne” (65-66). In addition to employing this nameless writer-narrator, Roy frames “Garden in the Wind” also by including an introduction to her collection that recounts briefly her actual encounter with a woman planting flowers on the western prairies:

Garden in the Wind was born of a passing vision I had one day of a garden filled
with flowers at the very outer limit of cultivated territory, and of a woman working

²¹ The *Inventaire des archives personnelles de Gabrielle Roy* does not identify the hand-written changes in this particular typescript; however, in two other drafts of the translation, hand-written changes are identified as those of the editor, the translator (Alan Brown), and Gabrielle Roy (Ricard 42).

there, in the wind, . . . who looked up and followed me with a long, perplexed and supplicating gaze which never left my memory and never ceased to demand—for years and years—the thing we are all asking for, from the very depths of our silence: Tell about my life. (10)

What this double framing technique suggests is that on two levels (in the text and of the text), the narrator's (and Roy's) written account, and not the garden, becomes the ultimate source of expression for Marta, the artist-gardener. Clearly, the writer-narrator and Marta differ with respect to their relative expressive agency, but together these women both share in and promote a common artistic purpose by creating art that serves to nurture others in its attentiveness to family, heritage, and home.

5. Leaving the Garden and Gabrielle's Return "Home" Through Writing

The relationship between Marta and the writer-narrator in "Garden in the Wind" demonstrates Roy's understanding of the problematic position and role of the female artist divided between familial, nurturing work and the independent pursuit of self-expression. This dilemma relates, of course, to Roy's own self-portrayal as an uprooted young woman who struggles with conflicting loyalties to both herself and to others in *Enchantment and Sorrow*. In contrast to Marta's ultimately enclosed experience, the young Gabrielle departs from Century Cottage to continue her journey of artistic self-realization, just as the writer-narrator in "Garden in the Wind" has evidently travelled away from the isolation of Volhyn in order to pursue her craft and write Marta's story. Clearly, Roy advocates a liberated, mobile feminine artistry that is not forever situated in, or confined by, the domestic setting, yet continues to pay homage to it. For Roy, the female artist is necessarily informed by both her independent quest and the ever-present

pull of the domestic. In “Garden in the Wind,” Marta has no recourse except for the writer-narrator who captures and relates through words the value and purpose of this gardener-artist and the need to nurture origins and a sense of home. Through the pairing of Marta and the writer-narrator, and through her portrayal of a transformed and domestically attentive Gabrielle, Roy puts forth a model of the female artist that is closely aligned with the “relational” model of art as proposed by Adrienne Rich:

I want to make it clear that I am *not* saying in order to write well, or think well, it is necessary to become unavailable to others, or to become a devouring ego. This has been the myth of the masculine artist and thinker; and I do not accept it. But to be a female human being trying to fulfill traditional female functions in a traditional way *is* in direct conflict with the subversive function of the imagination. . . . There must be ways . . . in which the energy of creation and the energy of relation can be united.

(“When We Dead Awaken” 43)

The traditional bower genre perpetuates the “myth of the masculine artist” as a solitary, questing figure. Roy’s spatial construction of her characters is in keeping with this discrepancy between gendered experiences of freedom and independence. Whereas Alexandre and Pierre are free to pursue their respective self-reflection and painting in relative solitude and with minimal regard for the domestic and all that it entails, Gabrielle is not afforded this level of independence; hers is a relational art delimited by familial responsibility.

In the context of Roy’s autobiography, the independent female artist who leaves home to discover her abilities is at odds with gender expectations of continued familial involvement. Unlike Pierre and Alexandre, Gabrielle feels reproached by her neglect of seemingly inherent responsibilities. Guilt weighs on the young Gabrielle for having left

behind her mother, Mélina, and resurfaces when Gabrielle receives a letter during her stay at Century Cottage. The following reflections reveal the particular entrapment of this woman artist who is torn between solitary pursuits and familial obligation: “I always trembled when [Mélina’s] letters came, not because I was afraid of reading reproaches or complaints—there never were any—but because seeing her writing was enough to open the door to memories of all the suffering culminating in me. Surely I shouldn’t be the only one to escape, I would think, and I’d feel condemned to suffer, as if it were a duty” (329-30). As a narrative told in retrospect, Roy’s autobiography and especially her garden motif are shaped by her sense of feminine duty as Gabrielle’s mother figures largely in this journey toward self-realization. The other related and more compelling implication is the fact that Roy devises a path of maturation for her protagonist in which the successful author (Roy) nurtures and protects in an almost maternal fashion the character and role of the developing young writer (Gabrielle). Saint-Martin argues that through her mother characters, Roy “succeed[s] in transforming tenderness into a ‘literary quality’” (“Gabrielle Roy” 316). In fact, in Roy’s *oeuvre*, the “mother is an authentic artist” who “practices a subtle and suggestive art that relies on the power of images” (Saint-Martin, “Gabrielle Roy” 316). In *Enchantment and Sorrow*, Roy turns this strategy of “tenderness” onto herself, that is, her self-portrayal as a young woman coming to writing. This tenderness manifests itself largely through the domestic-styled bower scene and garden imagery. Roy’s preoccupation with being an exile and without roots combines with her characterization of the female artist as a nurturing and, above all, cultivating figure in order to construct the young Gabrielle as a woman whose domestic responsibility, while separated physically and practically from the home, takes the form

of a “written” continuance, as she creates a literary homage to family and heritage within her art.

The familial garden that looms largest in Roy’s memory and speaks directly to Roy’s preoccupation with creating a nurturing aspect to her writer’s role is that of her grandmother’s Manitoba home and garden. Through her reflections on her grandmother, Roy links the Gabrielle of the past to the mature, narrating voice of remembrance. Reminiscent of Marta’s own nurturing artistry and communal attentiveness, Roy’s grandmother “used to grow the same flowers in her garden that she’d had in Quebec” (*Enchantment* 17). From the “mansard roof” and chimney to the “plants around it, the home and garden proclaimed Quebec very loudly in Somerset, which in those days was at least half English” (*Enchantment* 35). This garden demarcates territory; it generates a “home-ground” synonymous with Roy’s familial, francophone identity. Unfortunately, the final image of this garden is one that Roy recalls encountering later in life when a more mature version of her Gabrielle character returns to visit Manitoba in a somewhat romantic quest for ruins. Roy relates her younger self finding a “tumble-down ruin,” “deserted and mournful,” “abandoned . . . crumbling” (*Enchantment* 35). With a sense of neglected, unfulfilled responsibility, Gabrielle feels “reproached” by the deserted original maternal home (*Enchantment* 35). In this scene, Gabrielle, having long ago uprooted herself in a search for her vocation, and Roy, the established writer reflecting on her career, visit this home of the past, and stand together in Roy’s narrative in a conflation of time. The dual perspective magnifies the problematic position faced by Gabrielle and Roy, as the female writer’s domestic and artistic roles seemingly counter one another. Thus, while the relatively younger Gabrielle contemplates the purchase of the property until her cousin questions, ““And what would you do with a house here when you live in

Quebec?” (35), Roy (as narrator) declares, “I knew that little house. This was the one I had more or less in mind when I wrote ‘My Almighty Grandmother’ in *The Road Past Altamont*” (34). This return to ruins, which occurs early on in the autobiography, foreshadows Gabrielle’s physical departure from her own mother’s home, the overwhelming sense of abandonment, and the ultimate purpose of her vocation—the literary preservation or “home-keeping” in words of her domestic legacy. Despite her past contemplation of the purchase of the property in order to preserve the structure and her memories, the mature Roy implies that in her role as writer, she has assumed domestic responsibilities of an alternative form, much like that of the narrator in “Garden in the Wind” who writes on Marta’s behalf.²²

In contrast to Marta’s enclosed experience and decline, Gabrielle’s departure from Century Cottage to continue her journey of self-discovery seems initially less contained, suggestive of Roy’s desire for a relatively more liberated feminine artistry not impeded by the domestic. Century Cottage may have provided a vital shelter for Gabrielle’s transformation, but Gabrielle must leave her idyllic bower in order to observe and write critically about the world. Esther Perfect unwittingly reveals in a comment to the young Gabrielle that the innocence of Century Cottage is not conducive to Gabrielle’s further development as a writer: “[Father Perfect has] lived in a kind of Garden of Eden and the woes of mankind haven’t touched him as they have most people. And there really isn’t much left to say about Eden once the story’s been told, is there?” (313). Deciding that “[t]here was no closing one’s eyes any longer” (343), Gabrielle leaves Century Cottage in

²² When the elderly Englishman who purchases the grandmother’s Somerset home dies, Roy writes in her autobiography that the last time she was in Manitoba she “came close to buying it” (35) because of her nostalgia, guilt, and what it represented. The final image of loss clearly resonates with the image of Marta’s garden in the wind: “But more than the crumbling house I’d so wanted to buy because it touched the very heart of my most precious memories, perhaps it was the sound of the wind that voiced all those generations of longing for a home so often sought and so often lost” (35-36).

order to confront the impending war. Although Gabrielle seems to be exiting a world of innocence—the domesticated, childhood Eden of Father Perfect—Roy qualifies Gabrielle’s entrance as a woman artist into a fallen world of experience. First, Roy carries the garden motif forward as a way of creating both continuity and subtle disruption between Gabrielle’s gendered and artistic roles. Rejecting the ease and shelter of the bower, Roy believes that a key responsibility in Gabrielle’s role as a writer is to expose herself to the mutability and disparity of the modern world. Rather than remaining the aspiring woman writer planted and protected within the safe domestic realm, Gabrielle becomes an artist confronted with a dangerous, unsettled milieu. Roy complicates her bower motif, then, upon Gabrielle’s return to London just prior to the outbreak of World War II, when Gabrielle describes walking through Hyde Park where men “were digging trenches”:

They . . . were mining beneath the world’s most lovingly nurtured lawns.

Sometimes a shovelful would splatter into a bed of flowers. Children brought there by their nannies were hugely entertained by the transformation of the gardens into a battlefield. Playing at throwing grenades, they were hurling lumps of mud in one another’s faces. Adults went this way and that, saying and seeing nothing. (*Enchantment* 345-46)

The “globes of clay” and “splatter” stand in sharp contrast to the cottage garden left behind by Gabrielle. Once a garden “lovingly nurtured” and a place where children were brought to play, Hyde Park becomes a veritable battlefield of destruction. Re-invoking the garden motif, Roy grounds the maturing Gabrielle in her vocation, but the extreme juxtaposition of garden images further clarifies the direction of the woman writer’s craft. That is, Gabrielle wants to be immersed in, rather than isolated from, her milieu,

observing first-hand as only the perceptive eyes of a writer can. The adults of Hyde Park may drift aimlessly, “saying and seeing nothing,” but Gabrielle is there to witness and relate.

As much as Roy is drawn to a garden of innocence as a means of naturalizing and protecting the tentative female artist, Roy wants neither her writing, nor the woman artist, to be entirely enclosed by it. Venturing forth into this turbulent setting, Gabrielle appears initially to launch on a more masculine quest, as the domestic bower and familial model no longer surround her. Roy reveals her continuing concern for gendered propriety and familial responsibility, however, as Roy concludes her narrative by using the domestic garden motif as a means of framing, and ideologically containing, her narrative of feminine independence and artistry. The garden is not utterly abandoned as it continues to characterize Roy’s writing and persona.

Following her European travels, Gabrielle decides to live and write in Montreal, rather than return to Manitoba, her mother, and her teaching career. While this step toward independence seems necessary for the pursuit of her writing, Gabrielle is now also keenly aware of the need to be “at home” as a woman artist. Costantino reflects on Gabrielle’s new Montreal setting and asks, “*Va-t-elle s’enraciner ici?*” (392). At first, the urban setting seems an utter contrast and departure from the domestic-styled garden, and Gabrielle appears to shirk family obligations, as she writes a reply to her mother to inform her that she will not be returning.²³ The solitariness of Gabrielle’s journalism and artistic career counters more traditional femininity that entails domestic involvement or a

²³ The content of Mélina’s letter upon her daughter’s arrival in Canada reveals the domestic responsibility expected of Gabrielle as a young, unattached woman: “*Mon enfant, . . . so you’re back in Montreal, not so far from home now. Home isn’t a house any more, of course, but with the bit of money I have left and what you’ll be earning [from teaching] we’ll be able to live pretty well, you’ll see. And with you so independent and me probably too possessive, I’ll try to get used to letting you lead your own life. I imagine I can expect you home soon. . . .*” (406).

teaching career. Roy works to naturalize her character's unconventional choices and her artistry, however, by casting her writing in a domestic and organic light. Montreal may not offer the profusion of flowers and security of Century Cottage, but it becomes a kind of alternative bower for Gabrielle—a domesticated urban haven where she cultivates her expression. Like Century Cottage, Montreal grants Gabrielle the “feeling of having come home” (410). The French “words and expressions of [her] people, of [her] mother and grandmother” comfort the solitary Gabrielle who rents an apartment across from Windsor train station (407). Moving her character from her childhood home of Manitoba, to the idyllic bower of Century Cottage, to the familiar Francophone surroundings of the city, Roy formulates a final description of her early writing in Montreal that concludes the entire trajectory of Roy's domestic garden motif. Working as a journalist for the farming publication *Bulletin des agriculteurs*, Gabrielle hones her talent for observation and pursues her own impulse for fiction, as she “began to build on the reveries germinated beside the old [Lachine] Canal [one] April evening” (410). In the original French edition, Roy writes “des rêveries nées ce soir d’avril au bord du vieux canal” (*La détresse* 505), which is not as clearly linked to the garden motif as the translated verb “germinate.” The French text conveys, nevertheless, an organic model of the springtime birth and growth of Gabrielle's writing. In the context of her earlier garden motif, Roy maintains a naturalized, gender-appropriate model of her art. In her newly adopted Montreal home, Gabrielle tends not only the garden of her writing, but also the garden of her familial heritage by immersing herself in French society and her native language. As the questing woman writer, Gabrielle has been once again “brought home.” Instilling in Gabrielle's writing a “natural,” nurturing quality, Roy somehow compensates for the unconventional

quest that took her away from family and leaves her haunted by the deserted home of her grandmother, the “wind . . . plucking at the vestiges of [the] garden” (*Enchantment* 36).

Chapter Four

“Eden itself, paradise indeed”: The Search for Fulfillment in Carol Shields’

Domestic Settings

In the previous chapters, I examine writers responding to or depicting dramatic upheavals and changes in their lives or the lives of their characters through both literal and figurative uses of the garden. Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill write about gardens and consistently use the rhetoric of cultivation in their works in keeping with their nineteenth-century milieu, but they also adapt their garden aesthetics and the figurative trope of the garden to accommodate the profound changes brought on by their emigration and pioneer experience in Upper Canada. Gabrielle Roy captures, on the other hand, a very different kind of journey of upheaval: that of the desire for female independence and a willed departure from the home. Examining her characters’ movement away from the home, rather than the desire to recreate it (as in the case of Moodie and Traill), Roy communicates the ambivalence of female artist figures who feel the pull of the domestic-situated life even as they long to move beyond it in their search for expression and personal growth. Roy’s domestic-styled bowers offer a reassuring vision of female artists as nurturing, virtuous, and family-oriented, while at the same time, Roy launches these artists on more typically masculine quests of self-development that occur beyond the home. Roy’s vision of the domestic (as somewhat static, innocent, and enclosed) and her presentation of the longing to move beyond its confines (in order to experience growth and mobility) are consistent with traditional polarizations of gendered domains. But can gardens function as more than transitional settings or confining static spaces with regard to women’s journeys toward expression and self-discovery?

Whereas Roy tends to bring her female artist figures “home” both physically (for temporary respites) and figuratively (by having them remain committed to family and nurturing work through their artistry), Carol Shields promotes domestic garden enclosures as settings in which her characters not only reside, but also journey. By focussing on women and men in their everyday surroundings, Shields’ and Roy’s fictions share a clear affinity. Indeed, in an interview, Shields credits Roy as one writer who inspired her to pursue domestic-focussed narratives: “It was a joy to find a writer such as Gabrielle Roy, and the fact that she grew up in Manitoba made her even more of a model; she gave me courage to trust the stories of ordinary people” (Hollenberg 340). For Shields, home is the on-going site and ultimate objective of narrative. Rather than being static or stultifying, Shields’ fictional homes and gardens are highly dynamic and integral to a character’s ongoing development and journey. Whereas Roy emphasizes the ambivalent experience of the female artist through the much-desired physical departure from the domestic bower and the home’s continuing pull and presence within a woman’s art, Shields promotes the relative permanence of home and garden as both setting and symbol, infusing the domestic garden “home” with significance as an inescapable part of her characters and their destinies. In a figurative sense, then, the realization of “home” in Shields’ fiction is the realization of a mode of being in which characters experience personal fulfillment and a profound sense of self all within their quotidian surroundings.

In promoting the domestic setting as dynamic, symbolic, and capable of facilitating growth and journey, Shields challenges more traditional categories of gendered space within narrative. In *The Sacred and the Feminine: Toward a Theology of Housework*, Kathryn Rabuzzi summarizes the spatial polarization between outside (the

world) and inside (the home) as indicative of the different modes of being for men and women:

In a traditional society, it is understood that a man will go out into the world, or quest. . . . Implicitly, whether he quests for material goods, love, or spiritual boons, his life necessitates self-initiated movement from one place or condition to another. Simply the act of going out of the house each day—even if only to his nearby shop—gives movement, hence a sense of progress or change, to his day. And if he literally journeys, this motion is all the more pronounced. . . .

Waiting is reaction rather than initiation of action. It is a mode of existence that automatically constrains those forced to endure it to be dependent upon someone or something other than themselves. By definition, waiting implies that someone or something is being awaited. Thus to wait is to place that someone or something as the goal of your existence during the time of waiting. (144-45)

Women's traditional mode of being—or "waiting" within the home—is clearly related in classical myth and medieval literature, as Rabuzzi points to both the virtuous Penelope weaving and unweaving a shroud during her husband Odysseus's twenty-year absence and the patient Griselda whose husband tests her continually in "The Clerk's Tale" in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (143). As domestic-styled enclosures of routine, Roy's bowers facilitate in a similar way this mode of waiting: the young Gabrielle writes in accordance with Esther Perfect's daily routine and waits for the inevitable outbreak of war that signals her time to leave Century Cottage. If this conventional spatial polarization of stasis and waiting within the home, versus change and movement outside the home, is to be challenged, then an author such as Shields must illuminate women's traditional mode of being so that growth, change, and progress are

made visible. Furthermore, the home and garden must serve as dynamic settings, becoming both the site and ultimate destination of the personal journey itself.

This “domestic” mandate is by no means a simple one to fulfill. When reflecting on the topic of her writing, Shields admits, “I continue to worry about my chosen subject of home and family, always imagining it might be read as a retreat from real issues” (“About” 262). Ultimately, Shields concludes, however, that “we all possess a domestic space” and that “within this domestic arc . . . we express the greater part of our consciousness” (“About” 262). Shields writes, “It is simply this: that language that carries weight in our culture is very often fuelled by a search for home, our rather piteous human groping toward that metaphorical place where we can reach out and touch and heal each other’s lonely heart” (“About” 262). Shields believes that the “search for home” is the most relevant and valued story in literature, but she recognizes also that not all stories are equally “weighted,” especially those stories that do not take their shape from the more popular or conventional narrative forms.

In “Narrative Hunger and the Overflowing Cupboard,” Shields contends that although “stories . . . sustain our culture” they also “correspond or fail to correspond with our lives” (19)—the reason being that only certain privileged individuals are able to tell stories, and formal devices such as generic conventions and the popularity of the linear narrative of rising action, climax, and falling action (28) restrict the kinds of stories that are told. This concern features prominently in Shields’ fiction, particularly in her novel *The Stone Diaries*, which manipulates voice and forms of narrative. In Shields’ view, alternative kinds of stories need to be told and re-valued despite their non-conformity to the narrow spectrum of the readily available narratives and genres; otherwise, the loss is incomprehensible and “narrative hunger” remains:

I recently read a book called *Ruby: An Ordinary Woman*, made up of diary extracts of one Ruby Aliside, so ordinary a woman that you probably would not recognize her name. The diary spans the years between 1909 and 1969. They were rescued by a granddaughter and put into print. How many other such accounts go to the dump? Accounts that like Ruby's will change forever the way we think of women's lives during that period? ("Narrative Hunger" 31)

Drawn to, and locating value in, such stories as *Ruby*, Shields is by her own admission interested in "gender, and the creative life and folklore and stories that women tell" (D'Souza 16). Thus, whereas Roy takes her female artists out of the home and bower in a quest for independence and personal, artistic growth, Shields returns both male and especially, female characters to it, so as not to deny the creative force and energy rooted in domestic-situated work and lives. Shields' writing of the domestic is, therefore, a recuperative gesture, as she refuses to allow women's quotidian lives and stories to "go to the dump" literally and figuratively. Instead, Shields strives to grant the domestic a dynamic presence and value within the literary tradition, and she achieves this through a recurring paradise motif.

1. Paradise as Ideal Setting and Mode of Being

If the literary tradition needs to open to the possibility of alternative myths and stories in order to counter the "narrative hunger" that Shields perceives in terms of the recounting of women's lives and the importance of home, Shields reaches, ironically enough, for one of the most enduring and central myths in literature and Judeo-Christian culture: the myth of paradise and humanity's related search for fulfillment. In drawing on the narrative and symbol of paradise, Shields makes a daring but also highly appropriate

choice with regard to her artistic, feminist mandate—after all, what is the search for paradise if not the search for the ideal home? Indeed, as Genesis states, man and woman “have dominion over . . . every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (1.28). This paradisaal “dominion” refers to Adam and Eve’s ownership over Eden’s creatures and plants, but also intimates that Eden is their “domain,” or as John Milton interprets it, their “happy rural seat” (4.247). Turning to what can only be the most idealized, mythologized garden and adapting it to her own fictional treatment of the mundane and the ordinary (the middle-class, suburban lives of women and men), Shields makes a bold statement in terms of reclaiming and sanctifying the domestic. Shields applies this preeminent garden image and story to those narratives that have been silenced, deemed irrelevant, or thrown out with the trash. This celebration of the home as both a literal and symbolic paradise is neither a return to innocence, nor a move toward simplistic idealization. On the contrary, Shields takes a highly critical approach, indicating her characters’ freedoms and restrictions in their journeys toward their realizations of paradisaal “homes” within the spaces of their daily domestic lives and their various modes of being. Thus in her fiction, Shields strikes a difficult balance, acknowledging the problematic aspects of the home as a setting for women’s lives and narratives, while at the same time reasserting the home as a central place and symbol behind her characters’ search for personal fulfillment.

Like the bower, the concept of paradise is tied to the traditions of the *hortus conclusus* and *locus aoemenus* in that it is an enclosed, idealized, and pleasurable place. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, the etymology of “paradise” derives from the Old Persian word *pairidaēza*, which originally referred to “an enclosed park, orchard, or pleasure ground” (“Paradise”). Although “paradise” has acquired clear religious connotations in its signification of the Garden of Eden, the heavenly paradise of

the afterlife, and even the enclosed garden of a convent, the secular applications of the word remain prevalent ("Paradise"). "Paradise" can refer to a place "of surpassing beauty or delight, or of supreme bliss" and communicates in a figurative sense "a state of supreme bliss or felicity" ("Paradise"). While the term "Eden" and particularly its adjectival form "edenic" can also suggest a "delightful abode or resting place, a paradise; a state of supreme happiness," the distinction between "paradise" and "Eden" lies in "Eden's" potentially more specific reference to the original "abode of Adam and Eve at their Creation" ("Eden"). "Paradise" is a more fluid term, therefore, as it can refer to the Garden of Eden, heaven, a locale of extraordinary beauty, or a state of supreme pleasure and happiness.

Together, the literal and symbolic levels of meaning of "paradise" serve in the expression of the paradise myth. Clare Cooper Marcus notes that most "paradise myths embrace one or both of two themes: a hidden sanctuary that holds something of great value, such as wisdom, immortality, grace, or happiness; and a quest or journey to this hidden place, the journey . . . transforming the traveler" (30). In his epic recounting of the loss of Eden, Milton incorporates this notion of a quest or journey in his characterization of Satan and, to a lesser extent, Adam and Eve. The Miltonic Satan is an epic anti-hero battling heaven's angels, travelling in search of Eden, and bounding over the walls of this enclosed garden in order to wreak havoc upon God's creation (4.172-83). As for Adam and Eve, their journey and quest begins with the Fall and their expulsion from Eden (which is the conclusion of *Paradise Lost*), as repentance and Christ's redemption will lead humankind back to a heavenly paradise now that the earthly one is lost:

They looking back, all th' eastern side beheld

Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,

.....

They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow,

Through Eden took their solitary way. (Milton 12.641-49)

In these two related but diametrically opposed quests, the goal and destination is Paradise, and Milton grants readers a glimpse of this goal as an ideal abode or resting place of supreme harmony and fulfillment. In *The Architecture of Paradise: Survivals of Eden and Jerusalem*, William Alexander McClung concurs that the “search for Paradise is . . . an effort to discover the correct relationship between man, nature, and craft” (2).

Whether religious or secular, this quest culminates usually in the location of a walled garden—the wall being not only “a condition of [Eden’s] survival in the postlapsarian world,” but also the function of a desire for absolute contentment and pleasure: “The power of the walled garden as a figure seems to depend more on its walls than on the garden within them. If paradise is the place of fulfillment and enclosed places are the most fulfilled, then the phenomenology of the walled garden is explicitly paradisaical, no matter if the kind of fulfillment happens to be spiritual or merely erotic” (McClung 41). Clearly, the enclosed perfection that is paradise constitutes a self-sustaining environment where all needs are fulfilled by supreme fecundity.

As an enclosed, perfectly fulfilled place, paradise offers not just a place of perfection but also an ideal mode of being to its inhabitants. For instance, John Armstrong equates the garden’s supreme, idyllic nature with the state of Adam and Eve; they are “creatures of unsullied goodness, who are completely fulfilled and have no vacuity in their lives or cause for restlessness” (3). Paradise is not solely a spatial concept, but has additional figurative applications. Just as paradise is a site of fulfillment,

so too is the partnership of Adam and Eve. Part of Adam and Eve's shared contentment—their idyllic mode of being—is the fact that together, Adam and Eve create their own “paradise” of daily companionship. In Genesis, Eve is created as Adam's “help meet” (2.18) and together “they shall be one flesh” (2.24). In terms of the Miltonic Adam, there are supposedly “no deficiencies found” (8.415-16), but the Divine deems that it is “not good for man to be alone” (8.445). Milton creates a veritable domestic scene of marital bliss and partnership, housed most ideally and symbolically within Adam and Eve's “nuptial bow'r” (8.510). In addition to the “paradise” of Adam and Eve's sexual union, the couple's complementary roles facilitate an ideal domestic world. Eve's role is “to study household good” (Milton 9.233). For Adam and Raphael, Eve “prepare[s] / For dinner savory fruits” (Milton 5.303-04), and at the table “Ministered naked, and their flowing cups / With pleasant liquors crowned” (Milton 5.443-45). In light of this partnered vision of a domestic paradise, it is important to note that as much as Shields sees writing as “the search for home,” she contends also, when reflecting on her novel *The Republic of Love*, that “there is a part of human need that involves a search for the other, that ultimate intimacy” (Anderson 139). In much of Shields' fiction, finding companionship is central to discovering that sense of “home” and personal fulfillment. Indeed, just as Adam laments the unbearable prospect of living alone in Eden (“to lose thee were to lose myself”) following Eve's biting of the apple (Milton 9.955-59), Larry's father Stu in Shields' *Larry's Party* cannot fathom a life without his wife Dot after she accidentally kills her mother-in-law with botulism-ridden beans, “that treasonous vegetable” (53). Stu “uproot[s] himself” and leaves behind “all that was familiar” (52) in his original home in England and moves to Winnipeg out of love for his wife, as their “flight from the home country has the flavor of Old Testament exodus” following Stu's

father's grief-stricken accusations against Dot (52). Clearly, paradise denotes an ideal garden domain (whether the original Eden or another abode) where a human subject's desires and needs are fulfilled in the shared presence of a partner.

The features of paradise—the idyllic shelter, the harmony of one's work with one's environment, the fulfillment of one's needs and desires, and the intimacy of companionship—appear very similar to that of the fecundity, artistic inspiration, spatial intimacy, and pleasure that are typically associated with a traditional bower. Certainly, in *Paradise Lost*, Eden and the bower are interchangeable. Milton's Eden is not just “an enclosure green” (4.133) with “goodliest trees loaden with fairest fruit” (4.147), but also a “blissful bower” (4.690) with a “verdant wall” (4.697) where “flowers, garlands, and sweet-smelling herbs” (4.709) surround the shady retreat of a nuptial bed that rests on a floor “[b]roidered” with flowers (4.702). Milton synthesizes the paradise and bower tropes, as Adam and Eve inhabit two types of gardens simultaneously. A more immediate example of the conflation between these two types of gardens with respect to this study can be seen when Roy explicitly refers to her Century Cottage bower as a veritable “Garden of Eden” (*Enchantment* 313). Roy idealizes her bower supremely through this allusion to paradise, yet she concludes that this setting is but a temporary one. In his overview of the various constructions of paradise through centuries of art and literature, McClung suggests that in the romance narrative, secular paradises transform into bowers in terms of their form, temporal function, and perceived significance. Pointing to such gardens as Acrasia's Bower of Bliss in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, McClung argues, “In the Renaissance the Edenic garden loses even its claim to being a voyager's ultimate destination. [These] other worldly gardens . . . are the culminating paradise-gardens of secular literature: metaphors of states of mind, moral gardens and structures

rather than transcendent ones, through which heroes pass en route to their real destinies” (41). McClung’s conclusion regarding the temporary nature of secular paradise gardens concurs in some ways with Milton’s earthly paradise and in a large part with Roy’s bowers of innocence. For Milton, the incorporation of the bower trope within Eden seems appropriate since this original Eden is a fleeting one, utterly lost through Adam and Eve’s eating of the forbidden fruit. As for Roy, the secular, bowery “Eden” of *Century Cottage* continues in the romance tradition as described by McClung by serving as a temporary locale of transformation in a young Gabrielle’s journey toward self-realization. Even Marta’s prairie garden has the extraordinary appeal of paradise (though Roy does not make an explicit comparison) yet remains a temporary bower setting through which both Marta and the writer-narrator pass as they continue on their respective journeys toward death and the renewal of self-expression.

The secularization of the paradise myth results in a temporary respite and an ideal mode of being for the questing figure, which are reflected in the idyllic garden setting he or she occupies. But this temporality also points to, as Armstrong suggests, a somewhat troubling feature of the myth of the original Paradise of Adam and Eve: “the idea of life in a paradisaal garden, whether sacred or profane, an endless prospect of harmony and repose, strikes us as a most oppressive one, unless we think of this existence as a short fleeting phase of equilibrium” (4). Armstrong argues that in Milton’s epic, Adam and Eve’s innocent state (particularly their innocent love-making) seems appealing only because readers see Eden through the threatening gaze of Satan; the scene is “energized by the passionate force of Satan’s commentary” (111). Thus, both the bower genre and the paradise myth rely on the fleeting quality of their idyllic spaces in order to make them more appealing precisely because of the sheer unsustainable quality of these locales and

the modes of being they facilitate. The irony is that natural perfection soon becomes *unnatural* in its perfection because there can be no growth, change, or decline.¹ The permanent paradise is, in fact, one of unappealing stasis. For example, Esther Perfect observes that the innocence and magical comfort of Century Cottage cannot evolve as “there isn’t really much to say about Eden once the story’s been told” (*Enchantment* 313). Gabrielle realizes her true vocation in this perfect environment, but her character can only grow and evolve by moving beyond this innocent, static garden that seems unresponsive to the upheaval of the fast approaching war.

In a similar but not identical way to the bower genre, the paradise myth incorporates notions of enclosure, temporality, and the prospect of a journey; where the paradise myth differs, however, is in its intimations of “ultimate destination” and “real destinies” where there is the potential for a more lasting realization of fulfillment in a final, ideal “home” (McClung 41). As Marcus contends, with the loss of Eden, the paradisaal home is the goal and final destination of this myth: “The garden was where God first created order out of chaos; it was the home of the first man and woman. But the Garden of Eden, the place where we had our beginnings, was also Paradise, the place to which we would return. The myth of origin became fused with a myth of blissful homecoming” (26). With respect to this emphasis on journey and the ultimate destination, Shields seems very much at odds with the traditional conventions of this myth, particularly since she positions and keeps her characters at home. Shields’ interest

¹ Shields hints at this unnatural perfection when in *The Republic of Love*, she writes that “McDougal Hall was a kind of paradise” in the Department of Home Economics at the University of Manitoba (2). As an institutional “paradise” and not a real, imperfect home, McDougal Hall is a “practice house” fully equipped with the most modern conveniences (3). As a baby, the male protagonist Tom Avery is housed under the “maternal” care of the 27 home economic students of McDougal Hall when he is temporarily without his mother. Here in the “practice house,” baby Tom is given everything he needs; and with his diaper checked hourly, Tom becomes the “cleanest, brightest, most polished, ventilated, and smiled upon infant west of the Red River, maybe in the whole world” (3).

rests with more permanent occupations, the ongoing habitation of the home and garden. As Shields observes, “Domesticity is like breathing. It goes on and on” (De Roo 44). But because the “language that carries weight in our culture is very often fuelled by a search for home,” as Shields believes, then she must revise conventional understandings of what this “search” entails in the formation of her own stories of paradise (“About Writing” 262). Shields admits that she is not interested in a typical understanding of a linear plot focused on a climactic moment, but rather narratives that take place in small spaces, or “plots,” and illuminate quotidian lives.² Thus, in her writing of the search for home and her use of the paradise myth, Shields reclaims the home from its traditional association with stasis even as she works to capture its quotidian nature, re-imagining it as a thoroughly dynamic space in both a literal and figurative sense. Shields’ writing of the sanctification of the domestic portrays different and not always successful expressions of paradise that operate on both actual and symbolic levels. Shields does not simply equate home with paradise, but rather presents home as an evolving place and a symbol of the possibility of personal fulfillment and supreme bliss for her characters. Shields facilitates this “residential” quest for paradise through the physical appearance of her fictional homes and the fleeting, transcendental modes of being that her characters experience as they come “home” to their own identity and personal fulfillment. Shields achieves this complicated celebration not through the obvious temporality of the bower, but through the most preeminent and enduring garden image—paradise itself.

² In an interview, Shields explains her attraction to life writing as a genre that is not always determined by linear progression: “Yes, I am always interested in biographies—the idea of trying to catch a life in some way. The arc of a whole life when it curves. I don’t think in terms of plot very much, very little in fact, but I think that the arc of the human life is a plot and it is enough plot, for me” (Maharaj 11).

2. The Creation of Domestic Worlds

Before I examine how Shields integrates the paradise myth and a garden motif with her fictional domestic settings, it is first crucial to understand Shields' perceptions of the home as a site of tremendous significance central to her characters' daily lives and their own creative impulse. When questioned in an interview about the primacy of the domestic in her fiction, Shields comments,

I suppose I start with the assumption that everyone in the world has a domestic life. A bed to sleep in. A bowl to eat from. Walls and windows. Something to provide light. These things, which have to be secured and maintained, are comforting but they're much more than that. More than anything else they locate us in time and space. Perhaps domesticity's ubiquitous and essential nature is the reason it is missing from so much of our literature. . . . (De Roo 44)

The minute details of characters' surroundings are of the utmost importance to Shields. Her domestic settings serve not only to assist in characterization and to offer familiarity, but also, and perhaps most importantly, to create veritable worlds of quotidian life. When Shields speaks of wanting to "locate us in time and space," she presents a vision of the domestic that echoes Gaston Bachelard's and Rabuzzi's models of the home and its spatial effects as integral to the human subject's self-awareness and understanding of his or her world. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard argues that the house is "our corner of the world. . . . our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (4). Shields' reflections on the importance of the domestic in her fiction resonate with Bachelard's appreciation of the home's omnipresence in daily life and inherent value for the individual. This "first universe" of the home creates, shapes, and contains a person's life; it is, as Shields puts it, "like breathing."

For Bachelard, the domestic “cosmos” operates simultaneously on two levels: the literal and the figurative. Bachelard urges his reader to think about how this quotidian space is formulated not simply through floor plans or dimensions, but through memory, imagination, and even housework; this space “cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measure and estimates of the surveyor” (xxxvi). In terms of the role of the homemaker, the prospect of seeing the home as a “real cosmos” holds tremendous implications. Both Bachelard and Rabuzzi argue that although a home may function as a social space for family, at the centre of its design and creation is the personal work and vision of the primary homemaker, traditionally a woman. Emphasizing the power of women’s domestic labour, Rabuzzi uses the term “cosmization” to describe the process women put into action through their domestic work and creative will: “Few would deny that historically most women in Western culture have been both secluded and excluded from what many individuals construe as ‘the world,’ meaning by that term the world of masculine affairs. But in a far larger sense even the most traditional women have been in contact with ‘the world,’ have, in fact, been free to create it” (105). Rabuzzi sees women’s cosmos-creating force operating through what appears on the surface to be basic domestic tasks, such as arranging a room:

[A] housewife . . . create[s] and participate[s] in a symbolic space of her own as well as to create and order an environment for her family. Whereas, on the surface, a woman . . . may simply appear to be straightening her living room, she may actually be enacting her own psychic environment. As she sorts, cleans, and rearranges, she is able to externalize her inner need for order. (101-02)

When a woman sorts and arranges her home, she is in effect creating order out of chaos through personal, creative decisions. Through this homemaking activity, the entire home

becomes, in Rabuzzi's view, a veritable example of Virginia Woolf's "room of her own" (101); it is a bold allusion, but Rabuzzi insists on the tremendous expressive potential located in the process of homemaking and the space it creates.

This view of the home as an artistic, personal forum echoes Anne Giardini's own description of her mother's (Shields') perceptions of domestic settings as integral sites and sources of inspiration within her fiction. Reflecting on her mother's novels and in particular *A Fairly Conventional Woman*, Giardini feels that Shields roots her characters firmly in the everyday to the point that their experiences and surroundings function together as a unit; one cannot exist without the other:

I am not surprised by the fact that Brenda Bowman's delight in her completed quilts is eclipsed by the joy of her yellow quilt room, with its hooked rug and earthenware mugs. The quilts and the setting in which they were brought into being are of a piece, much as my mother's novels and the setting in which they were created are of a piece. My mother takes one foot off the ground, rarely both.

(11)

For Brenda Bowman, artistry is not limited to her craft—her quilting—but extends to the arrangement of her home and the appealing, personalized order she creates. For both Bachelard and Rabuzzi the microcosmic world that is home is a composite creation—a mixing together of the imagination, memory, and physical housework. Bachelard and Rabuzzi engender housework as feminine and see women as creators, manipulating and arranging their household environments for both themselves and others. This ongoing creative process instills women with substantial power and influence, and Bachelard goes as far as to suggest that housework can actually reanimate the domestic world—which

encompasses everything from a piece of furniture, to a single room, to the house as a whole:

Objects that are cherished . . . are born of an intimate light, and they attain to a higher degree of reality than indifferent objects, or those that are defined by geometric reality. For they produce a new reality of being, and they take their place not only in an order but in a community of order. From one object in a room to another, housewifely care weaves the ties that unite a very ancient past to the new epoch. The housewife awakens furniture that was asleep. (68)

The creative genesis that is homemaking, as Bachelard theorizes, is central to Shields' fictional homemakers and their various attempts to realize "paradise" in physical and/or symbolic ways. Like Bachelard and Rabuzzi, Shields constructs and celebrates the home as a foundational, expressive world for her characters. In Shields' fiction, then, the home not only operates as a place, but also manifests "new realities of being" for her characters as they search for moments of supreme bliss and profound personal fulfillment.

