

## **"My Little Readers": Catharine Parr Traill's Natural Histories for Children**

**Angela Byrne**

Catharine Parr Traill (1802-99) was a prolific publisher of children's books, emigrants' guides, and popular natural histories. As Catharine Parr Strickland, she published at least 15 moral tales and natural histories for children from 1818 to 1831. She married the Scottish Lieutenant Thomas Traill and the pair emigrated from England to Upper Canada in 1832. To support her large family and assist with her husband's debts, she published at least nine books for adults and children, and several series of articles in British and Canadian periodicals, in 1836-95.<sup>1</sup> While her writings have often been dismissed in favour of those of her sister, Susanna Moodie (1803-85), a place has been argued for Traill within "an eighteenth-century tradition of nature writing, which itself was a unique hybrid of both literary and scientific concerns" (Raglan 5). She occupied a noteworthy position within nineteenth-century Canadian natural history publishing and children's writing, receiving praiseworthy book reviews and letters from readers up to the time of her death in 1899.

However, Traill continues to be considered a conservative writer (Peterman and Ballstadt 1), in Janet Floyd's words, "the very pattern of middle-class emigrant domesticity" and an author whose texts were "apparently out of step with contemporary science on either sides of the Atlantic" (95). This article re-examines Traill's participation in and dissemination of Canadian natural history through her use of children's publishing as an interface between "amateur" and "professional" science. I argue that Traill's popular natural histories must be understood within the contexts of her correspondence with scientists, laypeople, settlers, and indigenous informants. Her natural histories for children are a form of cross-genre nature writing that present a holistic vision of Canadian ecology, interweaving as they do the scientific, settler, and indigenous forms of knowledge to which Traill had access. Her negotiation of these approaches and epistemologies is mirrored in the portrayal of Canada in various editions of her most popular books, as variously friendly and tame, or as wild and potentially dangerous. This article pays particular attention to the changing use of footnotes and illustrations through these editions as embodying Traill's loss of authorial control through unfavourable publishing contracts, and an alteration in the register of her original works that influenced later perceptions of Traill as less scientific than other writers.

Scholarly ambivalence about the scientific value of Traill's work (Peterman 173-74) may, to some extent, stem from the financial imperative behind her publishing career. Writing provided a means of supporting her large family, in light of their relative poverty and her early widowhood and, it has been suggested, her and her husband's lack of the skills necessary for settler life (Hopkins 117, 119; Traill, *Pearls and Pebbles* xxix). Traill's financial hardship was such that in December 1838 Susanna Moodie wrote to lieutenant governor of Upper Canada (present-day Ontario), Sir George Arthur, highlighting the predicament of "the poor author" (Hopkins 119). A devastating house fire in 1857 left the family homeless. By December 1860, a widowed Traill decided to take in a boarder to earn £30 per annum (Traill, MS, MG 29 D81, 2: 2856).