While Shields celebrates the domestic, critics of her work are not, however, always so willing to applaud her fictional "cosmoses" where women assume the seemingly unremarkable role of homemaker. Having one foot on the ground when that ground is kitchen linoleum is a position not always viewed as progressive, particularly when feminists reflect upon women's lives and the search for equality both within and beyond the home. When critics scrutinize Shields' interest in the domestic milieu, their negative judgments are usually founded upon conventional perceptions of the home as a static, uninformative site—a place where no sense of journey, change, or fulfillment is possible. In "Still in the Kitchen: The Art of Carol Shields," an article whose very title associates waiting and stagnation with the domestic, Laura Groening writes that "to call

Shields a feminist . . . is to place her distinctive fiction in an alien land” (14). Although she credits Shields with “celebrat[ing] the world of a certain kind of woman who is perhaps under-regarded in today’s world” (14), Groening takes Shields to task for her idealization of homemakers and mothers who are dedicated to their families because, in doing so, Shields consistently mocks feminist characters as “shallow,” “neurotic,” and “lack[ing] a sense of humour” (17). In Groening’s estimation, Shields’ domestic focus proclaims a lack of interest in gender reform: “Shields simply has no use for instruments of social change” (17). Groening is correct in highlighting Shields’ recurring parody of feminist characters, but Groening fails to acknowledge that for Shields, the home can be a site of resistance, freedom, and transformation.

Shields’ presentation of the domestic as an omnipresent, dynamic setting that facilitates journey and personal fulfillment can, in and of itself, be viewed as a revolutionary act. Shields has never viewed the domestic as neutral, apolitical territory, especially during the early years of her writing career. According to Giardini, her mother “took the stuff around her and made it into fiction. . . . [and] she was especially brave to do this. . . . The late ’60s and early ’70s were turbulent times, even in Canada. Still, [Shields] was convinced that there was sufficient drama in her circumscribed domestic and literary settings to captivate a reader and fill two hundred pages” (11). Shields admits in an interview that during the early years of her career, her focus on the home was quite out of fashion with the growing feminist political scene at the time: “I wanted to write a novel about women who were intelligent and loyal. This was the 70s, during the women’s movement, [*sic*] women were leaving home and not having children. . . . I wrote the book I always wanted to read . . . but could not find” (D’Souza 16). By counteracting the erasure of women’s quotidian lives both within contemporary fiction and within the

more specific politicized milieu of the latter decades of the twentieth century, Shields' writing of home is a recuperative gesture on two fronts. As a feminist, Shields refuses to cast the domestic purely as a site of imprisonment, stagnancy, waiting, or as a simplistically idealized and innocent paradise. Having recognized her own political "awakening," Shields brings her feminist consciousness to bear on her intelligent construction of the sanctity of the domestic.³ Shields' "awakening" as a woman and feminist writer suggests a kind of fortunate fall out of innocence and naiveté. Thus, when Shields approaches her writing as a search for paradise within the home, she is particularly attentive to exploring a full range of "paradises": those that are naïvely constructed and superficial, and those founded upon genuine self-knowledge and profundity.

In her celebration of the domestic world and women's traditional homemaking work, Shields appreciates that the home is a problematic physical and conceptual space for women as it is a space of continual social mediation and restrictions on the self. As much as women exhibit personal, creative agency by directing and enacting "cosmization" within their homes, the never-ending maintenance of that world and the dictates of external expectations and values encroach upon women's freedom and spatial quests for meaningful expression and fulfillment. Rabuzzi may describe the home as a creative space or "room of one's own" for the homemaker, but there are both physical and ideological obstacles to the pursuit of personal expression when that expression is situated in a site of daily responsibilities and tasks that cater to others' needs. In Shields' personal experience and in her novels, the demands of the domestic world encumber women's

³ Shields credits the work of Betty Friedan with her own feminist awakening as a young mother in the 1960s: "I didn't quite ever doze off quite the same again" (Wachtel, "Interview" 20).

various expressive desires creating a schism between the two “rooms” of creativity: homemaking and art. Giardini notes, for example, that domestic obligations left little space for her mother for other kinds of artistry: “[Shields] always had ‘a room of her own,’ but that room was in the house and the door could not be barred from the inside. She had few hours of her own” (10). As a young mother with five children striving for a successful writing career, Shields “claims to have done all [her] preliminary [writing] work while washing dishes and cooking meals and folding laundry. She also had reflective moments in the midst of the chaotic family activity, when she would pull out a small spiral-bound notebook and write something down” (Giardini 10). In *A Fairly Conventional Woman*, one of the quilting conference participants laments explicitly the lack of time for the pursuit of her art: “‘What I mean is, how much time does the average woman get to spend pursuing anything? She can’t afford to make a false start and begin over again. If she’s an artist of any kind, . . . then she’s expected to do her stuff between loads of wash’” (89). Clearly, domestic duties impinge on other creative activities. But in cases where homemaking is, itself, the means of expression, the home can also desist from being that “room” of personal reflection and creativity and, instead, become a forum of societal and familial expectations.

Shields invests tremendous value in the domestic work of women that is cooking, gardening, cleaning, and arranging, yet she also critiques the creative freedom and “cosmization” agency possessed by homemakers. If homemaking facilitates a potential domestic paradise, then there are clear obstacles that jeopardize its genuine realization. According to Rabuzzi, women’s creative experience within the home can be curtailed by external influences, particularly the ideals of consumerism. Pointing to women’s magazines, such as *Woman’s Day* or *Good Housekeeping*, Rabuzzi argues that a woman

“vicariously enters the imagined dimension of some other, usually totally anonymous woman” (118), and as the woman consumer aspires to these ideals, she risks her own individual expression. The homemaker’s “cosmos” ceases to be personal, intimate territory and instead becomes absent of genuine, authentic meaning: “Indeed, when consuming objects becomes a replacement for self-worth, substituting external props for internal strengths, consumption is as negative as any other form of escapism. In this regard a major argument often leveled against . . . consumerism, is that it is anticreative” (119). Rabuzzi’s argument and Shields’ fictional depictions of women reverberate with Betty Friedan’s ground-breaking book *The Feminine Mystique*, a text to which Shields refers frequently in interviews as having a profound influence on her feminist vision and writing.⁴ Friedan argues that media and cultural images of American women from the 1950s and 1960s demanded that women fulfill their feminine nature or “mystique” to the point that their lives were closed to other possibilities. Their domestic work was transformed “into a religion, a pattern by which all women must now live or deny their femininity” (37-38). Shields’ portrayals of a number of her female characters as avid consumers of *Better Homes and Gardens* echo Friedan’s and Rabuzzi’s arguments that the creativity and originality of homemaking can be replaced with the unimaginative and the banal. In *Happenstance*, Brenda Bowman reads “‘How to Put the Essential You in Your Home’” (27)—an article that reappears in *The Stone Diaries* when Daisy Flett

⁴ In an interview with Joan Thomas, Shields mentions a definite connection between how she conceived of *The Stone Diaries* and the argument behind *The Feminine Mystique*: “[Daisy] settled for exactly what she was offered, without ever forming the sentence parts for ‘I want . . .’ She believed what the women’s magazine said about women’s work. She absorbed, unquestioningly, the notion of what a woman’s life might consist of, its rewards, its bargains. If only one person had said to her: Your life is your own and there is work you can do. (A lot of women never heard this articulated before *The Feminine Mystique* was published)” (81).

follows religiously the advice given in “‘Putting the Essential You into Your Décor” (194).⁵ The commercialized, dictatorial nature of these articles leaves Shields’ characters feeling devoid of personal artistry within their homes. In fact, Shields describes Brenda’s decision to take up quilting in order to foster a rewarding means of expression as a “frenzied half-conforming, half-angry reaction to the many women’s magazines she seemed to read at the time” (*Happenstance* 27). Clearly, Shields problematizes the home as a site infiltrated by commercial ideals, and ultimately suggests that domestic space requires a genuinely personal element and depth beyond superficial, conforming appearances. In other words, the inhabitants of the home must realize their creative abilities in order to bring about the actual and symbolic realization of paradise—the complex integration of a place and a mode of being that results in supreme fulfillment.

Like Milton’s indomitable Satan who advocates free will in his statement, “The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heav’n of hell, a hell of heav’n” (1.254-55), Friedan argues for women’s agency, believing that “women can affect society, as well as be affected by it; that in the end, a woman, as a man, has the power to choose, and to make her own heaven or hell” (10). Friedan implies that “heaven” is best sought through a life beyond the confines of the home and the unfulfilling, conformist role of the suburban housewife. Rabuzzi, on the other hand, believes that as a potentially sacred space, the home can be fulfilling even during the twentieth century on the condition that women are self-directed: “As a major aspect of ritual housework, cosmization attempts to create or renew wholeness” (105). Of course, Rabuzzi’s references to renewal and “wholeness” subscribe to the rhetoric of paradise, which Shields also employs in her

⁵ Wendy Roy notes the lack of originality in Daisy’s use of the decorating ideas taken from this same article from *Canadian Homes and Gardens* magazine when Daisy makes a coffee table display of family photographs (136).

fiction. While Shields appreciates the problematic nature of the domestic for women, she remains steadfast in her promotion of the home's overwhelming significance for all individuals and the potential fulfillment it offers. Thus, Shields chooses willfully to locate paradise in the domestic because of what she perceives to be the literal and symbolic importance of "home" to both her male and, especially, female characters. Her celebratory, ideal domestic settings are not naïve in their constructions, however, since Shields' enclosures encompass all the dilemmas, deficiencies, and beguiling "serpents" readers come to expect with stories of paradise. When Shields invokes paradise and its ideals—specifically the ideals of a beautiful domain and a mode of being tied to fulfillment and companionship—she employs a double vision, revealing both what is, and what is not, genuine and fulfilling. Thus, Shields' paradise motif incorporates both celebration and criticism, enabling Shields not to foreclose on the home's narrative potential or relevance as one of the most complicated, dynamic sites for her characters' personal quests for fulfillment.

3. Gardens as Illuminating Spaces in Shields' Middle-Class Suburbia

Shields' commitment to writing fiction that is preoccupied with a domestic setting means more than describing bowls and walls; it almost always means depicting a garden. Gardens have a strong, persistent presence in Shields' writing and these spaces are intimately linked to domesticity. In an interview, Shields states, "I have tended to . . . take my passions and give them to my characters"; one of these passions is gardening: "I'm interested in living things, I'm interested in plants" (Ying 14). Shields' fictional garden settings range from the small and unimaginative to the expansive and highly intricate. In her first novel *Small Ceremonies*, the protagonist Judith laments the "flat

rectangle” of grass that is her sparse backyard and yearns for a “garden drunk with roses, criss-crossed with paths, moist, shady, secret” (17). In contrast with this plain, geometric garden, Daisy Goodwill Flett’s elaborate garden in *The Stone Diaries* is a veritable work of art. Similarly, in *Larry’s Party*, Larry Weller spends an inordinate amount of time constructing his first garden maze of complex twists and turns in his backyard to the point that his wife, Dorrie, puts an end to his “maze craze (as Dorrie calls it)” by hiring a backhoe to destroy the arrangement (71). Shields’ avid gardeners take great pride in their green spaces and view their work as integral to their daily lives and creative expression. Indeed, in Shields’ final novel, *Unless*, Reta Winters finds comfort in the usual task of caring for her garden, ordering “four yards of screened bark mulch delivered to the house” despite the fact that she finds it difficult to live a routine life while her daughter is “living like a vagabond on the streets of Toronto” (167).

Gardening is, however, much more than a popular pastime for Shields’ many characters. Shields associates the creative activity of gardening with the work and the art of homemaking. This complex pairing can occur through the subtlest details of setting and characterization, or extend to the more lengthy depictions of a novel’s overall fictional environment. For instance, many of Shields’ female characters are readers of women’s magazines in which the home and garden are a combined concern. In *Small Ceremonies*, Judith recalls that her mother was always glued to the pages of *Better Homes and Gardens* (16), and in *The Stone Diaries*, Daisy Flett reads the same magazine every night in bed next to her husband (164). Interestingly, Shields admits that the first thing she read as a young girl was “a magazine, it must have been *Better Homes and Gardens*” (Wachtel, “Interview” 8). By including these details of magazine titles, Shields accomplishes more than the recreation of realistic domestic settings; she associates

women's home-making with their gardening activities—a pairing that highlights her characters' creative involvement in the ongoing shaping and organization of their worlds.

Just as homemaking involves a process of cosmization through ordering, cleaning, or redecorating a room, gardening is instrumental in terms of shaping a personal, familial world. Rabuzzi's and Bachelard's theories of the home as a type of imaginative cosmos fashioned by a homemaker parallel garden theorists' position that the garden is a created, inhabited world made possible by the labour and imagination of a gardener. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka describes the garden as a type of home, a truly personalized space for an individual's distinct existence:

It is in what we are used to calling a “garden” . . . that we would establish our nest, our home, as a site upon which we unfurl our inhabiting/dwelling life modality, our springboard as well as retreat, our inner sphere among living beings wherein we encircle ourselves in our very own territory, “on the land,” as it were, differentiating it from without—that is, a terrain the spacing of which is measured and appropriated according to our own personal appetite and rhythm of life. (12)

Tymieniecka's interpretation resonates with Bachelard's description of the home as “our corner of the world.” Just as a homemaker orders a domestic environment ideally according to her own vision and preferences, a gardener has the ability to create a “world unto itself” that reflects specific aesthetics, personal needs, and desires. Paralleling the activities and territories of the home and garden, Shields integrates explicitly the processes of creative arrangement and maintenance that occur within these spaces. In *A Fairly Conventional Woman*, Brenda Bowman weeds the lawn in her backyard just as she “tells herself she could get busy and *weed out* a few” of the housekeeping items on her “to do” list posted on her kitchen bulletin board before heading out of town to her quilting

conference (2, my emphasis). In addition to this simple, metaphoric pairing of indoor and outdoor “garden” maintenance, Brenda’s reflections on the experience of acquiring and creating her first home as a married woman focus primarily on garden imagery. Brenda recalls planting and tending Japanese cherry trees in the backyard with her husband Jack during their first summer in the house:

They had bought—recklessly, Jack’s father maintained—a house in one of the oldest, most established suburbs. Perhaps they overreached themselves, acquiring, along with this sold brick structure, a garage, a toolshed, soil and grass, flower beds and shrubbery. Mysteries. . . .

At first one of the trees showed signs of withering, and Jack went back to the nursery for a recommended brand of insect spray. Every evening, arriving home from the Institute and setting his briefcase down on the grass, he checked the underside of the leaves for mites. Brenda, often carrying Rob in her arms, came out of the house to watch. “It looks okay to me,” she always told him. (15-16)

For Brenda, buying the first family home, creating a domestic life, and having a family are experiences intimately associated with the couple’s first garden.

In paralleling the “cosmization” inherent to homemaking and gardening, Shields is not remiss in acknowledging the extent to which these activities create not just personal worlds of family, but also worlds that respond and even conform to social values and ideals. Clearly for Shields, the combined cosmos of home and garden is not simply a form of personal expression or a sacred “inner sphere,” as Tymieniecka refers to the world of the garden, but rather a mediation of personal values and social influences. In terms of Shields’ fiction, gardening generates a particular view of the world, mainly

middle-class, twentieth-century suburbia. As one character at a cocktail party in *Small Ceremonies* declares, “lawns mean middle class” (81). Like Moodie’s and Traill’s backwoods kitchen gardens that are influenced by nineteenth-century picturesque aesthetics and promote genteel ownership of the land, Shields’ fictional gardens communicate privilege, a sense of security, and meaningful shelter within her characters’ particular socio-economic points of reference. In *Happenstance*, Jack and Brenda revel in the newfound social status that a home and garden signify after having spent their childhoods living in high-density city apartments. For Jack and Brenda, the edifice and garden are one—a combined near-paradisaal world that affords personalized order, ownership, and a particular view and experience of daily life based on financial means and middle-class social values:

On the day they moved in—Rob was only a baby that summer—Jack had wandered through the empty rooms, dodging the moving men, feeling effete but triumphant. “Domain, domain,” he’d whispered to himself, loving the sound of the word; my window ledge, my front door. Fences, hedges, shutters, gates, railings, vines—all spoke of a privacy of outlook that neither Brenda nor Jack had been schooled in. . . .

The first thing he did when he moved in was edge the flower border in the back yard. “If middle class means that people water tulips,” he had told Bernie Koltz, “then maybe middle class isn’t all that bad.” (*Happenstance* 18-19)

Clearly, Jack conforms to societal expectations of a middle-class homeowner by maintaining the orderly appearance of his yard. Shields intimates that there is a predictable, even mundane aspect to the middle-class, suburban world as signalled by the

uniformity of her characters' gardens.⁶ This homogeneous aesthetic of the middle-class domain as depicted in Shields' fiction does not necessarily mean a lack of inspiration or even fulfillment, however, as Brenda derives profound inspiration from her suburban neighbourhood and, in particular, from her lawn, suggesting the potential for subtle yet critical departures from the norm.⁷

Although Shields aligns the home and garden, these spaces and their associated activities are not exactly synonymous. Because Shields wants both to celebrate and to scrutinize the domestic world as a potential paradise, the garden assumes an additional role: Shields infuses the garden with a distinct capacity for critique and subversion. In many ways, Shields uses the garden to revitalize the home from the critical distance this green space offers, allowing her characters to question their domestic situations. As a writer, Shields believes that "risking deviance" is important: "fiction is not strictly mimetic—. . . we want it to spring out of the world, illuminate the world—not mirror it

⁶ In an interview, Shields speaks to what she saw at one time as the mundane quality of her own upbringing in the suburbs of Chicago: "What a place to grow up! Like living in a plastic bag is how I think of it; it was a very safe place to grow up" (5), and she later adds, "We . . . knew we would all get married and have children. The lives of middle-class girls in my era were highly predictable" (Wachtel, "Interview" 13).

⁷ Brenda derives a near-paradisaal vision from her suburban life as her prize-winning quilt *Spruce Forest*, looks like "an expanse of grass cooling off late in the day, a suburban lawn" (*A Fairly Conventional* 17). In *Happenstance*, Jack interprets this same quilt as a "green cube of the absolute purity" (31), a description that resonates with the cubed dimensions of the heavenly walled city of Jerusalem (made from jasper and other precious stones) as depicted in the Bible (Rev. 21.11-20). In addition to Brenda's artistic delight in this lawn-like "expanse of green," Shields suggests that there exist alternative visions of beauty in this suburban world through the example of Brenda's neighbour, Miss Anderson, who propagates "hollyhocks in the small waste spaces that lay between neighborhood garages and board fences and garbage cans" (*A Fairly Conventional* 137). Miss Anderson's random planting reflects the spirit of her garden "jungle," which lines the Bowman's property and forms a "wild bank of nameless, shapeless bushes" (*Happenstance* 79). After Miss Anderson's death, the new homeowners, Larry and Janey Carpenter, "[dig] up the garden and buil[d] a handsome cedar deck" (*A Fairly Conventional* 138). The eradication of Miss Anderson's garden highlights the artificiality of the Carpenter's "solid" and orderly suburban aesthetic. Just as "the long, fuzzed stalks and delicate, frilled blooms persisted remarkably" after the elderly gardener's death, however, Miss Anderson has a lasting impression (*A Fairly Conventional* 138). Shields writes, "Miss Anderson and her vigorous, purposeful back-alley striding [speak] to that part of Brenda she [keeps] unexamined"—that part being Brenda's artistic desire as expressed through her random, willful quilting designs (*A Fairly Conventional* 138).

back” (“Narrative Hunger” 26). A number of critics note that Shields embodies this deviant ability not in her characters who are writers, ironically enough, but more in her non-literary artist figures. Both Susan Grove Hall and Lisa Johnson observe that Shields infuses everyday work and home crafts—such as Mercy’s cooking, Brenda’s quilting, or Cuyler’s stone sculpting—with transformative, illuminating energy “as in each instance the art responds to and images the experience of life represented in the novel” (Hall 43). The crafters’ work and visions remain tangible, grounded, as Johnson argues, in the “material conditions of women’s [and men’s] lives” (Johnson 205). What I wish to focus on, in particular, is the non-mimetic or critical capacity that the garden as both a setting and symbol demonstrates in Shields’ fiction.

In her writing, Shields’ deviant gardeners and gardens concur with garden theorists’ understanding of an actual garden’s potentially illuminating relationship to architectural components. As Edward Casey argues, gardens have the ability to reflect significantly on built structures:

The most consequential liminal feature of gardens is the uneasy boundary they maintain between building and nature. Gardens are “literal worlds in which artifice strains against senseless growth.” They hold artificiality and naturalness apart—often putting their differences into sharp relief—while at the same time bringing them back together in revealing ways. The bringing together, the “art of the garden,” is tantamount to *cultivation*. (155)

Casey’s model of gardens as “literal worlds” that put artificiality and nature in “sharp relief” can be used as a lens through which to view Shields’ fiction, as Shields uses the garden both as a “material” setting and as a figurative trope to expose and bring together her characters’ disparate values and ideals as related to gender, home, and most

importantly paradise. Through the “sharp relief” of her garden settings and the garden’s figurative and symbolic applications, Shields turns over the notion of domestic paradise, questioning the ideal’s seemingly “natural” or proper meanings, forms, and values. Casey contends that “gardens of all kinds entice the lived body out of its self-stultified stationariness” (180), and Shields’ use of the garden enables her, therefore, to reanimate her fictional suburban worlds as critical, dynamic forums, rather than simply spaces of conformity and stasis.

4. The Garden Trope in “Mrs. Turner Cutting the Grass”

Before turning to the quests for paradise that Shields depicts in *The Box Garden* and *The Stone Diaries*, I want first to focus on one of Shields’ most problematic suburban gardeners and how the activity of gardening operates on a figurative level in Shields’ fiction. Shields presents gardening as a typically middle-class, suburbanite occupation and aspiration, but she also invests gardening with a disruptive, transformative force that challenges the status quo, particularly when it comes to her women gardeners.⁸ In the short story “Mrs. Turner Cutting the Grass,” the middle-aged widow Geraldine Turner, nicknamed “Girlie Fergus,” seems oblivious to the world around her. Throughout the story, the narrator relates how various people perceive and quietly disparage Mrs. Turner. Gardening without chemicals and striving for the perfectly manicured, organic yard, the neighbours Roy and Sally Sascher watch her with frustration. Mrs. Turner uses Killex on

⁸ Larry Weller of *Larry’s Party* is the most obvious exception in that he is a male character who challenges the norms of masculinity that stem from his working-class roots. As a prominent designer of garden mazes, Larry enters a seemingly marginal profession that appeals to “[m]aze aficionados . . . [who] posses an off-key imagination” (146). Moreover, Larry crosses gender divisions through his atypically masculine interest in gardens and flowers. Larry’s father (an upholsterer for a company that manufactures custom-made coaches) “doesn’t . . . know what to make of . . . Larry’s funny-bunny ideas about . . . planting shrub ‘arrangements’ in his yard and working in a florist shop year after year, fussing with leaves and flowers all day long” (55).

her dandelions and mows her lawn without a grass catcher, covering and impeding the new growth (26). While the Saschers cringe at the messy mowing, the highschool girls who walk past this fleshy middle-aged woman working in her yard are aghast at the “sight” of Mrs. Turner’s cellulite-ridden, short-clad thighs (29). Added to these disparaging views is the opinion of a nameless English professor from Massachusetts, who travelled with Mrs. Turner and her sisters in the past through Japan as part of a larger tour group. The Professor writes a belittling poem, “A Day at the Golden Pavilion”; the piece bemuses audiences at poetry readings and even appears in the *New York Times*. The verse is the harshest response to Mrs. Turner’s character in its condemnation of her ignorance and grotesque bodily nature:

The poem was not really about the Golden Pavilion at all, but about three
Midwestern lady tourists who, while viewing the temple and madly snapping
photos, had talked incessantly and in loud, flat-bottomed voices about knitting
patterns, indigestion, sore feet, breast lumps, the cost of plastic raincoats and a
previous trip they’d made together to Mexico. . . . They were the three furies, the
three witches, who for vulgarity and tastelessness formed a shattering
counterpoint to the Professor’s own state of transcendence. (37)

The Saschers, the school girls, and the Professor perceive Mrs. Turner as ignorant, unattractive, and banal—in other words, a woman who uses Killex, is not self-conscious about her body, and does not read the *New York Times*. In contrast, the narrator recounts “Girlie Fergus” as an adventurous young woman who, instead of working at Eaton’s or attending Normal School like her sisters, stole secretly away to New York city, lived with an African American man, had a child out of wedlock, and later married upon returning to

Manitoba.⁹ Simone Vauthier contends that Mrs. Turner's story is "a feminine and radical rewriting of a well-known script (young girl from the provinces, goes to the big city, becomes pregnant, is deserted, etcetera)" (126-27). Departing from the conventional narrative and the narrow-minded judgments of the spectators in the story, the reader is privy to alternative knowledge of Mrs. Turner and sees a decidedly different woman of profound life experience.

At the centre of Shields' communication of Mrs. Turner's underestimated knowledge of life is the trope of the garden, expressed through Mrs. Turner's mowing of her lawn. When the story begins, Mrs. Turner is an embarrassment, "a sight," with her old ball cap and shorts. By the concluding paragraph, however, Mrs. Turner transforms:

In the summer, as she cuts the grass, to and fro, to and fro, she waves to everyone she sees. She waves to the high school girls, who timidly wave back. She hollers hello to Sally and Roy Sascher and asks them how their garden is coming on. She cannot imagine that anyone would wish her harm. All she's done is live her life. The green grass flies up in the air, a buoyant cloud swirling about her head. Oh, what a sight is Mrs. Turner cutting her grass, and how, like an ornament, she shines. (39)

The images of the "green grass," the "buoyant cloud," and the "ornament" generate notions of fertility, transcendent experience, and beauty—all elements that the other characters perceive Mrs. Turner as lacking. As a paradisaal image, Mrs. Turner's lawn undermines the superficial perfection of the Saschers' "bagged" garden. Clara Thomas writes, "Mrs. Turner is living without a 'catcher' as she is cutting grass without a

⁹ In the early part of the twentieth century, Normal Schools were educational institutions attended by young women pursuing a teaching certificate. Shields' story implies that the career paths of an Eaton's store clerk or a teacher are predictable choices for women.

‘catcher,’ for living, to her, means partaking of experience on the wing” (“Stories Like Sonnets” 83). Clearly, Shields captures the silent Mrs. Turner and juxtaposes this character’s (a widowed suburban housewife’s) mode of existence against that of the other characters, who have supposedly greater depths of experience, beauty, and savvy. But more than this contrast, the story “turns” and transforms the reader’s understanding and evaluation of the world in keeping with the namesake and activity of the protagonist gardener, Mrs. “Turner.” Thus, just as Casey argues that gardens as an aesthetic form are able to “hold artificiality and naturalness apart . . . while at the same time bringing them back together in revealing ways” (155), Shields uses the setting and trope of the garden to turn Mrs. Turner into a transforming figure. At first, Mrs. Turner seems laughable and outdated, cutting the grass in “an ancient pair of shorts” (29), but through the progression of the story, readers form alternative estimations of the other supposedly superior, but ultimately superficial and mundane, characters. Thomas concludes, “The Saschers, with their earnest concern for the ecosystem, are meager and stunted by comparison, and the young girls passing, repelled by her pudgy thighs, and enclosed in their dreams of Neil Young, their folk-rock hero, are denizens of another element, artificial by comparison” (“Stories Like Sonnets” 80). Clearly, Shields infuses Mrs. Turner with a genuine spirit that her various, superficial spectators lack. More to the point, though, Shields presents gardening as a potentially rebellious activity. There is both a material pleasure and a critical, figurative value in the understated image and rhythm of Mrs. Turner’s mowing. The “to and fro, to and fro” movement in alternative directions suggests a repetitive but also subversive energy, turning the original significance into other ways of meaning.

The destabilizing quality Shields bestows upon the gardener Mrs. Turner points to Shields’ desire for a critical use of the garden trope that is anything but a straightforward

celebration or idealization of her characters and their domestic worlds. The relationship between home, garden, and gardener is problematic in Shields' fiction, and Shields complicates it further through the incorporation of a paradise motif that forces readers to scrutinize closely domestic ideals and notions of fulfillment within quotidian settings conventionally depicted or perceived as sites of women's imprisonment, triviality, and stagnancy. Quests for paradise and the contrasting examples of what is *not* paradise provide significant commentary on what Shields sees as the centrality of "home" to identity and the search for self-fulfillment. For Shields, the paradise that is "home" is both a real setting and a symbol signifying an ideal mode of being—which usually entails a sense of being "at home" in one's identity, daily life, and companionship. Thus, in evoking paradise in association with the home, Shields formulates fictional spaces for both celebration and invaluable critique. Shields' paradises may provide shelter and fulfillment but these real and imaginative spaces can also prove insufficient and flawed, falling short of her characters' ultimate needs and desires.

5. Superficial/Genuine Quests for Paradise in *The Box Garden*

In Shields' first two novels, her preoccupation with domestic settings—particularly in terms of their facility for, or failure to provide, an ideal shelter and a paradisaal sense of fulfillment—is clearly evident. Both protagonists, Judith Gill in *Small Ceremonies* and Charleen Forrest in *The Box Garden*, are writers: Judith is writing a biography of Susanna Moodie and Charleen is a published poet. Ironically, while both these writers reject and distrust symbolism in their own estimations of Canadian literary criticism and creative writing in general in the fictions in which they figure, Shields uses garden imagery and the symbol of paradise (especially in *The Box Garden*) to

communicate the two women's personal quests for fulfillment and self-realization within and through the domestic.¹⁰ Faye Hammill recognizes the symbolic paradox at the centre of *Small Ceremonies*, as "Judith's meditations on the nature of Canadian literature and criticism are entwined with aspects of her own personality and life" (93). Within this first novel, Shields embarks on what becomes in her fiction an enduring exploration of her characters' misperceptions of both their domestic worlds and their life partners through a recurring paradisaal motif. In *Small Ceremonies*, Judith is embarrassed by her husband Martin, a Milton scholar who creates a curious knitted wool tapestry that interprets the themes in *Paradise Lost* according to a colour scheme. Just as Judith underestimates her husband's literal demonstration of the fabric and texture of literature, she perceives her family as "flat leaves which grow absently from a stalk in [her] head" (24). In other words, her family life is as banal as the square of lawn that grows in her backyard. Clearly, despite Judith's rejection of national literary tropes, she subscribes to simplistic, or "flat," symbols when analyzing her own life until she comes to appreciate the multi-dimensional nature of her world and those around her.

While critics were favourable to Shields' first novel at the time of its publication, her second book, *The Box Garden*, has to date received minimal critical attention and usually only in conjunction with discussions of *Small Ceremonies*. In an overview of Shields' novels, Dave Williamson contends that Shields demonstrates a penchant for pairs as a means of exploring similar issues and events from different perspectives. Hammill uses this occurrence of "pairs" in Shields' writing to full advantage when she interprets

¹⁰ Faye Hammill argues that in *Small Ceremonies*, Judith rejects national thematic criticism as espoused by Canadian literary critics in the 1960s and 1970s; its promotion of a reductive "symbolic framework" (92) and narrowly defined "'national' traits" (93) distort interpretations of writers' works and promote art based on national content, rather than literary achievement. Through Judith's skepticism, Shields parodies the Canadian literature professor Roger Ramsay and the writer Furlong Eberhardt by exposing their "quintessentially" Canadian identities and belief in Canadian symbols as fraudulent and superficial.

Shields' critique of a "native genre" of Canadian literature and its narrow symbolic framework through the stories of Judith and her sister Charleen.¹¹ Dee Goertz concurs with Hammill's interpretation, as *The Box Garden* "shows that Shields was thinking about the issue of symbolism and its viability in the postmodern era even at the beginning of her career" (231). As a poet, Charleen "reviles symbolism" (Goertz 231), yet Charleen "cannot avoid interpreting" the symbols she sees in her life (Goertz 232).

Shields uses symbolism in *The Box Garden* to continue her reaction against national thematic criticism and conventions promoted by educational institutions and the government during the early years of her writing career. But if Shields' first two novels reveal a reaction against how myths and themes are created and perpetuated in the name of a national literature, then *The Box Garden* demonstrates also Shields' boldness by locating symbol and myth in an unexpected and somewhat mundane place: home and daily life, the so-called void or "vacuum" of the quotidian that both critics (Groening, Amiel) and even Shields' own characters dismiss.¹² In reviews of *The Box Garden*,

¹¹ Hammill notes that in *The Box Garden* the "'manufacture' of Canadian myth in Canada is presented as a narcissistic and faintly ludicrous process" (94), as Charleen detests symbolism. Charleen admits that her unoriginal first book of poems was praised as equally as her second more genuinely personal and innovative collection, suggesting that "nationalist critics . . . were praising and promoting Canadian writing in all its manifestations, with little regard for traditional standards of originality and merit" (Hammill 96).

¹² While Groening's "Still in the Kitchen" is a relatively recent criticism of Shields' chosen topic of the quotidian, at the beginning of her career, Shields received similar reviews. In a 1977 issue of *Maclean's*, Barbara Amiel deems the commonplace lives of Shields' characters in *The Box Garden* as uninspiring: "For the past 15 years most Canadian . . . writers have worked very hard to convince the public that small, grey, pinched characters have significance and, ugh, relevance to our lives—simply by virtue of their ordinariness. Carol [S]hields, an Ottawa writer of some ability . . . , gives us the latest example of this literary fallacy" (54). In her own fiction, Shields cannot resist depicting similar disparaging views of the domestic through her characters. In *Swann*, for instance, Professor Sarah Maloney struggles to understand from where the poet Mary Swann derived her inspiration in her rural existence as a farmer's wife: "Where in those bleak Ontario acres, that littered farmyard, did she find the spark that converted emblematic substance into rolling poetry? Chickens, outhouses, wash-day. . . . That's the stuff this woman had to work with" (31). In *The Stone Diaries*, Shields presents a comparable assessment of Daisy's mundane domestic world, which the narrator describes as a kind of perceptible void: "House plants, after all, thrive in a vacuum of geography and climate—why shouldn't she?" (192).

critics respond variously to the novel's symbolism, yet no scholar has published an in-depth analysis of the paradise motif that imbues and structures this novel. As an early example of Shields' fiction, *The Box Garden* reveals through its use of the paradise myth and garden imagery what becomes an abiding interest for Shields in her fiction: the search for an ideal, domestic-situated life that offers, at least momentarily, a fulfilling mode of being and self-realization. Thus, while Williamson suggests a linear progression of "pairs" in Shields' novel-writing, I suggest that as an early attempt at depicting a domestic quest for paradise, *The Box Garden* is integral to understanding the role and evolution of the paradise motif within Shields' most acclaimed and eighth novel, *The Stone Diaries*, and its critical celebration of the domestic.

Critics of *The Box Garden* and even Shields herself describe this work as her weakest novel, which perhaps explains the minimal critical attention it has received. In a 1977 review shortly after the novel's release, Shirley Gibson questions *The Box Garden* in terms of its credibility and thinly developed and overly dramatic plot line (73). In a similar review, Sandra Martin argues that the plot-driven narrative detracts from the domestic focus: "Shields was writing a delightful little back garden of a novel. . . . Why she felt compelled . . . to dress up the plot with the most absurd series of coincidences and contortions remains a mystery" (15-16). Following up with a similar perspective in 1989 after Shields is well on her way to establishing her status as novelist, Eleanor Wachtel writes, "[The second novel] suffered from her susceptibility to her editor's advice. *Small Ceremonies*, she was told, didn't have a lot happening. So Shields added plot, a pseudo-kidnapping and police, to *The Box Garden*" ("Telling It" 13). Shields herself acknowledges the unrealistic plot and states in an interview, "It's the one book I would rewrite" (Ying 15). In the novel, the divorcée protagonist Charleen Forrest (née McNinn)

travels by train from Vancouver to Toronto with her orthodontist boyfriend Eugene to attend her mother's wedding. While struggling to come to terms with her mother's remarriage, her childhood, and her ex-husband Watson, who has been contacting her under the guise of the monk persona "Brother Adam," Charleen faces the kidnapping of her teenage son, Seth, by a friend who is supposed to be looking after Seth during Charleen's trip east. The highly dramatic plot is not in keeping with Shields' usual focus on domestic scenes and the ordinary "small ceremonies" of everyday life. Giardini states that compared to Shields' first novel, "*The Box Garden* [is] a less domestic novel," but the dynamic plot is not the sole reason for this effect (11). In this novel, Shields cultivates a paradise motif that stages difficult, failed quests for fulfillment within the characters' extremely superficial domestic settings and divided families. In Giardini's view, "home ground" for Shields is what readers encounter in *Happenstance* and *A Fairly Conventional Woman*: "a comfortably married couple, two awkward children, an academic interest" (11). Through false paradises and ill-conceived quests for paradise that reject family in favour of solitariness and a narrow vision of the self in *The Box Garden*, Shields reasserts the importance of home. Thus, critics, such as Giardini, reveal assumptions behind what constitutes the domestic (ideally) in Shields' fictional worlds: a genuine home environment, comfort, routine, family cohesion, and partnership. In *The Box Garden*, the search for paradise is the search for "home" in both a literal and figurative sense. Unfortunately, a paradisaal place and state of fulfillment long elude the Forrest/McNinn families, as Shields reveals that the domestic is a site of difficult mediation between desired ideals and realities.

In *The Box Garden*, Shields depicts states of containment, superficiality, and emptiness—all of which contribute to her consideration of false domestic paradises and

her promotion of more feasible, realistic quests based in everyday life. The first paradisaal garden that readers encounter is the box garden of grass that Charleen grows in her Vancouver apartment after receiving seeds in the mail from the mysterious Brother Adam. After reading Brother Adam's paper on the sociological benefits of grass that is rejected by the *National Botanical Journal* for which Charleen works, Charleen begins an intimate correspondence with this seemingly religious man from Toronto. Upon telling her sister Judith about Brother Adam and his eccentric gift of grass seed, a planter box, and sieved earth, Charleen defends Brother Adam's vision despite Judith's cynicism:

"Maybe he's talking about marijuana."

"No. Just ordinary grass. Garden grass. He's trying to prove that where people don't have any grass, just concrete and asphalt and so on, then the whole human condition begins to deteriorate."

"It sounds a little fanciful," Judith's old skepticism again. (81)

While Judith is wary of Charleen's exuberance for Brother Adam and her box garden, even inquiring as to whether or not Eugene (the orthodontist boyfriend) is aware that Charleen is corresponding with another man, Charleen has clearly been seduced by the idea of her unusual garden:

I have to hold my tongue to keep from telling Judith more: the way, for instance, I felt about those first little seeds. That they might be supernatural, seeds sprouted from a fairy tale, empowered with magical properties, that they might produce overnight or even within an hour a species of life-giving, life-preserving grass. How that night I fell asleep thinking of the tiny, brown seeds lying sideways against the clean, pressing earth, swelling from the force of moisture, obeying the

intricate commands of their locked-in chromosomes. Better not tell Judith too much. . . . (84-85)

The fecundity of this species of “life-giving, life-preserving grass” makes Charleen’s garden seem paradisaical, especially when readers consider the obvious biblical allusion of Brother Adam’s name. Like the enclosed garden space that is paradise with its lushness, divine order, and harmony, the box garden grows readily without fertilizer and springs from beautiful “clean, clean earth” of a sandy colour over which Brother Adam had prayed previous to mailing the gift (83). Charleen is attracted to its “divinely soft” blades, the “brilliant green” colour, and its rapid growth (86). Charleen’s box garden may be abundant but it is also highly contained, and she notices “*the way it struggles against the sides of the box*” (86). In addition, the grass’s perfection becomes unnatural with its supernatural seeds and otherworldly, “fairy-tale” qualities. Thus, this supposedly idyllic box garden is at once purposeful and impractical, restricted and restricting, natural and unnatural. The garden’s sensuality appeals to Charleen, but clearly there is no real use for it, as Judith enquires, ““But what . . . does one do with a box of grass?”” (85). In addition, Charleen must contain her fanciful notions about the garden’s growth or else face the more grounded scrutiny of her sister. The value and emotion that Charleen attaches to her grass seem disproportionate and at times even isolating, as she guards her feelings and then admits to Judith, “Eugene doesn’t know. . . . He doesn’t know Brother Adam even exists” (87).

Although Charleen perceives her box garden as life-giving, Shields generates alternative impressions of what “boxed” space offers and contains by expanding her box garden image to include other spaces, particularly homes and their sometimes unfulfilling, stagnant, superficial natures. Whereas Charleen nurtures her box garden

grown in sandy coloured earth, her mother, Florence, tends a suburban bungalow, “a brick box on a narrow, sandy lot” (44). As Patricia Morley observes in her review, “the real box is the small Scarborough bungalow where Charleen grew up and in which her mother still lives; its postage-stamp garden, and the stifling mentality of Mrs. McNinn” (83). Reflecting on her childhood within this suburban bungalow, Charleen recalls how her mother continually redecorated the rooms of the house, learning how “to paint, solder, wallpaper, stain and upholster” (44). Just as Charleen watches the grass of her box garden thrive through careful watering and trimming, in the past Florence “planned her rooms as carefully as any set designer, bringing into life whole new environments” until she “unveil[ed] her creation” (47). Both Charleen and Florence engage in “cosmization,” creating their respective worlds of grass and the suburban home, yet already Shields hints at artificiality, particularly in the comparison of Florence to “any set designer.” When reflecting further on her childhood home, Charleen perceives underlying problems in the brick box house, and she recalls how after years of constant change in the appearance of the décor, her mother suddenly stopped her obsessive, inauthentic home-making:

I don't know why she stopped. I must ask her when I see her. . . . But of course I won't ask anything of the kind. . . . To question would be to injure the delicate springs of impulse and emotion. For an obsession such as the one which ruled my mother's life could only have existed to fill a terrible hurting void; . . . It may be that she suddenly realized one day that all her energy was being poured into an unworthy vessel. Or perhaps she was struck with the heart-racking futility of altering mere surfaces and never reaching the heart: her world was immutable, she may have decided. What was the point of trying to change it? (48-49)

The ever-changing interior of the brick home seems suddenly fruitless and dissatisfying—an empty vessel. There is no growth or development within the mother's daily domestic existence and surroundings, as the only apparent changes are superficial and unfulfilling.

Once Charleen and her sister Judith reunite at their mother's home, they recall that sense of living in a "hurting void" or empty place as young girls and women. After staying up late talking with Judith, Charleen reflects that she does not feel "so much hungry as emptied out; a late night hollowness gnaws at [her], the grey uneasy anxiety [she] always feel[s] in this house" (87). The physical and emotional emptiness that Charleen recognizes and that her mother housed within herself for so many years finds its expression elsewhere in the various "boxes" of this domestic setting. The kitchen's breadbox contains scanty loaves of bread offering only "[m]eagerness" (87). As a child, Charleen's home was without a birdfeeder or "saucers of milk . . . for stray cats"; service men were not offered a "cheering cup of coffee" and "the postman was not presented with a box of fudge at Christmas. (Such generosities belonged only to fairy tales or soap operas.)" (87-88). Unlike the apparent life-giving but highly suspect "natural" abundance of Charleen's box garden, her "fairy tale" of magical green seeds (85), Charleen's childhood home provided no fulfillment in the past. With such a meager domestic setting for her upbringing, it is not surprising that Charleen is so drawn to images of profuse growth and surreal fertility. Indeed, it is this past domestic experience of meagerness and emptiness that led Charleen as a young woman to seek fulfillment in superficial and unproductive ways (like Florence's endless re-decorating) within another kind of contained, seemingly paradisaal existence: her first marriage to Watson Forrest. Vulnerable to symbols, a young and impressionable Charleen saw Watson "Forrest" as offering natural abundance: "After being Charleen McNinn for eighteen years it seemed a

near miracle to be attached to such a name. Forrest. Woodsy, dark, secret, green with pine needles, exotic, far removed from the grim square blocks of Scarborough, the weedy shrubs and tough brick bungalows. Forrest” (3). Clearly, Watson Forrest represents an alternative mode of being compared to Charleen’s scant, orderly existence.

In a novel that explores unfulfilling domestic settings and false paradises, the marriage of Watson and Charleen is perhaps the most superficial and most obviously Edenic in its *outer* appearance. Watson and Charleen share a son named Seth, which is also the name of a son of Adam and Eve. Considering Watson’s renaming of himself as “Brother Adam,” readers detect immediately a paradisaal prototype of the seemingly perfect family. As Charleen reflects on her failed marriage, however, grave deficiencies and an artificial domestic setting begin to surface. According to Charleen, Watson created and defined their relationship from the beginning, providing meaning and enrichment to her Eve-like naiveté and narrow world. A modern-day prince charming, Watson whisked Charleen away from her parents’ home and drove off into the west (heading for Vancouver) on his motorcycle. In his veritable “Adam” role, Watson determined the nature of the relationship and Charleen’s very identity and substance, providing her with her married name, her interest in poetry, and her wifely role. For instance, Charleen dismisses happily her maiden name of McNinn as “a bundle of negative echoes—minimum, minimal, nincompoop, ninny, nothing, non-entity, nobody. Charleen McNinn” (3). Charleen’s choice of words, “a bundle of negative echoes,” is reminiscent of the Miltonic Eve’s infatuation with her own insubstantial reflection:

As I bent down to look, just opposite,

A shape within the wat’ry gleam appeared

.....

Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed
 Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
 Had not a voice thus warned me, "What thou seest,
 What there thou seest fair creature is thyself,
 With thee it came and goes: but follow me,
 And I will bring thee where no shadow stays (4.460-70)

In this scene, Milton recreates the Classical myth of the self-loving youth Narcissus and the pining nymph Echo, who is reduced to her voice when Narcissus fails to return her affection. Eve is both "vain" and insubstantial (but a "shadow") until she is told to locate her role and identity in the companionship and face of Adam: "Whose image thou art" (Milton 4.472).

In *The Box Garden*, Charleen fulfils the role of the insubstantial Echo prior to her marriage. Upon marrying Watson, Charleen credits her husband with bestowing upon her an identity and name of depth and purpose. Rejecting her emotionally malnourished family origins and intellectually depleted suburban upbringing, Charleen notes that her vocation as a poet "was grafted artificially onto her lazy unconnectedness, and it was Watson—yes, Watson—who did the grafting. Watson made me a poet" (150). Just as Charleen was cast into an acceptable creative role, Watson formulated his own appealing array of personae. From a child prodigy, to a "lazy dreamer of a student" (153), to a married graduate student who

stunned [Charleen] with a whole new set of mannerisms and attitudes; he literally fought his way into all-roundedness—he boxed, he ran for elections, he wrote articles . . . , he signed petitions, he played softball. . . . It had been during that period that [they] actually bought a house with a garden. And actually conceived,

with brooding deliberation, a child. House, wife, child, all he needed was the ivy.

But already he was on to his next creation: rebellious young intellectual. (154)

Learning to “box,” culturing himself, and striving to create a domestic world complete with house and garden, Watson enclosed both himself and Charleen within societal expectations and outward appearances of “all-roundedness.” Of course, after trying to conform to a preconceived ideal of a married scholar and family man, Watson, who is “a bit like a snake . . . in his ability to continually shed his skin” (153), cast away his role as husband and father and instigated the downfall of the highly superficial domestic world he had created with Charleen. Now, no less than twelve years following her divorce and the loss of her “paradise” marriage, a pining Charleen remains transfixed by her former husband and deficient in independent growth and self-realization, as she lives with her son Seth in an apartment of “chaste furniture” that lacks “verve” and is filled with a “deep-breathing dreaminess” (9). Charleen persists in locating meaning in external sources and illusions (the box garden and Brother Adam) even as Shields renders the “miracle” of Watson Forrest’s substance and depth highly suspect and superficial.

Despite the failed “gardens” of the McNinn and Forrest households, Shields refuses to dismiss entirely the domestic as a setting capable of promoting profound personal fulfillment. In order to endorse and even celebrate quotidian existence, Shields undermines Watson’s current vision of paradise and revitalizes the familial home of Charleen’s childhood. Both Charleen and Watson undertake new quests for paradise, journeying east from Vancouver to Toronto at different times. But while Shields exposes Watson’s journey as superficial, grandiose, and scattered in focus, Charleen’s trip is a true homecoming, a discovery of a “paradise” grounded in humble self-awareness and the imperfections of everyday life, family, and home. Creating a counterpart to Charleen’s

paradisaal domestic model of the quotidian, Shields invites her readers to enter into Watson's "rooming-house Eden"—a transitory or "rootless" garden setting that ultimately serves to reinforce domesticity and companionship within the McNinn home by thwarting Watson's solitary quest as a superficial source of fulfillment (188). Fearing that Watson has kidnapped Seth, Charleen and the police locate this self-proclaimed "Brother Adam" living in a one-bedroom apartment in a dilapidated rooming house. Here, Shields' paradise motif culminates in a definitive box garden setting:

A small square room under the eaves, and yet my first impression was one of blinding, dazzling space. It was the mirrors, of course, huge mirrors mounted on two facing walls and lining the sloping ceiling, so that the small space seemed endless and unbelievably complex, like the sudden special openings that sometimes occur in dreams. . . .

The room was alive with tiny lights. They were strung on wires and they beamed like miniature suns on the wooden flats of grass. The whole room, except for a neatly made-up army cot, was carpeted with grass. In the rebounding arrangements of mirrors and lights, the grass stretched endlessly, acres of it, miles of it; it was like coming upon a secret Alpine meadow, like a pocket of perfect and perpetual springtime where there was no night, no thought of cold or death. Even time seemed to fall away from me, as though the endless grass lived in another dimension altogether where growth and fertility took the place of hours and days. (186-87)

Charleen finds the freshness and greenness of Brother Adam's Eden all-consuming: it feels like "another dimension" where time no longer matters, where night and death are obsolete. Despite the immense freshness of this miniature "paradise," it remains—like

Charleen's tray of grass, her failed marriage, and her mother's suburban home—a mere box garden existing through highly artificial conditions, like the “artificial interior of a greenhouse” (187). Although the room seems “alive with tiny lights” these “miniature suns” are strung on wires, generating a false, unnatural environment that forces growth. As “Adam, king of his rooming-house Eden,” Watson nurtures a shallow level of contentment in his solitary box garden (188). Charleen discredits easily the dazzling space and Watson's self-absorbed mode of being. The room and garden are empty symbols, lacking all substance and meaning. Concerned for her missing son, Charleen questions whether Watson knows of Seth's whereabouts, but Watson shows no feeling for his son and is more upset about the intrusion into his private garden. At this point for Charleen, the garden is but a “dead-end” filled with lights, mirrors, and “riotous grass” (189). Clearly, this “Adam” has regressed into the role of Narcissus, captivated with himself and his infinitely mirrored reflections. Watson demonstrates no compassion or parental concern and instead is preoccupied with his solitary quest to go “East,” a word he pronounces with “a central, undernourished innocence” (188). Watson's journey may appear profound and deeply spiritual, as he has lived in his “Eden” meditating “alone for two years”; this quest is, however, pure performance, as Charleen remembers “[Watson's] terrible need for an audience,” noting the mirrors on his walls and ceiling (192). There is no more truth or greater wisdom to be found in Watson's solitary garden than in the false domestic world he created with Charleen during their marriage. Leaving behind yet another false, temporary paradise, Watson steals out the fire escape of the rooming house and “drop[s] into darkness” at the same moment Seth runs into the grass-filled room (190). Once drawn to fairytale abundance as a reaction against her meager childhood, Charleen is no longer seduced by idyllic images based on whimsy and false ideals. Thus

“above the brilliant jungle of living grass” Charleen’s final vision is that of Seth’s “familiar face” as he enters the apartment to greet his worried mother (190). The conclusion to Seth’s abduction and the mystery of Brother Adam is overly dramatic, yet Shields achieves a clear and obvious shift in her paradisaal motif. A particular type of domestic garden founded upon fancy has ended and Charleen welcomes a more realistic, modest cultivation of domestic life rooted in family, growth, and a sheltering openness that will not box her in with false ideals.

With the undoing of the box garden motif and the exposure of Watson’s and Charleen’s false paradises, Charleen begins to appreciate the value of a more humble, imperfect “paradise” that is based in routine, family, and renewal. Paradise is not located elsewhere, but rather takes root at home and in the daily capacity for self-realization. On the day of Charleen’s mother’s wedding to Louis Berceau, a former priest who has left the church and his solitary life for companionship, everyone is busy working in Florence’s yard and home, preparing the scene for the nuptials. Planting a mock orange shrub in the garden, Louis comments, ““Good healthy roots on this one”” (198), suggesting that his new married life with Florence holds promise. Of course, the fact that this shrub is a “mock” one and that Louis and Florence are married “in front of the artificial fireplace” suggests that unrealistic and even false ideals persist in shaping these characters’ lives (209). The suburban box home may be renewed with all the cleaning and preparations for the ceremony, but the living room still “looks barren, pinched and depressing” (199). Shields impresses upon her readers that no domestic setting is truly perfect, but at least Florence’s home has become open to change, companionship, and potential fulfillment, rather than remaining closed and empty. Amidst the frenzy of wedding preparations, both Seth and Eugene become a part of the family gathering; Seth

mows the small patch of grass in the backyard and Eugene purchases flowers to decorate the home when no one else remembers such details. Once known only for meagerness, the home seems teeming with life, energy, and renewal, as even Judith's daughter Meredith throws an impromptu kitchen shower for her grandmother (giving her brand new utensils and towels) and later gathers lilacs for a bridal bouquet. Tempering this idyllic scene is the fact that Florence believes that lilacs are "just weeds," a significant declaration during this moment of nuptials, as this mother, once so obsessed with appearances and décor, succumbs no longer to illusions (205). Shields suggests that Florence's choice in her second marriage is grounded in reality. Clearly, appearances are insubstantial and not the sole indicator of a paradisaical achievement, as personal fulfillment is a mode of being grounded in the routine and imperfections of everyday.

In *The Box Garden*, the enclosed, fulfilling space of paradise is realized, paradoxically, through openness. During Charleen's rebellious adolescence, Florence was overly concerned about appearances, a fact Charleen appreciates when reflecting on her elopement with Watson: "Later I learned from Judith exactly how shattered [mother] had been, how for months she'd hardly left the house, how for years she'd been unable to look the neighbours in the face" (142). This closed outlook is central to Florence's personality and of course to the novel as a whole, particularly in terms of Florence's philosophy: "Underpinning all her beliefs is the idea that people 'should keep to themselves.' They should stand on their own feet, they should mind their own business, they should look after their own, they should steer their own ship, *they should tend their own gardens*" (123, my emphasis). By allowing Louis into her life and garden, Charleen's mother discovers the potential for personal fulfillment, as her previous superficial preoccupations are countered by simple scenes of quotidian life and

unexpected companionship: “And now my mother is getting married and she doesn’t, it seems, worry at all about what the neighbours will think. She doesn’t care a fig; she doesn’t care a straw” (142). *The Box Garden* reveals that paradise cannot be achieved through superficial means or empty symbols. Paradise must be grounded in reality and it is not simply a place, but a mode of being. When Charleen witnesses Florence and Louis together, the elderly couple’s “paradise” seems to be genuine, founded upon companionship and routine:

Later, when he had finished the planting, he went inside the house. He and my mother sat at the kitchen table talking a little and drinking coffee, Louis stirring in sugar, and my mother primly, awkwardly, perseveringly sipping. Seeing them sitting there like that I had a sudden glimpse of what their life together would be like. It would be exactly like this; there would be nothing mystical about it; it would be made up of scenes like this. (198)

In contrast to this quotidian scene, Watson’s isolating, undernourished, and self-regarding “Eden” fails to accommodate the realities of family, just as Charleen’s obsessive tending of her box of grass and her fascination with Brother Adam pre-empt her from moving forward and sharing a life with Eugene. By the conclusion of the novel, however, Charleen formulates new ideals that enable her to be open to change and humble expectations. Realizing that her box of grass has probably died from neglect, Charleen turns away from this symbol, and instead opens herself to a new “garden” of companionship and practical considerations as she flies home to Vancouver with Eugene and Seth by her side: “Eugene, peering down through grey mist, says, ‘What we should do is buy a farm. A few acres. For weekends, you know. Maybe grow some vegetables, have a horse for the kids. Might even be a tax advantage there...’” (213). Clearly, by

using the box garden motif and overlaying and contrasting it with the symbol of paradise, Shields exposes the unrealistic ideals that shape expectations of the domestic setting and experience. For Shields and for her protagonist Charleen, the quest for paradise is most fulfilling not when it takes place in the world of fairytale, but rather when it finds expression in and through the shelter and imaginative space of daily life. Ultimately, in Shields' fiction, paradise is about "coming home"—a physical and symbolic return—as the true paradises are the ones her characters create with others in their desire for fulfillment and harmony based in realistic settings and circumstances, not the "paradises" they devise through artificial means and far flung ideals that can neither function nor hold any purpose in the real world.

6. Shields' Return to Paradise in *The Stone Diaries*

As an example of Shields' early exploration of a paradise motif, *The Box Garden* tends to be formulaic in its approach to plot and various garden enclosures. Nevertheless, Shields' second novel discloses an enduring preoccupation for her as a writer: the domestic as a paradisaal place that facilitates an ideal mode of being. When Shields writes *The Stone Diaries*, published sixteen years after *The Box Garden* and her most critically acclaimed novel having garnered the Pulitzer Prize and Governor General's award in 1993, she creates a layered narrative, melding voices and genres. Not surprisingly, the majority of criticism of *The Stone Diaries* concentrates on Shields' metafictional, post-modern approach and the difficulties of telling a woman's life story through the available generic forms and narrative conventions.¹³ In conjunction with this focus on narrative,

¹³ In the context of this meta-fictional approach, Wendy Roy argues that Shields "undermines traditional privileging of linear and cohesive narratives but also questions the efficacy of the discontinuous and

scholars turn to the prominent motifs of stones and flowers, highlighting Daisy's profound emptiness and how stones, and the combination of stones and flowers, communicate a solid, united sense of self for Shields' protagonist.¹⁴ Taking their lead from the stone motif, the novel's title, and the epigraph (which describes life as a monument), critics, such as Leona Gom, argue that stone is the "dominant image/symbol/theme running through the novel," as stone becomes integrated with Daisy's difficult construction of her life narrative (22).

While stones form a central motif in, and frame for, the novel, it is interesting that critics turn so readily to another character's form of artistry (Cuyler Goodwill's stone masonry and monument), rather than pursuing Daisy's own form of expression, gardening, as potentially illuminating for her own life story. Referring to the multiple voices, genres, and pieces of Daisy's life, Hall argues that *The Stone Diaries*' "piecework structure resembles the tower built by Daisy's father" (45). Similarly, Mellor describes Daisy as a "mute hollow structure" (99) and even goes as far as to compare Daisy to her father Cuyler's stone monument for his first wife Mercy Stone (104). In his promotion of the stone motif, Slethaug acknowledges (in a footnote) that perhaps Daisy's gardening

relational nature of autobiography as proposed by feminists" (114). The gaps and fragments in Daisy's story suggest that Daisy "risks becoming lost in the interconnections of voices and perspectives" (W. Roy 122). In a similar argument, Winifred M. Mellor contends that *The Stone Diaries* "acts as a metafictional container for the exploration of the pitfalls and inadequacies entailed in constructing a speaking subject" (97).

¹⁴ Scholars who focus on Shields' stone/flower motif include Chiara Briganti, Leona Gom, Lisa Johnson, and Gordon Slethaug. Many of these critics feel, as Johnson expresses, that Shields counters the textual construct that is Daisy's life, as "[the] metaphor of stone weighs the novel down and provides the reader with a much needed sense of groundedness to counterbalance postmodernism's often dizzying stories of textuality, interiority, and multiple realities" (Johnson 208).

needs further consideration, but quickly resumes his discussion of Cuyler's stones as the predominant model of both expression and the novel's structure:

Shields suggests that all of us are capable of acts of imagination, which turn chaotic materials into pattern and beauty. These may take the form of cooking and gardening that Daisy inherits from her real and foster mothers, and are perhaps even more critical to her development than her father's imaginative sculpturing of stone. There is, of course, a connection between the artistic production of stonework and Cuyler's ability to speak. He felt a stone dislodged in his throat, and he began to speak in wonderful ways. (79)

Somewhat counterbalancing critics' clear attraction to stones and Cuyler's tower are Gom and Marie-Louise Wasmeier, who tease out the significance behind the other predominant image in Daisy's life story: the flower. For both these critics, the flower and stone images characterize the different aspects of Daisy's life and finally merge to form a united family legacy by the conclusion of the novel and Daisy's death.¹⁵ While flowers are integrated in their arguments, both critics seek a unity of the flower/stone images, with Daisy (the flower) being grounded in, and returned to, her "stone" origins. When critics discuss the flower imagery of *The Stone Diaries*, invariably Daisy's gardening arises as part of their arguments—an important acknowledgement, as clearly Daisy's gardening demands as much attention as Cuyler's stone masonry. Critics tend, however,

¹⁵ Wasmeier writes, "Stones and flowers are ubiquitous in the novel: they are employed as realistic elements of the story . . . ; they serve as a means of characterization, using the two elements' opposing traits. . . . Most importantly, however, they represent the relationship between life (flower) and text (stone), converging in the image of the fossil . . . the tangible but dead proof of a past life, and the material on which to develop imaginatively an idea of what that life could have been like" (440). Gom's tracing of the two images resonates with Wasmeier's argument for convergence: "If stone is her legacy from her father . . . , flowers are the legacy from Clarentine. . . . If we can see the two struggling in her for meaning and coherence, what we can also see in the closing of the novel . . . is an effort to reconcile these two elements" (Gom 26).

to idealize Daisy's gardening in keeping with Shields' most apparent description of it. For example, Gom states that gardens give Daisy "the purest of pleasures" concurring with Shields' description of the Ottawa garden as a kind of paradise:

If Daisy's garden is Edenic . . . then what really is Daisy? Is she God? A kind of bewildered, troubled God, nurturing what she has been given and ignoring the rest? Well, why not? Clarentine sees the Christian God as 'the petulant father blundering about in the garden, trampling on all her favourite flowers.' . . . Daisy, the child Clarentine raises, learns to do a better job than that. (25)

But does Daisy truly succeed in her garden? Is this terrain truly paradisaal? As demonstrated in *The Box Garden*, Shields' domestic enclosures, such as Charleen's box of grass or Watson's rooming house "Eden," can be deceptive and illusory in their achievement of seeming paradisaal states. In *The Box Garden*, paradise is both a tentative place and a mode of being realized only temporarily and located in dynamic domestic settings not necessarily founded upon the obvious visual cues or overt declarations of their "Edenic" status. Thus, when Shields revisits this quest and symbol in *The Stone Diaries*, she approaches notions of paradise with an equally critical eye.

Rather than turning to Cuyler's stones as a model for Daisy's life narrative or idealizing Daisy's flowers and garden, I argue that a decidedly problematic motif of paradise and related quests for fulfillment frame and imbue *The Stone Diaries* from beginning to end. Unlike *The Box Garden* with its linear plot and demonstrable quests in Charleen's and Watson's separate journeys east, *The Stone Diaries* undermines any simple progression of Daisy's life or personal quest. Daisy's quest for paradise is not as readily recognizable or conventional as Charleen's as there is no overt sense of journey or singular narrative thread of rising action focused on a particular home-coming. As a

practical orphan dispossessed of any clear sense of home, family, or identity, however, Daisy searches for and attempts to create her ideal “home” in both a real and figurative sense. Gardens and gardening are intimately integrated with this ongoing pursuit. Adding to the complexities of this unconventional, non-linear quest is the fact that *The Stone Diaries* does not contain obvious contrasts of natural and artificial settings, such as those seen in *The Box Garden*. In Daisy’s story, readers encounter nuanced and subtle expressions of what both is and is not paradise and the difficulty of truly realizing, even for a moment, this ideal place and mode of existence.

In this examination of the progression of Shields’ paradise motif, it is important to note that *The Box Garden* and *The Stone Diaries* exhibit a clear link in terms of how Shields conceived of these two works. First, both novels focus on the domestic, states of emptiness, and the search for fulfillment through a garden-related model of life. Interestingly, just as Giardini calls *The Box Garden* her mother’s least domestic novel, Giardini observes that *The Stone Diaries* is “not a cozy, domestic book” (11). In *The Box Garden*, the motif of boxes and particularly empty boxes that are both real and symbolic, are at the forefront of the novel, as Shields explores how these domestic, ideological enclosures contain her characters, leave them with a sense of meagreness, or become open to change and the possibility of fulfillment. It is significant, then, that with respect to *The Stone Diaries*, a novel that also foregrounds a lack of fulfillment and the narratives that contain Daisy’s life, Shields describes this later novel as a series of boxes: “the novel ‘is a box within a box within a box. . . . ‘I’ve made the big box; Daisy is the box inside, and the box inside Daisy is empty’” (Graeber 3). While this box model pertains directly to Shields’ narrative technique, setting remains a vital aspect in *The Stone Diaries*, just as it does in *The Box Garden*. In fact, Shields links the two novels explicitly by reproducing

in *The Stone Diaries* the almost identical garden motto relating to happiness and home, which in *The Box Garden* “[u]nderpin[s] all [Florence’s] beliefs” (*Box Garden* 123). In *The Box Garden*, Charleen’s mother believes “people ‘should keep to themselves’” and instructs her daughters to “tend to their own gardens” (123). In *The Stone Diaries*, Daisy’s grand-niece, Victoria, reads a similar phrase on a wall plate during her research trip to Scotland:

*Happiness
grows at our own
fireside and is
not to be picked
in strangers’
gardens* (302)

In her interpretation of Daisy’s love of flowers and gardens, Gom agrees with Victoria’s assessment that her great aunt would “endorse this sentiment, but she will not” (Shields 302): “Perhaps [Victoria] has learned from Daisy that seeking happiness only at one’s own stone fireside makes for too limiting a life; for women of Victoria’s generation, life means exploring the gardens of strangers” (Gom 26). Clearly, Gom believes that Daisy refuses to enter others’ gardens and segregates herself. But is this truly Daisy’s opinion and experience?

If readers consider the unhappy void of Florence McNinn’s first marriage and her eventual opening of her suburban box home, life, and garden to Louis Berceau, then Shields demonstrates that even the most enclosed “gardens” can open to change. Unfortunately in *The Stone Diaries*, readers never hear Daisy’s thoughts on this garden/home motto and its direction for the achievement of happiness. In examining the

subtle details of setting, Daisy's various modes of being, and the paradise motif, I believe that Daisy would not necessarily endorse this message. Through the guise of seemingly natural and highly nuanced domestic worlds, Shields demonstrates in *The Stone Diaries* that her characters can, sadly enough, be strangers even to those individuals who are most familiar, residing together in a shared home. In *The Stone Diaries*, home is sometimes a deceptive and formidable place; both the home and its inhabitants must be open to others in order to realize the profound fulfillment that comes only through a daily setting of true companionship, where each individual recognizes and sees the other with verity. Thus, in comparison to *The Box Garden*, *The Stone Diaries* promotes a more profound realization of the domestic world's complexities. Home and the self can neither be closed nor stagnant, otherwise true happiness—the “paradise” that is both a place and a mode of being—is never truly experienced.

In the opening pages of *The Stone Diaries*, the narrator Daisy Goodwill Flett declares, “Every last body on this earth has a particular notion of paradise” (2). As a malleable ideal, a “notion” changes according to an individual's imagination, experience, or knowledge, but what is held in common by the various characters in terms of their idiosyncratic notions of paradise is the search for personal fulfillment, which is more often than not associated with home and companionship. With the aim of recreating the story of her parents and their deepest desires and pleasures as a young married couple, Daisy imagines what constitutes paradise for Mercy and Cuyler just prior to her birth. Noting the heaven motif that begins the novel in chapter one (and later contrasting this scene with the hell motif of chapter five), Wendy Roy argues that Mercy's assembly of the Malvern pudding provides “an imaginary rendering of the joys of domestic life” (136). Ironically, Mercy experiences paradise in the “murderously hot back kitchen of

her own house” where she “concoct[s] and contrive[s], leaning forward and squinting at the fine print of the cookery book, a clean wooden spoon in hand” (Shields 2). Through Daisy’s description, readers glimpse immense pleasure, or what Roy notes to be the ““heavenly”” aspect of Mercy’s “preparing and eating food” within her kitchen (136). As the scene progresses, Mercy’s paradise is not, however, as straightforward or idealistic as Roy asserts. Although Mercy’s domestic work is creative and artistic, Mercy’s solitary paradise is sadly deficient, as paradise in the context of Shields’ novel is not discovered solely through an individual’s work, but rather through true companionship and mutual self-fulfillment.

In order to expose the troubling discrepancies in this imagined paradise of her birth, Daisy reconstitutes the past through the two perspectives of Mercy and Cuyler, providing a dual and problematic vision. Described in conjunction with Mercy’s miraculous kitchen scene is her husband Cuyler’s own notion of paradise. For the two years of his married life, Cuyler revels in the abundance of Mercy’s body and the domestic setting she creates. When Cuyler was a boy and, later, a single man living with his parents, his mother’s pathetic garden was merely “a few weak rows of cabbages, some spindly wax beans” (274). In contrast, his marriage and home with Mercy form a true shelter of abundance, more “an enclosure he’d stumbled upon than a legal arrangement he formally entered” (275). In his life with Mercy, Cuyler feels that he “has been transported to a newly created world” (35). Prior to his marriage he imagined “nothing but misery within” (36) the homes of the Galician immigrants that line his walk home from his job at the limestone quarry, but now Cuyler perceives redefined domestic worlds within these walls: “Now he knows better. Now he has had a glimpse of paradise and sees it everywhere” (36). Mercy’s and Cuyler’s individual ideas and experiences of

paradise are profound and world-altering, but these “notions” exist independently and all is not entirely perfect as Shields uses these two separate paradises to critique a decided lack of fulfillment in the relationship and the shared home. Rather than being “Imparadised in one another’s arms” like Milton’s Adam and Eve (4.506), Cuyler and Mercy reveal major discrepancies between their personal notions of paradise. Whereas Mercy revels in food, Cuyler is a “pick-and-nibble fellow” who does not partake in the same joy as his wife (1). As for Cuyler, he exhibits great ardour in the bedroom as his notion of paradise is sexual intimacy: Mercy’s “own fingers have once or twice brushed across his privates, touching the damp hair encircling his member and informing him of the nature of heaven” (34). Unfortunately, Mercy experiences no sexual pleasure, compensating for her bodily needs by devouring bread: “Her inability to feel love has poisoned her, swallowed down along with the abasement of sugar, yeast, lard, and flour; she knows this for a fact. She tries, she pretends pleasure, as women are encouraged to do, but her efforts are punished by a hunger that attacks her when she’s alone” (7). As an ideal, paradise symbolizes ultimate fulfillment, a place and mode of existence where all needs are readily satisfied and assured, yet Mercy and Cuyler’s relationship is clearly characterized by deficiencies and a lack of mutual recognition.

Mercy’s and Cuyler’s individual paradises are profound, compelling, and by no means as artificial in their realization as those in *The Box Garden*. Their respective domestic visions are sadly isolating, however, and decidedly temporary as the paradisaal scene unravels into Mercy’s sudden and difficult labour. Roy argues that “[b]y representing the life-giving properties of the mother’s breath” during Daisy’s birth, Daisy “as autobiographical narrator reappropriates the female creative ability that has long been patriarchally appropriated in the biblical rendering of a male God breathing life into dust

as a means of generating human life" (132). But if this scene is one of original female-directed creation, then Daisy expands her story of "genesis," incorporating also the story of the Fall and the loss of a seeming paradisaal world for all the characters involved. Mercy's heavenly kitchen scene and Cuyler's newly created domestic world are quickly dismantled, culminating in the chaotic scene of Daisy's birth, Mercy's sudden death, and Cuyler's utter bewilderment: "His small dark face and sinewy body burst through his back door, the tune he has been whistling dying on his lips as he falls upon this scene of chaos, his house with its unanticipated and unbearable human crowding, a strange sharp scent rising to his nostrils, and a high rhythmic cry of lamentation" (38). Mercy's lack of physical self-awareness and innocent deception regarding her pregnancy result in Cuyler's sudden descent into disorder, as he "falls upon this scene of chaos." Through this opening chapter, therefore, Shields positions the domestic setting as something that both is and is not paradise. Together, the alluring vision and ultimate loss of this seeming paradisaal scene in chapter one launch Daisy on her life's journey, which is her search for personal fulfillment and self-realization through the cultivation of her own idyllic domestic world. Furthermore, the discrepancies Daisy imagines as existing between her parents' mutually exclusive "notions" of paradise speak directly to the difficulties Daisy encounters in her own quest for a true place and sense of "home."

Beginning with the edenic frame of chapter one, Shields invokes paradise throughout *The Stone Diaries* as a means of exploring what is and is not fulfilling in her exploration of Daisy's life. As a strategy connected to narrative perspective, Shields' portrayals of various visions of paradise enable her to individualize this ideal as specific to each character, thereby exploring the risks of disingenuous fulfillment in connection with both isolation and superficiality. As mentioned earlier with regard to Roy's critique,

Shields makes an obvious contrast when she parallels the kitchen scene from the opening chapter, “Birth, 1905,” with the dinner scene in chapter five, “Motherhood, 1947”:

While for [Mercy], preparing and eating food is “heavenly” and her “notion of paradise” (2), Daisy’s culinary enterprises are described using the language of hell and damnation: her kitchen is “hot as Hades” (157), and she says “Damn it” five times under her breath as she prises [*sic*] the veal loaf out of the pan (158-9).

Daisy’s recipe is not from a cookery book passed down from woman to woman, as is her mother’s recipe, but from the pages of *Ladies Home Journal* (158). Her young son thinks she looks “straight from the Oxydol ads” (160). (W. Roy 136)

“Mrs. Flett (Daisy)” embodies a 1950’s superficial ideal of femininity and wifely duty; she subsumes her identity and desires under an artificial performance of pleasing perfection and marital bliss (Shields 161). Daisy wants to recreate a culinary masterpiece of domestic heaven as dictated to her through women’s magazines and consumer culture, but her realm of domestic artistry and her pursuit of perfection lie elsewhere: in the garden. Daisy may not possess the culinary grace that Mercy demonstrates, but critics see a link between Mercy’s and Daisy’s individual abilities. For example, Johnson argues, “Traditionally female art forms in *The Stone Diaries*—the folk arts of cooking and gardening—reiterate the alchemy of women’s imaginations on everyday materials. . . . Daisy inherits her mother’s talents for making art from things of the earth” (206). Mercy exhibits exceptional aesthetic vision in her kitchen, but readers should not be quick to idealize so entirely Mercy’s cooking or, for that matter, Daisy’s gardening. Mercy may revel in the “heavenly” creation of her Malvern pudding, but she abuses the food that she creates to feed an overwhelming sense of emptiness: “Eating was as close to heaven as my mother ever came. (In our day we have a name for a passion as disordered as hers)”

(1-2). In *The Stone Diaries*, there is no simplistic, straightforward paradise, as Shields aspires to create an *intelligent* sanctification of the domestic. Just as Mercy's cooking and eating are problematic, Daisy's gardening discloses subtle discrepancies and discord between her outer appearance and her innermost, unfulfilled desires.

Using garden imagery as a way of tracing the various stages of Daisy's life, Shields provides an organic model for personal growth and relationship experiences. In the opening chapter (the scene of Daisy's birth), Daisy describes herself lying helpless and unheld on the kitchen table, the valves of her heart "as fragile as the petals of flowers and not yet, quite unfolded" (38). This sense of vulnerability is captured again, but in a different way, during an elderly Daisy's "Illness and Decline, 1985" when she glances at the white plastic of her hospital wristband and sees that her married name has been accidentally cut off, "leaving the old name—her maiden name—hanging in space, naked as a tulip" (320). Gom highlights this life-encompassing organic model of growth and degeneration: "When Daisy's life shrivels to its end at the retirement home in Florida, we see it reflected in her diminished garden, a row of miniature geraniums on her balcony. Her dreams are of dead shrubbery, or trash strewn in flower beds" (25). Clearly, the garden trope is a central metaphor for Shields' exploration of Daisy's life, a fact that Daisy's daughter Alice acknowledges: "[Mom] stayed home and looked after her children and sewed and cleaned the house—even though she could have afforded help—and did the garden. That garden of hers, it functioned like a kind of trope in her daily life, and in ours too" (236). But while Gom tends to celebrate Daisy's flowers and gardening, describing them as providing "a spiritual sustenance" (24) and giving her "the purest of pleasures" (25), Shields' use of gardens and garden imagery is actually more evocative of

the complexities of Daisy's difficult search for paradise and fulfillment throughout her life's journey.

Shields' use of the garden motif reaches beyond simply demonstrating Daisy's affinity for plants, her love of gardening, and the "floral" family legacy of the Fletts. Instead, Shields uses the garden to reveal not only how others perceive Daisy, but also how Daisy *performs* various roles according to others' desires. Garden imagery and garden settings provide, therefore, not simply an organic or "natural" model of Daisy's life, but also a paradoxical means of "staging" the sometimes superficial, unfulfilling life roles that constitute and deter Daisy's own personal quest for paradise. In terms of using the garden for the purposes of both characterization and setting, Shields makes a particularly apt choice as a way of exploring Daisy's life of social "acting," as Shields draws upon a key function of gardens: performance and theatre. In his study of garden design and artistic representations of historical gardens, John Dixon Hunt emphasizes the garden's ability to function as both a formal and informal kind of theatre. While historically gardens contained actual platforms or green spaces for dramatic and musical entertainment, informally they offered space for social acting and interaction. Alluding to gardens of eighteenth-century Europe, Hunt writes, "Gardens offered themselves as spaces where stage and auditorium, theater and world, were constantly interchanged, where socially imposed roles could be played out before an understanding if critical audience, and where social artifice was 'naturalized' amid the garden's greenery in ways that it could never exactly be within doors" (*Greater Perfections* 163). Critics of *The Stone Diaries* (such as Briganti and Johnson) note that social artifice and gender expectations constrict Daisy's development and determine her identity. These critics focus primarily on the language and narrative structures that contain and construct

Daisy's life roles. For example, Briganti suggests that by shifting between first and third person narration, Shields "emphasizes that identity doesn't belong to the self, that it is forever elusive, only to be briefly glimpsed in the play of language, never to be discovered or unmasked" (192-93). Echoing Briganti's idea of "masking," Johnson argues that Daisy possesses "the ability to draft alternative versions of [her] life," as women are "storyers, bearers of social change brought up from the depths of our own autobiographical bodies" (221). But in addition to the constructs of language and narrative as shaping influences on Daisy's life, Shields uses the garden as another compelling means of exploring Daisy's social roles.

As both a physical setting and a trope, the garden in *The Stone Diaries* underscores what is natural and artificial in Daisy's life. Hunt argues that both the world of theatre and the theatre that is the world occupy the space of a garden. When placed in the context of *The Stone Diaries*, this interpretation of the garden as a site of drama reveals that Daisy "acts" according to the needs of others, and her sometimes superficially constructed identity finds expression, ironically enough, through the seemingly "natural" image of the garden. In the earliest days of her life, Daisy becomes Clarentine Flett's ticket to freedom when Clarentine leaves her husband, Magnus. Boarding the train, Clarentine carries a "bag, bouquet, and baby" in her arms (48). Together, these three items provide Clarentine with the impetus to seek a new life, mobility, and independence, as she creates a new family in Winnipeg and sells flowers to earn a living. Indeed, the three "b" items seem interchangeable: Clarentine transfers her love of gardens to her surrogate daughter by bestowing Daisy with a floral name and an interest in gardens; she launches Daisy on a life of "journeys" to and from different homes so Daisy's life is always in transit; and she provides Daisy with a degree of financial freedom through the

proceeds of her business. In many ways, Clarentine sets the “garden” stage for Daisy’s life and identity. Judging by a list of its components, readers surmise that this “golden childhood” is idyllic and natural: “Warmth, security. Picnics along the river. A garden full of flowers” (148). Appearances are not, however, adequate indicators of a truly paradisaic state. In reality, Daisy spends part of her childhood in the dark, literally (during her illness of the measles and bronchial pneumonia) and figuratively (by remaining ignorant about her family origins and identity): “Something was missing, and it took weeks in that dim room, weeks of heavy blankets, and the image of that upside-down tree inside her chest to inform her of what it was. What she lacked was the kernel of authenticity, that precious interior core that everyone around her seemed to possess” (75).