Despite having a career that spanned nine decades, and the popularity of her books among a general audience, Traill never achieved financial security. This appears to have been partially due to poor publishers' terms. *The Backwoods of Canada* was first published by Charles Knight in London as part of the "Library of Entertaining Knowledge" series and was very successful – the British Colonial Office and shipping companies purchased large numbers of copies, and it was reprinted several times between 1836 and 1846 – but Traill received only £110 in payment (Hopkins 117). Nor did the success of *The Female Emigrant's Guide* (1854; reprinted as *The Canadian Settlers' Guide*, 1855) bring much relief: the publisher, Revd Henry Hope, appears to have sold the publication rights without Traill's permission (Hopkins 121) and payments owed to her for the work remained outstanding (Peterman and Ballstadt 9). Agnes Dunbar Fitzgibbon, botanical illustrator and daughter of Susanna Moodie, referred to the "mismanagement of her [Traill's] editor and publisher" (*Pearls and Pebbles* xxx). However, it was the norm among Canadian publishers in the late nineteenth century for titles to be published at the author's expense, to ensure the publisher's financial security (Peterman and Friskney 63-64). Such problems dogged Traill's publishing career, leading her later successes to be attributed in large part to the efforts and determination of Agnes Fitzgibbon (Peterman and Ballstadt 9-10).<sup>2</sup> Fitzgibbon provided botanical illustrations for some of Traill's publications and edited the miscellany of stories and observations, *Cot and Cradle Stories* (1895). She highlighted Traill's poor treatment at the hands of publishers in her biographical introduction to *Pearls and Pebbles*, stating that her aunt had received only £50 for the copyright to *Canadian Crusoes* and *Lady Mary and her Nurse* (*Pearls and Pebbles* xxix-xxx) – both books appeared in several editions under different names. However, Traill's close friend, Frances Stewart, thought in July 1867 that Fitzgibbon was "treating her very shabbily in only allowing her £50. If she gets a thousand copies of the Flower Book sold, a thousand copies will fetch £1250 & surely dear Mrs. Traill had the half of the work I think but I believe Mrs. Fitzg. has had some expense with it" (Stewart 225). Fitzgibbon's primary role was as a friend of Edward S. Caswell, book publishing manager at the Toronto-based Methodist Book and Publishing House (1892-1909) – the publisher of Traill's final two books, *Pearls and Pebbles* and *Cot and Cradle Stories* (Peterman and Friskney 66). Traill was asked to secure 200 subscribers to affray publishing expenses for *Pearls and Pebbles* in 1894 (Traill, MS. MG 29 D81, 1: 978-1127), and its success led Caswell to agree to publish *Cot and Cradle Stories* the following year. However, the latter work did not achieve the same success (MacLaren 106; Peterman and Ballstadt 9-10), selling only 390 copies in the first four months of its publication (Peterman and Friskney 63-64), possibly due to its standing as a miscellany of moral tales and personal observations, some of which had been penned decades earlier (e.g. 215-39, "The Swiss Herd-Boy and the Alpine Mouse") and some of which had been published previously as part of the "Forest Gleanings" series in 1852. The difficulties Traill experienced in having her work published, particularly from the 1860s onwards, have been understood as an indication of a decreasing appetite for works of the kind she authored and a lightening of the moral tone in children's natural histories (Peterman and Ballstadt 9; Ritvo 89). However, contemporary responses to her publications indicate that she remained popular for the duration of her publishing career.

Traill's role in Canadian natural history and its dissemination in the second half of the nineteenth century must be understood in terms of the scientific context within which she operated. She occupies an important place within the tradition of a

popular mode of natural history, which traces its roots to the Enlightenment. While she included some of her own observations of bird and animal behaviour in *Pearls and Pebbles* (59), for example, she clearly stated that *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* was "not a book for the learned" (i). She portrayed herself as a "forest gleaner" who coped with her "want of other objects of interest" by learning about Canadian natural history: "books I had none to assist me, all I could do was note facts, ask questions, and store up any information that I chanced to obtain" ("Forest Gleanings" VI: 183). Her engagement with the sciences has been understood as an extension of the Enlightenment tradition of "both literary and scientific concerns" (Raglon 5). While Traill's means did not permit her to purchase equipment like a microscope, or to amass an extensive library (evident in her book-borrowing, discussed below), her interest in botany extended beyond "a genteel taste for floral beauty" to include "every aspect of the plant: its appearance, its medicinal and nutritional value, its life cycle and its relation to other flora and fauna" (Elizabeth MacCallum qtd. in Peterman 173). Within the context of late-nineteenth-century Canadian science, however, Traill's approach has been argued to have rendered her "a distant and small player" (Peterman 173). A review article on nineteenth-century Canadian botany published in *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* in 1897 made no mention of Traill among over 100 name citations and 500 pieces of writing (Peterman 174-75). From early in her career she publicly emphasised her distance from centres of learning, complaining that her access to information was limited by her location and education: "The only botanical work I have at my command is Pursh's North American Flora, from which I have obtained some information; but must confess it is tiresome blundering out Latin descriptions to one who knows nothing of Latin beyond what she derives through a knowledge of Italian" (*The Backwoods of Canada* 233).

Despite her employment of the modesty topos, Traill was securely located within the epistemology of the British naturalist tradition. Traill did not blunder into natural history publishing – she knew the market for such works and recognised the opportunities presented by the vast new repository of information that was Canada. Given the education Traill received, and her father's library, she must have been aware of her place in the genealogy of scientific and natural history texts for children. The first English language zoological book for children, Thomas Boreman's *A Description of Three Hundred Animals*, was published in 1730; by 1800, at least 50 such books for children had been published (Ritvo 72). Traill's ambitions were not too modest to prevent her from expressing the hope that *Studies of Plant Life* would "not prove an unacceptable addition to the literature of Canada, and that it may become a household book, as Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selborne* is to this day among English readers" (*Studies of Plant Life* 3) – or from publishing over a dozen natural history articles in the form of tales and sketches in a series entitled "Forest Gleanings" in the *Anglo-American Magazine* in 1852-53 (Floyd 93-104).<sup>3</sup> She also published articles in *The Horticulturalist* based on her observations near her home at Rice Lake (Ainley 86).

Traill's books self-consciously disseminated information on Canada internationally. When she arrived in Upper Canada in 1832, botanical knowledge of the region was relatively poor. There were no botany manuals for the general reader, a situation she attempted to remedy with her emigrants' guides, and later with *Canadian Wild Flowers* (1868) and *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* (1885). Her books emphasised the necessity of practical household skills (*Canadian Settlers' Guide* 2), and that such knowledge should be founded upon a working knowledge and

appreciation for natural history. The preface to *The Female Emigrant's Guide* stated that "the females have everything to learn, with few opportunities of acquiring the requisite knowledge," and the book set about "instructing and advising" in a "simple useful" way (ix, x). Traill herself recalled in 1884 that when she first arrived in Canada and longed to learn more about the plants and trees of the forest, she "experienced the need of some familiar work, giving the information respecting the names and habits and the uses of the native plants" and that the only book to which she had access was "an old edition of a 'North American Flora' by that good and interesting botanist Frederick Pursh [*sic*]" lent to her by her close friend, Frances Stewart<sup>4</sup> (*Studies of Plant Life* 2-3). The first comprehensive botany of Canada was William Jackson Hooker's *Flora Boreali-Americana*, published a year after Traill's arrival in Canada (1833). A signal moment in the record of Canadian natural history, compiled from observations made by Sir John Richardson (during Sir John Franklin's Arctic expedition, 1819-22) and Thomas Drummond (during Franklin's Arctic expedition of 1825-27), it was a compendium of existing knowledge of Canadian botany and acknowledged the collections and observations of hundreds of others, many of whom can be located alongside Traill within the strong British "amateur" natural history tradition in British North America in which fur traders, missionaries and explorers had participated since the early eighteenth century. The Hudson's Bay Company, for example, gave orders for botanical inventories by their servants from 1730 (but Zeller (192) cautions that these orders had to be reiterated in 1760 and that responses were poor).<sup>5</sup> "Amateur" botanists were active in Canada from the early nineteenth century (including the collectors acknowledged in Hooker's *Flora Boreali-Americana*) and the period saw the foundation of natural history societies like the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec (1820) and the Natural History Society of Montreal (1827) (Zeller 193-94). Despite this picture of activity, the Botanical Club of Canada was not founded until 1892, and in 1897 the Canadian-American botanist David P. Penhallow lamented: "Our universities are yet doing in large measure what more properly belongs to the high schools" (qtd. in Peterman 175) – although this serves more to demonstrate his prejudice against the work of "amateur" and female botanists (Peterman 175). Zeller notes the "relative lateness of botany's emergence as a modern science" and the lack of international prestige in Canadian botany, as compared to Canadian geology or astronomy, even in the latter decades of the nineteenth century (Zeller 184-85).

After Pursh – the only reference book to which Traill had access when she emigrated to Canada in 1832 – Traill's next teachers were "old settlers' wives, and choppers and Indians" (*Studies of Plant Life* 2-3). Her position as an "amateur" allowed her to reference traditional knowledge without inhibition, from both settlers and First Nations. She recorded in her journal her regard for the "valuable knowledge" possessed by the "simplers and herbalists among the old settlers" and noted that: "It was from such sources that I myself learned the common names of most of our natural plants and some of their sanitary virtues" (Traill, MS, MG 29 D81, 2: 2924).<sup>6</sup> Indigenous knowledge and a list of 28 "Indian words" mostly relating to plants and birds are provided for child readers of *Afar in the Forest* (206-07). *Pearls and Pebbles* also provides "Indian" names for birds (67, 78) and an "Indian friend" named Peter acts as the source of much of the narrator's information (79-80). Indeed, Traill considered "Indian name[s]" as "descriptive of some natural quality of the plant – its growth or habits" (*Studies of Plant Life* 19). Many references to traditional knowledge relate to the medicinal qualities of certain plants (*Canadian Wild Flowers*