After witnessing Daisy playing in Clarentine’s garden and then becoming seriously ill, readers are somewhat distrustful of garden settings, as innocence and protection are not entirely assured. This skepticism of the garden continues to develop when a young Daisy leaves Clarentine’s mothering garden and enters into Barker Flett’s sexualized, imaginative landscape located in “his woolen trousers and underwear [where] there is a wild pubic sprouting like a private garden” (112). A staid scientist with a botanical fetish for lady’s-slippers, Barker desires Daisy’s pre-pubescent body and her “budding breasts” (111). Daisy is the focus of Barker’s sexual desires and he cannot classify her despite his scientific objectivity:

Like a chart on a wall, the complete organization of the botanic world is suspended in his consciousness. . . . [Daisy] sits far out at the end of one of the branches, laughing, calling to him. . . . she remains steadfastly there, a part of nature, confused with the subtle tendrils of sexual memory; he could no more ignore her presence than erase a sub-species of orchid or sedge. (143)

If *The Stone Diaries* is Daisy's life story told in retrospect, then Daisy projects herself into what she imagines to have been Barker's vision of and desire for her eleven-year-old body. Evidently, the young Daisy fulfills a certain role here, and although she seems to be "a part of nature," she has actually transformed into a highly unnatural construct: the objectified young temptress to her surrogate uncle. Daisy may appear to be "laughing, calling" to Barker as a sexualized exotic other, yet in reality, the pre-pubescent Daisy is naïve and willfully unaware, "translat[ing] her uncle's long brooding sexual stare . . . into an attack of indigestion" (77).

When Daisy matures, Shields incorporates the garden in pronounced ways as a means of staging Daisy's various roles and performances. When an adult Daisy embarks on a real romantic relationship in the chapter "Marriage, 1927," she is cast in an unexpected maternal role that caters yet again to the needs of a male figure, her fiancé Harold Hoad. During a luncheon on the veranda, Daisy's future mother-in-law, Mrs. Hoad, provides detailed instructions on how to "mother" the groom. In a later scene, readers witness Daisy performing this parental role when the young couple strolls through a public garden:

"Don't do that with your stick," she said to him.

Idly, he had been swinging a willow wand about in the air and lopping off the heads of delphiniums, sweet william, bachelor buttons, irises.

"Who cares," he said, looking sideways at her, his big elastic face working.

"I care," she said.

He swung widely and took three blooms at once. Oriental poppies. The petals scattered on the asphalt path.

"Stop that," she said, and he stopped. (116)

Gom points to this exchange between Harold and Daisy as an indicator of Daisy's role as "a caretaker of the garden, its advocate": "The scene works to give us an easy characterization of Harold, but we also see Daisy, usually so placid and agreeable, assert herself, not on her own behalf but on behalf of the flowers. And she wins. He stops" (25). Daisy may be the garden's protector when faced with a destructive Harold, but this passage is not entirely about Daisy's genuine self-assertion. Following the exchange of dialogue, Shields underlines the role Daisy has just performed in relation to Harold—a role based on providing Harold with *his* desired counterpart: "He knows how much he needs her. He longs for correction, for love like a scalpel, a whip, something to curb his wild impulses and morbidity. She honestly believes she can change him, take hold of him and make something noble of his wild nature. He is hungry, she knows, for repression" (Shields 117).

Daisy may be the guardian of nature, but she serves also as Harold's maternal chastiser and stages a type of garden performance. Hunt writes, "We talk casually of garden 'settings' or 'scenes'; the etymological connection to the theatre is no accident" (*Greater Perfections* 166-67). With regard to Daisy's exchange with Harold, Shields creates a veritable "scene" not just through the couple's tense emotions, but more significantly through dramatizing the garden incident through an abrupt shift in the text. Following a recounting of Cuyler's wedding gift to Daisy (a carved garden gnome) and his long-winded convocation speech to the graduates of Long College (115-16), Shields switches immediately into a new setting and employs dramatic, rather than linear and explicit, narration. The effect is that the incident of Harold's flower decapitation becomes distinctly separate, a scene set apart from the previous narrative line in the text. Shields stages a garden "scene" in the full sense of the theatrical meaning of that term,

thereby revealing Daisy's participation as a social actor responding to the expectations and needs of others.

Although Shields presents the exchange between Daisy and Harold as a private moment between the affianced couple, the scene takes place in "Bloomington's public gardens" (Shields 116). There is an explicit blurring of public and private space, an effect that is key to understanding how garden space accommodates role-playing:

[T]he garden invites, even requires or compels its owners or its visitors to 'perform,' to entertain a new self or to exploit the full potentialities of an old one. The very decision to depict owners and/or their guests in a garden [by a painter], whether or not they are deliberately posing for the artist, is an invitation to show them behaving self-consciously or with that extra verve or spirit that comes from registering a special place and moment. (*Greater Perfections* 165)

Gardening for Daisy is clearly much more than a personal interest nurtured during her "golden childhood" in Clarentine Flett's Winnipeg garden and carried forward during all periods of her life. Instead, the garden is a site of heightened self-consciousness and a "special place and moment"—a veritable theatrical venue that facilitates numerous modes of being in which her personal desires and social conformity find complicated, intertwined expressions.

Shields' incorporation of garden theatrics—mainly through Daisy's "acting out" of societal expectations within a garden or through garden imagery—problematizes and even undermines a central concern of the novel: the desire to understand everyone's "particular notion of paradise" in his or her individual quest for personal fulfillment (Shields 2). In *The Box Garden*, Shields renders performances and explicit constructions of paradise as superficial and suspect. Charleen and Watson's failed marriage is rooted

clearly in fairytale, not reality. Moreover, Watson's rooming house "Eden" exists through electric lights, transported grass, and mirrors—the tricks of illusions. His "paradise" caters to his "need for an audience" (himself), making this enclosed, artificial garden seem shallow, narcissistic, and spiritually unfulfilling. Considering that the same desire for paradise is emphasized in the opening chapter of *The Stone Diaries* and that superficiality and performance, rather than a more "genuine" self-realization, are suggested through Daisy's assumption of her social roles, then readers must question the substance and verity of Daisy's own particular "Eden" that is her Ottawa garden and her time as the much-loved garden columnist "Mrs. Green Thumb."

In contrast to Watson's garden of grass and mirrors, or Florence's gaudy home of ever-changing décor, Daisy's garden appears entirely natural, a true achievement. Where Mercy revels in the miracle that is her artistic cooking, Daisy finds heaven in the creation of her backyard garden at number 583 The Driveway. For over two pages, Shields provides a lush, detailed, and exclamatory description of Daisy's garden that recalls the comprehensive, joyous narration of Mercy's opening kitchen scene—a paralleling of scenes that Johnson observes.¹⁶ It is a garden setting that evokes a truly paradisaal experience:

The Flett's large, rather ill-favored brick house is nested in a saucer of green: front, back, and sides, a triple lot, rare in this part of the city. . . . And her lilacs! Some people, you know, will go out and buy any old lilac and just poke it in the ground, but Mrs. Flett has given thought to overall plant size and blossom color. . .

¹⁶ After discussing Mercy's artistic abilities in the kitchen, Johnson notes that "Daisy inherits her mother's talent for making art from things of the earth," such as Daisy's tremendous cultivation of raspberries (206). Just as Mercy uses raspberries to make her Malvern pudding, Daisy grows this fruit in abundance in her backyard. In addition to the two women's shared artistic materials, Shields incorporates other descriptive details to mirror the two scenes of domestic artistry. Just as Mercy revels in her kitchen on a "boiling hot day" (1), Daisy "lives for summer, for the heat of the sun—for her garden" (194).

. These different varieties are “grouped” not “plopped.” At the side of the house a border of blue sweet William has been given a sprinkling of bright yellow coreopsis, and this combination, without exaggeration, is a true artist’s touch. Clumps of bleeding heart are placed—placed, this has not just happened—near the pale blueness of campanula; perfection! . . . And the dahlias!—Mrs. Flett’s husband jokes about the size of her dahlias, claiming that the blooms have to be carried in through the back door sideways. . . . This garden . . . is full of grave intelligence and even, you might say, a kind of wit. . . . Does Mrs. Barker Flett understand the miracle she has brought into being in the city of Ottawa on the continent of North America in this difficult northern city in the mean, toxic, withholding middle years of our century? Yes; for once she understands fully.

(194-96)

Daisy’s garden bursts with verdant beauty. Her ability to “group” varieties of plants and “place” flowers and colours points to a true artistic vision that is subtle, complex, and pleasure-filled. The narrator’s voice expresses awe and wonder, capturing every detail and accomplishment of this gardener who has created “perfection,” a “miracle.” Unlike many of the roles and plots in which Daisy has found herself cast by others throughout her life, her garden has “not just happened.” In its design, the garden communicates an awareness and consciousness, suggesting that Daisy is indeed an intelligent creator who possesses “grave wit.” With the sheer abundance of detail in Shields’ description, it is difficult for readers not to be seduced by Daisy’s backyard paradise.

After witnessing Daisy’s hellish scene of dinner preparation, critics are quick to celebrate Daisy’s garden as her ideal space of self-expression and profound creativity (Johnson, Guttman, Gom). For some, the garden is a feminine oasis within a patriarchal

society that has always entrapped and defined Daisy according to pre-determined gender roles. Johnson argues, for instance, that gardening is Daisy's mode of empowerment: as a "sensual and subversive" garden (206), the Ottawa yard serves as Daisy's "space of self-actualization" (207), as Daisy becomes an influential creator, not just a flowery female other. Similar to Johnson, Naomi Ellen Guttman contends that Daisy's garden holds great significance as a liberating space, "provid[ing] . . . an escape from the rigid confines of the home and . . . culture's expectation of ideal womanhood" (25). The "subversive" aspect of gardening to which Johnson refers is what Guttman understands to be the "fundamental purpose" of Daisy's garden: "the freedom from self" and the scrutiny Daisy endures under patriarchy (103). Guttman believes that within the privacy of her garden—a place that is Daisy's "child, her dearest child" (Shields 196)—Daisy finds a sacred space of spiritual renewal, childhood innocence, and personal fulfillment, countering the many voids in her life:

If we were to psychoanalyze Daisy we might see her as plagued by her mother's death and her father's mourning, and conclude that Shields is portraying a character who has never developed the care of herself—the ego—that is said to be a natural part of growing from babyhood to independence. The garden, then, is both the baby she never was, merging with the mother, and her 'dearest child.' (Guttman 103)

Clearly, critics celebrate Daisy's garden as an immensely personal space of intimate expression and pleasure; it is a self-directed environment, and Daisy "understands fully" what she has achieved (Shields 196).

For the most part, critics' appraisals of Daisy's garden are in keeping with the meticulous care Shields takes in establishing the heavenly quality of Daisy's garden, even using the term "Eden" explicitly. The description of Daisy's garden conveys a truly

paradisaal quality. It is a place of fertility and perfection replete with “apple trees in the back garden,” their “leaves throw[ing] kaleidoscopic patterns on the fine pale lawn” (195). Mercy found and lost paradise in the kitchen, and now Daisy creates and regains paradise in her backyard. As if to validate the idyllic status of Daisy’s garden, Shields relates both indirectly and directly other characters’ overwhelming response to Daisy’s artistic work:

The fact is, there are many in this city who feel a genuine fondness for Mrs. Flett, who warm to her modesty and admire her skills, her green thumb in particular. Her garden, these good friends claim, is so fragrant, verdant, and peaceful, so enchanting in its look of settledness and its caressing movements of shade and light, that entering it is to leave the troubles of the world behind. Visitors standing in this garden sometimes feel their hearts lock into place for an instant, and experience blurred primal visions of creation—Eden itself, paradise, indeed.

(Shields 196)

In addition to this general consensus on the paradisaal achievement that is Daisy’s garden, Daisy’s daughter Alice points to the garden as a pinnacle in her mother’s life. Alice describes the garden as offering a near-transcendent experience, where order, beauty, and “fulfillment . . . whatever the hell fulfillment is” (326), exist within the normal routine of life:

Have you ever looked at, say, a picture or a great building or read a paragraph in a book and felt the world suddenly expand and, at the same instant, contract and harden into a kernel of perfect purity? Do you know what I mean? Everything suddenly fits, everything’s in its place. Like in our Ottawa garden, that kind of thing. (Shields 326)

Judging by the admiration of friends, visitors, and even Alice for Daisy's paradise, readers and critics alike are understandably prepared to accept Daisy's garden as a supreme accomplishment. This place is, after all, where people "leave the troubles of the world behind" and "feel their hearts lock into place for an instant" with "primal visions of creation" (196). After serving so long as the object or "other" to various characters' desires and needs, Daisy finally seems in control and self-directed within this idyllic green space; she is the creator of, not merely an actor in, the garden. But readers must remember, however, to be cautious of assuming uncritical celebration or straightforward idealization, particularly since in the opening chapter, notions of "paradise," even when they are explicitly named as such, are not entirely unproblematic or truly fulfilling.

When Shields introduces her motif, Mercy's and Cuyler's paradises prove temporal and flawed, as their individual notions of fulfillment compensate for immense deficiencies. In this first chapter, which begins in paradise and unravels into chaos, Shields encourages readers to be suspicious of domestic paradises and instead to look more closely at the complexities of the spaces which enclose and define her characters' lives and modes of being. Therefore, while Daisy's garden may seem to be "perfection," "Eden," and "paradise indeed," upon closer inspection, the exuberance of the description disguises a subtle but persistent lack of personal fulfillment within Daisy's life that remains present even within her Ottawa garden. Like her father and mother before her, Daisy's notion of paradise contains its own telling limitations, deficiencies, and superficial comforts.

7. The Deficiencies of Daisy's "Eden"

While Daisy's garden represents a profoundly personal space, a site of self-expression, and a haven from her daily life, Shields problematizes the supposed perfection of Daisy's domestic paradise by implicating it in Daisy's lack of self-realization and her tendency to perform to others' expectations. Heralding the garden as spiritually revitalizing, Guttman sees the garden as Daisy's best retreat because of "the freedom from self it gives her" (103). Indeed, as an individual who has always performed various roles for others, Daisy experiences a sense of escape in her garden; here, mystery and anonymity thrive: "She may yearn to know the true state of the garden, but she wants even more to be part of its mysteries. She understands, perhaps, a quarter of its green secrets, no more. In turn it perceives nothing of her, not her history, her name, her longings, nothing—which is why she is able to love it as purely as she does" (196). Having performed her expected roles, such as Harold's mothering fiancée, Daisy seems now to revel in the lack of audience in her private garden that "perceives nothing of her." Indeed, Daisy's paradise suggests a more genuine, deeply private sense of self when contrasted with Watson's mirrors and self-absorbed performance, or Daisy and Harold's "scene" in Bloomington Public Gardens. According to his discussion of visual representations of gardens and the people within them, however, Hunt explains that these spaces, even when they appear "private," occupy an ambiguous zone, facilitating a combination of private-public modes of behaviour and conduct:

[T]oday we tend to think of gardens as essentially private places where we feel able, as we say, to "be ourselves" (by contrast, "public garden" seems something of a contradiction in terms). Yet even while celebrating that seclusion, the painter constantly recalls us to the obligations of privacy, maybe to the obligations of

ownership, the responsibilities of creating, maintaining, or even just visiting a garden, and to the self-conscious requirements of apt garden behavior. . . .

(*Greater Perfections* 164)

If private, not just public, gardens instill a sense of performance and self-consciousness, then critics' suggestions that within Daisy's garden there is a supposed lack of audience or a sense of liberation from a performed "self" do not entirely hold true. Undeniably, Shields promotes the Ottawa garden as a retreat from the world, yet the fact remains that she also places Daisy within it for readers' assessment and critical viewing. Neither Daisy nor her garden escapes scrutiny or performance entirely; both remain objects of the reader's gaze and occasionally of other characters' interpretation.

In order to appreciate the subtle complexities, qualified freedom, and deficiencies of Daisy's "Eden," readers must first step outside of the Ottawa garden to appreciate how Shields directs and frames their entrance into it. Before readers are introduced to Daisy's "paradise," the narrator recounts Daisy's journey to Canada from Bloomington, Indiana at the age of thirty-one with garden images that undermine this young woman's expectations of her new life with Barker and the apparent freedom she hopes to realize. In the seemingly innocent, "cool clean place" and "polite" space of a paradisaal Canada, Daisy fails to find "a healing kingdom" (133). Canada is not the idyllic escape that Daisy hoped it would be, and neither, Shields warns, is the Ottawa garden. Prior to Daisy's reunion with Barker, Daisy tours Canada, the "[s]cenery just heavenly" (146). Undermining Daisy's naïve hope and girlish expectations, Shields draws upon the story of the Dionne Quintuplets to present Canada as a place of confining narratives and continued performance. After visiting Niagara Falls, Daisy travels like hundreds of other tourists to Callander, Ontario and views the Dionne "Quints":

As they [Daisy and the other tourists] at last approached the viewing area, they were ordered to remain silent so as not to disturb the young quints who were playing in an enclosed garden. She caught only a glimpse of little white dresses and sun bonnets against the vivid green grass. At least one of the infants was wailing. People behind her pushed up against her, and she was obliged to move on. She felt herself part of a herd of absurd creatures observing other creatures, and dwelt with a part of her mind on the need to set herself at a distance from all these sunny, chatting people There was something comical about this, and something deeply degrading, but why should she be surprised? She had come to see this spectacle knowing she would go away filled with a satisfying sense of indignation—and so she did. (134)

This enclosed garden with “vivid green grass” set against white dresses and sun bonnets seems like an idyllic world in which to live. Clearly, however, this site of seeming perfection is neither innocent nor sheltering, as the girls are “spectacle” for the paying public. If the enclosed, private world of the Quints’ residence can serve as a venue for the performance of a public “paradise,” then Daisy’s own adult life in the “garden” (both in her Ottawa yard and in her role in the public domain as Mrs. Green Thumb) must be carefully assessed not simply as a spiritual haven, but rather as a place of audience, scrutiny, and self-conscious performance. In other words, Daisy’s supposed “paradise” is both a place and mode of behaviour that prohibits unqualified self-realization and total escape.

Together, Daisy’s Ottawa “paradise” and her role as the media persona Mrs. Green Thumb illuminate the limitations in Daisy’s quest for fulfillment. Reflecting on Daisy’s gardening, Shields states in an interview that Daisy “stumble[s], for a time, into

meaningful work. Her garden offer[s] her a form of creative expression” (J. Thomas 81-82). This sense of temporary purpose and expressive pleasure stems not from an entirely private retreat, but from Daisy’s appreciation of the blurred distinctions between private and public garden terrain, especially when she begins to write a garden column for public consumption from the privacy of her own home. When Daisy assumes the persona of Mrs. Green Thumb for the *Recorder*, she acquires a new role that allows for a degree of self-realization and expression, albeit within the continued, inescapable constraints of performance. After spending her life fulfilling various roles according to the needs and desires of others, that is, Daisy learns finally through the garden how to harness the power of performance for her own personal fulfillment.

When Daisy acquires the role of Mrs. Green Thumb by chance following Barker’s death, she seems to have “veered, accidentally, into her own life” and demonstrates a clear aptitude and enjoyment for journalism (237). Alice observes her mother’s amazing concentration and apparent success in her new role: “She gets lost in what she’s doing and doesn’t even hear the phone ringing; none of us ever guessed she had this power of absorption. . . . When she isn’t actually writing, she’s answering mail from her readers—she averages at least twenty letters a week” (239). Mrs. Green Thumb’s fan letters compose a significant portion of the information communicated in the chapter “Work, 1955-1964.” From her readers, Mrs. Green Thumb receives everything from questions about staking perennial asters (208); to offers of gardening advice (209); to compliments on her writing style: “Your piece on hollyhocks was terrific. I liked the part about their ‘frilled dirndl skirts,’ and their ‘shy fuzzy stems’” (225); to declarations of affection from an anonymous admirer:

O dear mrs green, my dear mrs thumb

how i love you love you for
your goodness your greenness your thumb-readiness
your watering can your fertilizer pellets. . . . (218)

Through her writing and gardening persona, Daisy connects with people, and her audience responds to her performance. As one fan “Fed-Up-With-Weeds-And-Bugs-in-South-Ottawa” writes, “You’ve got a real gift for making a story out of things” (222). Even Daisy’s own daughter, Alice, recognizes Daisy’s hidden abilities and depths that surface as a result of the new public title and role: “It appeared she had a knack for this kind of writing. It surprised everyone” (237).

This surprising, developing aspect to Daisy’s character extends beyond her professional role as Mrs. Green Thumb. On a personal level, the period of “Work” becomes an unconventional time of creative independence in Daisy’s life. Apart from coming into her own as a garden writer, Daisy welcomes into her home her pregnant, unwed niece, Beverley, much to Alice’s chagrin: “Let me say right off that you’ve completely lost your marbles about this baby business” (212). Daisy allows the household to slip into disarray during her busy writing schedule: “She got way behind on the vacuuming. Everything. Even her beloved African violets dried up, even her ferns” (237). And Daisy involves herself romantically, readers suspect, with her editor Jay Dudley when he reflects, “I was very, very fond of her” (254). Clearly while the persona Mrs. Green Thumb is somewhat conventional, Daisy pursues her own interests and life path, expressing herself in a less scripted manner during, ironically enough, an overtly

“performative” phase of her life.¹⁷ Alice recalls this “Work” period as an immense but welcomed disruption in her mother’s normally routine life:

In 1954 we were a nice ordinary family, Mr. and Mrs. Barker Flett and their three tractable children. Then—it seemed like a lightening flash had hit our house—there was just one parent (distracted, preoccupied) and an unwed mother and a baby with colic and three teenagers. . . .

You’d have thought my mother would be wildly unsettled by all this, but you would be wrong. She let the chaos that hit our household in 1955 roll right over her like a big friendly engulfing wave. (238)

The sudden “chaos” that hits the Flett household is reminiscent of Cuyler’s fall into chaos in the opening chapter; but here, disorder becomes paradoxically a kind of “paradise” for Daisy who, in this wave of change, “bob[s] to the surface, her round face turned upward . . . happy” (238). Through the role of Mrs. Green Thumb, Daisy assumes with comfort and pleasure a public, self-assertive demeanor. Daisy may still be performing through the garden, yet her performance seems more self-directed and rewarding than her previous personal/familial roles.

When readers take into account both the troubling story of the garden-enclosed Dionne quintuplets and the superimposition of others’ perspectives and desires on to Daisy throughout her life, then Daisy’s stint as a garden writer must be carefully considered as potentially restricting as much as it is liberating. Praising Daisy’s time as Mrs. Green Thumb, Guttman concedes that Shields composes the chapter on Daisy’s work entirely through the words of others. The chapter consists of a series of letters

¹⁷ Johnson notes that “Daisy is effaced by the patriarchal custom of taking one’s husband’s name” (Barker was the original Mr. Green Thumb), yet Shields still “celebrates the real and worthy work of Daisy’s hands” (206).

addressed to Daisy and Mrs. Green Thumb, but readers are never privy to Daisy's own thoughts, feelings, or perceptions of this seemingly exciting, unconventional, and personally fulfilling period of "Work." If this time and space represents "paradise" in Daisy's life, then she is unsettlingly silent. Daisy connects with strangers, acquaintances, lovers, and family members, but readers perceive these relationships only through others' impressions. One of her fans, a housewife, even sounds similar to Daisy, but readers can only assume an affinity since Daisy neither responds to this fan nor declares seeing herself in the woman's anecdote.¹⁸ If Daisy functions as both an object and mirror for others' desires, then it is extremely difficult for readers to see Daisy as an individual in her own right. Sadly, Daisy remains silent and detached within this key chapter. Readers have no choice but to interpret the responses of Daisy's audience in order to have some appreciation, however skewed, of Daisy's character. Ironically then, as much as the garden facilitates Daisy's connections and relationships with others, it also inhibits her ability to create her own self-directed performance of "Daisy" and even "Mrs. Green Thumb," leaving an undeniable absence in her story and a sense of her overwhelming isolation and silence. Something is lacking and amiss in this supposed "paradise," just as Daisy's parents, Mercy and Cuyler, revel in their individual, but ultimately deficient, notions of fulfillment.

Daisy's composite experience of performance and self-assertion in her role as Mrs. Green Thumb eventually comes to bear upon her seemingly private retreat of self-expression: her Ottawa garden. The garden columnist role is undeniably performative

¹⁸ Just as Daisy loves "to tie a crisp clean apron around her waist . . . , peel a pound of potatoes in three minutes flat and put them soaking in cold water" (263), Mrs. Alice W. Keefer recounts similar daily experiences and private pleasures in her fan letter to Mrs. Green Thumb: "Your tribute to geraniums touched the middle of my heart. These sturdy, stout-hearted darlings have kept me company for the fifty years of my married life, sitting on the window sill and cheering me on while I peeled the supper spuds" (220).

and self-effacing; readers yearn, therefore, to idealize Daisy's Ottawa garden as a truly personal haven in an otherwise bland and growth-restricted existence. When Daisy loses her position as Mrs. Green Thumb and is pushed aside by the underhanded and appropriately named journalist "Pinky Fullman"—an egotist who is "full" of himself and his talent for botanical illustration, but is a less qualified garden journalist being endowed merely with a "pinky," rather than a true "green thumb"—Shields forces readers to assess the nature of Daisy's paradise. In "Sorrow, 1965," Daisy enters a period of depression and silence, and Alice recounts visiting her now-unemployed mother: "I find my mother seated in the garden, gripping the arms of a wicker chair, her chin oddly dented and old, her mouth round, helpless, saying, 'I can't get used to this. I can't get over this.'" (240). Through this short passage, Shields creates another critical garden scene, depicting Daisy as a woman in crisis who seeks comfort in her personal garden but finds none. What can Daisy not "get used to" or "over"? Readers may choose to agree, or not, with Alice's theory that Daisy's grief-stricken obsession is the loss of her job: "A year ago she was sitting at that desk with her hair buzzing around her head like something alive and her pen scrambling. . . . She was Mrs. Green Thumb, that well-known local personage, and now she's back to being Mrs. Flett again" (240). Alice appreciates that her mother has experienced an exhilarating expansion and disappointing contraction of her identity through acquiring and then abruptly losing her Mrs. Green Thumb title and role. But when Daisy sits in her garden and says, "I can't get used to this," her declaration demands consideration within a much broader life-encompassing framework.

Throughout the chapter on "Work, 1955-1964"—the seemingly most liberating and rewarding period of Daisy's life—and the chapter on "Sorrow, 1965"—the most debilitating and unfulfilling time—Daisy is perceived entirely through the words and

opinions of others. Readers cannot confer with Daisy as to whether or not the other family members, friends, work colleagues, acquaintances, lover, and strangers communicate her person and experience appropriately or justly. Thus, when a depressed Daisy enters her garden—her supposedly “dearest child” and site of “perfection”—Daisy and her readers are met, sadly enough, with a strangely similar predicament. Guttman celebrates the “freedom from self” the garden gives to Daisy (103), and indeed, Shields states that the garden “perceives nothing of her, not her history, her name, her longings, nothing—which is why she is able to love it as purely as she does” (196). Clearly, in her garden, Daisy is not at risk of being type-cast as girlish temptress, maternal chastiser, matronly mother, or garden columnist in order to suit the needs and desires of others. If Daisy’s garden is her “Eden,” however, this unperceiving, unfeeling paradise is a rather cold alternative and preference. The people in Daisy’s life misperceive her, yet Daisy’s garden presents a similar dilemma of self-erasure by not perceiving Daisy at all—“not her history, her name, her longings, nothing” (196). Daisy may revel in her garden-based anonymity given that at least she escapes unsolicited scrutiny and containment within unwanted social scripts, but within this state of anonymity she remains unexpressed, unknown, and at times unfulfilled: “I can’t get used to this” (240).

As much as Daisy’s Ottawa garden provides her with sanctuary and an outlet for creative self-expression, it is also a space that accentuates Daisy’s isolation, unhealthy containment, and deficient self-development. The Ottawa garden is an idyllic paradise, but it is also a provisional and somewhat flawed one in terms of the quality of its freedom and solace. Clearly, Daisy confers much of her own self—her passion, thoughts, and predilections—into the creation that is her garden, yet she herself only “understands, perhaps, a quarter of its green secrets, no more” (196). As if demonstrating the distance

and uncertainty that characterizes Daisy's lack of self-perception, the Ottawa garden is also related to readers as an "other." Daisy longs to understand and interact with it on a profound level: "She may yearn to know the true state of the garden, but she wants even more to be part of its mysteries. . . . she has opened her arms to it, taking it as it comes, every leaf, every stem, every root and sign" (196). Clearly, Daisy wants to read and understand the "signs" of her garden just as readers, critics, and even other characters in the novel attempt to "read" Daisy and the meaning of her life. By "open[ing] her arms to it," Daisy attempts to embrace her garden and her own otherness, those unexamined mysteries of her innermost self. Unfortunately, the later garden scene of isolation and bewilderment featured in "Sorrow, 1965," where an unemployed Mrs. Green Thumb sits uncomfortable and lacking all serenity, problematizes what once seemed pure perfection, "paradise indeed." Sadly, Daisy cannot realize true happiness and fulfillment in her garden because she remains within it a stranger to both herself and to others.

Through the ultimately unfulfilling, provisional paradise of the Ottawa garden, Shields presents Daisy as a woman who never truly communicates herself to, or is genuinely perceived by, others. Nowhere is this sad realization made more evident than in the final chapter "Death," as Daisy's own adult children lack an appreciation for their mother's real pleasures and interests. Having earlier recognized her mother's profound interest in the garden and transformation into a creative, independent woman as Mrs. Green Thumb, Alice now dismisses what readers can only imagine is Daisy's most prized, bequeathed possession—her garden trug:

"She left you what?" Joan shouted over the telephone (A bad transatlantic connection.)

"Her trug," said Alice, grimacing.

“What in God’s name is a trug?”

“That old gardening basket of hers. That old mildewed thing with the huge hooped handle?”

“I think I remember. Vaguely. But why?”

“I don’t know. Same reason you got the silver asparagus server, I suppose.”

“Lordy.” . . .

“She really kind of lost it at the end, didn’t she?” (347-48)

The concluding passage of the novel similarly emphasizes the lack of thought and attention others bestow upon Daisy throughout her life and even in her (imagined) death. In the final scene, two unidentified speakers comment on the flowers at Daisy’s funeral service:

“The pansies, have you ever seen such ravishing pansies?”

“She would have loved them.”

“Somehow, I expected to see a huge bank of daisies.”

“Daisies, yes.”

“Someone should have thought of daisies.”

“Yes.”

“Ah, well.” (361)

Taking into account that Daisy “once . . . said she liked pansies at a funeral” (a statement made a few pages earlier in the chapter), readers appreciate that one of Daisy’s final wishes has been respected (356). Readers assume that as an avid gardener familiar with botany and the language of flowers, Daisy understands the meaning behind pansies and their appropriateness for memorial services because the flower symbolizes memory being

the “messenger of affectionate thoughts” (Dumas 112).¹⁹ The pleasing sentiment of the pansies is undermined, however, as the speakers betray their thoughtlessness and callousness through the ““Ah, well”” response to the fact that the flower of Daisy’s namesake is absent from the service. Sadly and ironically, the daisy is not only Daisy’s signature, but also the symbol of Daisy’s unperceived life:

A daisy really is a bit like an eye when you think about it, round and fringed with lashes, staring upward.

Opening, closing.

. . . And we require, it seems, in our moments of courage or shame, at least one witness, but Mrs. Flett has not had this privilege. This is what breaks her heart.

What she can’t bear. Even now, eighty years old. (339)

From the moment of her birth to her (imagined) death, Daisy is assessed and interpreted by her family according to their needs and desires, but Daisy is rarely perceived in her own right.²⁰ Like her parents before her and their individual but mutually deficient notions of paradise, Daisy remains isolated, a stranger to those who should have known her best, including herself.²¹

¹⁹ Pansies are also the flower with which Daisy says goodbye to her adoptive mother upon Clarentine’s death: “Daisy floated her to heaven on a bed of pansies” (77).

²⁰ In a parting, posthumous note to his wife, Barker offers a glimpse of this failed perception by acknowledging the tragic isolation of his and Daisy’s marriage: “The memory of our ‘lady’s-slippers’ discussion has . . . led me into wondering whether you perhaps viewed our marriage in a similar way, as a trap. . . . Between us we have almost never mentioned the word love. . . . This I regret. . . . I would like to have danced with you through the back door, out into the garden . . . Oh, my dear. I thought we would have more time” (198-99).

²¹ During his massive heart attack, Cuyler comes to a similar realization as that of Barker. Cuyler’s first marriage—a seemingly magical “enclosure” (275)—lacked in true companionship: “She is always in his recollections, standing at the doorway, waiting for him, a presence, a grief, an ache. In fact, she had never

The beauty and fecundity of Daisy's Ottawa garden make it seem a veritable paradise, but its unperceiving nature perpetuates the pattern of Daisy's life. Through the figurative "garden" of the "Flowers" in Florida, however, Shields provides a counterpart to this unfeeling, literal Ottawa garden, which gives Daisy nothing more than solace in "Sorrow, 1965." When Daisy moves to Florida and takes up residence in the Bayside Towers retirement community, Daisy begins to realize true companionship, a home of belonging, and genuine mutual perception. Daisy discovers finally that as an enclosed place and mode of being, "paradise" requires, paradoxically enough, true openness to others. In keeping with Shields' negotiation of "natural" and superficial notions of paradise, the initial description of Bayside Towers presents a contained, highly artificial, and insubstantial home.²² Daisy feels that "[e]verything she encounters . . . lack[s] . . . weight. The hollow interior doors of her condo. The molded insubstantiality of the light switches. The dismaying lightness of her balcony furniture" (280). Reminiscent of the empty McNinn home in *The Box Garden*, the hollow quality of Bayside Towers is unappealing, and the former Mrs. Green Thumb cannot walk around her unnatural surroundings without feeling some displeasure: "In the foyer of Bayside Towers stands an artificial jade plant, and she is unable to walk by this abomination without reaching out and fingering its leaves, sometimes rather roughly, leaving the marks of her fingernails on

once waited for him at the doorway, being occupied at this hour with supper preparations. He must, however clumsily, get that part right, that he had not been awaited" (275).

²² The fact that the retirement complex is called "Bayside Towers" is significant and in keeping with Daisy's contained life and delimited roles. For instance, Daisy's daughter Alice comments on the age difference between her parents and how this dynamic contained and protected her mother from change: "being a young wife to an older husband—it kept her girlish, made her a kind of tenant in the tower of girlhood. There she remained, safe, looked after" (235-36). Slethaug makes note of this enclosed, crystallized image of Daisy's life, a life which progresses through all its phases in a predictable manner—"the equivalent of a fairy-tale princess locked in a tower" (61).

the vinyl surfaces, finding sly pleasure in her contempt” (280). Surely, readers surmise, this place cannot be paradise as the condominium contrasts decidedly with the visually stunning, natural Ottawa home and garden.

Within the artificial décor of Bayside Towers, however, Daisy realizes an alternative “garden” of profound fulfillment that does not leave her alone in a solitary, unfeeling paradise. Together, the four elderly “Flowers” of Bayside—Daisy, Lily, Myrtle, and Glad—form their own kind of garden of true companionship, laughter, and mutual recognition. In this group of women, who possess similar life experiences, readers sense that Daisy has finally found understanding and a paradisaal “home” of belonging:

The four Flowers are fortunate in their mutual attachment and they recognize their luck. Lily’s from Georgia, Glad from New Hampshire, the breezy-talking Myrtle from Michigan—different worlds, you might say, and yet their lives chime a similar tune. Just look at them: four old white women. Like Mrs. Daisy Flett, they are widows; they are, all of them, comfortably well off; they have aspired to no profession other than motherhood, wife-hood; they love a good laugh; there is something filigreed and droll about the way they’re always on the cusp of laughter. (318)

The narrator commands, “Just look at them,” and readers must perceive and recognize, as the Flowers do, that in this “garden” exists a profound, fulfilling bond of companionship—paradoxically, a truly genuine “performance.”²³ Daisy finally cultivates

²³ Daisy and her fellow “Flowers” possess certain popularity and provide entertainment in the form of daily witticism to the other residents: “‘How’re the Flowers blooming today?’ other Bayside residents call out by way of greetings. . . . one of them will be sure to call back, cheerfully: ‘Fading fast,’ and one of the others will add, with a calypso bounce, ‘but holding firm.’ It’s part of their ritual, one of many” (319).

a meaningful and deeply personal social life. And although the Flowers seem like an exclusive domain—as “[o]ther people at the Bayside envy their relaxed good nature,” and the four women occupy the best bridge table (the round one in the corner away from the noisy air-conditioner), which “is the Flowers’ table and no one else’s” (318)—Shields implies that this “garden” is ultimately open and accepting:

It’s already been decided that when one of them “hangs up her hat” or “kicks the bucket” or “goes over the wall” . . . that then, given a decent week or two for mourning, the surviving three will invite the unspeakable Iris Jackman (third floor, west wing) to fill in at the round table, even though Iris has the worst case of B.O. in captivity and is so dumb she can’t tell a one-club hand from a grand slam. (319-20)

In the artificial surroundings of Bayside Towers and through the dear companionship, Daisy discovers finally a paradise of mutual fulfillment and openness; the Flowers’ round bridge table is, indeed, a table of equals and profound intimacy. After having entered the gardens of other people and of her own making, Daisy has lived and performed for most of her life according to societal expectations, remaining for the most part unperceived and unrecognized, a veritable stranger to both herself and her family. Daisy’s retirement persona as one of the “Flowers” is undeniably another assumed role, yet this “performance” is interactive, spontaneous, and familiar, occupying a truly shared “garden.”

Constructing problematic notions of paradise that operate as both places and modes of being, Shields makes an intelligent investment in the sanctity of the quotidian. Through the example of Daisy and a critical scrutiny of notions of paradise and fulfillment, Shields contends that personal journey, growth, and profound fulfillment are all possible within the confines of what is traditionally understood as a place of supposed

stagnancy: the domestic world. Using the quest and symbol of paradise, the most preeminent garden in the Judeo-Christian world's mythology, Shields reclaims the suburban, middle-class home as the site and destination of this ultimate journey. After having staged a plot-driven quest in *The Box Garden*, Shields returns to the paradise motif in *The Stone Diaries* in a more sophisticated and nuanced way, presenting and undermining both what is and is not paradise on actual and symbolic levels. In their clearly celebratory readings of Daisy's Ottawa garden, critics reveal themselves to be enthralled by this apparent "Eden" in their move to venerate the traditional place and work of women, "the alchemy of women's imaginations on everyday materials" (Johnson 206). Although Shields works to sanctify the domestic, she remains critical of the enclosed quality of women's domestic-situated lives and by no means simplifies this kind of life as lacking in complexities or uncertainties. Just as Shields presents her characters as struggling for understanding, Shields encourages her readers to adjust and readjust their perceptions of home and the quotidian so that they may appreciate the dynamic and evolving subtleties of the domestic. Ideally, Shields suggests through her fiction, home should not be the isolating domain of unexpressed and unacknowledged individuals, but rather a place profoundly shared, where its inhabitants are mutually perceived and understood. Domestic paradise can be both elusive in its temporality, and deceptive in its "artificial" or seemingly "natural" expressions, as the garden trope allows Shields to "turn" her meaning, placing important distinctions in close relief. Shields destabilizes readers' expectations as to how paradise should appear and what it should offer. As Shields sees it, the most meaningful quests take place within the spaces and routines of daily life, but the fulfillment that *is* paradise is realized only through the most intimate sharing of each other's gardens in whatever form they may take.

Chapter Five

Denaturalizing the Garden: Lorna Crozier's Garden Poetics

By introducing the idealism of the garden within their writing of the feminine and the domestic, Susanna Moodie, Catharine Parr Traill, Gabrielle Roy, and Carol Shields allow the garden to provide a rhetorical and ideological refuge for their expression even as they (and their gardens) make visible the physical and social constraints that enclose women. In a similar manner, Saskatchewan-born poet Lorna Crozier perceives an intimate relationship between the garden and women's domestic experience and artistry. For Crozier the garden renders visible both the extraordinary and problematic aspects of quotidian life. During the thirty years of her writing career, Crozier has garnered a reputation as a poet who illuminates the everyday. In *Before the First Word* (2005), Crozier's latest poetry collection (a selection of previously published work), Catherine Hunter observes in the introduction that "[t]he miraculous and the ordinary come together" in Crozier's writing (x). In terms of her garden poetry, Crozier undertakes this integration of the sometimes mundane backyard garden with more ethereal experiences, such as encounters with angels. Her poem "Angel of Roses" enables us, Crozier writes, to witness "the invisible / unfolding of our days" by infusing every petal with light and movement (*Inventing the Hawk* 55), just as the angels' hands in "Angels of Snow" inspire the mesmerized woman who contemplates "how large and strong they look / as if they too raised children, planted seeds / and carried water from a well" (*The Garden Going* 14). These magical transformations of the quotidian into the ideal, and specifically of the female custodian of the garden into a near-angelic being, align Crozier's interest in the

garden with the other writers in this study and their respective idealizations of the garden and women's creative role and work within it.

Crozier's interest in the domestic and the garden resonates with these writers who give voice to the often silenced or undervalued expression of women's lives. Specifically, Crozier's poetic celebration of the domestic is very much in keeping with the recuperative, feminist mandate put into action by Carol Shields in her fiction. Indeed, in a CBC radio interview with Mary Lou Finlay on the program *As It Happens*, Crozier speaks directly to Shields' conclusion (in "About Writing") that the "language that carries weight in our culture is very often fuelled by a search for home" and comments, "Everything happens over the kitchen sink" (Finlay). An affinity between Crozier and Shields is demonstrated further by Crozier's reflections on her reason for writing. Echoing Shields' comment, "I was conscious that all the women in the fiction I read were nothing like the women I knew. . . . There was a real gap" (Wachtel, "Interview" 20), Crozier expresses a similar motivation. She addresses the silences she senses in literature: "I write because I want to tell myself the stories I never heard as a child, as a grown woman, the stories I still can't find in books" ("Who's Listening" 25). Reviewing Crozier's various collections, critics note this preoccupation with untold domestic tales. Lucille King-Edwards writes of Crozier's *The Garden Going On Without Us*, "Through it all, one envisions a level-headed persona who takes pleasure in the quotidian, the small manifestations of a stove in morning light" (15). Janice Kulyk Keefer argues similarly that Crozier demonstrates a "'pluralist' feminism, one which would acknowledge and revalidate traditional female qualities and skills—nurturing, caring; emotional responses to experience and intuitive ways of knowing" (64). This approach means that her "poetry reveals the delicacy and transparency of the structures in which we house ourselves and

the people and things we love” (Keefer 65). Crozier’s “revalidating” of domestic experience—her illuminating of the “delicacy and transparency” of certain aspects of quotidian life—does not, however, always result in the kinds of idealization or celebration of the garden that I address in the previous chapters. In Deborah Keahey’s description of Crozier as a “literary homemaker” (4), Keahey examines Crozier’s “dark” approach to the domestic, as Crozier uses traditional gender paradigms but exposes the cruelties, abuse, and hurt that operate inside these daily familiar models. Crozier “writ[es] home from within it” (76), yet her “‘home’ appears as a tragic hero of sorts, attractive and appealing, yet carrying within itself the seeds of its own destruction” (84). Thus, despite her focus on the extraordinariness of the quotidian, Crozier’s work and, as I shall demonstrate, her garden poetry especially mark a significant departure from the approaches of the other writers in this study.¹

In comparison to the other writers in this study, Crozier is the most distrustful and manipulative of the garden ideal and its conventional applications as a literary trope. Crozier may be drawn to idealizing the domestic garden, but she is equally, if not more so, prone to thwarting its aesthetic, venerable appeal by bringing her garden poems “down to earth” or making them downright “dirty” through the raw, the visceral, and the unexpected. Whereas the writers in the previous chapters strive to naturalize and/or sanctify their characters’ and personae’s gender roles as pioneers, women writers, and homemakers, Crozier works to denaturalize both the garden and women’s enclosed positions through ideological upheavals and transformations at the levels of language and

¹ Tellingly, while most critics praise Shields’ celebration of the domestic world in her fiction and reveal in their comments their assumptions behind what the “domestic” should entail in terms of family, routine, and comfort, Crozier sees Shields’ work in a somewhat different light: “[Shields] always, I think, ‘told the truth’ in her books. I think she got down into some very dark bedrock” (Finlay).

poetic device. While Crozier shares in these writers' idealizations of the garden, she departs significantly from their "garden strategies" by recognizing that the garden needs to be rigorously challenged as a trope and ideological construct that contains and excludes through subtle inscriptions of power and gender imbalance. In Crozier's view, no well-entrenched myth, tradition, or ideal is too sacred to be questioned and disrupted through creative intervention.

Moodie, Traill, Roy, and Shields use the garden as an idyllic yet problematic middle ground in both literal and figurative senses for the negotiation of women's various arrivals to, departures from, and returns to domestic space as they inhabit it through changing gender roles. Crozier, on the other hand, turns her critical vision on the garden trope itself, using and turning over ideals that operate through the surface and appeal of a garden. Unlike the Strickland sisters, Roy, and Shields, Crozier uses the garden trope to disrupt and denaturalize, to turn over the underlying societal taboos and ideologies that operate on and through the apparent surface of the garden trope and its "natural" appeal. Within her poetic *oeuvre* and feminist mandate, therefore, Crozier's use of the garden trope is characterized by a strategy of defamiliarization. The notion of "defamiliarization" derives from Victor Shklovsky's formalist theory in which Shklovsky argues that in response to perception becoming "habitual" and "unconsciously automatic," writers have the ability to prolong perception and render it hyper-sensitive: "And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar'" (741). Through a process of defamiliarization, or "denaturalization," Crozier's "garden strategy" is a decidedly ironic one. As a poet known for her interest in

the familiar (the quotidian) and the natural, Crozier looks to the garden to alter and disrupt her readers' perceptions by laying bare the ideologies and social conventions that structure and sometimes limit their ways of perceiving and understanding. Some of the strategies that Crozier draws upon in her denaturalization of the garden for her readers include irony, fantasy, and the presentation of the "garden" as a model for the text. By challenging habitual or conventional uses of the garden trope, then, Crozier creates an "unnatural" garden poetry to express and make perceptible alternative experiences, signification, and knowledge.

1. Crozier the "Garden Poet"

Crozier has acquired a popular reputation through her presentation in the media as a "garden poet" and through her notorious garden poems—primarily her sequence "The Sex Lives of Vegetables" from her sixth collection *The Garden Going On Without Us*.² In this series of poems, Crozier provides explicit descriptions of the sexual activity and bodily aspects of a common vegetable patch. In an interview in 1988, Crozier comments on the astounding success of *The Garden Going On Without Us*, which at the time had sold 2500 copies and gone into a third printing: "Nobody expected it. . . . I was

² As yet, no scholar delves at length into the garden's specific role or function within Crozier's writing. Indeed, for such a prolific poet, Crozier has received minimal scholarly attention in general. Apart from reviews of her various collections, there exists only a handful of published critical articles, including Susan Gingell's foundational essay on Crozier's use of myth, Nathalie Cooke's monograph on Crozier's career for the ECW Press series *Canadian Writers and Their Works*, Tanis MacDonald's reading of the phallic imagery of Crozier's "Penis Poems," Marilyn Rose's examination of Crozier's ecological lyrics, and Deborah Keahey's study of the home place in prairie literature. In less-detailed criticisms that focus on one or two poems, scholars feature Crozier alongside other Canadian poets with regard to their differing artistic approaches to specific topics or genres. For example, Lorraine M. York looks at Crozier's poetic inscription of political atrocities in Chile in connection with writers Mary di Michele and Patrick Lane; Deborah Bowen examines Crozier's adaptation of elegy in her prose poem "Quitting Smoking" and compares it to Margaret Avison's own manipulation of the genre; and Gary Boire studies Crozier's inscription of sexual abuse in conjunction with the work of Di Brandt and Mary di Michele.

absolutely thrilled. It's a bestseller in poetry terms. It seems to have hit a market that wasn't merely composed of regular poetry readers.' She laughs. 'People, I think, bought the book for friends who happened to be gardeners'" (Adachi M3). In recent years, Crozier has tapped into this "gardener" demographic of readers by appearing with her husband, Patrick Lane, who is also a writer/gardener in the episode "Reflections of the Soul" from the *Recreating Eden* television series on Canada's Home and Garden network (HGTV). In the episode, which takes place in Crozier and Lane's garden at their home near Victoria, British Columbia, writing and gardening go hand in hand for this literary couple, as the documentary traces Lane's battle with alcoholism, his healing through his garden, and his writing of his memoirs. Indeed, in his memoir, Lane refers to Crozier as his companion in the garden, his "assistant" (*There is a Season* 23). While the program emphasizes Lane's relationship with *his* garden, Crozier recites some of her garden poems and conceptualizes the garden in the interview in terms of her own experience living with an alcoholic partner. While the garden is initially idealized in the episode as a space of healing and artistry (the Eden from which Lane was temporarily exiled during his addiction), Crozier describes the garden instead as a "negative space" in which she searched in the darkness of night for empty bottles hidden among plants and flowers in order to verify her worst fears and perceptions of Lane's escalating addiction.

Clearly, Crozier possesses and fosters a public persona as a poet of the garden, but the amusement with which Crozier's poetry has been received in the past tends to facilitate simplified descriptions of Crozier and her work through appealing catchphrases and headings, rather than comprehensive inquiry into why the garden holds such a formidable presence within her poems. For instance, in a *Toronto Star* article, "'Carrot Lady' Poet Pulls up Roots," Susan Walker notes that "the veggies [of Crozier's poetry]

have given her a place in the public mind” (E3)—a fact that Crozier admits in the interview: “‘People will come up to me at readings and say ‘Oh, you’re the carrot lady,’ she says with a laugh’” (E3). For this “Carrot Lady” poet so identified with the garden, it is somewhat surprising that Crozier’s own early garden experience during her working-class upbringing in Swift Current was in a household that had minimal time for gardening: “my family lived in a big, run-down house and unlike the rest of the block, we didn’t have a lawn or flowerbeds to trample. We didn’t have ornamental plums whose branches might break if you swung on them or cedars you had to cover with burlap to get them through the cold” (“The Shape of Human Sorrow” 35). As Canada’s veritable poet of the garden, however, Crozier persists in being identified with the green space and in surprisingly non-critical ways. Walker suggests that in the mid 1980s, Crozier “discovered her sense of humor—and her garden—at about the same time” but “[s]ince then [Crozier] has won awards for more serious works” (E3). It seems, in Walker’s view, the garden and “veggie” poems promote laughter and mere amusement, in other words these particular poems are not “serious” in purpose. In the article “Crozier and Lane: The Sexologist of the Garden Meets the Carpenter of Words” from *Western Living* magazine, Elizabeth Philips highlights the relationship between Crozier and Lane and yet again emphasizes the popularity and “risqué humor” of Crozier’s sexy garden poems (148). Philips implies that Crozier has been cultivated into the poet that she is today through her relationship with Lane. Philips describes Crozier as a “budding poet” when she left her first husband for Lane at the age of twenty-seven with only one “slim collection” to her name (147). Philips then proceeds to recapitulate the somewhat benign controversy of Crozier’s work, such as the time a Manitoba MLA “read a poem into Hansard as an example of the kind of filth governments were enabling artists and writers to disseminate.

The poem was about peas" (148). But is Crozier's poetry simply "about peas" and why have her poetic "gardens" captured the imagination of the Canadian public? Surely it is not just because gardeners are reading her work en masse. But if they are, then perhaps the way in which Crozier uses the garden in her writing, and not just the popularity of the topos and trope in general, explains her poetry's imaginative appeal.

A recurring trope, the garden is a persistent presence and imaginative force for Crozier throughout the arc of her artistic career. While critics note this particular preoccupation, they do not explore at length how the garden operates and evolves in Crozier's writing. For instance, Gingell admits, "the prairie garden . . . is the context of much of Crozier's poetry, as her partially summative edition of selected and new poems, *The Garden Going On Without Us*, makes clear" (76). Similarly, Cooke comments, "Themes that are central to Crozier's work include the poet's relationship with nature, the garden, the many selves, and desire of a spiritual/magical realm in everyday life" (94). One reason for the lack of in-depth criticism on Crozier's use of the garden trope is perhaps because of critics' uneasiness with presenting Crozier in what could be construed as a regional light. For instance, pointing to Crozier's poems "The Influence of an Avid Fisherman on Ordinary Life" and "Fishing in Air," both Gingell and Cooke are drawn to Crozier's use of poetic personae.³ For Gingell in particular, the fisherman model with the move "to aquatic images" is appealing as it differentiates Crozier from a typically prairie poet identity, suggesting "those who write from a prairie home base are no different from other poets, in that meaning for them can begin in other dimensions than the land, which

³ Gingell writes, "[Crozier's] admiration for the fisherman's predawn practice of his casting skills is obviously the admiration of one dedicated practitioner for another. Both poet and fisherman operate in imaginative realms" (69). Similarly, Cooke believes the fisherman "is the metaphor that Crozier offers for the search inherent in the activity of writing/reading poetry" and the "poet's desire for faith, her need to celebrate the wonder of the world" (123).

[Henry] Kreisel sees as the inevitable content of prairie poetry” (70). Admittedly, both critics and Crozier herself are wary of defining and delimiting her work as that of a prairie poet—a concern that perhaps motivates this attention to her non-prairie images that do not delimit her status to that of a prairie writer who muses about a typical landscape and acts of cultivation. Alternatively, when it comes to one critic’s desire to identify Crozier as a prairie writer, Dennis Cooley makes particular note in “Correspondences: Two Saskatchewan Poets” of Crozier’s artistic interest in gardens, linking this preoccupation with a western, agrarian-based vision: “I know they grow vegetables elsewhere, but I like to think only a prairie poet could have written so rambunctiously, so affectionately, of the secrets their lives hold” (4). In any case, these competing efforts to create either distance from, or a reassurance of, regional writing defer a thorough contemplation of how the garden topos and trope operate in Crozier’s poetry.

The presence of gardens is impossible to ignore in Crozier’s works. Critics who incorporate Crozier’s garden poems as part of their analysis, nonetheless, do not explore the garden’s specific roles. Critics neglect to formulate distinctions between Crozier’s “nature poetry”—which includes everything from animals, insects, to the geography of the prairies and the west coast—and her “garden poetry”—which focusses predominantly on archetypal ideals, myth, male-female power dynamics, denaturalized garden imagery, and the challenges of an enclosed space of expression. The blurring of categories between Crozier’s “nature poetry” and “garden poetry” can be explained partly because of the fact that Crozier approaches nature and landscapes from a figurative and highly imaginative vision, rather than from a realist or documentary perspective. In her introduction to *A Sudden Radiance*, a collection of writing by Saskatchewan artists which Crozier co-edited with Gary Hyland, Crozier admits that what she enjoys about the selection for the

anthology is that “you will rarely find a poem *about* landscape. When geographic features or other natural images do appear, they are used as reflections of the human” (xvii). Crozier expresses a similar sentiment about her own art: “One thing I’ve never done is write about ‘The Prairie.’ I wouldn’t say any of my poems are about ‘The Prairie.’ In most of my poems I use the images that surround me, and that includes the prairie but the poems are about something else” (Meyer and O’Riordan 28). In addition to this imaginative approach, critics perceive Crozier’s engagement with landscape as part of her feminist writing strategy. In her influential essay “Let Us Revise Mythologies: The Poetry of Lorna Crozier,” Gingell compares Crozier’s poetics to Adrienne Rich’s notion of feminist revision, where the woman writer “enter[s] an old text from a critical direction” in a “drive to self-knowledge” and alternative constructions of the feminine (Rich 35). In terms of the landscapes featured in Crozier’s poetry, Gingell sees a critical reworking of socio-cultural myths that stem from a variety of sources, including the religious narratives of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the canonical myths of prairie writing as espoused by Kreisel in “The Prairie: A State of Mind” and Laurence Ricou in *Vertical Man/Horizontal World*. Gingell notes that Crozier “contend[s] with some of the dominant myths that govern our sense of who and where we are” and offers “in their stead not a single sacred feminized vision, but rather a plurality of possible ways of understanding human beginnings” (67). This search for plurality within Crozier’s prairie vision means that an individual’s relationship to the landscape does not have to exist purely in terms of a polarized state between the dominant and the submissive as modelled by Kreisel, but rather in terms of other possible organizing principles, such as “a saving identification with the land” (Gingell 71). While Gingell notes that “the prairie garden . . . is the context” (76) for much of Crozier’s revising of myth, Gingell makes no distinction

between the writing of the garden and the writing inspired by the larger landscape.

Gingell reads “the sexual energy” of Crozier’s garden poems in direct relation to prairie myth as another way of “sabotage[ing] the idea of the prairie as the realm of the puritanical” (79). Similarly, in describing Crozier as a “nature poet” and a “lyric poet of the new order” because of Crozier’s eco-critical slant, Rose makes no differentiation between Crozier’s garden poetry and her other landscape-related verse (62). Rose takes issue with Gingell’s notion of a “submission to” (as opposed to human domination) or a “saving identification with the land,” and instead argues that Crozier sees nature as an integrated, independent world with respect to humanity. In Rose’s interpretation of Crozier’s work, the poet must be receptive to this natural presence in order to find illumination and inspiration (62). Rose works to curtail the critical focus on the subjective ends of Crozier’s lyrical poetry, promoting instead what she reads as an initiation of a new way of “relating to the world in its own terms and in ecological ways” (55).⁴

Clearly, both Gingell and Rose reveal the imaginative significance of nature and landscape in Crozier’s poetry. Further nuance with respect to Crozier’s garden poems allows for an appreciation of the “garden poet” as one whose work involves purposeful agency, a willingness to disrupt and manipulate through the use of aesthetic device rather than merely “submitting” or being “open and receptive” to the natural world. For instance, my argument that Crozier uses the garden trope to denaturalize and turn over underlying social assumptions and ideologies resonates with, but clearly differs from,

⁴ Rose contends that Crozier demonstrates this vision of “an enlightened nature” particularly through the animals of her poems because these creatures embody the fact that “one enters into nature as a humble part of it” (61) and with the realization that one is “not superior to it in any sense whatsoever” (62).

Rose's understanding of Crozier as a "nature poet" who strives to be open and receptive to the parallel natural world (58).⁵ In citing poems such as "Inventing the Hawk," in which the poet must wait for the hawk's cry to enter her body, and "The Garden at Night," in which the poet glimpses the mole tunneling through the dark earth to the light, Rose reveals what she reads as the eco-philosophy of Crozier's poetry in which Crozier posits an "interdependent world" of nature. If readers are to differentiate further, however, between Crozier's "nature poetry" and her "garden poetry," then the receptive function of the poet who listens to the darkness, as Rose outlines it, needs to be qualified to allow for a more active and determining role. Whereas Rose's central metaphor of light in her elucidation of Crozier's eco-philosophy and my notion of denaturalization in terms of Crozier's garden poetics share similarities as processes of illumination, my model emphasizes overt manipulations of the imaginative, textual terrain of the garden poem by foregrounding both language and the artist as a figure who creates and disrupts through poetic device. Crozier's garden poetics involves, then, not merely receptiveness to what lies below, but rather a conscious engagement with and manipulation of language in order to expose and form alternative layers of significance. Ironically then, Crozier's garden poems reveal an aspect of this poet's approach that has little to do with "nature" or what is "natural," and more to do with purposeful artistic intervention and processes of defamiliarization (or denaturalization).

As an aesthetic form, an actual garden entails a conscious manipulation of nature according to the highly subjective desires and needs of its creator. A gardener is an

⁵ Rose believes that "Crozier ascribes sentience to the natural world and records the enlightened nature of its various creatures, beginning with the animals" (58). Thus, in the context of Rose's argument, gophers "are poets in their own right" (58). Rather than focussing on what Rose presents as Crozier's attempt to "record" nature's poetic, visionary work, I choose instead to present another aspect of Crozier's engagement with the "natural" world through a foregrounding of artifice and denaturalization in her garden poems.

artist—a comparison that Lane expands upon in his garden memoir with regard to his poetic mode of expression: “Done well, a garden is a poem, and the old lesson of gardening is the same in poetry: what is *not* there is just as important as what is” (*There is a Season* 202). The garden is an artistic arrangement and one must pay attention to rhythm, space, and transition (Lane, *There is a Season* 202-03).⁶ In the context of Crozier’s writing, the inverse of Lane’s statement also holds true: a poem can be a garden at the level of the text through the purposeful design and arrangement of language. In order to differentiate Crozier’s garden poems from her other musings on nature, I propose a “garden tour” of Crozier’s poetry collections in order to focus on the changing trajectory of her garden poetics and to foreground the various strategies of denaturalization Crozier uses within the imaginative space of her garden poems. Throughout her career, Crozier’s garden poems reveal an evolving engagement with the garden trope as a device of defamiliarization. Crozier’s fourteen books of poetry exhibit as many as four phases in the development of her garden poetics.⁷ These sequential phases reveal Crozier’s progression from an early vision of the garden as a site and topic (1976-83), to gardens that operate as humorous, figurative terrains that expose social conventions and taboos through the subversive effects of the fantasy mode (1985-88), to explicit comparisons between the act of writing and the act of gardening—specifically creating and digging in the garden (1992-95), to a “turning over” or denaturalization of the gardener-poet figure herself and her preoccupation with the textual garden as a space of erasure and exclusion (1996-2005). These four phases of Crozier’s developing garden

⁶ Lane enacts this claim in his book *There is a Season: A Memoir in a Garden* by relating the daily life of his garden as a way of telling his own life story and struggle with addiction.

⁷ I have chosen not to include *No Longer Two People* (1979) in my “garden tour” of Crozier’s work, as this publication is a poetic collaboration with Lane (Lane and Uher).

poetics are not strictly demarcated; some overlap exists in terms of Crozier's approaches and concerns in my grouping of the various collections. Nevertheless, these phases provide a useful tool with which to plot the development of Crozier's garden poetry. My purpose in this "garden tour" of Crozier's collections is to trace some of the identifiable changes in her garden poetics as exhibited by specific poems in the first three phases. After which, I concentrate more closely on one particular work, *A Saving Grace: The Collected Poems of Mrs. Bentley*, from the fourth phase. *A Saving Grace* offers the most formidable example and culminating expression of Crozier's denaturalized garden vision as Crozier assumes an alternative gardener-poet persona and questions explicitly the consequences of a strategy of denaturalization for the female artist. Furthermore, as a series of poems focussed on exploring a single narrative and its related themes, *A Saving Grace* provides an opportunity to examine a prolonged engagement with a "denaturalized" garden trope within a single Crozier collection.

2. Crozier's Early Garden Poems

The first phase of Crozier's garden poetics spans the initial seven years of Crozier's career and includes the collections *Inside Is the Sky* (1976), *Crow's Black Joy* (1978), *Humans and Other Beasts* (1980), and *The Weather* (1983).⁸ The garden poems in these collections reveal the early emergence of Crozier's denaturalized vision of the garden as a site and topic (or topos) in her writing. In Crozier's first publication, *Inside Is the Sky*, readers are affronted by gardens that Crozier presents as sites of coercion and

⁸ Crozier's first three collections were published under her married name "Lorna Uher" (from her first marriage). In her fourth collection, *The Weather*, Crozier begins to use her original surname for her publications, and dedicates this book to her family: "For the Croziers, whose name I have reclaimed" (n. pag.).

disillusionment, two aspects that characterize much of this first developmental stage of Crozier's garden poetry. The garden as a site of brutal manipulation and lost innocence shifts between both literal and figurative levels throughout this period, as Crozier demonstrates a distrust of aesthetic and romantic ideals normally associated with the garden.

In this first phase of her career, Crozier works to denaturalize the garden to the extent that it becomes a site of superficiality and discomfort. Crozier distrusts the appearance of the garden, as she exposes the ideological and archetypal frames that operate as part of a larger, underlying hegemony. Noting the Gothic elements of Crozier's early poems, Cooke writes that Crozier demonstrates "a dark and serious vision" (94), and in keeping with this ominous perspective, the gardens in these initial poems are unappealing places. In *Inside Is the Sky*, brutality and aggression are major themes, and her garden poems exhibit an awareness of power politics played out in extremely manipulative ways at the levels in and of the text. "The Fattening," "Backyard Eden," and "Rebirth" offer disturbing images of the garden in that the garden is not an ideal, welcoming, or even "natural" environment. Instead, physical aggression and subtle coercion render the garden a terrain constructed solely for oppression. More importantly, the poems feature ironic titles that create and then fail to meet readers' expectations as to meaning during the progression of the poem. Thus, the poems enact an aesthetic manipulation of their own through layered and doubled signification that allows for a disturbing transformation as to meaning and effect. Irony is central to Crozier's process of defamiliarization as it allows her to say one thing and mean another, providing a subtle questioning technique as she denaturalizes the garden and its aesthetics by inviting

readers to consider what lies behind the ideals of beauty, cultivated order, growth, and containment.

In “The Fattening,” the male figure kills a mother pigeon and disregards the rotting “stink” of the corpse of a female rabbit before he takes the female speaker for a walk down “the trails of his garden” where poppies “stroke soft petals on [her] eyelids” (18). In terms of the language of flowers, the poppies provide an image of unconsciousness or relief from the earlier unease derived from witnessing the degradation against the recently killed and decomposing animals’ bodies (Waterman 166). With his knife, the male subject slices through the stems of the three peonies—a flower with large, full blossoms symbolizing sincerity (Dumas 82)—and offers the flowers “to scent [her] room” (18). The romantic gesture appears both superficial and foreboding, however, in terms of its territorial, predatory nature and implications of violence. The red, white, and pink peonies should communicate love, purity, and affection. The odours of decomposition, the coldness, and the fear that permeate the poem render the colours of the garden and its flowers a threat, the pink peony recalling specifically the “pink tunnels of the ears” of the dead rabbit down which the “Flies drag their legs” as they consume the corpse (18). Crozier gives voice to the female speaker’s experience, yet her speaker is still subject to the ironic “fattening” process of the predatory male suitor. The irony lies in the realization that the “fattening” results only in the brutal reduction of the body as figured through the starved pigeon and rabbit corpse. Rendering the garden ideal unnatural through such visceral associations as death and violence, Crozier suggests in a highly tangible way that the garden is both a controlled space and an instrument of control. The female speaker in “The Fattening” is deceived and “led down the garden

path” by her romantic male suitor after witnessing his brutal neglect and treatment of the animals.

“The Fattening” renders the garden a dangerously superficial space in its facility for romantic pretense. In a similar fashion, “Backyard Eden” and “Rebirth” disturb readers through an ironic refusal to fulfill the expectations of beauty, paradise, and renewal signalled by the titles. In “Backyard Eden” Crozier describes an urban gardener whose swift, violent actions create an impossible, antiseptic version of perfection:

All summer rubber-gloved
 she digs her fingers
 in the garden soil.
 Her silver hoe
 slashes every weed.
 Rose lice she kills
 with a quick swish of poison.
 Plastic ribbons she ties on the wind
 to frighten robins (*Inside Is the Sky* 23)

Rubber-gloved, this gardener does not enjoy the sensuality of her garden; her metal tools, poison, and plastic distance her from nature and from the nurturing aspects normally associated with a cultivator. The gardener is a figure of tyrannical force, brutally controlling and subjugating the terrain. It is an experience that the speaker in “Rebirth” similarly imagines, as what grows from the body after death is “just green”—a colour of renewal treated with irrelevance as the speaker anticipates harsh treatment, “the sharp stab of insects / the careless cut / of the gardener’s hoe” (*Inside Is the Sky* 41). As figures of control and destruction, the two gardeners in both poems are unreflective and heedless

as a “quick swish” (“Backyard Eden” 23) and a “careless cut” (“Rebirth” 41) work to kill indiscriminately. At first glance, the power of the gardener in “Backyard Eden” seems to recreate the desired result of a perfect Eden with “well-ordered life” and “color creations” in the “greys of the city” (23). In the monotone urban setting, the garden generates an other-worldly terrain, where the magic of synesthesia sets “Canturbury bells / tinkling mauves and pinks through the air” (23). In Crozier’s poem, however, the archetype of paradise is impossible, as this backyard Eden is already lost to the past, signalled through the change in tense in the final lines of the poem: “Yesterday / there was a frost” (*Inside Is the Sky* 23). Judging by the mechanical, life-destroying work of the gardener and the “well-ordered” yet tenuous “life” of this created terrain, readers conclude that this Eden is unsustainable. The array of colour stimulates the senses, but this burgeoning paradise is ultimately artificial in nature, a realization Crozier communicates through a complicated vision.

The implied and explicit violence of *Inside Is the Sky* positions the garden as both a questionable space in Crozier’s imagination, and a site of power politics and confrontation. In her next three collections, this process of denaturalization continues, albeit in a more subtle manner, as images of physical brutality shift to the less tangible forces and constraints of language and perception.⁹ As a trope that frames and directs understanding, the garden manipulates as much as it pleases or entices. The various

⁹ In the episode “Reflections of the Soul” from the television series *Recreating Eden*, Crozier reflects on her first marriage and her former husband’s lack of understanding with regard to her desire to write poetry: “My first husband was not a poet and he didn’t understand half the time why I was so obsessed with language and with words. . . . And you know, he’d actually say, ‘Why do you waste your time on this.’” The end of her first marriage may account for this shift away from the images of confrontation and brutality that are present in her first collection, *Inside is the Sky*. In addition, during this first phase of her career, Crozier began her relationship with Lane, which undoubtedly had, and continues to have, an influence on her writing. Indeed, Crozier dedicates her third collection, *Humans and Other Beasts*, to “Patrick.” (n. pag.).

personae in the garden poems in *Crow's Black Joy*, *Humans and Other Beasts*, and *The Weather* voice disillusionment through figurative gardens that highlight the manipulative forces of artistic arrangement—though articulated, ironically, within Crozier's carefully organized, poetic constructs. The garden poems of these collections shift focus from literal garden sites, to figurative “gardens” of verbal expression and perception as experienced through romance and gender constructs. Crozier transitions away from engaging with a highly physical garden terrain (as seen in her first collection), as her garden poetics responds to a more figurative contemplation that posits both language and perception as types of “gardening” in terms of how they work to control and order the world. The various garden poems vacillate between male and female gardeners using and/or recognizing the garden trope as a means of manipulation and seduction. Both sexes possess agency within the “garden,” but usually Crozier highlights the men's dominion over this figurative terrain as decidedly more brutal and disenchanting. In “Calligrapher” from *Crow's Black Joy*, for example, the female speaker describes her lover as an artist of words and decorative script, which he manipulates

slowly deliberately

like a holy man arranging

white sea-stones

in a Japanese garden (*Crow's Black Joy* 33)

The diminished “i” of the female speaker serves as this calligrapher-gardener's terrain, and when she tries to turn away, the “new designs” he creates with the “solid and cold” sense of his words weigh her down like stones in the hollow of her neck. The female speaker controls the poem's perspective and narrative, but the seductive beauty and power of the male calligrapher's words are undeniable, as his “garden” generates a

painful melding through Crozier's enjambment of stone, words, and bone: "i feel your pattern / pressing into bone white / stone white words heavy" (33). Clearly, Crozier's feminist revisionist strategy involves highlighting the garden as an internal landscape, a mental framework through which her speakers relate their "garden" positions and perceptions.

This disenchantment with the garden as a manipulative ideal continues in *Humans and Other Beasts*. "From the Garden I See Him" demonstrates an imaginative, ideological "garden," as Crozier addresses how the romance narrative frames and shapes the evolving point of view of her speaker. The romance narrative calls forth conventional images for readers in the form of a maiden enclosed in a beautiful green space awaiting the entrance of her wooing knight. As the title of the poem indicates, Crozier's speaker spies her future lover from the "garden." His heroic entrance lacks the honour and chivalry of knightly manhood, yet he is replete with sexuality and romantic appeal:

He rides the horizon
 on a dusty thick-necked stallion
 Bottle raised in hand
 head thrown back and jeans
 hard as leather (*Humans and Other Beasts* 45)

This unruly masculine figure seduces the garden-situated female speaker who runs, skirts gathered, toward him. She is drawn to his rebellious freedom, self-indulgence, and virility as figured through the horizon he rides, the bottle he drinks, and the hardness he displays. Unfortunately, as she nears her virile seducer, her perception of him transforms and he seems to figure more as a typical good man or chivalrous knight than the rebellious dark figure. Now, his dusty stallion signals seeming purity and "flashes

white,” and at the same moment, his bottle becomes a shield in his hand (45). The female speaker is disillusioned with her vision because the romantic appeal and sexual overtones of her original garden-situated perspective have been undermined. In other words, then, the speaker is a “gardener” not only because she arranges the vision, but also because she modifies it, redesigning her original ideal to allow for her growing understanding of the realities of her partner. Upon closer inspection, the male subject’s transformation belies the shortcomings of his character and the obstacles of the relationship. His white horse, once a stallion, is a “gelding” lacking the virility she was first drawn to, and his “bottle is a shield,” promoting an intoxicated distancing from the world and from her. Furthermore, the horizon of freedom is pre-empted by mountains “that slam the sky shut” (45). This sense of increasing limitation concludes in the final stanza. No longer riding the horizon, the couple resides in a “garden” that lacks romantic appeal in its failure to sustain an archetypal narrative framework:

There the horse turns hobby
 rocks in the garden wind
 and he picks hybrid roses
 to kill the smell of loving
 in our narrow bed (45)

The heightened sensuousness of romance and initial physical attraction lessen into a familiar hobby—the habit and routine of quotidian life. More importantly, however, the garden-situated visions trace a regression and belittlement of the male suitor (in the eyes of the speaker) from a virile rider atop a stallion, to a questionable, less appealing knight with his gelding, to a child-like figure with his toy hobby horse. The picking of impure roses as a romantic overture does not necessarily enhance this long-term “garden”

romance, but rather seems ambiguous as the flowers “kill the smell of loving” in a relationship experienced through a series of restrictions and misperceptions, a relationship ultimately enclosed not in romance, but in disillusionment and an uncomfortable intimacy as suggested through the couple’s “narrow bed.”

Like the irony of “The Fattening,” “From the Garden I See Him” undermines readers’ and the speaker’s expectations as to romance. The female persona perceives and speaks from within the garden—the ideological trope and pre-existing romantic frame of reference—that Crozier undermines and presents as deceiving. Through the progression of the poem, the male subject is emasculated in conjunction with the speaker’s growing disillusionment with both him and the garden. In “From the Garden I See Him,” readers witness, then, a gradual transformation of the speaker’s garden-based vision in this unravelling of the romance narrative and manly sexuality to disillusionment, impotence, and the mundane. The female speakers in “From the Garden I See Him” and “Calligrapher” voice their perspectives, yet their gardens paradoxically curtail their agency as the speakers create the expectation, rendering the garden romantic. As a consequence, the disillusioned speakers ultimately present gardens underscored by violence with actions that “kill the smell of loving” and words that “press into bone.”

Although this first phase of Crozier’s garden poetry is largely characterized by images of brutality and artistic manipulation both in and at the levels of the poems, the collections are not without moments of enchantment. For instance, the poem “Lala” in *Crow’s Black Joy* features a woman who revels in the sensual beauty of flowers and their capacity for transforming a damaged, mortal world as she places “gladioli on broken tables” and “baby’s breath in the jaw / of a collie stiff on the roadside” (38). Similarly, “The Apple Tree” from *The Weather* demonstrates the garden trope as an ideal and

Crozier's simultaneous desire for, and tempering of, this ideological frame and vision.

The speaker may long for an ideal, paradisaal state and experience of beauty, yet Crozier's poetic world in "The Apple Tree" is a fallen one, characterized by time and experience.

The first three stanzas trace an evolving image of a blossoming apple tree as the white petals shift into various states of freshness and decline. Through these lines, Crozier initiates a contemplation of ideal states of being and the inevitable transformation away from the ideal through the course of time and life's processes:

The apple tree hums
white blossoms turn
yellow, honey bees carry
the shape of tree
up up in a buzzing
bloom high into the
high wind (*The Weather* 1)

Life's energy reverberates between the humming tree teeming with life and sound and the buzzing bees that carry the tree's imprint and potential for renewal with their pollen-covered bodies. The insects' buzzing sounds the promise of another bloom in the future but this renewal extends beyond simple pollination. The vibrant garden elevates; its potential travels "high into the / high wind" as the speaker's thoughts move from the physical to the metaphysical—"the shape of tree." As magical and musical as this garden is, however, the perfection is unsustainable as "white blossoms turn / yellow," suggesting that within this seeming ideal, decline is already underway. Stanza three demonstrates these diverse garden processes by juxtaposing altered states. The music of the humming

apple tree persists through Crozier's rhyming, yet the direction of this flight of fancy shifts toward a more realistic grounding:

Wind breathes through
the tree, loosens petals
into a butterfly's
brief flight
they light

from birth to death (*The Weather 2*)

Crozier's image transforms as the petals' air-born flight mimics the caterpillar's brief life as a butterfly. The metamorphosis is magical but momentary, as the experience of lighting into the air is actually one of falling into decline: "in a wing instant, a / sigh, the petals fall" (*The Weather 2*). Through the intimate space of an orchard-like scene, Crozier juxtaposes various life processes, accelerating and slowing down these transformations in an instant, or turn of her line.

For Crozier's readers, the archetype of the garden calls forth myths of creation, paradise, romance, innocence, and the Fall. Crozier's "The Apple Tree" signals, therefore, through its title and imagery, notions of falls from innocence into experience, seduction, and the forbidden fruit of knowledge. The petals offer both reverent beauty and visible decline, and this mutability inspires in the inhabitants of this garden a common longing for renewal, innocence, and faith in higher ideals despite their shared fallen state:

Someone says
it's just like a wedding
this white confetti

and we laugh
 none of us believing
 in weddings anymore
 still we sit
 where petals
 settle in our hair
 blessings
 in the early
 apple morning (*The Weather 2*)

The extraordinariness of the simple—the beauty of windblown petals—provides a moment of unity and wonder to the bemused garden spectators, who are described as “none of us believing.” The confetti-like blossoms unite the individuals and stir within them the promise and freshness of apples. Despite their state of experience and propensity for critical vision, the spectators become the garden’s almost-innocent inhabitants, wedded momentarily to ideals not confined to time (“still we sit”) and the novelty of “blessings” in a disbelieving world. In the final stanza, the music, fancy, and ideal wonderment return to the apple tree even as the “petals / settle,” falling to the ground, yet still humming with life and rhyme.

The nuance and subtlety of a poem like “The Apple Tree” could not have appeared in Crozier’s first collection *Inside Is the Sky*, where “Backyard Eden” presents an entirely ironic and violent interpretation of the garden ideal. Through this initial early phase of Crozier’s garden poetics, therefore, readers detect an increasing level of sophistication and complexity with regard to Crozier’s approach. Crozier’s garden poems still exhibit disillusionment with the garden trope and a highlighting of its coercive

potential, but Crozier is prepared now to express these ideas in less extreme formulations of figurative garden terrain. By the time Crozier's next collection *The Garden Going On Without Us* is published in 1985—a collection that contains new and selected poems, signals Crozier's obvious interest in the garden through the title, and garners Crozier the rather public identity as the “Carrot Lady”—Crozier acquires a new level of confidence in her engagement with the garden trope. Together, *The Garden Going On Without Us* and *Angels of Flesh, Angels of Silence* (1988) form the second phase of Crozier's garden poetics and reveal Crozier's embracing of the garden trope in an alternative way, as she generates garden poems formulated towards the humourous yet subversive exposures of social taboos.