10, 41, 54; *Studies of Plant Life* 37-38, 48, 59). For instance, Traill notes the use of the juice of the blood-root (*Sanguinaria Canadensis*) as a red and orange dye, and for medicinal purposes – noting that its medicinal use was acknowledged by the American Eclectic School of Pharmacy (*Studies of Plant Life* 11) – and First Nations' use of the "Indian Turnip" (*Arisaema triphyllum*) as a treatment for colic (*Studies of Plant Life* 21). Traill not only demonstrates her own exchanges of information with settlers and First Nations, but also exchanges between those groups, such as settlers learning the medicinal value of the "butterfly weed" (*Asclepias tuberosa*) from "Indian herb doctors" (*Studies of Plant Life* 66). Traill repackaged and disseminated the natural historical knowledge she received from settlers, First Nations and "men of science," as well as her own observations made during lakeside camping trips in present-day Northern Ontario, and in her own garden. In *Lady Mary and Her Nurse* (1856), the nanny character, Mrs Frazer, delivers this range of knowledge in an easy, accessible manner. The hybridity of style employed by Traill in her presentation of Canadian natural history, then, mirrored the variety of her sources as she negotiated "amateur" and "professional" forms of science through children's publishing.

As if to cement her position within the "amateur" tradition, Traill employed the modesty topos all too common in nineteenth-century women's scientific writing (Carl Thompson 339). Her earliest publishing success, *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836) included a number of letters between Traill and her family in England, in one of which she confided: "I [...] have hardly confidence in my scanty stock of knowledge to venture on scientific descriptions, when I feel conscious that a blunder would be easily detected, and expose me to ridicule and contempt, for an assumption of knowledge that I did not possess" (233). In the same letter, Traill bemoans her lack of skill in making botanical drawings, yet goes on to supply observations on resinous trees, the popular names and habitats of common Canadian plants, and Latin names from Pursh (233-54); she also cites Pursh throughout *Studies of Plant Life*. She reiterates her disclaimer in *Studies of Plant Life*: "I cannot venture to treat the subject of the Grasses as a botanist" (102) – and in 1894, continues to claim a limited knowledge: "I am afraid my very unscientific mode of description may offend the learned entomologist. If so, I crave pardon and plead limited knowledge as my sufficient excuse." (*Pearls and Pebbles* 106). Despite this, her books cite some important botanical reference works, provide both the common and Linnaean names for plants, and use botanical terminology – but not so frequently as to discourage the general or young reader. References in *Studies of Plant Life* alone include the noted botanist John Lindley's 1836 work, *A Natural System of Botany* (14, 59, 70, 137); general references to the work of English botanist and founder of the Linnaean Society, Sir James Edward Smith (19); the American Professor, Charles Lee's, work on medicinal plants (22, 120); Asa Gray's seminal *Manual of the Botany of the Northern United States* (23, 49); Richardson's *Flora Boreali-Americana* (56); and John Evelyn's early (1664) but influential work on forest trees (*Studies of Plant Life* 151). These references not only ground Traill's knowledge firmly within canonical Enlightenment and recent nineteenth-century botanical traditions, but also serve to locate Traill more closely to centres of Anglophone learning, closing the epistemological gap between her rural settler life and limited resources, and her authority as a botanical writer. This process was cemented by Traill's iteration and reiteration in her books of the geographically and socially diverse networks of which she was a part.

Traill's early bibliography featured mostly fictional, didactic works for children, but later included some of the most important popular and accessible natural histories of Canada. The style established in her early years as an author of popular natural histories remained a central aspect of the charm her works possessed for contemporaries. The respect she gained for her work is only thinly veiled in her publications. By the time of her marriage and a subsequent tour of Scotland with her new husband, Thomas Traill, in 1832, she possessed an understanding and appreciation of natural history sufficient to prompt a request from a professor of botany at the University of Edinburgh – probably Robert Graham – that she collect plants in Canada (*Backwoods of Canada* 240). By 1868, and her publication of *Canadian Wild Flowers*, Traill's Canadian learned circle included professors of botany and natural history, such as Revd William Hincks (1794-1871) at Toronto who kept a sizeable herbarium and to whom Traill sent "queries about plants" (Peterman 181) and Professor George Lawson (1827-95) at Kingston (*Canadian Wild Flowers* 8). In July 1869, Frances Stewart forwarded to Traill some "queries about plants" from Michael Pakenham Edgeworth (1812-81), Irish botanist and stepbrother of Maria Edgeworth:

which I think you can answer better than I can & also a commission to procure some seeds of the Pitcher Plant (*Sarracenia Purpurea*) and also seeds of the Sugar Maple. He has written all his questions & directions on a separate paper [...] they are for his friend Dr. Aitcheson who is anxious to introduce them to the Himalaya District for cultivation & who is to leave England in Oct'r for India [...] I look to you dear Friend for all necessary information as well as the best way to pack them up secure from damp &c &c. They want such a large quantity that I don't know where it can be procured or found in such abundance but you or dear Kate I am sure will let me know all particulars as soon as you can as I wish to answer his letter & enquiries as soon as possible. Any expense there may be I shall pay so let me know. [...] you are much more accustomed & more capable of such business than I am. (Stewart 239, 241)

While it is unclear whether Traill did supply the seeds to Edgeworth, the directing of the query to her is in itself a signal of her standing as an expert in North American botany by the 1860s. By the time of the publication of *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* (1885), her network had expanded greatly and her international renown was evident in her acknowledgements of receiving specimens from named and unnamed naturalists, professors and laypeople all over North America (*Studies of Plant Life in Canada* 31, 232, 245). She established a herbarium at her home, and made some money in the early years of her widowhood by selling specimens to English botanical collectors (*Pearls and Pebbles* xxxi).

Perhaps Traill's most important correspondent (and friend) in her later life was James Fletcher (1852-1910) – naturalist, Canadian Parliamentary librarian, and first Dominion Entomologist of Canada. As a favour to Traill he edited *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* (1885), which Traill acknowledged in the preface to the book along with acknowledgement of John Macoun's "opinion of the usefulness of [Traill's] work on the vegetable productions of the country" (*Studies of Plant Life* ii-iii).<sup>7</sup> Fletcher and Traill's correspondence (1883-98) includes evidence of their exchanges of information, books, traditional ecological knowledge, and specimens. It was also

jovial, friendly, and mutually-supportive; he often praised her work, as in the following reaction to a draft of *Studies of Plant Life* in March 1883:

I am charmed with your style & find it so very attractive after the irreverent materialistic philosophy, falsely so called, of too many of our own modern naturalists. It is very charming to me to see such love for our beneficent creator & reverence for his perfect works. In all my instructions in botany I have always endeavoured to draw attention to the marvellous & beautiful adaptations of all objects presented to us in the study of nature, to their required ends and to show how much we have in this lovely world to make us happy. (Traill, MS, MG 29 D81, 1: 478-81)

When Fletcher finished reading the first part of Traill's manuscript of *Studies of Plant Life* in June 1883, he sent further praise: "Allow me to say I have seldom enjoyed any 'communing with nature' more than I have the perusal of your thoroughly & patently original notes on her loveliest treasures 'the flowers of the field'" (Traill, MS, MG 29 D81, 1: 482-89). What Fletcher's reviews reveal is an appreciation for a holistic view of the study of nature, appearing "romantic" in its subjectivity, and running counter to the professionalization of the sciences. While including scientific information such as Latin names and conditions for growth, Traill's information is also highly subjective, as she assesses the "prettiness" of plants (*Studies of Plant Life* passim). The emphasis rests on a marriage of the practical and the pleasurable, endorsed by one of Canada's leading contemporary "professional" scientists. It may be this very subjectivity and reverence for nature that has earned Traill the reputation of representing an archaic form of science, but Traill's popularity was derived in part from this very characteristic. She achieved mass appeal by allowing what she saw as the beauty and perfection of nature to speak alongside straightforward explanations of its mysteries, and detailed catalogues specific to Canadian natural history. Her work therefore made a significant contribution not only to the corpus of natural-historical or scientific knowledge of Canada, but also to the development of nature as an essential component in Canadian national identity formation (see: Baldwin et al.).