3. Desire, Humour, and Fantasy in the Garden

When Crozier publishes *The Garden Going On Without Us*, the garden is no longer a site of literal brutality or figurative coercion; instead, readers begin to see a garden of a different sort: a figurative space of profound and humourous exposures of ideologies that underlie conventions relating to sexuality and gender.¹⁰ In *The Garden Going On Without Us*, Crozier works to uncover desire for her speakers (the “vegetable subjects” of her poems), her readers, and, herself as a poet. As a feminist, Crozier

¹⁰ Despite her prominent use of humour, Crozier continues to signal distrust of the garden as an ideal in terms of its superficial appeal, manipulative potential, and unnatural growth. In *The Garden Going On Without Us*, the poem “Seraglio” renders ideals of beauty corrupt and stultifying through her imagery and use of language. “Seraglio” features a sultan's harem residing within a self-contained palace garden, an enclosure that circumvents mobility and progress with its circular paths: “Here paths turn back on themselves / under the perfect circles the trees / are twisted into” (94). The garden lacks true vivacity as it does not diverge from its singular, superficial expression: “impersonal as desire. / The women seduce / their own reflections, leaves curl inward” (94). The contradiction of the simile “impersonal as desire” exposes the unnatural, corrupt, oppressive atmosphere. Focussed solely on cultivating “reflections” of beauty, the women seem identical and lack true substance. As the harem, the women are denied their individual thoughts, desires, and voices, as the “petals close like mouths” in the garden (94). Thus, the garden is not a place of spontaneous, open growth or idiosyncratic beauty, but rather a site of corrupt commodity where “the leaves turn over / like fingers testing the richness of silk” (94).

understands desire to be the longing for that which has been silenced (which in the case of *The Garden Going On Without Us* relates especially to women's sexual desire) and has the potential to challenge and transform societal conventions through its expression. In her introduction to *Desire in Seven Voices*, a collection of women writers' thoughts on gendered experiences of desire, Crozier describes desire as something that is usually silenced, buried, and problematic to unearth through writing:

The difficulty the seven of us had in finding words for what has been unspoken is surely a sign of tremendous force building to a breaking point just below the surface. When desire finds expression in the voices of such writers as these, its resistance to words, its own stubborn desire to remain subterranean creates a complexity and an energy that suffuses every sentence. ("Changing into Fire" 17)

The desire that is "subterranean" implies a potential for ideological upheaval and disruption if it is to come to "a breaking point just below the surface." The challenge is to find effective artistic strategies for voicing this desire, particularly when language has so long silenced that desire through a lack of naming and purposeful erasure. For example, as Crozier observes in "Changing into Fire," what is hidden below, or "underground," and kept in the "dark" is perceived as threatening and forbidden, especially when this "subterranean desire" is associated with the female body:

"Down there" was what my mother called it. The words made me tingle with excitement and fear. "Down there" also meant the cellar with its earthen walls and floors, its shelves of canning, the bins of softening potatoes scabbed with mud, the smell of damp and darkness. Something was always just behind me as I ran up the wood stairs. . . . Down there was dangerous. Down there was where your hand

shouldn't wander, and later, where a boy shouldn't touch you. A no man's land, my mother hoped, down there. (71)

Crozier's description of female sexual desire—the energy and forbidden nature of its expression and the challenge to find appropriate words that do not perpetuate the denial of its presence—is reminiscent of Hélène Cixous' highly metaphoric theorizing of the writing of desire as *écriture féminine*. Cixous states, "Time and again, I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst" (1091), and later concludes, "a feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust" (1099). Whereas Cixous envisions the writing of feminine desire as having effects of volcanic proportions, shifting the deepest "crust" of patriarchal ideology through creative, desirous energy, Crozier enacts imaginative upheaval in her poetry on a relatively more modest scale, staging it within the garden. Crozier may use an intimate space, but her shifting of gendered, ideological foundations within her figurative gardens is provocative and disruptive.

In *The Garden Going On Without Us*, readers encounter garden poems in a section highly suggestive of Crozier's "subterranean" pursuit of female desire and transformation. The section entitled "What the Mind Turns Over" invites readers to ponder what lies buried in the dark reaches of the "garden" and seemingly "natural" gender conventions and ideas of sexuality. This particular section title recalls the poem "In Moonlight" (placed earlier in the collection) that speaks to the mind's "clumsy" groping in the "garden" and supplies the title for the collection as a whole (123). "In Moonlight" posits the garden as a site of potential and depth, a visionary space at times inaccessible to the mind's attempt at understanding, leaving "something" just beyond the subject's imaginative grasp:

Something moves
just beyond the mind's
clumsy fingers.

It has to do with seeds.
The earth's insomnia.
The garden going on
without us

needing no one
to watch it (123)

This underground garden grows “without us”—beyond our perceptions and without our input or direction. Rose reads Crozier's garden poems as attempts to access the natural world as an inter-dependent realm, but I believe this rather magical, “moonlit” garden operates instead as a highly figurative space, evocative of the energy, desire, and transformational presence that lie beyond our “clumsy fingers,” our endeavours for understanding.¹¹ More importantly, “In Moonlight” points to Crozier's interest in the mode of fantasy as a way of rendering the garden subversive.¹² Rosemary Jackson writes

¹¹ For instance, in reading the poem “Garden at Night,” Rose sees “a parallel and companionate world to our own that generates and lives by its own light, a world that human consciousness is sometimes privileged to enter partially” (61). I argue instead that in her garden poems, Crozier employs fantasy not to point to a “parallel” world of nature, but rather to expose her readers to the invisible elements of their own human, social world that remain undetected because of conventional ways of seeing and understanding. One way Crozier signals her interest in human perception, and not simply in nature, is through her personification of the activities and creatures of the garden. Thus, in the poem “Garden at Night,” plants “know” the darkness, and the earthworm “pulls threads of light” through the “sleeping eye” (*The Garden Going* 120).

¹² In “When Fact Meets Fantasy,” Caroline Heath notes an “infusion of fantasy” has become present in recent years in Prairie literature, and lists Crozier (among others) as a poet who partakes in this mode of

that “fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss” (3). Fantasy is not about inventing or supposing another, separate reality, rather it involves “inverting elements of this world, re-combining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and *apparently* ‘new’, absolutely ‘other’ and different” (Jackson 8). The garden that readers and the speaker in Crozier’s “In Moonlight” cannot perceive is one held in common by the “us” of the poem; it exists unperceived as part of our world. References to darkness and “deep shadows” are just one indicator of Crozier’s use of the fantasy mode in her attention to faulty perception and the previously unseen. Moreover, it is a garden we struggle to access through our minds, through the constraints and limitations of our own imaginings. The garden “going on / without us” is not exactly a non-human world, then, but rather a world set in relation to our own. This personified garden with its “insomnia” and “seeds” at work in the dark does not need to be seen or “watch[ed]” in order to exist. It is Crozier’s wish, however, that through our mental machinations and her artistic maneuverings as a poet—that is, this imaginative “turning over” of the “subterranean” world through critical reading and writing directed towards defamiliarization (a central feature of the fantasy mode)—we will unearth and bring to light alternative forms of knowledge and being. As Jackson notes, fantasy involves an “*opening* activity which . . . disturb[s], by denying the solidity of what had been taken to be real” (22). This “opening activity” is often signalled through a work’s title, which can suggest four possibilities: “(1) invisibility, (2)

writing. Despite this brief mention of fantasy, the principle claim of Heath’s argument is that “Prairie writing continues to display an awesome reverence for historical fact” (194). In her introduction to *A Sudden Radiance*, Crozier takes issue with Heath’s promotion of history-centred and documentary writing in the Prairie context (xvi).

impossibility, (3) transformation, [and] (4) defiant illusion” (Jackson 22). Together, the title of *The Garden Going On Without Us* collection and the poem “In Moonlight” (which contains this garden image and title), imply notions of invisibility or that which is difficult to perceive. The collection and the poem invite readers to open their imaginations to undetected “gardens” that have the capacity to alter and transform their understanding.

Appropriately then, with regard to Crozier’s desire to access the “garden going on / without us” through the fantasy mode, the section “What the Mind Turns Over” contains a garden poem that features one of the most notorious philosophers of desire, the familiar, and the uncanny: Sigmund Freud. Cooke summarizes the section “What the Mind Turns Over” as “a series of insights into the lives and ideas of artists” and as “a series of negative portrayals of men” (126). In keeping with this exploration of art and gender, “The Flowers of Georgia O’Keefe” explores a process of ideological exposure and disruption of patriarchal hegemony through an alternative feminine vision of desire. In contrast to Crozier’s early garden poems of coercion and brutality, “The Flowers of Georgia O’Keefe” demonstrates a shift in terms of the control of the garden from man to woman (and from literal to figurative gardens, as well), as Crozier creates a desire-filled, subversive space. The poem captures the extraordinary sensuality and presence of an O’Keefe floral painting where “Light spills from each petal, gathers / at the soft, sweet centre” and “flowers open their mouths, bees mount stamens” (*The Garden Going* 142). At the centre of this O’Keefe floral garden sits Sigmund Freud, “check[ing] his watch,” impatient with and overwhelmed by a feminine sensuality and desire he neither understands, nor is receptive to, as he “wonders / what his wife will make for dinner, / whispers *shit, cunt, fuck*” and fails to hear his wife singing “[s]omewhere” (142).

Freud's vulgar language betrays his ideological assumptions. The O'Keefe flowers "make his head hurt" (142), and with this disruption in and through the garden, Crozier works to reveal different interpretive frames of reference. What the mind turns over in this poem and garden is a repositioning and belittling of Freud and his theories (which define the female as lack or negative other) in the context of O'Keefe's tremendous flowers. He sits like a bee "at the soft, sweet centre" of the O'Keefe flower—just "where he's always wanted / to be"—while Freud's marginalized wife is neither present nor located, being only "[s]omewhere." In the poem, however, Crozier undermines Freud's central position as a male philosopher of desire and human sexuality and displaces him as he sits at the centre of a flower, rather than in association with phallic imagery. "[D]rowning in pollen" and situated "where he's always wanted / to be," Freud is unable to master desire and the "Too many / flowers in his garden"; he fails to understand different forms of "being" as the pun suggests (142).

Even though Freud sits at the centre of the flower and garden, "The Flowers of Georgia O'Keefe" foregrounds an undeniable feminine presence and transformative desire that is absent from Crozier's early garden poems that contain literal and figurative garden scenes of coercion. It seems that during this second phase of her garden poetics, Crozier claims the garden trope and uses it to advance her feminist mandate. Part of the way in which Crozier uses the garden trope and, in the process, transforms her garden poetry is through a confident tone and a predominant use of humour. Her garden poems in *The Garden Going On Without Us* continue to enact ideological disruption through a denaturalization of the garden, yet she achieves this effect through a seemingly less brutal vision. In an interview, Crozier acknowledges the change in her approach to her poetry during this phase of her career:

I think I was an extremely passionate, strident writer when I began. I had a bottle full of feelings just waiting for an outlet. I'm embarrassed by a lot of those poems now when I look at them. They are very angry, very serious poems. . . . I still have a lot of anger that has to come out, but in more subtle ways I hope. And over the past ten years I think I've learned a lot about diction and tone. . . . (Meyer and O'Riordan 28)

Anger remains a disruptive energy in her poems, but Crozier admits that her growing confidence as a poet enables her to unearth this subversive emotion in alternative ways, particularly through humour. Indeed, part of the appeal and controversy of Crozier's garden poetry during this period of her career is the unsettling humour that Crozier's poems provoke. In an interview, Crozier describes humour as a clear strategy of subversion, and not simply amusement: "humour can be radical and subversive; you can say things in humour that you can't say in other ways and get away with it" (Carey 16). Reflecting further on this notion of "getting away with it," Crozier writes explicitly about the empowering nature of humour in poetry:

Humour hits readers in the gut harder because it makes them relax, let down their defences and open up. Then the sharp edge comes, the turn that makes them feel a little less comfortable and assured than they did before. . . . Humour, especially humour with a dark side, is a way of affirmation. Treating our terrors as farce, mocking them, is a step towards recognizing our own power and the power of words. . . . In feminist poetry with a humourous twist, it is often anger, not laughter, that is the driving creative force producing poems both funny and deadly serious at the same time. ("So Much Sorrow" 28-30)

The “sharp edge” of critical, angry humour and “the turn” of phrase that causes discomfort in the reader are central to Crozier’s use of the garden trope in *The Garden Going On Without Us*. In this second phase of her garden poetics, Crozier may now be having fun in the garden, but her interest in amusement and laughter remains critical in purpose.

In *The Garden Going On Without Us*, Crozier demonstrates irreverent humour in her infamous poetic sequence “The Sex Lives of Vegetables,” which destabilizes “natural” conventions of gender and human sexuality by offering a different kind of erotic knowledge. Crozier states that the inspiration for “The Sex Lives of Vegetables” sequence came from “sitting in our back yard [in Regina] and contemplating Patrick’s garden” (“A Western Poet’s Journal” 6). Although both Lane and Crozier draw upon the garden in their creative work, Lane observes in an interview that Crozier’s relationship to the garden is striking: “Lorna has always had an erotic relationship to the landscape. . . . She has written poems about gardens . . . and is a wonderfully sensitive, sensual woman so she has a palpable erotic relationship to everything in the world. The garden is just one aspect. She responds to it very viscerally” (Litwin C4). Crozier’s “visceral” response to the garden relates directly to her feminist mandate; she herself describes the relationship: “It is women writers saying—hey, here’s another way of looking at things you thought were wrapped up, tied with string, stored in the basement. We’re going to open the packages and surprise you. We’re going to tell you some secrets and expose some lies. We’re going to peel some vegetables and show you what’s underneath the skin” (“Speaking the Flesh” 92). Crozier’s desire to uncover gendered power dynamics within and through the garden in such a bawdy way counters more traditional understandings of gardening and literature’s cultivating influence over nature as I discussed previously in

the nineteenth-century gardening milieu of Moodie and Traill. If poetry from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was supposed to “dress and adorn Nature” as one of the three sister arts (Hunt and Willis 11), then Crozier’s contemporary poetry undermines the language that binds and “covers up,” as she not only redresses, but also undresses the garden at the level of language as a means of exposing gender paradigms and hierarchies. In “The Sex Lives of Vegetables,” Crozier enacts this exposure in literal and literary ways through a veritable strip tease, a peeling back of the skin of the vegetables. Despite the overt physicality of the imagery, Crozier persists, however, in drawing readers’ attention to the relationship between language and desire. These “sex lives” are not just on show, but rather written down as this garden contains a number of “vegetable-writers.” The “Scarlet Runner Beans” are the “[l]yricists and scribes” who “illuminate the vegetable / book of hours” (*The Garden Going* 115). These “poets” of the garden “write couplets,” pairing and sounding the flirtations between the various vegetables, finding pleasure in layering meaning through provocative “puns on *pistil*” (*The Garden Going* 115). Clearly, Crozier wants to highlight that this garden is not just a bawdy place or embodied through the personification of the vegetables, but also a terrain of language and forms of expression.

“The Sex Lives of Vegetables” sequence marks a significant progression in terms of Crozier’s garden poetry, as she begins to use the garden as an active yet subtle agent of disruption that turns over conventions. Crozier admits that she “would never have written a poem in sequence in the early years” and that she has “become more and more interested in taking more than one look at something. . . . from le[f]t and right and upside-down” (Meyer and O’Riordan 28). Crozier embraces the poetic sequence as a potentially subversive form, therefore, particularly in terms of developing a garden poetics that

works to disrupt and “turn over” alternative perceptions and desire through a renewed, or “upside-down,” perspective. In an interview, Crozier comments on the multi-layered appeal of the sequence, particularly in terms of working to go “down” in her search for meaning:

That’s why you see so many of my poems [are] written in parts. I love poetic sequences, like the ones I wrote on penises, vegetables, Icarus, etc. You can say, well, here’s one way of doing it, one way of seeing it, and here’s another, and another. And if you push and go a little deeper, you surprise yourself and find yet another version, the one buried deepest underground—and all of them are possible at the same time. (Philips, “Seeing Distance” 144)

For some of the vegetables in “The Sex Lives of Vegetables,” mainly those depicted as female, their poems are curtailed into shorter entries of the sequence—implying that these particular sex lives are controlled and delimited by what is taboo according to “nature,” the societal norms and hierarchy of the garden. Through their foreshortened entries (being only four to six lines in length) and a focus mostly on appearance and dress, the female vegetables’ desire remains the most curtailed or “buried.” Their limited, dictated sexual roles become apparent in “Lettuce,” as the subservient courtesan is “[r]aised for one thing / and one thing only” with her body controlled and distorted to satisfy a particular ideal: “[u]nder her fancy crinolines / her narrow feet are bound” (*The Garden Going* 102). In “Tomatoes,” there are the notorious seductresses that go by the name “Pixie” and “Pretty Patio”: “No wonder / they all have round heels / and rouge their nipples” (*The Garden Going* 105). At the other extreme from the promiscuous tomatoes are the virginal “Peas,” who “never liked any of it” and remain resistant and tightly closed, “keeping their knees together” (*The Garden Going* 111). Within the superficial

limitations of this virgin-whore dichotomy, individual desire is lost; the female vegetables are contained within one-dimensional archetypes of female sexuality.

Supplying a critical, humorous vision in her raunchy garden poems, Crozier puts into action a process of exposure that denaturalizes gender paradigms of sexuality by making the garden a place of personified activity. At the same time, Crozier undermines the garden's poetic and conventional appeal (such as its role as a magical bower) by writing about vegetables, as opposed to flowers. The first poem, "Carrots," features erotic thrusting, albeit an ineffectual attempt, into the feminine underground:

Carrots are fucking
 the earth. A permanent
 erection, they push deeper
 into the damp and dark.
 All summer long
 they try so hard to please.
Was it good for you,
was it good? (The Garden Going 99)

With their unrelenting drive of bravado, the carrots strive to gratify the "damp and dark" earth, which remains unchanged, or "permanent." The carrots' potency is diminished, then, as no physical reaction or verbal response ("the earth won't answer") is given to the carrots' questions regarding their sexual performance (99). Ultimately, Crozier suggests that these ineffectual vegetables can only fulfill other appetites:

While you stroll through the garden
 thinking *carrot cake*,
carrots and onions in beef stew,

carrot pudding with caramel sauce,

they are fucking their brains out

in the hottest part of the afternoon. (*The Garden Going* 99)

The casual “stroll” of the “you” undermines the carrots’ sexual exertion. Moreover, the listing of possible desserts and main courses signals a reversal of agency, as the carrots transform from being sexual subjects to oblivious objects of consumption—a shift that unravels their supposed supremacy over the terrain and their own endurance as “A permanent / erection.”

Crozier’s dismantling of myths of male sexual potency, her use of explicit and vulgar language, and her frank discussion of female pleasure and genitals, such as “clitoral” peas in a pod (111), make her sequence a controversial piece. Indeed, her use of bawdy humour does not always allow her to “get away with it” when it comes to the subversion of sexual taboo (Carey 16). Crozier reflects on the controversy surrounding the reception of “The Sex Lives of Vegetables”:

I heard from a teacher who was using McClelland & Stewart’s *The New Canadian Poets* anthology in his Canadian literature course at a community college. He had been called to the principal’s office because several students, men and women, had complained about my section in that book, particularly the poem, “Carrots.” He didn’t think he’d put the text on his course another year. (“Speaking the Flesh” 91)

In an interview, Crozier admits that people have walked out of her poetry readings in protest when she recites “The Sex Lives of Vegetables,” and she has even received “the occasional ‘hate letter’ in the mail” (Meyer and O’Riordan 28). Cooke observes that the discomfort and anger with which Crozier’s vegetable poems have been received derive from Crozier’s addressing sexuality in a frank and humorous manner (93). Moreover,

Cooke notes that Crozier's incorporation of bawdy humour within a traditionally high art form raises eyebrows, as "it also forces reviewers to come to terms with the relationship between humour, politics, and poetry" (93). To laugh openly at sex within a poetic medium implicates Crozier with a level of bawdiness not viewed as particularly feminine or even artistically respectable. In an interview with Carey, Crozier confirms this assessment of the gender politics: "I think they don't expect a woman to be saying 'dirty words' out loud, in front of an audience," or, for that matter, in a poem (15). Crozier's use of humour signals her accessing of alternative, "subterranean" levels of awareness and sexual innuendo deemed inappropriate, unfeminine, and subversive by her audience. Judging by the angered responses of the government representative (the Manitoba MLA) and her audience members at recitations, Crozier believes her gender as an artist is the main source of controversy as she undermines social propriety. Clearly the topic (human sexuality) and Crozier's gender have some impact on the poems' reception, but this sequence is also one of her most popular and recognized works. Surely the public's titillation is not the sole reason for the sequence's notoriety.

In addition to the vulgar language and explicit exploration of sexuality in "The Sex Lives of Vegetables," readers and critics should not downplay the significance of Crozier's figurative gardens and their role in creating a defamiliarizing effect and prompting readers' volatile response to the sequence. Although Crozier uses an immodest female voice of sexual experience in her sequence, she admits that her gender cannot be the sole reason behind the poems' troubled reception. As Crozier states, "Call me naïve, but I thought the vegetable sequence was simply fun. Obviously, for many people it's more than that. Weird as it sounds, these common garden vegetables are threatening" ("Speaking the Flesh" 92). Crozier struggles with this conclusion, however,

and writes, “it can’t be because they are *doing it* in the garden. There’s more blatant sexuality on prime time TV than in these poems” (“Speaking the Flesh” 92). In response to Crozier’s perplexed assessment, I suggest that the dramatic response to the vegetable poems is in large part because of the fact that *the vegetables* are doing it in the garden. The absurd pairing of a seemingly asexual terrain (a vegetable garden) with a clearly personified display of sexuality brings alternative layers of significance alongside each other, thereby forcing the reader to examine gender and sexuality without familiar, reassuring constructs. Ironically in the process of this pairing, both the garden and notions of human sexuality become denaturalized. As Jackson observes, part of the appeal of the fantasy mode for writers is that “natural” categories are challenged and rendered unfamiliar: “Gender differences of male and female are subverted and generic distinctions between animal, vegetable, and mineral are blurred in fantasy’s attempt to ‘turn over’ ‘normal’ perceptions and undermine ‘realistic’ ways of seeing” (49). Fantasy is a strategy of relationship, of contrast, as “the ‘unreal’ is set against the category of the ‘real’—a category which the fantastic interrogates by its difference” (Jackson 4). “The Sex Lives of Vegetables” enacts, therefore, a process of exposure that renders established norms of male and female sexuality ludicrous, destabilized, and unfamiliar. In effect, Crozier turns societal assumptions on their head not just in terms of sexuality but also in terms of the cultivated “nature” of the seemingly benign vegetable patch. The garden’s traditional association with both men’s gendered practice of directing the dressing of “Nature,” and archetypes of innocence make Crozier’s erotic vegetable garden a highly disruptive, imaginative terrain.

Crozier employs this strategy of humour and denaturalization elsewhere through unusual garden comparisons in *Angels of Flesh*, *Angels of Silence*, as the sequence “Penis

Poems” destabilizes phallic imagery and draws on garden imagery to effect defamiliarization. As MacDonald argues, “Crozier is careful to choose metaphors that eroticize but do not romanticize the penis” (253), a strategy that goes against the grain of poetry’s ability to elevate a topic through figurative language. Crozier foregrounds the corporeality of the penis, and the phallus is returned from its signifying power to its physical disposition through comparisons that speak to its basic “nature” and vulnerability. For example, in “Variations,” the penis becomes a “Common garden slug, / ugly and beautiful” (*Angels of Flesh* 83); while in “Their Smell” she conjures the image of an unappealing, unruly garden:

a fridge
when it goes crazy,
growing its blue, green and black
gardens of mould. Some smell (*Angels of Flesh* 87)

At one point in the poem “Phallic,” Crozier compares the male organ to a plant, specifically a flower “poking through / the soil. An amaryllis bud / just before it opens” (*Angels of Flesh* 86). Instead of male authority owning a personified female “Nature” as property and binding her feminine tresses according to masculine will, the phallus has been undressed and the “nature” of the penis and its “growth” are placed under the sway of an ambiguous other, as the masculine subject becomes plural:

green thumb
alter-egos,
how you tend them,
how you coax them
with your gardener’s hands

to make them grow. (86)

Undressing nature and human sexuality through absurd and amusing comparisons, Crozier performs a veritable strip tease that appears, at first glance, to be purely bawdy in nature. Indeed, critic Shirley Neuman finds “The Sex Lives of Vegetables” sequence trivial and narrow-sighted in its preoccupation: “when the sequence asks the reader to play Peeping Tom on the entire garden in 17 poems that tell us about the joys of sex from artichoke to zucchini, she may long to put the pathetic phallacy behind her and to imagine *what else* might be going on in the garden without her” (32). This process of garden-exposure is not focussed purely on titillation through sexual imagery, however, as Crozier invites readers not simply to gaze on raunchy vegetables, but rather to experience a poetics that works towards profound disruption, forcing readers to question societal taboos and gender conventions. The figure of the flasher appears and reappears in the sequence, suggesting that as much as the act of “baring all” is a sudden, unexpected expression that threatens and makes readers turn away, “flashing” can also initiate a process of revelation that leads to critical pleasure. The flashing yams reveal that the process of seeing beyond the surface, or the laying bare of social convention, yields immense pleasure as Crozier’s artistry peels back the layers of language:

Sweet potatoes, yams
 what delights they hide
 inside their dappled jackets
 hot from the oven
 steaming in the bowl
 at the first
 touch

of the knife

they flash

orange flesh (*The Garden Going* 106)

Instead of shocking their audience through unruly antics, the flashing yams generate disruptive amusement. The orange flesh, the pleasing taste, and the sound of the imperfect rhyme of “flesh” and “flash” generate a highly sensual, linguistic garden experience. The pleasure is derived not just from the visual shock of orange flesh, but from the added exposure “to our tongues,” as Crozier’s rhyme delights and the shortened lines increase the movement and urgency of the poem (106). For Crozier, desire and pleasure can be accessed through a defamiliarized use of language. Her garden sequence challenges her readers to reflect upon and experience how language shapes, contains, or alternatively denies certain experience.

The irreverent humour with which Crozier approaches her poetry facilitates both shock and amusement as she employs a seemingly benign and insignificant subject (vegetables) in order to access another decidedly more problematic level (human sexuality) buried beneath patriarchal conventions, social propriety, taboos, and “proper” language. It is truly within the layers and denaturalized effects of language itself that Crozier revels. Language is the means and site of her unearthing of desire. In Crozier’s view, the female body is kept under wraps and silenced, and this concealed knowledge counters the restrictive roles women are forced to fulfill when they are “raised for one thing / and one thing only” (*The Garden Going* 102). In her erotic vegetable patch, therefore, Crozier exposes a knowledge derived from female pleasure and especially from plurality, as the multiple layers of significance are accessed and sounded in language:

The onion loves the onion.

It hugs its many layers,
 saying O, O, O,
 each vowel smaller
 than the last.

.....

If Eve had bitten it
 instead of the apple,
 how different

Paradise. (*The Garden Going* 104)

With its orgasmic, multiple “O’s,” the onion offers Eve a different sensation and knowledge of the world and of herself. This “different / Paradise” undermines restrictions on the feminine and forms Crozier’s revised garden mythology. With an alternative vision that is not singular but formed of “many layers,” Crozier locates desire in language—in the vowels that sound meaning in the erotic expression of “O, O, O.” Furthermore, Crozier signals language’s facility for creating and defining the social world in terms of male-centred knowledge. Crozier’s layered onion offers, then, alternative forms and sources of knowledge that disrupt the patriarchal convention of the apple. Instead, Eve finds both agency and desire in a language she can bite into and enjoy for her own purposes. The result is not one of loss—Adam and Eve’s fallen expulsion from the garden—but rather one altogether different: the realization of an alternative “tasting” and use of language.

4. The Gardener-Poet Who Creates and “Turns”

In this phase of humourous exposure in Crozier’s garden poetics, *The Garden Going On Without Us* suggests a clear preoccupation with that which is “subterranean”: desire that cannot be accessed through a straightforward use of convention, even in the most ardent of attempts. The notion of “what the mind turns over” becomes a prominent concern and particularly in terms of allowing one’s perspective to be open to the possibility of different ways of being that exist alongside what is accepted as “natural.” The garden trope in *The Garden Going On Without Us* is clearly fantastic and subversive, as Crozier looks underneath into the “dark” reaches of this imaginative terrain. *The Garden Going On Without Us* initiates this subterranean focus in Crozier’s garden poetics, but during the next “garden” phase of her career, Crozier formulates an explicit relationship between the creative work of writing and gardening, and specifically the gardener’s work of digging. The collections *Inventing the Hawk* (1992) and *Everything Arrives at the Light* (1995) align the poet and gardener as sympathetic figures in their acts of artistic genesis. Both poet and gardener create meaning through their arrangement of either language or plants as they cultivate aesthetic, signifying worlds through their extraordinary capacities for effecting transformation. This explicit comparison of the poet with the gardener through a paralleling of their respective powers of creation and disruption stems in part from Crozier’s move from the prairies to the west coast and her attempt to realize a new vision of home: an understanding of the familiar within the unfamiliar. The garden trope continues, even in its “naturalness,” to serve Crozier as a paradoxical device of denaturalization, as she foregrounds the purposeful construction of her craft.

In both *Inventing the Hawk* and *Everything Arrives at the Light* there are a number of garden poems that explore the re-creation of a home, or personal understanding of the world, through a synthesis of language and plants. While Crozier's "gardens" motion toward an experience of artistic transcendence, these poetic musings remain clearly rooted in time, despite their capacity for the highly imaginative. The economy of Crozier's lyric poetry—its compactness, its juxtaposition of ideas, and its communication of processes of transformation—seems particularly well-suited to a garden topos and trope as the garden provides an appealing, figurative location for her speakers' reflections and spatio-temporal frames of reference. In "Gardens" in *Inventing the Hawk*, the extraordinary temporal frame of the garden enables Crozier to compress and expand time simultaneously, shifting backward and forward between the prairie childhood of her male subject and his west coast present. The paradoxical result is a sense of timelessness within the multiple gardens that are planted "in time" within the poem—harmonized with the seasons (despite the distinct places and ages of the respective gardeners) and at the level of the writing, as the lines of the poem express a doubled meaning simultaneously through imagery, puns, and enjambment. In "Gardens," plants and words contribute to the creative process that takes root in both the literal (the ground) and the figurative (the imagination). It is a fusing of garden and language that creates the different levels of meaning when Crozier begins to explore the artistic genesis of the gardener-poet. Like the plural "Gardens" of the title, Crozier shifts between two different geographical and temporal plains through the gardens of both the adult male subject and his mother, and the imaginative space of the poem:

he'll grow different things, some basil,
a little thyme. He plants the seeds already

in his mind, no fear of frost,
 the summer's long, herbs grow

 on stony constellations, air
 moves in from the sea with its smells

 of eternity. Back where he was born
 his mother now would be soaking seeds

 in a shallow bowl, snow outside the window.
 He'd give anything to be there,

 crossing time as if it were
 a landscape he had dreamed, a garden (*Inventing the Hawk* 117-18)

The garden that the man plants is decidedly different in locale and content; he “grow[s] different things,” but the ritual of planting, the urgency with which he begins his work, and his artistic dreaming transcend the geographical and temporal discrepancies. Crozier signals a rootedness in time, however, as the male gardener’s planting of “a little thyme” creates a pun on “time,” suggesting the anticipation of the gardener as he sows his seeds “already.” In another time (the past), the mother soaks her seeds “now,” despite the fact that there is still “snow outside the window.” The “little thyme” the male gardener has holds the paradoxical potential to transcend any limitations, as the dream that is his garden allows him to experience the sense and sensation of eternity. In this compression

and expansion of time, the gardens of both the male subject's childhood and adulthood take root simultaneously, and Crozier draws upon the spatial frame of the garden to juxtapose the diverse processes of their planting and realization:

She lets him rearrange the rows,
placing peas by broccoli,

carrots by tomatoes, marigolds
along the border. On the coast

he says the names out loud:

Early Bird. Sweet William. Everlasting. (Inventing the Hawk 118)

The actual companion-planting of vegetables highlights the figurative "companion planting" in words. The pairing of the garden's border (of the prairie garden) with the coast, and the use of couplet stanzas throughout the poem create not just two gardens in two different geographies and time frames, but a doubled "garden" that exists simultaneously on the page. The rows are not just rows of seeds in the gardens, but the lines (or "rows") in Crozier's poem, as the word "marigolds" is left "planted" at the end of the line (along the border). Crozier's use of run-on lines, or enjambment, enables her to juxtapose the experiences of the two gardens and to blur the boundaries and distinctions between them.¹³ "On the coast / he says the names" of the plants from his prairie past as he watches the sun bring forth "pools of light" (118); yet this coastal vision

¹³ Cooke notes that Crozier's structuring of her poetic line through enjambment occurs throughout much of her writing and allows for a layering of signification: "The kind of double take that this break requires of the reader is reminiscent of [Margaret] Atwood's use of the line end" as it "requires that the reader grasp its meaning in two stages" (102).

and memory transform into the “pools of light / along the window sill” and the table his mother wipes in preparation for dinner (118). “Gardens” is an ideal rendering of the creative potential shared by both gardener and poet in their creation of aesthetic visions of the world (a “dream” and a “garden”) into being.¹⁴

Some of the most explicit comparisons between the gardener and the writer in this third phase of Crozier’s poetics emerge in two poems that feature the speaker’s denaturalized experiences in her unfamiliar west coast garden environment. It seems that the garden topos of these poems provides the impetus for the poet-speaker to partake in her own kind of figurative “gardening” in her writing. The most explicit comparisons in Crozier’s poetry between the gardener and the writer are made in “If I Call Stones Blue” and “A Good Day to Start a Journal,” which highlight a poetic garden vision of purposeful “digging” or “turning over” with disruption and transformation as the objectives.

“If I Call Stones Blue” was first published as a chapbook of ghazals entitled *Eye Witness* in 1993 (following the publication of *Inventing the Hawk*), and its focus is Crozier’s transplanting from the prairies to the west coast. As Cooke notes, *Eye Witness* “is not focused on a particular loved one (the traditional subject of ghazals)” but rather offers “poems that mourn a particular absence” (144) —mainly the absent prairie home

¹⁴ In *Everything Arrives at the Light*, Crozier continues her examination of the gardener and poet as comparable artistic creators in their aesthetic arrangement of the world. Crozier’s reflections on the unfamiliar west coast landscape of British Columbia provide the impetus for these musings on acts of creation, particularly in the poem “Finding the Name,” which explores the process of recreating a home and sense of self through plants and words when the speaker responds to her physical and emotional uprooting. Having to explain “the language / we brought with us: *maggie, slough, / caragana, brome*” (6), the prairie-born speaker remembers finally the name of the yellow flower—*mimulus*—that distinguishes and makes her home and garden in her new surroundings: “to our friends, ‘Every summer / in our porch we hang *mimulus*,’ / memory and small half-spoken wishes / making out of flowers another home” (7). Like the hanging plant, the remembered words from the prairie form a tentative “garden,” as the speaker names and plants anew her transplanted identity and sense of home.

the speaker has left after starting a new life on the West Coast. With her lover gone—
 “Two place settings. / Only one sits down” (83)—and her cat writing from afar, “I’m
 okay / in Saskatoon without you” (94), the speaker looks for some form of
 companionship through a kind of “companion planting” in the hope of finding a sense of
 renewal. The collection enacts this search for belonging and companionship (or pairing)
 through both garden imagery and the ghazal with its series of five to eight couplets:

Don’t put tulips and narcissus in the same vase,
 says the flower-woman on the roadside.

Now you know everything you need to know.
 I place the tulips by the coffee pot.

Companion planting. Old enamel stove
 now you know it’s spring. (*Everything Arrives* 84)

The line “Now you know everything you need to know” is reminiscent of the final lines
 of John Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn”: “‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’ – that is all / Ye
 know on earth, and all ye need to know” (49-50). For Crozier’s disoriented speaker in
 this unfamiliar west coast environment, however, her knowledge and sense of beauty are
 displaced; the speaker chooses, however, to use this unnatural vision and bizarre form of
 companion planting (pairing tulips with the stove) in her struggle for poetic inspiration
 and an aesthetic understanding of her new home. Trying to bring creative energy to her
 writing, the speaker is out of synch with the spring season; her visions of inspiration are
 almost comical, producing unoriginal and artificial germinations (such as light “bulbs”
 from a lamp) in her struggle for an illuminating idea:

Are you going somewhere? My favourite

lamp in this cabin is a Snow-White Dwarf

in a red jacket and tall yellow hat.

The bulb grows from his head. Eureka! (96)

The writer cannot relate to her environment, yet she is also captivated by the growth of these temperate gardens compared to the relative harshness and stunted growth of the prairies: "Crocuses grow tall / here, four inches, their eyes / wide open" (*Everything Arrives* 97). What marks this poem as significant, however, is Crozier's progression from writing about gardens to making an *explicit* connection between the act of writing and the activity of gardening.¹⁵ There is, therefore, a sequential shift in Crozier's garden poetry as she moves from writing about literal and figurative gardens of coercion and humourous exposure (wherein she affords readers a glimpse into the secret, personified sex lives of vegetables), to writing that presents itself as a type of figurative gardening, as the gardener-poet creates and arranges her world through words. Unfortunately for the speaker in the poem, her coastal environment intensifies her sense of loss and she "laments the lack of growth in her figurative garden" (Cooke 145). The springtime renewal of the garden contrasts with her dormant state as a writer:

Something doesn't bloom,

doesn't blossom.

¹⁵ Crozier explicitly relates writing to gardening in "If I Call Stones Blue" by emphasizing her speaker's discordant poetic vision in relation to her burgeoning environment, and the speaker's active struggle to turn her infertile imagination into a creative product through poetry or a journal. Elsewhere, in her collection *Bones in Their Wings: Ghazals*, Crozier reflects on the ghazal form and its particular appeal as a kind of "garden" of comparisons and contrasts: "The form challenges our notions of what can be brought together and held. . . . The ghazal invites everyone and everything through the gates of its walled garden" (*Bones in Their Wings* 68).

**

Keep a weather journal.

Write: first day of spring.

Write: the naked gardens of my skin.

Write: no buds on this tree. (*Everything Arrives* 88-89)

With the ghazal form providing a visual and conceptual break between the couplets, Crozier captures the discrepancy between the weather journal, in which the speaker records the spring, and her barren state as a writer. The speaker must clearly command herself to “Write,” but her creative desire embodied in her naked skin finds no outlet and expression; hence, no buds form. For the speaker, the west coast demands a new vision on her part even though like the crocuses, her “I” and “eyes” are “wide open.” She appreciates that a new garden of expressive possibility is present, but she will have to work to access it, to see in a different way the beauty and inspiring aspects: “Gardens everywhere / even when you cannot see them” (*Everything Arrives* 97).

When Crozier publishes *Everything Arrives at the Light*, she reproduces *Eye Witness* as a long poem under the title “If I Call Stones Blue,” a title that highlights the gardener-poet’s act of naming as a potentially creative act of genesis that gives a particular shape to the world. The reappearance of this garden poem is fitting particularly since this collection concludes with a similar poem, “A Good Day to Start a Journal,” that parallels the process of writing with the processes of the garden and the activity of digging. Indeed, “A Good Day to Start a Journal” reproduces but also transforms lines from “If I Call Stones Blue” in order to communicate what has become the inspired work and renewed creativity of this gardener-poet. In “A Good Day to Start a Journal,” the

speaker is now established in her home on the west coast. She reveals that it is her second spring, because the last was “our first on the Coast” (134). She is no longer without a companion as she watches her lover working in their garden. Despite being at home in her adopted garden, there remains a discrepancy between the activity of the garden and the activity of the writer. As in “If I Call Stones Blue,” the speaker in “A Good Day to Start a Journal” is a writer struggling to find renewal and inspiration in her writing, yet the challenge stems from a somewhat different predicament of artistic vision that focusses on the past. Furthermore, the final result is not a barren image of “no buds on this tree” (89), as seen in “If I Call Stones Blue,” but one where spring gardening (via the initial process of turning the earth) and poetic writing finally merge. In “A Good Day to Start a Journal,” the speaker sits at her window watching her lover digging in the garden in early spring. She struggles to find the words to express to her lover her thoughts on life’s fleeting nature and their relationship on the day of his birthday:

The only way to tell you is to write
this down, our lives a journal
with notes about the weather, perhaps
a grocery list and appointment never kept (*Everything Arrives* 134)

In her journal the speaker records quotidian facts that mark the passing of time and form the apparent content of a person’s life. Beyond this initial comparison between life and writing (“our lives a journal”), the poem progresses to suggest a renewed sense of meaning in the speaker’s work, perceptions, and expression that comes from “underground,” from what lies unexpectedly below the surface.

The image of the speaker’s lover working in the garden brings thoughts of springtime renewal, such as the vision of her lover as an unborn child, warm and “curled

inside [his mother's belly] / as she waited in the spring for the pale / buds of fingers to unfurl and bloom" (*Everything Arrives* 134). But the speaker's writing is also directed toward unearthing images of death and the past:

You'd been working
in the garden, turning the damp earth.
On the prairies it would still be frozen
nine feet down. For a body to be buried,
the ground is set on fire, bundles of straw smoking.

Birthdays always bring the old deaths back. (*Everything Arrives* 134)

The contrasts of warmth and coldness play throughout the poem, signalling the oppositional visions of birth and death that are triggered by and parallel the transitional spring-time garden scene: digging in preparation for planting unearths, in the speaker's mind, a digging for the past and burial graves.

The machinations of the speaker's mind as she turns the varied images in her head allow her to see the transformations of life and particularly the effects of time on her and her lover's aging bodies: "they shine like parchment, worn by fingers, / by the spittle on the thumb as we turn / a page" (*Everything Arrives* 135). The processes of turning the soil, a lover's body, or a page of a book find themselves aligned in Crozier's poem. Here, they all become sensual acts that move both along and, more importantly, beyond the surface of things. Crozier writes, "a page, We read each other, nearsightedly, / hands and tongues and even toes find where / the skin gives way" (135). The lines suggest that the couple's awareness of each other is found through close inspection, a *working* to find and to feel the significance below, "where / the skin gives way," or alternatively, where the earth or language yield to an alternative vision or expression of experience. This sensing

“below” as the couple “turn[s] / a page” is not, then, simply a matter of being receptive or submitting to different levels of perception and meaning. For Crozier’s speaker, this process is one of struggle and persistence: “Since I cannot say / it right, for you today I must try” (135). Thus, in the final stanza, readers hear the speaker command herself not just to “write,” but also to get it “right,” as she suggested earlier in the poem. The work of digging echoes its rhythm in the repetition of the speaker’s command, “Write,” as she struggles to find renewal in the image of her lover labouring in the garden and in the parallel work of her writing:

to keep this journal. Write:

March 26, and a little cold.

Write: Overnight the plum tree

has become one blossom. Write:

The days are getting longer

because my lover in the garden

turns and turns the earth. (135)

Initially, the speaker records the date and the temperature—those quotidian details of life and notably the coldness of the air in keeping with her own perceptions of life’s passing. With the next “turn” of the line, however, and her command to “Write,” she is able to expose a different image, one of delightful transformation through the blossoming plum tree in her lover’s springtime garden. She no longer sees “no buds on this tree,” as she did in “If I Call Stones Blue”; instead, the barrenness turns to blossoms. In the “digging” and turning of her own writing, the speaker works to capture a layered vision that communicates not only the mundane passing and turning of seasonal time toward death,

but also the process of artistic rebirth and renewal within the creative space or “terrain” of her poem.

“A Good Day to Start a Journal” highlights what Crozier sees as an affinity between a gardener’s spring digging in the earth and a writer’s work of creative renewal on the page. As an important precursor to Crozier’s figurative use of digging, Irish poet Seamus Heaney provides the touchstone for the trope in his poem “Digging.” In “Digging,” Heaney creates an artistic posture that resonates with Crozier’s writer-persona in “A Good Day to Start a Journal.” Like Crozier’s speaker who watches from a window as her lover turns the earth, Heaney’s persona works indoors, as his father digs potatoes outside the window: “Under my window, a clean rasping sound / When the spade sinks into gravelly ground: / My father, digging. I look down” (“Digging” 1). With the speaker’s final declaration, “Between my finger and my thumb / the squat pen rests / I’ll dig with it” (2), Heaney synchronizes the labourer and the poet. His father works “in rhythm” planting potatoes and digging “down and down / For the good turf” (1), just as the young poet must search his own internal landscape as “living roots awaken in [his] head” (2). The shared rhythm of the work is reminiscent of Crozier’s speaker’s repeated command to “Write” at the same time as her lover turns and turns the earth. Clearly, Heaney’s speaker finds and stirs the “living roots” within his creative mind and memory in a similar way as Crozier’s writer in “A Good Day to Start a Journal” looks to find inspiration through her own memories and imagination, ultimately allowing the image of the frozen prairie ground to transform into a March day, still a “little cold” but also blossoming overnight. For both Heaney and Crozier, writing is about finding a renewed vision, as the words and their arrangement convey the emotions and alternative knowledge that stir within the depths of the poet’s sensibilities.

When Crozier foregrounds and parallels the process of digging with the process of writing, she accentuates the role of the writer as a creative agent of transformation. Moreover, "A Good Day to Start a Journal" concerns the integration of different visions—those of the poet-speaker and her lover-gardener. The poet-speaker practices a relational art as she attempts to write and to get it "right" for her lover. The poem emphasizes, as does Heaney's "Digging," the convergence of different kinds of work. While both poems focus on a familial setting and set of relationships, the politics of Heaney's "Digging" is readily apparent in terms of active defiance and Ireland's cultural recuperation.¹⁶ Crozier's digging in "A Good Day to Start a Journal," on the other hand, does not appear to be overtly political or feminist in purpose. The trope begins, however, to demonstrate a feminist objective in subsequent poems, as Crozier's gendered slant extends digging to include acts of "turning." It is important to note that Crozier nuances the act of digging in "A Good Day to Start a Journal" when she concludes the poem with the expression "turns." The change in diction highlights a word and process that Crozier foregrounds repeatedly in her texts: there is the section "What the Mind Turns Over" in *The Garden Going On Without Us*, and the section "Turning the Earth" (in which "A Good Day to Start a Journal" appears) in *Everything Arrives at the Light*. The emphasis on "turning" plays into the various processes—literal and figurative—that the gardener-poet participates in within the context of Crozier's poems. In an actual garden, digging and turning the soil play a significant role in terms of preparing the ground for planting, removing plants, aerating, mixing, and integrating. *The Oxford English Dictionary*

¹⁶ In "Digging," the pen in the speaker's hand "rests; snug as a gun" and Heaney strives to capture a patrilineal heritage that is at once familial, class-based, and national. The speaker appreciates the generations of downtrodden yet determined labourers: "By God, the old man could handle a spade. / Just like his old man" (1). Heaney envisions a conscious political role for the "digging" poet: "In Ireland in this century it has involved . . . an attempt to define and interpret the present by bringing it into significant relationship with the past. . . . [to] forge the uncreated conscience of the race" ("Feeling into Words" 60).

Online defines the verb “turn” as “to reverse the position of the turf, or of the soil, in ploughing or digging, so as to bring the under parts to the surface” (“Turn”).

Figuratively, “to turn” enables one “to consider in different aspects; to revolve in the mind” or even to “turn over” and “to move into the contrary position, so that the upper side becomes the under” (“Turn”). Of course for the writer who wants to connect gardening with her composition, “turning” elicits a further connotation as “to turn” can also mean “to shape, form, or fashion artistically or gracefully” such as “a piece of literary work” or “a tune” (“Turn”).

In Heaney’s work, the work of “digging” often involves an excavation, the search for material fragments and (human) remains from the past. In contrast, “turning the earth” or imaginative “turning over” emphasizes the process and pleasure of disruption and transformation, and not necessarily the reconstitution of the past from buried materials. In *Everything Arrives at the Light*, Crozier begins to present her trope of “turning” as a strategy of exposure and disruption that strives to effect ideological upheaval and transformation. Gingell notes Crozier’s interest in Rich’s notion of feminist revision (68), and a closer reading of Rich’s essay and her phrasing reveals further relevance to Crozier’s disruptive garden poetics. Reflecting on her essay, Rich describes a feminist desire to “unearth” a tradition of women’s writing (34). This process of unearthing alternative perspectives and forms of knowing is phrased in a particular way: “You have to be free to play around with the notion that day might be night, love might be hate; nothing can be too sacred for the imagination to turn into its opposite or to call experimentally by another name” (43). While Rich focusses here mainly on binaries, her phrasing of the observation that the imagination can “turn” over a different vision of the world and of relationships speaks to Crozier’s own “turning over”—and more specifically

“turning” as an appealing strategy for a feminist poet. Crozier is not preoccupied solely with subverting binaries, however, but rather effects exposures and combinations of multiple levels of meaning and perspective. In an interview, Crozier notes that “part of [her] revisioning comes from a feminist stance” (Philips, “Seeing Distance” 143), and presents this process as one of turning over stories: “The desire to resist erasure is part of the desire to retell. . . . We want to know what’s behind the story. No matter who’s retelling it, we know there’s another narrative that deserves to be heard. And then another. These rich, buried versions sit alongside what we think we already know” (Philips, “Seeing Distance” 144). Crozier envisions the hidden, unvoiced, and gendered depths as various and layered; there is no singular truth, but rather plurality, and allowing these “buried versions” to emerge ultimately transforms and questions the inter-related ideals of the garden and gender conventions. When Crozier incorporates the notion of “turning” into her garden poems, readers encounter disruption, a linguistic unsettling through conscious inversions, exposures, and transformations of meaning.

In this third phase of Crozier’s garden poetry and in the “Turning the Earth” section particularly from *Everything Arrives at the Light*, Crozier shifts from an exposure of the hidden contents of highly figurative gardens and begins to concentrate on the provocative, transformational powers of gardeners as artists and poet figures. In the context of her poems, the gardener-artists initiate unsettling views of, and desires for, alternative worlds of experience. “Turning the Earth” provides two portraits of disruptive, playful gardeners who serve as catalysts of change, allowing others to “turn over” alternative views and understanding that manipulate an established, ideological order. In “How Things Get Started,” Crozier depicts the gardener as an energizing transgressor when Father Phillip’s desire and imagination are unleashed through an

anonymous note declaring, “*I love your feet*” that appears in his sock (115). Trying to decipher the identity of his mysterious admirer, Father Phillip considers a range of people from Agnes, “the laundry woman who laughs too loud”; to the reflexologist, who “bounces around the grounds without a bra”; to the cook, who “touched [Father Phillip’s] hand beneath the bubbles” when washing dishes (115). These individuals of excess and subterfuge are all capable of secretive flirtation, but it is the pony-tailed novitiate whose sensual gardening activity appears and reappears, significantly concluding the poem as the foremost catalyst, in Father Phillip’s view, for transgression and change:

*I love your feet. Could it be the young
pony-tailed novitiate who picks weeds
from the roadside and calls them flowers,
who replaces turnips with columbines
in the old monks’ garden, carrots with lupines
taller than the chapel candle stand? (115)*

The novitiate disrupts and rearranges the Father’s world through her redefining and sensual veneration of the aesthetic. Unearthing the usual and the practical (turnips and carrots) and replacing them with showy flowers, the novitiate gardener alters the normal placement of things. Through her plantings, the novitiate exceeds the ceremonial presence and height of the chapel candle stand and praises plants normally viewed as inconsequential weeds. This gardener demonstrates an erotic, self-indulgent relationship with the world, rather than an abstemious one, and her nonconformity alters Father Phillip’s own appreciation of the world he inhabits. It is both the secret love note and the work of the novitiate that spur Father Phillip toward his own unsettling transgression, as he devises

what to slip in the pocket of the Abbot's
 clean pyjamas, what to write in pencil
 on the cotton gloves of the novitiate
 whose fingers green from gardening
 smell like flowers
 even when the season's done. (117)

In this self-denying, controlled religious setting, one small transgression begets another, initiating a series of disruptions as “things get started.” Even the simplest lapse can have an enduring effect, as the earthy smell of the novitiate's fingers lingers in Father Phillip's consciousness, rendering his surroundings hyper-sensual and forever transfigured. The novitiate's delight in the beauty of the commonplace, her subversion of established order, and her creative work of renewal (imaged in the “fingers green from gardening”) rouse Father Phillip's own desire to inhabit his life more intensely and provocatively through an unearthing of his own desire for the female novitiate and for the world.¹⁷

In *Everything Arrives at the Light*, Crozier emphasizes both the gardener's and the gardener-poet's ability to provoke and transform through an aesthetic strategy that “turns over” perceptions and understanding, allowing for the possibility of an alternative expression of desire for either the gardener, or for others. In this third phase of her

¹⁷ “How Things Get Started” appears as a benevolent and amusing example of a garden poem of transformation in the “Turning the Earth” section of *Everything Arrives at the Light*. But the desire that Crozier “turns over” also appears through somewhat threatening portraits of gardener-artists. For example, in “The Magpie Dance,” the woman gardener “drums in her garden” to attract, rather than to frighten away, magpies. While the neighbours revel in the unprecedented growth of their magpie-free gardens—“how plump the peas this year, how sweet”—the woman gardener diverges from the norm of productivity and beauty, creating in her own yard a “patch of flattened peas and leaves of cabbage” (106). This extraordinary garden dance is tension-filled (as figured in the woman's drum, the “taut blue air” through which the magpies dance, and the “beads of a pellet gun glinting in [the woman's] eyes”), but it is through this very tension, this unconventional partnership, Crozier suggests, that the gardener-artist and the dancing magpies realize and express “a dark under-rhythm, / a different sort of knowing” (106).

garden poetry, Crozier highlights women's various literal and figurative "gardening" activities; however, her feminist politics, an integrated part of her garden poetics and "turning," does not find its fullest or most provocative expression in the garden poems of *Everything Arrives at the Light*. Because of her feminist mandate to give voice to the silent, Crozier's use of the garden trope and her interest in notions of "turning over" by writing through a figurative "garden" of language, ideology, and perception demand further nuance as consciously gendered activities. In her subsequent collection, *A Saving Grace: The Collected Poems of Mrs. Bentley* (1996), Crozier commences on the fourth phase of her garden poetry as she "turns over" the creative, subversive abilities of the woman poet-gardener. This fourth phase of Crozier's garden poetics focusses on the problematic and sometimes exclusionary aspects of acts of creation, and includes (in addition to *A Saving Grace*) Crozier's most recent collections: *What the Living Won't Let Go* (1999), *Apocrypha of Light* (2002), *Bones in Their Wings: Ghazals* (2003), *Whetstone* (2005), and *Before the First Word* (2005).¹⁸ While the garden poems in the collections of this fourth phase touch on the garden as the originating space of creation and language, I focus predominantly on *A Saving Grace* because it offers a prolonged examination of the gardener-poet. In this collection, Crozier redirects her strategy of denaturalization away from the various uses of the garden trope and onto the "creator" gardener figure herself who effects disruption and unnatural "turns" as a writer.

¹⁸ *Before the First Word* is a collection of previously published poems, and the other four collections contain garden imagery and poems to varying degrees. *What the Living Won't Let Go* features minimal garden-related poems, whereas *Apocrypha of Light*, *Bones in Their Wings*, and *Whetstone* present gardens prominently. Both *Apocrypha of Light*, which rewrites biblical narrative, and *Whetstone* contain garden poems relating to creation, naming, and silence. *Bones in Their Wings* offers a collection of ghazals in which garden imagery figures in relation to seasonal changes, "unnatural" transformations ("Petunias, pansies and lobelia / started walking. With a limp" after being planted in an artificial leg [n. pag.]), and notions of vision as a way to understanding ("Monet paints 'The Path through the Irises.' / It's the way I'm looking for" [n. pag.]).

5. The Gardener-Poet as Unnatural Creator

In *A Saving Grace: The Collected Poems of Mrs. Bentley*, Crozier explores the “garden” as a textual creation by using palimpsest to respond to, and rewrite through poetry, Sinclair Ross’ 1941 novel *As for Me and My House*. In *A Saving Grace*, Crozier’s persona of Mrs. Bentley (based on Ross’ protagonist) debuts as a gardener-poet herself, responding to and creating a vision of the world that is layered with alternative meanings and subterranean desires. Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley turns the work of her writing “upside down” when she remakes her world through a process of denaturalization. Responding to Ross’ original character, Robert Kroetsch writes, “Mrs. Bentley must come close to being the most incompetent gardener in all of fiction,” and Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley maintains this dubious reputation, albeit with the additional “turn” in her role as a gardener-poet (*Lovely Treachery* 77). As Canada’s most popular garden poet, Crozier makes an ironic but appropriate choice of a poetic “gardening” persona, then, especially with regard to her interest in denaturalization as a feminist strategy. Crozier turns to this failed fictional woman gardener (and her garden) as a paradigm of abhorrent creative genesis. Through the poetic creation that results from her figurative “gardening,” Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley unearths her womanly desires and rages, and revels in her “unnatural” facility for words as she both composes and decomposes her world according to her own particular vision. Having explored the work of the poet-gardener as one who “turns”—that is, disrupts and defamiliarizes language and social values—Crozier now “turns over” the gardener-artist herself, and denaturalizes the poet’s creative ability. In Crozier’s contemporary reworking of Mrs. Bentley through both a literal use of palimpsest and a figurative modelling of this genre as a “garden,” Crozier makes certain that the buried levels of

meaning—particularly Mrs. Bentley’s sexual desires and creative impulses—do not always remain concealed. Just as Crozier writes a palimpsestic text based on Ross’ fiction, Crozier presents her Mrs. Bentley persona as a highly conscious poet, layering and manipulating meaning through her own rewriting and “turning over” of other sources or intertexts. Thus, Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley writes, erases, and rewrites in order to reveal and to denaturalize what lies below the visible surface as she moves from silence to voice according to her own creative, palimpsestic impulse.¹⁹

6. Palimpsest and Creative Erasure

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* the literal definition of “palimpsest” is a “paper or parchment which has been written on again” or “a parchment from which writing has been erased” (“Palimpsest”). When a literary text is described as being a palimpsest, as having been “written over again; having the original writing effaced and overlaid by later writing,” it is read as a “multi-layered record” and a highly intertextual work (“Palimpsest”). In *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, Gérard Genette describes palimpsest as an example of “*hypertextuality*”: “any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary” (5). The “graft” that is the hypertext may not be critical, however, Genette

¹⁹ Obviously, Crozier is the author of the collection, but the poems work toward an erasure of Crozier herself by presenting Mrs. Bentley as the poet through both the subtitle and the persona’s voice. This semi-erasure of the actual author is in keeping with the spirit of Ross’ novel. As Pamela Banting observes, “The artfulness of writing in *As for Me and My House* is hidden under at least four “veils.” In the first place, generally speaking diaries are not considered to be art, and this is especially so of the diaries of housewives. Secondly, within the particular form the narrative takes in this novel, books disappear. That is, Sinclair Ross’ writing is under erasure, Philip Bentley’s has been erased, and what the reader is given instead is the diary of the failed writer’s wife! And *her* attention is deflected away from herself and toward her husband. (31)

argues, palimpsest results in “a transformative process” (5) that can expand upon, condense, or alter the hypotext through such devices as satire and parody (5). Genette sees hypertextuality as a process of “*tinkering*”; in other words, “the art of ‘making new things out of old’” (398). In this artistic “tinkering,” the author of the hypertext employs a number of rhetorical strategies, such as: “diegesis,” which involves altering “the world wherein that story occurs” (295); “transvocalization,” which pertains to a shift in person (from first to third, or alternatively third to first) (290); “transsexuation,” which requires a switching of gender for the main characters (298); or “transvaluation,” which entails a shift in the value scheme of the hypotext (367). Genette notes that although hypertexts have an intimate relationship with their hypotexts, they are not beholden to them: “Every hypertext . . . can be read for itself without becoming perceptibly ‘agrammatical’; it is invested with a meaning that is autonomous and thus in some manner sufficient. But sufficient does not mean exhaustive” (397). A hypertext “always stands to *gain* by having its hypertextual status perceived” (397-98). In his conclusion, Genette reasserts that the “hypertext invites us to engage in a relational reading, the flavor of which, however perverse, may well be condensed in an adjective recently coined by Phillipe Lejeune: a *palimpsestuous* reading” (399).

With its capacity to respond to a previously existing text and altering its value scheme, the palimpsest has obvious gendered implications in terms of exposing or obscuring various ideologies operating within discourse and creating an ambiguous, composite middle ground. Patricia J. Thompson argues that the alternative layers of the palimpsest are either subtle agents of suppression, or are suppressed in their own right. Thompson presents a gendered model of the genre: “The patriarchal palimpsest that ‘lies beneath’ feminist texts often influences the visible thoughts or ideas. I maintain there

may be yet another palimpsest—a hestian²⁰ palimpsest—that remains invisible beneath the surface of patriarchal texts” and masculine value systems (75). In the context of women’s nineteenth-century literature, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue similarly that women writers from the Romantic and Victorian periods “produced literary works that are in some sense palimpsestic, works whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning” (73). Gilbert and Gubar believe the suppression of a subversive feminine subtext within women’s obedient writing under patriarchy leads to expressions of schism and monstrosity:

Even the most apparently conservative and decorous women writers obsessively create fiercely independent characters who seek to destroy all the patriarchal structures which both their authors and their authors’ submissive heroines seem to accept as inevitable. Of course, by projecting their rebellious impulses not into their heroines but into mad or monstrous women . . . , female authors dramatize their own self-division. (77-78)

In creating these “dark doubles,” women writers address the “traditional . . . association between creative women and monsters. . . . For it is usually because she is in some sense imbued with interiority that the witch-monster-madwoman becomes so crucial an avatar or the writer’s own self” (Gilbert and Gubar 79).²¹

²⁰ Thompson derives her notion of “hestian palimpsest” from the Greek goddess Hestia, a “sedate guardian of the *hestia*, or hearthfire, [who] presided over the private domain of the *oikos*, the homeplace of the Greek family. . . . Hestia is thus associated with the Family and the systems of action necessary to sustain and nurture it”—in other words, a traditionally feminine perspective of personal and private, rather than public status (xv).

²¹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) provides a key example of the expression of this barely visible feminine perspective in a palimpsestic form that exists behind a superimposed masculine ideology. The end result is the emergence of an alternative, frightening female

Rather than projecting a mad double who stems from a muted feminine voice, Crozier, as a contemporary and overtly feminist writer, does not split the writing subject of Mrs. Bentley. Instead, Crozier revels in her persona's plurality, allowing Mrs. Bentley to vocalize her desires and embrace her seemingly monstrous, rebellious, "creative" femininity. In an interview at Simon Fraser University, Crozier speaks explicitly about the muted aspects of the original Mrs. Bentley that she wanted to explore, including "sexuality . . . to give more body to the character of Mrs. Bentley"; this silence "wasn't a fault in the novel," Crozier adds, but "it was just something [she] wanted to try" (Ainsworth n. pag.). What is of particular interest to my study, here, is the fact that in the original Ross novel, the space that is instrumental in exploring the reproductive failures and suppressed desires of Ross' female character is Mrs. Bentley's garden. As a site of women's work (and occasionally men's), the original garden as portrayed by Ross is intimately related to Mrs. Bentley's barrenness, her flirtation with Paul Kirby (the schoolteacher), and the emotional and sexual drought of her marriage to Philip (the town's minister). The garden as palimpsest becomes, in Crozier's reworking of Ross' novel through lyric poetry, a layered paradigm for Mrs. Bentley's unnatural "counter" creativity. Through a textual "garden," Crozier highlights Mrs. Bentley's body, sexuality, and desire for (unnatural) fecundity that are curtailed within the scope of Ross' novel.

Crozier's "garden" palimpsest has a significant Canadian precursor in Robert Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue* (1977), which celebrates the garden as a gendered, textual

figure. As a veritable example of the "madwoman in the attic" who struggles with her own suppressed rages and desires beneath a more socially acceptable demeanor (as dictated by John, her physician husband), Gilman's narrator is a woman told not to write about her innermost thoughts. Gilman's narrator comments on the problematic nature of her writing: "I did write for a while in spite of them [her husband and brother]; but it *does* exhaust me a good deal—having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition. . . . John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition" (947).

palimpsest. With the original Turnstone Press edition of *Seed Catalogue* offering a visual representation of palimpsest with Kroetsch's poems being superimposed in green ink onto the images taken from pages of a MacKenzie seed catalogue, Kroetsch signals to readers his desire to explore multiple perspectives through distinct narratives, alternative uses of language, and a hybridized imaginative space. In this long poem, Kroetsch's speaker experiences what he considers to be a fortunate fall from his standing horse—an image suggestive of the masculine myth of the lone hero of the West—and into the garden of his mother—an image of femininity, domesticity, and an alternative space of creativity:

I was sitting on the horse.

The horse was standing still.

I fell off.

.....

Bring me the radish seeds,

My mother whispered. (*Seed Catalogue* 11)

Immersing himself in his mother's garden and adjusting his poetic senses to "grow cabbages / in [his] ears" (11) so he is attuned and responsive to alternative experiences and forms of expression, Kroetsch's speaker discovers that which has been invisible or beneath the surface. The figurative space of the garden provides Kroetsch's speaker opportunity and imaginative space to discover alternative narratives of experience that are usually negated by patriarchal or European value systems. For example, Kroetsch overlays the seed catalogue's authoritative descriptions of "Copenhagen Cabbages" and "Golden Wax Beans" with his own parodic interpretation of the vegetables. While McKenzie's seed catalogue describes in a dignified tone the virtues of its yellow beans

and the “many expressions from keen discriminating / gardeners” (13), Kroetsch’s speaker adopts his own vulgar style, responding with irreverence and bodily humour:

Beans, beans,
the musical fruit;
the more you eat,
the more you virtue. (*Seed Catalogue* 13)

Kroetsch’s speaker uses his amusing banter as a means of refreshing his language through a “green poetics” that allows alternative, renewed forms of expression in this palimpsestic garden.²² According to Wanda Campbell, Kroetsch’s attraction to palimpsest and the garden resides with the implications of generative potential for the artist and his language. Quoting Kroetsch, Campbell writes,

“West is a winter place” characterized on the surface by absence, death, the empty page. It is also a “palimpsest.” Under erasure, another text can be read. Under the snow, a seed is burrowing. Into the January darkness, the seed catalogue blooms. The harshness of winter may invite a flight, an escape and evasion, but the model of the garden offers a place to be rooted, and a place to grow. (“Strange Plantings” 34)

Kroetsch positions his “garden” palimpsest as a regenerative ideal. Kroetsch may associate this “natural” space with feminine creativity, but as David Arnason contends, this feminization of the garden’s poetic potential still incorporates and allows for the participation of the masculine: “the site of artistic creation is a female site, the site of the garden, the site inhabited by the mother who is also Nature. Natural fecundity, growth

²² Genette characterizes the effects of hypertext in a similar “fertile” way in his conclusion: “But humankind, which is ever discovering new meaning, cannot always invent new forms; it must at times be content to invest old forms with new meanings. . . . Memory, they say, is ‘revolutionary’—provided, no doubt, that it is impregnated, made fruitful, and not reduced to *commemorating*” (400).

and creation, and by extension, artistic creativity partake of the feminine. And yet the energy that fuels the creation is masculine, the energy of the seed” (81).

In “The Sex Lives of Vegetables” Crozier performs a bawdy version of a seed catalogue and implies a palimpsest of layers within the imagery of the poem.²³ In her poetic sequence, Crozier suggests a layered, somewhat obscured writing in green ink, as the scarlet runner beans

articulate

erotic chlorophylls

almost visible

on the wind’s turning pages. (*The Garden Going* 115)

Crozier’s attraction to the “erotic chlorophylls” of her “garden” writing—a writing centred on the regenerative, defamiliarizing potential of language—resonates with Kroetsch’s “green” poetics, which allows him to imagine refreshing ways to answer his question, “*How do you grow a poet?*” (*Seed Catalogue* 31). For Kroetsch’s speaker, his mother’s garden affords the opportunity to partake in a renewed genesis project by renaming and reshaping his view of the world in multiple and various terms. While Crozier may embrace a similar objective in “The Sex Lives of Vegetables” sequence, her collection of Mrs. Bentley’s poems relies on a quite different creative impulse when she uses the garden topos and trope in conjunction with her use of palimpsest. The textual layers that Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley composes are productive in that the buried emotions of

²³ Crozier’s poetic sequence inspired Ontario artist Lise Melhorn-Boe, who is known for her “sculptural bookworks,” to use Crozier’s vegetable poems as part of a visual, palimpsestic interpretation of the text by overlaying images and descriptions of vegetables with Crozier’s words. On her website, Melhorn-Boe describes her bookwork of Crozier’s “The Sex Lives of Vegetables” as a veritable art of palimpsest: “Poems about the sex lives of vegetables are mingled with seed catalogue descriptions. The text is superimposed on colour-copies of these vegetables. The handmade paper pages are accordion-folded, cut in the shape of vegetables and enclosed in a handmade paper folding case with a garden-twine closure” (*Lise Melhorn-Boe*).

rage, jealousy, deviousness, and sexual longing (within Ross' novel) act as disruptive forces in Crozier's poetic interpretation. Alternatively, though, Crozier works also to "turn" and to disrupt her persona's "green poetics" through a defamiliarization process. Mrs. Bentley's poetics are not "green," but rather unnatural and abject in effect, making this gardener-poet a frightening, formidable figure.

As a writer drawn to acts of defamiliarization, Crozier embraces an abject vision of writing in *A Saving Grace* as her Mrs. Bentley is a literary "gardener" whose artistic medium is a gendered, textual palimpsest of unnatural effects. The term "abject" derives from Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* in which Kristeva defines abjection in relation to the formation of the subject. Kristeva characterizes the "abject" largely as "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (232). These disturbing effects of abjection relate to the effects of the fantasy mode in that fantasy also interrogates unity and defamiliarizes.²⁴ In terms of Crozier's collection, Mrs. Bentley exists within this ambiguous, composite state as an enigmatic artist who both horrifies and attracts. Mrs. Bentley (the poet) is a highly unnatural, non-maternal figure who, nevertheless, assumes reproductive, generative powers in order to create her palimpsestic poems that both expose and obscure the "truth" of the world she writes into being. Thus, the drought-ridden, failed garden of Ross' novel provides, ironically, a figurative "fertile ground" through which Crozier's Mrs. Bentley cultivates her creativity and poetic inspiration. By approaching Mrs. Bentley's original garden setting in a highly conceptual and intertextual way, then, Crozier attends to what Genette argues is the "specific merit of hypertextuality": "it constantly launches . . .

²⁴ Jackson writes, "Like the grotesque, with which it overlaps, the fantastic can be seen as an art of estrangement, resisting closure, opening structures which categorize experience in the name of a 'human reality'" (175).

works into new circuits of meaning” (400). Crozier positions Mrs. Bentley as an artist who is an unnatural creator—an abject version of a “gardener.” This “poet” springs from an original garden of abhorrence and failure, and in keeping with this original topos, Mrs. Bentley’s “garden” shapes her expression into a palimpsest that works to disrupt, expose, obscure, and most of all “create” an alternative, even “unnatural” reality for herself and others through her writing. While Arnason sees a “natural fecundity” in the combination of a female garden and male seed in Kroetsch’s *Seed Catalogue*, Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley is a barren woman incapable of natural reproduction. Thus, Crozier embraces a failed garden topos and infuses it with a truly unnatural productivity. Through this approach, Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley becomes an abject figure of creation involved in a counter-genesis project as Mrs. Bentley the gardener-poet erases and rewrites her world into being.²⁵

As the hypotext from which Crozier fashions her “unnatural” poet-persona and her “garden,” *As for Me and My House* focusses on Mrs. Bentley’s failed garden—“bare, inert, impaled by the rays of the sun” (119). For Ross, the garden symbolizes Mrs. Bentley’s barren, infertile state, as she discloses, “I had a garden once. The bright seed packages on display in one of the stores this morning reminded me. It was the year after the baby was born” (59). As Denham remarks, Mrs. Bentley’s garden is a mirrored reflection of years of drought, childlessness, and her failures as a wife: “In [eleven years]

²⁵ This notion of artistic genesis through the use and erasure of language resonates with Kroetsch’s notion of “unnaming” as a prerequisite to “naming” when it comes to forming a Canadian literature and identity. In *The Lovely Treachery of Words*, Kroetsch suggests that “with an abundance of names inherited from Britain and the United States” (50-51), Canadian writers feel more of an affinity with Eve, rather than Adam, as “Eve is created into the world after Adam has been created—and after the naming has been done” (50). The response to this already-named world and identity, then, is “to hold those names in suspension, to let the identity speak itself out of a willed namelessness” (51). Crozier recreates her nameless “Eve” in the form of Mrs. Bentley not so much with a focus on a national identity or literature (although she does make allusions to Margaret Atwood, Susanna Moodie, and the wilderness in the collection), but rather with a feminist mandate. Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley reclaims the knowledge and power of language by situating and engendering her writing as an expression pieced together from the quotidian details of domestic life and her own feminine desire.

Mrs. Bentley has tried only once before to grow a garden, the summer after the baby died. In realistic terms this is remarkably slovenly housewifery; only in symbolic terms does it make sense, the single withered garden paralleling the single dead child" (121). Mrs. Bentley's garden communicates overwhelming failure and death, as she rakes the dead plants and scatters the seeds of one surviving poppy as if, in Philip's words, "'Casting the ashes to the wind'" (138). As a symbolic setting, Mrs. Bentley's garden reflects the complete lack of intimacy between this married couple. Just as Philip confines himself to his study, Mrs. Bentley admits to enclosing herself in the space of her garden to maintain both emotional and physical distance: "If I don't have the garden he's going to hate the sight of me by fall" (Ross 58). Unfortunately, this distancing effect is the inverse of what Mrs. Bentley's ideal garden would entail: a site of romantic union and a partnership of fecundity. It is from her garden that Mrs. Bentley hears the music of the saxophone from the community dance hall and "imagin[es] the couples moving round the floor" (64). In contrast, she remains "shut away from life, too old, forgotten" and does not have the opportunity to dance with the "helpless, wooden" Philip who states halfheartedly, "'I suppose if I knew how, we could dance just a little ourselves out here'" (Ross 64). The Bentley's are a pathetic semblance of marital partnership, and when the couple temporarily adopts the young boy Steve, Mrs. Bentley suggests that there is a disturbing, complicated "growth" at work underneath the appearance of this makeshift, yet highly dysfunctional and infertile family: "Philip, Steve and I. It's such a trim efficient sign; it's such a tough, deep-rooted tangle that it hides" (81).

Unlike the lack of “garden” companionship with her husband,²⁶ Mrs. Bentley experiences other, more productive pairings. Mrs. Bentley recalls, for instance, a time when she was a young, aspiring pianist. Accompanying the young violin player Percy Glenn, Mrs. Bentley experienced a “fertile,” lush artistry in a figurative garden when she played Debussy’s *Gardens in the Rain* (102). Now in *Horizon*, the only mutual garden work Mrs. Bentley partakes in is with Paul, who helps her to widen her window sills for her geranium pots (92), and to clear away the dust from her bean plants (100). Ross’ Mrs. Bentley finds in Paul a sympathetic partner who shares the literal and imaginative space of her garden by reading “below” the surface of things. During a scene of work in Mrs. Bentley’s dismal garden, Paul (the teacher and avid etymologist) reveals that language hides alternative meanings: “But while words socially come up in the world, most of them morally go down. *Retaliate*, for instance: once you could retaliate a favour or kindness . . . but memories being short for benefits and long for grievances, its sense was gradually perverted” (101). The verb “pervert” means “[t]o turn aside (a process, action, text, etc.) from a correct state, course or aim” (“Pervert”). In the context of Crozier’s use of the garden as a model of palimpsest, it is important to note as well that the verb “vert” (the root of “pervert”) means “[t]o turn up, root up (the ground)” or “to turn or twist out of the normal position” (“Vert”). The act of corrupting or leading astray (or turning up the ground) is central to this process of subversion, or “turn[ing] upside down” (“Pervert”). Paul’s attention to perversion exposes meaning and highlights underlying

²⁶ When Philip consents to dig the garden, he does so alone, as Mrs. Bentley watches his progress from a distance: “I kept watching him out of the window today, thinking how good it was to see the steady ply and rhythm of his body. . . . He has the build and stride of out-of-doors. In these little rooms I seldom see him” (Ross 60).

social corruption.²⁷ But at one point in the novel, Paul also participates in the “perverted” meanings of words in his interactions with Mrs. Bentley, as he entertains her in her garden with the etymology and flirtatious innuendo of words like “garden,” “cupidity,” “erotic,” “venereal,” and “aphrodisiac” (100-01). In Crozier’s palimpsestuous interpretation, however, Paul remains too focussed on “original” and “natural” meaning, and Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley becomes frustrated with his pedantry.

A poet and figure of counter-creativity, Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley derives pleasure instead from the transformative effects of a perverted use of language. Paul’s garden work and use of language with sexual overtones reveal a subterranean desire that is not fulfilled in Mrs. Bentley’s marriage and subsequently communicated through her failed garden. When Crozier turns to the original Mrs. Bentley’s garden as a model of her persona’s counter-creativity as a poet, Crozier both follows and departs from Ross’ depiction by making her Mrs. Bentley a more conscious “gardener” of underlying signification. Crozier transforms Mrs. Bentley into a bold female figure, revelling in desire and using language with explicit purpose and intent in order to produce “unnatural” effects. Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley creates, erases, and inverts the world according to her own desire. In keeping with the original characterization of Mrs. Bentley as a failed, solitary gardener, Crozier’s persona longs for a garden of mutual desire, moisture, and productivity in order to counter an emotional and sexual drought that offers only suffering. In “I Feed on Thistles,” Mrs. Bentley speaks of this idyllic mutuality:

²⁷ Scholars have differing opinions of Paul. Dennis Cooley argues that Paul’s interest in etymology does not make him a poet, as Paul fails to demonstrate “any desire to use words in new ways. He does not . . . advance into a dominion where the word is made flesh. Paul’s names are determined and confirming. His names, in other words, are for the most part confined to what once was” (“An Awful” 112). Barbara Mitchell argues, on the other hand, that Paul is a kind of fool and poet in that while his “preference is for the natural and original meaning of words and, by extension, of human values, he shows his knowledge of the laws of change and convertibility” (49).

you will be a watered garden.

I will tend you I will make

of you a harvest, the fruit

of my body will be sweet (48)

With both the lover and the beloved becoming a watered garden, Mrs. Bentley's vision of the garden becomes a figurative terrain of overt sexuality and erotic verbal propositions. However, Crozier's Mrs. Bentley also uses the garden as a space of irreverence and cynicism when, in the poem "Garden," Mrs. Bentley not only entertains Paul's innuendo as he tells her that "*breast / comes from brustian, / to bud or to sprout*" (41), but also makes the adulterous flirtation explicit and, paradoxically, ambiguous when she "make[s] a joke about the garden," and about both Philip and Paul, saying "it's more like a priest, / . . . / abstemious and thin. Paul" (41). This Mrs. Bentley offsets Ross' original image of barrenness and inertia when she rubs her nipples—awakening a "Neglected" garden anxious to be tended: "it only takes a word for me / to bud and moisten, brustian / Mrs. B in her celibate garden" (42). "Mrs. B" may "bud and moisten" in an instant but only through her self-caress, as Mrs. Bentley reminds her readers that this "celibate garden" lacks "natural" productivity and true companionship, as Paul "smiles, but nervously" (41). Crozier's Mrs. Bentley (as a poet) and Paul (as a philologist who "was very good with his tongue" ["Paul" 71]) share the erotic space of the garden momentarily through their mutual interest in language, their sexual flirtation, and their realization of an adulterous affair. Their individual approaches to language and its uses diverge, however, leaving the "celibate" Mrs. Bentley to turn to counter-creativity. In Crozier's collection, as in Ross' novel, readers see Mrs. Bentley occupying her imaginative garden alone, naming and unnamng the world according to her own perverted genesis project.