While, by the late nineteenth century, "professional" scientists were turning to specialised textbooks, the natural-historical tradition of which Traill was part remained the domain of the amateur (Raglon 6). This tradition had the advantage of appealing to a wide readership. *Canadian Wild Flowers* (1868) has been referred to as "the first Canadian botany book with easily accessible scientific text" (Ainley 88). Within ten years of its initial publication, *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836) had gone through five reprints and two editions (Ainley 83). A review of a new edition of *Canadian Wild Flowers* in 1907 referred to Traill as "among the leaders in popularizing a knowledge of American wild flowers by presenting them untechnically and attractively to those who could or would not make their acquaintance through keys and manuals" and asserted that the new edition would "stimulate in many people of the present day that love for plants and their ways which comes through knowing what they are, and toward which the first edition did such good service two decades ago" ("A Popular Book" 197-98). Edward Caswell's concerns about the market for Canadian books in 1894 proved unfounded with the placing of an order for 250 copies of *Pearls and Pebbles* from the London (UK) publisher, Sampson Low, Marston and Co. (Peterman and Friskney 67).

Letters Traill received from a cross-section of colonial Canadian and British society demonstrate the popularity of her works among a wider audience. Lord Dufferin wrote in April 1895 in praise of *Pearls and Pebbles*: "The freshness and beauty of nature breathes through them all [the chapters of the book]," and in March 1896 Lady Aberdeen informed Traill of letters received from indigenous and settler children from all over Canada in response to the publication of adaptations of some of Traill's children's stories in a magazine (unspecified) in which Aberdeen was involved (Traill, MS, MG 29 D81, 1: 343-46, 389-90). However, it is worth bearing in mind the role of Caswell's marketing acumen in gaining widespread praise for *Pearls and Pebbles*; he proposed soliciting half-page summaries of the book for publicity purposes from the historian and journalist Professor Goldwin Smith, principal of McGill Sir John William Dawson, principal of Queen's College George Monro Grant, and the philanthropist and reformer Lady Aberdeen, by sending them complimentary copies (Peterman and Friskney 67).

It is not unreasonable to suggest that generations of Anglophone Canadians grew up with Traill's books. In her later years, her position as Canada's foremost popular science writer was evident in a subscription collected for her assistance in June 1898:

Some of your many friends and admirers, having learned that you have recently sustained a severe financial loss, desire to express their sympathy with you and they embrace the opportunity of recording their appreciation of your long and honourable life of literary and scientific labours, two thirds of a century of which have been devoted to Canada. [...] Three years after your arrival the publication in London of your 'Backwoods of Canada' began to attract the attention of the British people to the character and advantages of life in this portion of the Empire. Since then a series of writings of great literary merit [...] have issued from your pen. They manifest a keen interest in your Canadian surroundings; a pure love of nature, an appreciation of her beauties, and a reverent insight into her mysteries, as well as a loving sympathy with your fellow creatures of every race. You have been instrumental, under Divine Providence, in leading many to love the treasures of Nature, and to read the lessons that are patent in the beauty, symmetry, and grace which you have so faithfully portrayed in the Flora and Fauna of our woods and forests. We cannot forget the courage with which you endured the privations and trials of the backwoods in the early settlement of Ontario, and we rejoice to know that your useful life has been prolonged in health and vigor until you are now the oldest living author in Her Majesty's Dominions. Nearing the close of the century we desire to pay tribute to your personal worth, and we ask your acceptance of this testimonial as a slight token of the esteem and regard in which you are universally held. (Traill, MS, MG 29 D81, 1: 1234-36)

This letter reiterates the value James Fletcher placed on Traill's work, as resting in both her evident love for the natural world, her obvious sentiment for childhood, and her settler sentiment for the old country. It also further demonstrates the popularity of her books and the significance of settler experience of nature in Canadian identity. Discussion will now turn to one of her most popular children's books and what it reveals about Traill's strategies for communicating Canadian natural history.