Crozier's collection does not depart dramatically from Ross' novel in that her Mrs. Bentley persona uses language in a similarly underhanded, concealing way; the difference is that Crozier's Mrs. Bentley instigates devious, poetic acts of exposure that, paradoxically, work toward erasure, producing art that composes and decomposes itself in her unnatural "cultivation" of her world. Kroetsch writes that the Mrs. Bentley (in Ross' novel) "engages in vast and devious verbal design to give herself at least margins of freedom, while finding herself tagged as the minister's helpmate. . . . She names her world in great detail in order to keep herself nameless. She is the taboo-keeper, not of God's name, but of her own" (*Lovely Treachery* 45-46). Crozier departs from Ross, however, by enabling her Mrs. Bentley to expose more taboos through confessional-style poems, such as "Sins of Omission" (51), "Confession" (15), and "The Truth" (90). In the poem "Sins of Omission," for example, Mrs. Bentley offers a list of the things she did not mention in her journal (in Ross' novel), such as "toiletries, relatives, bankers, / favorite books, hobos, yeast infections" (51). This list works to expose experiences, particularly a woman's experiences that are omitted from or truncated in Ross' text.²⁸ The poem is an unabashed account of life's quotidian details from intimate bodily functions to Depression era recipes for cake—"no butter, no / eggs" (51). This confessional poem continues, however, even in its process of exposure, to obscure some of the items from view, as Mrs. Bentley's divulgence of her miscarriage becomes a fragmented statement, itemized to the point of being buried not just within the garden "where nothing grows," but within the list itself:

²⁸ For example, while Crozier explores an explicit sexual interaction between her Mrs. Bentley and Paul, Ross is more elusive in his suggestion of the sexual tension: "Our hands lay side by side on the railing, two or three inches apart. We watched the water and didn't speak, conscious of those inches. . . . We came home leaving it there" (Ross 208-09).

well-witchers, buffalo stones, what came out
 of me that night, chinook arches, grasshopper
 plagues, the white enamel pan Philip
 carried to the garden, Bennett buggies,
 chokecherries, burying what was in it,
 box socials, potato moonshine,
 where nothing grows (51)

Clearly, Mrs. Bentley's confessional "garden" in "Sins of Omission" operates as a site of both composition, in her writing down of the details of her life, and decomposition, in its obscuring—its literal and figurative burying—of the "truth" in the strata of her garden and the progressive lines of her poem.

She may no longer be a "taboo-keeper" to the extent that she is in Ross' text, yet Crozier's Mrs. Bentley remains, nevertheless, nameless and evasive, providing only the barest of description: "I've walked through this story / in housedresses and splay- / footed rubbers" ("Mrs. Bentley" 83). Addressing the fact that Philip never painted a portrait of her, Crozier's Mrs. Bentley uses the details of her splay-footed rubbers to signal her desired creative role as "gardener." She is clearly conscious of the unthreatening image she presents in her housedress and nurturing garden work. Mrs. Bentley is fully aware of the stereotypical image she casts as the preacher's wife—"Bentley, dowdy, frumpy, plain" (84)—destined only to be known as a "Mrs." Crozier's persona speculates but refuses to give herself a first name, not because she lacks identity or self-assertion and begrudges her married title, but because she indulges in the manipulative power her anonymity and seemingly benign, unproblematic appearance

provide.²⁹ In contrast to Ross' character, Crozier's Bentley persona becomes an unsettling, more self-conscious artistic figure, as she uses expression and erasure to promote her own unnatural, perverted vision in her acts of artistic genesis.

Instead of maintaining Mrs. Bentley as a figure of utterly failed fecundity, Crozier provides an additional turn to Ross' character by making her an artist of unnatural generative potential. Crozier infuses Mrs. Bentley with a creative force denied in the novel (particularly through the failed Bentley garden) by re-imagining the garden as a textual palimpsest that generates a subversive commentary on the state of the Bentley marriage while also granting Mrs. Bentley the ability to explore and express her own abject desires. Where Ross' character needs her garden to escape from, and to feel normal in, her skewed world—"And that's why I need the garden. . . . The house huddles me. I need a tussle with the wind to make me straight again" (Ross 58-59)—Crozier's Mrs. Bentley uses her textual palimpsest model of the garden as a personal, visionary space of transformation and self-assertion. Through this "garden," Crozier's Mrs. Bentley foregrounds her "bent" perspective and skewed acts of creation. In keeping with but also departing from the novel, then, Crozier achieves this unnatural "garden" vision by making Mrs. Bentley an artist of inversion and perversion, one who turns the world upside down and away from a "natural" purpose and order.

²⁹ In a review in *Quill and Quire*, Michael Holmes pays particular attention to the fact that Crozier's Mrs. Bentley remains nameless—both literally and figuratively—as a shortcoming of the collection: "Obviously attempting to do for Mrs. Bentley in the '90s what Michael Ondaatje and Margaret Atwood did for Billy the Kid and Susanna Moodie in the '70s, Crozier's *A Saving Grace* is at times diminished by its own narrow and singular conceit. And although Mrs. Bentley compares herself to Mrs. Moodie in the poem 'Wilderness,' she just doesn't come alive. . . . Mrs. Bentley's 'collected works' are, as a whole, a bit too 'dowdy'—too 'plain,' unfortunately, in the sense that Mrs. B never really becomes anything more complex than Sinclair Ross's already fascinating cipher" (66). Taking issue with the review, I argue that Crozier does in fact expand upon and "amplify," as Genette would argue, Mrs. Bentley's artistry through the cultivation of her garden poems, granting her a perverse creative potential that is more understated in the novel.

7. Mrs. Bentley's Perverted "Garden"

In the novel, Ross incorporates a motif of the "world turned upside down" and extends it to a discussion that takes place between Philip and Mrs. Bentley, as the couple contrast the ways in which they approach art. The exchange occurs toward the conclusion of Ross' novel, but Crozier recreates it near the beginning of her collection as a way of initiating Mrs. Bentley's own counter-creative vision as a poet of unnatural effects.³⁰ In one of the final diary entries in *As for Me and My House*, Mrs. Bentley describes spreading dozens of drawings on the table and calling Philip to view her selection. It is Mrs. Bentley's wish that Philip capture in his art a palimpsest layered with original desires and, conversely, superimposed realities: "I'd like to see what he'd do with his own expression—if he'd catch it all, the dreams that are there, underneath, like the first writing of a palimpsest, and their paraphrase by life as well" (Ross 202). While Mrs. Bentley yearns for alternative layers of significance, the register of changing emotions brought on by experience and time, Philip argues for a more detached vision, focussed purely on form. Curiously, he tells his wife to turn his artwork upside down in order to see it correctly—to judge through a process of defamiliarization and disassociation as to whether or not the form of the work is correct and in proportion:

"You can't be detached about your own work," he said presently. "You feel it too much—and the right way is only to see it. That's your trouble, too. These things all mean something to you because you've lived in these little Main Streets—with me while I was doing them. You're looking at them, but you're not really seeing them.

³⁰ Changing the chronology of Ross' novel, Crozier works to disrupt the narrative for readers who are familiar with the original narrative. In addition to these "inverted" hypertextual changes in her palimpsest, Crozier also manipulates the format of her collection through inversion by placing the list of contents at the conclusion, effectively reversing the traditional format of Crozier's own collections and disorienting the reader as to the progression and direction of the poetic sequence.

You're only remembering something that happened to you there. But in art, memories and associations don't count. A good way to test a picture is to turn it upside down. That knocks all the sentiment out of it, leaves you with just the design and form." (Ross 202)

Philip is forceful in his criticism of his wife and commanding in his expression of his own artistic vision; Mrs. Bentley seems, however, incapable of entering this intellectual exchange: "I gathered them up [the paintings] then, and trying to laugh, said the exhibition was closing for lack of an appreciative public" (Ross 202). In his essay "'Turn It Upside Down': The Right Perspective on *As for Me and My House*," Wilfred Cude categorizes Philip's and Mrs. Bentley's respective artistic visions as rational and emotional, claiming that their contrasting perspectives ultimately discredit Mrs. Bentley's understanding and description of her world. Cude argues that Philip offers the most valid interpretive vision: "the one enduring response to art is intellectual: a work must be appraised strictly as a construct" (469). Cude concludes that Ross endorses Philip's aesthetic vision and undermines Mrs. Bentley and her music: "the emotionalism practiced by Mrs. Bentley is clearly discredited by the calculating way she turns it to the exploitation of music, employing her expertise to reduce the products of genius to sensual snares for the innocents around her" (470). In re-reading and rewriting Ross' text, Crozier positions Mrs. Bentley as an artist of words, not music, and lends credence to Mrs. Bentley's emotionality and visceral creativity, as Crozier enables her persona to repudiate Philip's detached approach to artistic creation. In "Confession," when Crozier's Mrs. Bentley recounts Philip's instruction for her "to turn / his drawings upside down" (15), this poet-persona refuses to "turn" away from her own interpretation.

Finally, Mrs. Bentley breaks her silence to the reader (but not to Philip) and speaks her opinion on her husband's shortcomings as an artist:

I've never said it
 but there's something missing,
 something about this place
 he hasn't caught. (15)

As a poet, Mrs. Bentley objects to Philip's interpretation of the "upside down" vision as one of cool detachment. Instead, her understanding of the artistic act is one practiced by an earth-bound creator—engaged, immediate, and sensual:

His hand is connected
 only to his eye
 as if he were the god
 who's forsaken all his creatures

 forgetting what his hands
 must have felt
 as he pulled them from the mud, (16)

In Mrs. Bentley's view, Philip's focus on visual form denies immediacy and sensuality to the artistic process. Like Ross' character, who longs for a palimpsest of emotional variety, then, Crozier's Mrs. Bentley creates her own layered art in words—whose "surface designs" do not always "conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning" (Gilbert and Gubar 73), but rather bring to life and reveal in compelling ways Mrs. Bentley's desires and visions. Unlike Philip whose disconnected eye remains severed from the earth and mud, Mrs. Bentley with her splay-

footed rubbers revisits the “garden”—not just the failed garden setting of Ross’ novel—but an alternative “garden” of palimpsest and language. Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley remains a figure of infertility and a failed gardener, but Crozier gives her persona an added facility by making her an artistic creator: a poet who remakes reality through devious acts of abject, perverted artistic genesis.

In her collected palimpsestic poems, Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley draws upon the Song of Songs (also referred to as the Song of Solomon or Canticles) using the words of the Old Testament to create a subversive, layered expression of her sexual desires, the failure of her marriage, and her visceral response that results from her husband’s rejection of her. According to Alicia Ostriker, the Song of Songs has long been interpreted as an allegorical text praising the love and devotion “between God and Israel, love of Christ for Church, or for the individual Christian soul, or the mystical marriage of God and the Virgin Mary” (38). In addition to being a song of praise, the Song of Songs also functions as a “countertext” in that “[w]here the Bible concerns itself overwhelmingly with obedience, the Song inscribes an alternative story of voluntary love and pleasure” (Ostriker 43). As one of the most erotic passages of the Bible, the Song of Songs celebrates sensual love between husband and wife, or unwed lovers. The pastoral tropes that form the Song of Songs—for example, the woman and her sexual purity are described as a “garden inclosed,” a “spring shut up, a fountain sealed” (4.12)—foster a sense of lushness and a privileged, natural intimacy. These property metaphors may seem to subordinate the woman in this erotic exchange, but scholars, such as J. Cheryl Exum, note that the female speaker can be read as autonomous, a desiring subject active in her pursuit of her beloved and her satisfaction: “At first glance, the Song of Songs seems to be a woman’s text: it boldly celebrates female desire, and the behaviour of the woman . . .

does not conform to the social norms we can construct from the rest of the Bible. A woman initiates sexual encounters; a woman roams the streets looking for the lover; a woman speaks openly about her desire” (24). As an intertextual layer of Mrs. Bentley’s poetic palimpsest, the Song of Songs is highly effective, therefore, in terms of resonating with Mrs. Bentley’s yearning for her husband and the explicit voicing of her female desire.

Like the female speaker in Song of Songs, Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley longs for mutual, sensual love. The Song of Songs with its expression of sexual desire is a fitting choice as a biblical hypotext for Mrs. Bentley (the minister’s wife) in her creation of a palimpsest about her own home, marriage, and desire for love:

Comfort me with apples,

for I am sick with love.

Comfort me with sweet grass,

.....

for I am sick with love.

Let me follow the antelope’s

trails into the pastures

of your flesh, let me lie

where the graceful one is sleeping, (43)

Mrs. Bentley uses the language of scripture to infuse a tone of reverence in her appeal for love, yet she also contextualizes her song to her own prairie setting by incorporating images of sweet grass (not just apples) and antelope (instead of deer).³¹ Although she seems to want to “lie / where the graceful one is sleeping,” the enjambment creates an

³¹ In the Song of Songs, the female speaker states, “My beloved is like a roe or a young hart” (2.9).

ambiguous impression. The phrase “of your flesh, let me lie” carries an unsettling resonance by eliding meaning through turns of phrase and carefully manipulated line breaks within a work that characterizes many of its poems as both confessional and ambiguous in its recounting of the truth. After all, this Mrs. Bentley points to her own uncertain status and duplicity when she describes Philip as having “his faithful / wife” with him in *Horizon* (81). Indeed “Comfort Me” quickly deteriorates from its pastoral foundation as the speaker’s original objective (to be in the presence of mutual love) and the idyllic description are perverted.³² Ultimately, the phrase “sick with love” fails to communicate longing and instead turns into an image of disease and unnatural intentions, as Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley calls on herself to “suckle the bud that never blooms” and notes that “the rains do not come” (43). These images of infertility and drought are in keeping with Ross’ original setting of the Great Depression and provide a direct contrast to the biblical text that recounts a season of renewal: “For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over *and gone*; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing *of birds* is come” (2.11-12). Within her own song, Mrs. Bentley begins to divulge her status as one who lives askew or “bent.” Mrs. Bentley’s “sick” love cannot make her into “the upright

³² It is important to note that the imaginative space of the prairie (and by extension, the prairie garden) lends itself to a figurative understanding of the palimpsest genre. In his article “Race of Place? The Palimpsest of Space in Canadian Prairie Fiction,” Hartmut Lutz describes how “20th century Canadian authors of European descent living in and writing about the Prairie West took part in a process of palimpsest. They inscribed themselves and the experiences of their communities into and onto the ongoing story of the gigantic space of the Canadian Prairies” at the expense and erasure of First Nations (171). Lutz notes that while some texts, such as Martha Ostenso’s *Wild Geese*, present “no awareness of older presences in the land,” creating a veritable *tabula rasa*, others, such as Margaret Laurence’s *The Diviners*, highlight a palimpsest of previously silenced stories (175). Lutz aims to reveal hidden layers—and particularly those layers of First Nations and ethnic minorities—that are part of the imagined “space” created by prairie fiction. When Crozier turns to Ross’ *As for Me and My House*, she is primarily interested in a feminist revision of Mrs. Bentley, but she works also to give voice to other silenced aspects of prairie culture in general. The poem “Names” exposes the overt racism that stigmatizes various inhabitants of the prairie, as language creates and negates aspects of the world of *Horizon*. Mrs. Bentley introduces readers to the “Bohunks” (10), “The Dirty Jew” (11), and the “good Chink” (12). Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley refuses to allow the prairies to be glossed over by exposing racial slurs; when it comes to rewriting the character of Mrs. Bentley, however, Crozier creates a gardener-poet who uses language not simply to expose what is hidden, but also to deceive and conceal, creating a self-indulgent process of inscription and erasure.

[who] love thee” as the Song of Songs describes (1.4). Her vision offers an upside down, perverted perspective, rather than a straightforward declaration of love or passionate desire.

Being denied a “natural” garden trope through the failures of her marriage, her garden, and her barren body, Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley generates a textual palimpsestic model of a figurative “garden” in her poem “Judith” in which the Song of Songs becomes extensively recontextualized and transformed. The poem “Judith” begins in an altered dream-like state—a detail reflective not just of Ross’ novel, but also of the Song of Songs when the female speaker rises from her sleep to search for her beloved: “By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets” (3.1-2).³³ In arguing that the Song of Songs functions as the female speaker’s inner discourse, Daphna V. Arbel comments that the nighttime images from the biblical verse are not from events of reality but rather from the female speaker’s dreams: “Such a search by night is highly unrealistic, considering the accepted norms of the writer’s patriarchal society. Thus her introduction, ‘upon my bed at night’, is necessary. It characterizes this experience as a mental search in which she is not passive, as in a dream, but active, as in a personal process of imagination” (92). In a similar altered state of consciousness, Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley begins her palimpsestic perversion of the Song of Songs in her bedroom. Rather than dreaming of her desired fantasies, however, Mrs. Bentley awakens in a feverish state only to encounter her husband’s sexual betrayal:

³³ In Ross’ novel, Dr. Bird gives Mrs. Bentley sleeping powders that “stupefy” (161) her and induce her into a frightening reverie: “I seemed suffocating and fighting for breath. It was a kind of nightmare. My hands were tied, and someone was stealing Minnie’s hay. I could see El Greco sitting on his haunches in the garden, but when I called him, he didn’t hear me” (162).

That night I moved through my fever
 as if it were a house; remember
 the game you played as a child?
 Lying on your back in bed you stared
 till the ceiling became the floor.
 You stepped over a ledge
 through the doorway, circled
 the lightbulb, stem tall as a tulip's

*The beams of our house are of cedar
 and our rafters of fir.*

That's where I was, on the ceiling,
 looking down. (57)

Mrs. Bentley's ill condition and fever-induced poetic reverie are reflected in the appearance of her house. Walking across the ceiling, Mrs. Bentley notes the structural aspects of her home: the tulip lightbulb, the wooden beams, and fir rafters. Her home has been turned upside down into a "garden" of reversed growth. Here, the italicized passages from the Song of Songs are reduced to mere description, while the original figurative meaning is displaced in this upside-down, skewed vision. The biblical verse no longer functions as part of an address by a woman to her beloved: "Behold, thou *art* fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant: also our bed *is* green. The beams of our house *are* cedar, *and* our rafters of fir" (1.16-17). Instead, Mrs. Bentley's home is one of disease and corruption, its "green" growth perverted.

As Mrs. Bentley's palimpsest progresses, her perverted expression elides Ross' novel and the Song of Songs as she transforms the meaning of these original texts. When Crozier's Mrs. Bentley comes upon Judith and Philip in the sexual act, she places them in her kitchen, not in the woodshed (as in Ross' version), as a way of highlighting the betrayal and the corrupt appeasing of sexual appetites:

It made it worse somehow,
in my kitchen. He sat naked on a chair.
She straddled him.

He feedeth among the lilies.

I seemed to float above their heads
though I could clearly see
the swell and gleam of her buttocks
and hear him groan.

*I am my beloved's
and his desire is towards me.*

My whole body ached (58)

Through the italicized, offset passage from the Song of Songs, Mrs. Bentley's poem creates a visual effect of layered lines in this palimpsest, but it is her manipulation of the biblical verse that reveals further a skewed garden vision as she "turns" the lines into a reversed order and alters the meaning. In the Song of Songs, verse 2.16 states, "My beloved *is* mine, and I *am* his: he feedeth among the lilies." The female speaker in the Bible describes mutual desire and concludes her declaration with the image of herself as her lover's garden—a garden of purity as suggested through the lilies. In Mrs. Bentley's poem, however, the garden image opens (rather than concludes) this now-inverted biblical passage. Furthermore, the passage from the Song of Songs is fragmented and broken, as Crozier inserts the account of adulterous betrayal between the biblical lines that once communicated a commitment of love and purity. After witnessing her husband and Judith having sexual intercourse, Mrs. Bentley makes the statement, "*He feedeth among the lilies,*" to accentuate Philip's self-indulgent betrayal. From the viewpoint of Mrs. Bentley, who floats upside down from the ceiling, her husband's act of sexual fulfillment is exclusionary and lacking its reciprocal nature, as she is no longer part of this exchange. Thus, the lily passage is severed from the words and content of the original phrase and becomes perverted in this instance. When the words, "*I am my beloved's / and his desire is towards me*" are finally uttered in Mrs. Bentley's poem, the voice is rendered ambiguous. Although the passage appears to come from the speaker of the poem, Mrs. Bentley, as she desperately reasserts the partnership of her marriage, the voice also carries the possible threatening tone of an interloper, Judith, who provides the title of the poem and lays claim to an alternative pairing beyond the covenant of husband and wife.

Layering and misinterpreting the Song of Songs with her own poems, Mrs. Bentley creates an alternative expression of desire and rage through an upside-down vision, as she asserts her own personal sense of the world that is at once self-serving and disturbing. Mrs. Bentley enters the imaginative space of her poetry in an act of abject genesis, creating a “garden” through a palimpsest of words that unsettles readers in its ability to obscure truths and rewrite the world into a seemingly unnatural state. At first glance, the Song of Songs seems a fitting text on which to build a subversive poetic palimpsest; Mrs. Bentley speaks about her marital union from a position of self-assertion as does the female speaker in Song of Songs. However, in manipulating the Song of Songs, Mrs. Bentley undermines and disrupts idyllic tropes through her counter-creative interpretation. Following this intense, perverted vision in “Judith,” Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley becomes in her subsequent poems a highly devious and potent creator of palimpsest through disruptive acts of exposure and calculated erasure.³⁴

When Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley turns to the Song of Songs and positions herself as a veritable poetic creator of artistic genesis, any notion of a fertile, “natural” garden as a model for her writing is discordant in terms of the drought-ridden Mrs. Bentley. In her biblical-inspired palimpsest, Crozier surmises an “unnatural” garden topos and trope that reflect Mrs. Bentley’s self-serving, perverted vision, as this poet-persona names and un-names at will her barren world. Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley is an artist, therefore, who uses palimpsest not only to denaturalize the idyllic “garden” of mutual love, but also to offer an alternative model of the artistic process than that of Philip, who argues for the emotionally removed, physically detached eye of the creator. Mrs. Bentley’s poetry

³⁴ For example, in the poem “Mater Dolorosa,” Mrs. Bentley usurps Judith’s role as mother to Philip’s child. Mrs. Bentley all but erases Judith’s presence, dismissing the young woman’s suffering as a mere element of plot: “If she were a proper heroine / next day she’d die” (75).

springs from a visceral source and even more so from an “unnatural” female creativity.

Barren and undesirable to Philip, Mrs. Bentley describes herself as an infertile, neglected “garden,” unable to bear children or form an intimate bond with her husband. In “Bag of Oranges,” this Mrs. Bentley is “a gourd with hard / and bitter seeds” (64). In contrast, Judith represents “the waters of Paradise” and “is a fruit full and ripening” (64).

Although Mrs. Bentley cannot become fruitful in a “natural” or physical capacity as a mother, she constructs herself as an alternative creative entity—a female artist whose artistic vision stems not from the eye, but “from [the] gut” (61); hers is a visceral, bodily art. Ironically, then, from her “celibate garden” (42)—that is, her garden, her palimpsest, and her barren womb—Mrs. Bentley’s role as a poet partakes of the feminine by assuming the power of an unnatural maternal figure of creation who bears (through her words and her garden palimpsest) an alternative world, one that is perverted according her desires.

Crozier’s Mrs. Bentley brings to the surface what the other inhabitants of Horizon do not want to confront. The image she presents of herself is that of a visceral, subversive creator who brings the unthinkable to “life,” bearing a (de)composed palimpsestic world through her words:

Years later all these
stories no one wants to hear
pushing out of me
like big bleached bones
in silent meadows. (“Leaving” 81)

As the “bleached bones” of her stories suggest, Mrs. Bentley’s paradoxical poetics thrives on palimpsest—the decomposing acts of composition. She is a figure of evasion, disclosure, and perversion, as she creates an art of disruption and truth-telling fabrications. Clearly, Crozier’s gardener-poet persona departs from Ross’ character in her threatening, embodied creativity. This revised Mrs. Bentley finds a way around her infertility in order to become an alternative creator. In “Truth,” Mrs. Bentley gives birth to fictions and truths in all their seemingly unnatural, uncertain forms: “Truth is, the only ending / is the one you make up, the one you can’t / live without, the sweet, impossible birth” (92). As a creator working with an unnatural garden topos and trope of artistic genesis and originating acts of perversion, Mrs. Bentley both composes her world and undoes it through rewriting and acts of erasure. In other words, the truth “you make up” and “the one you can’t” (92) are layered together in her literal and figurative palimpsest. The actual “truth” does not matter, as Mrs. Bentley’s desire takes precedence; the “sweet, impossible birth” is an artistic labour she refuses to deny herself.

As a garden poet, Crozier revels in “turning” over her ideas, words, and meanings; her adoption of Mrs. Bentley as a gardener-poet-persona is, therefore, an ironically “natural” and fitting choice, particularly in terms of Ross’ original character’s troubled relationship to her own abnormal garden. By bringing this fictional muse to life and making her a gardener-poet of palimpsest, Crozier takes her garden poetics in yet another direction. After presenting the poet as a gardener who “turns” in order to disturb and illuminate readers through alternative significance and perspectives, Crozier now redirects her disruptive imagination onto the digger of the “garden” herself—the poet. *Saving Grace* offers readers a further intensification of Crozier’s defamiliarization strategy: Crozier—the garden poet who “turns over” the garden for a plurality of truths—

now revels in cultivating not just truths, but deviance and manipulation. Thus, paradoxically, Crozier looks to palimpsest as a genre of layers and layering to defamiliarize the trope of digging and the process of artistic “turning.” In her adoption of the Mrs. Bentley persona, Crozier pursues a paradoxical building up of textual layers so as to turn them over and pervert meaning. Crozier facilitates acts of perverted genesis in and through words, creating poems with the objective of unsettling and disturbing the reader.

Throughout Crozier’s writing career, the garden topos and trope are continual sources of creativity and, paradoxically, means of denaturalization. From her distrust of surfaces and the hidden coercion of gardens in her early collections, to her figurative gardens that provide humourous exposures of social conventions, to her explicit pairing of the poet with the gardener and the activity of “turning over,” to her denaturalization of the gardener-poet as a counter-creative figure, Crozier is consistently inspired by a “garden” where the creative potential lives in its “unnaturalness.” Since her assumption of the gardener-poet persona in *A Saving Grace*, Crozier continues to include garden poems in her collections. As her latest collection of selected poems, *Before the First Word*, intimates in its title, Crozier remains preoccupied with acts of creation, naming, and giving voice to the otherwise silent. For example, in *Apocrypha of Light*, Crozier rewrites the story of Genesis in the poem “Original Sin,” focussing not on Eve’s biting of the fruit from the tree of knowledge, but instead on Lilith’s (Adam’s first wife’s) banishment from the Garden of Eden. When Crozier switches to Eve’s perspective inside the Garden, the limitations of the terrain as a pre-defined space are made clear, as Eve hears only rumours of Lilith’s existence: Eve “walked to where the garden stopped / and everything Adam couldn’t name / fell into poetry and silence” (22). Adam has already

named the contents of the Garden, but Eve intuits another kind of expression and the potential for an alternative naming in poetry: "Beside the hawthorn hedge, the forbidden / Tart on my tongue, I said *Lilith*" (22). Crozier's Eve bites not from the proverbial apple, but from the "forbidden / tart," creating another garden through the fruit, the word on her tongue, and the erotic taste of Lilith. As a figurative garden, then, poetry demands, in Crozier's view, alternative turns of signification that destabilize the "natural," the accepted, the "real." Through her denaturalized "gardens," Crozier generates different forms of knowing and being. She invites her readers to taste the "tart" (or the layers of the onion) and to sense through words an alternative, unfamiliar world of meaning and experience.

Conclusion

In her collection *Everything Arrives at the Light*, Lorna Crozier writes that there are “Gardens everywhere / even when you cannot see them” (97). Crozier’s statement refers to her speaker’s struggle for inspiration when surrounded by the unfamiliar geography of the west coast; however, this observation also applies to the gardens in the works of Canadian writers that remain misperceived or overlooked by scholars. The gardens most noticed and examined by critics of Canadian literature are those of an archetypal nature. Whether it be the notorious “bush garden” of Northrop Frye’s wilderness-focussed model of the Canadian imagination, or the symbolic paradise of the North American “new world,” scholars gravitate toward highly figurative applications of the garden as it relates to the larger environment and Canadian society. My objective, therefore, has been to readjust the critical focus in order to perceive other garden spaces and other ways in which textual gardens function.

My strategy has been to cross-fertilize my literary analysis of the texts with garden theory so that other aspects of the garden (besides the archetypal roles so popular among literary critics) contribute to the discussion of garden-related criticism of Canadian literature. Garden theorists and historians, such as John Dixon Hunt, Edward Casey, Charles Moore, William Mitchell, and William Turnbull, adopt an interdisciplinary approach when analyzing traditions of design and the garden’s artistic and social roles. For these scholars, gardening is an equal “sister art” of painting and poetry (Hunt and Willis 11), and has much to communicate in terms of aesthetics, the environment, social ideals, and conventions. I contend and illustrate through a series of critical readings of literary gardens that just as garden scholars turn to literature to understand the garden,

garden-related criticism in the field of Canadian literature can derive great benefit from a similar cross-disciplinary approach.

In this project, I draw a parallel between the formal aesthetics and functions of actual gardens, and the forms and functions of gardens in literature. This comparison leads undoubtedly to complications in terms of how I read these literary “terrains” and, alternatively, how the writers originally designed them. Authors incorporate the garden in their writing in a variety of ways: as a setting, an idealized concept, or a model for the text itself, for example. In addition, writers are either more, or less conscious of the form and function of the garden topos and trope in their writing. Educated in landscape aesthetics and keenly aware of the rhetoric of the cultivated woman, Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill are clearly active “gardeners” within both the backwoods of Upper Canada and their texts. Gabrielle Roy, on the other hand, demonstrates a more straightforward, idyllic rendering of the garden and its domestic associations. By reading these textual gardens through the lens of garden theory, however, I explicate additional, complex roles for gardens in literature. Although textual gardens (like their actual counterparts) can be taken for granted by readers (and perhaps even by writers) as innocuous ideal spaces, it is important for those who interpret these terrains to question assumptions and scrutinize with a critical eye. Significantly, in *Gardeners: The Magazine for the Gardeners of Ontario*, Margaret Atwood admits (in her own rather dark assessment) that gardens are designed spaces and carefully constructed: “I’m not a very good gardener for the same reason I wouldn’t make a very good poisoner: both activities benefit from advance planning” (“A Garden Memoir” 72). Similarly, Hunt asserts that an individual’s relationship with the garden is anything but straightforward. Gardens are some of the most complex sites of human expression: “But because . . . gardens go one

stage further than the cultural landscape of second nature in representing the extent and significance of control over their environment, gardens may arguably offer a more refined, more acute, and more intricate expression of human experience” (Hunt, *Gardens* 9). Because gardens are an art of sophisticated mediation and nuance, it follows then, that in the case of Roy, the garden can be read not simply as an innocent, flowery enclosure, but rather as a subtle means for the female artist to communicate her ambivalence over her familial obligations. The garden enables Roy to naturalize a woman’s independent creative pursuits within the context of the turbulent mid-decades of the twentieth century. While textual gardens may seem, upon initial reading, as uncomplicated ideals of comfort, pleasure, and beauty, they can, in fact, occupy a dynamic space of intricate signification.

When discussing the garden trope and the image of paradise in the context of prairie fiction, Karen Clavelle contends, “To imagine garden is to come to terms with, to contain, and even control new and seemingly limitless space” (8). Gardens may relate to both writers’ and critics’ perceptions of the larger landscape, but gardens also negotiate and even reinforce highly circumscribed, well-established social terrains that are by no means “new” or “limitless.” The garden has the potential to delimit and define not just space, but also individuals and social conventions. To explore the garden as a literal and figurative terrain in and of itself, I focus on a very immediate and intimate kind of garden—what I refer to as the “domestic garden”—so as to avoid the temptation to view the garden in its figurative and archetypal relation to the larger landscape. Casey posits that the garden is a boundary-space that mediates between nature and culture, private domain and public realm (154). Because of this mediating role, I argue that the garden is particularly appealing to women writers in their consideration of changes in gender

conventions and women's understanding of their domestic, quotidian existence. This sense of physical and conceptual movement within and through the garden-as-boundary facilitates my tracing of the various writers' arrivals to, departures from, returns to, and disruptions within, the literal and figurative space of the domestic garden. What I glean from the writers' varied approaches to the garden is that the garden operates as a malleable ideal, responsive to the particular needs and desires of the writers. In all the works I examine, gendered ideologies are clearly visible, at work, and being worked upon through the garden and its transitory nature. Embracing the garden topos and trope in their expressions of moments of change and upheaval, the writers I study are able to communicate subtle divergences in gender conventions even in their promotion and/or use of the longstanding ideal of the garden and its varied associations with femininity and the domestic.

While I employ a gendered interpretive framework when analyzing the domestic garden, there is, of course, great potential for further examinations of the various other kinds of gardens present in Canadian literature. Instead of addressing, as I do, the personal, more intimate aspects of gardens related to house and home, scholars could emphasize the garden as public space, mediating exchanges between people and communities. Works by such writers as L. M. Montgomery, Irving Layton, and Helen Humphreys contain examples of gardens as sites of ongoing, critical social dialogue.¹

The garden may serve as a highly figurative "meeting ground" for authors in their

¹ For instance, in *Anne of the Island* (1915), Montgomery stages Anne Shirley's communal identity through Anne's efforts as spokesperson for A.V.I.S. (Avonlea Improvement Society) as part of the "City Beautiful" movement, and the local residents' reception of the redressing of their buildings and landscape. Layton's poem "The Gardener" uses the garden as a symbol of "the two solitudes" of the linguistic divide between the French and English (584). In her novel *The Lost Garden* (2002), Humphreys depicts a communal garden project—the "Dig for Victory" campaign of World War II—through the story of a women's land army based next to a military camp of Canadian soldiers.

experiments with collaboration. The creative exchange between Crozier and Patrick Lane warrants further scholarly attention not only in terms of their mutual influence on each other's writing (Lane quotes Crozier's garden poems frequently in his conceptualization of the garden in his memoir), but also in terms of their collaboration and use of garden imagery in the collection *No Longer Two People* (1979). Similarly, P. K. Page and Philip Stratford use the garden as one of their shared poetic spaces in *And Once More Saw the Stars: Four Poems for Two Voices* (2001). In these instances of collaboration, writers enact a kind of "companion planting" or "companion gardening" in and of language. Apart from Page's collaboration with Stratford, Page also provides the opportunity to consider her writing of the garden through an additional interdisciplinary perspective. Page not only writes about gardens, but also interprets these terrains through another of the sisterly arts—that of painting.

The title of my dissertation asks the question "How Does Her Garden Grow?" and in doing so reveals my focus on women, both real and imagined, who "garden" within and through a text. By deviating from well-trodden paths of garden-criticism in Canadian literature that search for larger, sustained patterns of garden mythology in its various applications to settlement writing, national identity, or region, I point to an alternative and neglected way into the garden by emphasizing the *how*—that is, the formal strategies that gardener-writers employ in their individual artistry. In this regard, my examination of five women writers, who span more than a century, reveals three important insights. First, gardens in and of the text are similar to actual gardens in that they operate as art of milieu. As a defining feature of the garden, the garden's milieu clearly relates (in the context of this project) to the authors' different approaches in their negotiations of gender conventions. At one end of the spectrum, the Strickland sisters attempt to adhere to their

nineteenth-century norms of cultivated femininity in the backwoods. At the other end, the contemporary feminist poet Lorna Crozier makes explicit transgressions against social taboos that lead to her notorious public reputation as the bawdy “Carrot Lady” (Walker E3). In this continuum of garden writers, there is more at stake in their textual gardens than simply the nurturing of ideal archetypes, or the depiction of natural processes of growth. All the writers are “at home” in their domestic gardens but the extent of their transgressions vary greatly in accordance with their socio-historical contexts and predilections for questioning gender paradigms.

Within the general category of the “domestic garden,” different kinds of gardens appear in writers’ works in conjunction with the socio-cultural milieus that they address. Gender is not, therefore, the only defining feature of these gardens. As a consequence of the garden’s reflection of its larger milieu, I have examined utility gardening used to provide vegetables and comfort in a pioneer environment (in Moodie and Traill); idyllic gardens rooted in family heritage and nostalgia for a simpler time within the upheaval and uncertainty of the modern world (in Roy); gardens defined by a middle-class suburban ideal of grass and consumer culture in the latter half of the twentieth century (in Shields), and gardens of words disrupted and questioned at every turn through a post-modern, feminist vision (in Crozier). These varied gardens suggest that it is vital for literary critics to heed the specifics—the larger context, specific content, and form—of textual gardens. Even when gardens play a seemingly symbolic role, as do the paradisaal gardens evoked by Shields, their symbolism can extend beyond the typical associations of paradise with innocence to reflect aspects of the writers’ *oeuvres*. The garden topos and trope in Canadian literature is as dynamic and multi-faceted as the writers who use it in their works. Clearly, as demonstrated by the authors whom I examine, the garden

provides innumerable ways to dress, redress, and undress not just nature, but also women and changing social values.

Because gardens (both real and textual) are an art of milieu, then the gardens “planted” in Canadian literature have the potential to participate in a larger, ongoing story with respect to the Canadian literary tradition. Just as garden critics examine garden history within specific national contexts, garden critics of Canadian literature can trace an evolving tradition of garden writing as produced by its many writers. Thus, in addition to forming part of a narrative within a single text or part of a recurring motif in an author’s work, a textual garden serves as part of the evolving “plot” of garden-related writing in Canadian literature. This tradition of garden writing clearly demands further examination, particularly in terms of how various “gardens” speak to the changing structure, social values, and literary imagination of Canadian society. I do not suggest, by any means, that there are specific national garden traits, or a singular concept of a Canadian literary garden. Rather, this larger “garden story” as designed in part by its many writers (and critics) demonstrates changes in artistic influences, contains many facets of garden-related expression and writerly strategies, and speaks to the varied socio-historical contexts in and of which authors write. In the August 2006 issue of *Canadian Gardening*, Patrick Lane reflects on the garden he tends with his wife, Lorna Crozier, and concludes, “We are gardeners because we are artists. To write a poem or story is to try to contain a beauty inside words. That beauty is given to us each day by the world. Our garden is a mystery” (“Journey into Mystery” 55). Clearly, writers and gardeners share an affinity for beauty and expression. In the context of this project, I reveal the artistic appeal of the garden in its various appearances and evolving roles in the writings of five Canadian authors. Because of the recurring, thoroughly nuanced roles of the gardens

within the works of the Strickland sisters, Roy, Shields, and Crozier, these writers offer significant contributions to a tradition of garden writing within the field of Canadian literature.

The notion of writers cultivating gardens in and through words leads to my second insight: when authors are gardeners, the gardens in and of their writing operate on multiple levels simultaneously. Most compelling is the fact that textual gardens perform similar functions to that of real gardens by putting “differences in sharp relief,” inviting contemplation of the natural and the artificial, or alternatively conveying a sense of reassurance and continuance in the context of change and upheaval (Casey 155). Furthermore, gardens allow writers to create veritable garden “scenes,” foregrounding the theatrical, social functions of gardens. Readers must be attentive to characters’ or personae’s subtle “performances” within these designed spaces. Garden settings are significant ways of “planting” a character or persona and “plotting” the progression of a story. A writer’s formal “gardening” techniques are integral to how readers experience and understand both the garden and potentially the text as a whole. The gardener-writers’ strategies and manners of expression are in keeping with their socio-historic contexts and mandates. The language of cultivation serves, for example, alternative purposes: it can reflect a form of rhetoric that was popular during a specific time period, as it does in the cases of Moodie and Traill; or this figurative language can reflect the processes of the garden that speak to a writer’s particular concerns, as it does through Roy’s interest in familial “roots” and the experience of “uprootedness.” When authors embrace the garden so thoroughly in their writing, they adopt a mode of expression that takes its shape through their handling of both thematic content and form. Together, the literal and

figurative levels of textual gardens serve to create the very experience of reading a story or poem, and the conveyance of that text's meaning.

This complex integration of thematic and formal features leads to my third and final conclusion: like their actual counterparts, gardens in and of literature provide readers with a way into the text as a whole. Garden critics "read" actual gardens as rhetorical landscapes that communicate the human subject's relationship with his or her socio-physical environment (Moore, Mitchell, and Turnbull 49-50). As an art of concentrated, discerning representation, gardens are an "acute, and . . . intricate expression of human experience" (Hunt, *Gardens* 9). In the context of literature, the garden is endowed with a similar expressive function: that is, a textual garden serves as a sensitive and critical prospect, or perspective, on the larger text itself. In other words, the textual garden operates as an interpretive lens through which readers perceive the text and the author's concerns as a whole. The gardens I explore are expressions of larger concerns: the affirmation of a changing identity and the desire for home within an unfamiliar environment; the experience of linguistic and gendered displacement, the sanctification of the ordinary, and the exposure of social conventions and taboos. The garden rewards attentive readers who reflect on their own expectations, take into consideration the milieu from which the garden springs, and heed how gardens direct perceptions through formal effects; it is this combined process of interpretation that brings other gardens to light and into view. From its archetypal associations to its more particular functions and meaning with respect to an individual writer's work, a textual garden provides space for heightened contemplation, and evokes an imaginative, aesthetic experience for the reader. When exploring the literal and figurative terrain of a textual garden, readers must remember not simply to tread with pleasure, but to read with care.

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