One of her most popular children's books was *Lady Mary and Her Nurse*. First published in 1856, it was republished in 1857 as *Stories of the Canadian Forest; or, Little Mary and Her Nurse*; in 1869 as *Afar in the Forest; or, Pictures of Life and Scenery in the Wilds of Canada* (the title by which it would become best known); and finally in 1881 as *In the Forest; or, Pictures of Life and Scenery in the Woods of Canada*. *Afar in the Forest* was, according to its preface, "considerably improved, so as to increase its attractions for the young." The book was to provide "anecdotes respecting the plants and animals of our great Canadian Colony, and not a few lively details of the habits and customs of the Indians, now fast disappearing before the encroachments of European civilisation." It was also anticipated that "Both girl and boy may find amusement and instruction in these pages" (*Afar in the Forest* v). Reflecting on her own childhood, Traill referred to the study of botany as "a practical and useful part of our education" (Traill, MS, MG 29 D81, 2: 2947). Traill's desire to both amuse and instruct permeated not only her natural-historical writings, but also her fiction (Thompson, *The Pioneer Woman* 9-29), and has been linked to the influence of her deeply held religious beliefs on her vision of, and relationship with, the natural world (see: Thompson, "Catharine Traill's Ecological Vision"). *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* contained a special message addressed to the "Mothers of Canada" – that they should teach their children to "know and love the wild flowers springing in their path, to love the soil in which God's hand has planted them, and in all their after wanderings through the world their hearts will turn back with loving reverence to the land of their birth: to that dear country, endeared to them by the remembrance of the wild flowers which they plucked in the happy days of childhood" (*Studies of Plant Life* ii).

The many reprints and new editions arising from what was originally published as *Lady Mary and Her Nurse* may appear as an easy way for an author or publisher to earn additional commissions. Aside from the fact that Traill's publishers did not make her the beneficiary of the strong sales of these works, the evolution of the series represents much more than a commercial enterprise – in it can be traced a process of wilding of the Canadian environment. The change in title is just one of the ways in which *Afar in the Forest* offers an image of a wilder Canada than *Lady Mary and Her Nurse*. In *Afar in the Forest*, Canada appears as a dark, remote, forested place inhabited by potentially threatening "Indians" and presenting such dangers to children as bears, snakes, and getting lost. This process of wilding is continued in the second edition of *Afar in the Forest* (1873), in which the forest and First Nations are given prominent positions in attractive full-colour frontispieces. This process, removed from the author's hands and controlled by editors, sits in opposition to the authorial intention of domesticating the Canadian landscape.

The illustrations form the greatest point of difference between these books, with *Afar in the Forest* achieving a more unified conversation between the text and the images, but also providing more representational balance between images of domesticity and images of wilderness and danger. The six illustrations in *Lady Mary and Her Nurse* all portray animals in the wild, save the frontispiece of the child being presented with a pet squirrel. *Afar in the Forest*, on the other hand, includes an equal number of domestic and "wild" images (six of each), as well as seven images of First Nations. Four of the total 23 images in *Afar in the Forest* depict European settlers within the Canadian landscape, displaying varying degrees of comfort within it. This explains the role of the increased number of "domestic" images in the book. In juxtaposition with the safety of little Lady Mary's home, operated another Canada –

one darkened by the threat of bears, snakes, and getting lost in the woods. The frightening image of a lost child hiding from ravenous bears in *Lady Mary and Her Nurse* is counteracted in *Afar in the Forest* with the inclusion of other, more comforting scenes – and, indeed, by an image of armed settlers ready to protect their community from bear attacks. Canada is at once domesticated and exoticised, the dangerous wild animals and First Nations providing a counterpoint to the cosy homeliness of little Mary's home life which is securely situated within British cultural contexts, despite its geographical remove.

Indeed, these texts are familiarly situated not only in their physical setting (the respectable Anglo home), but also in the modes of learning employed within them. Traill's natural histories for children, including *Afar in the Forest*, perpetuate the Enlightenment motif of learning through conversation. *Afar in the Forest* is arranged around a series of conversations and anecdotes pertaining to different birds, animals, indigenous customs, or natural phenomena. Prompts elicit educational conversations; for example, when Mary is made a present of a flying squirrel by (her nanny) Mrs Frazer's brother, the creature's habits and antics provide the basis for the child's learning (*Afar in the Forest* 9-16). Mrs Frazer's anecdotes perform the same function, with the child interrupting with questions and points of clarification. A view of the *aurora borealis* is used as an opportunity to counter myths about the phenomenon itself and to teach the child about electricity (156-62). Traill demonstrates the effectiveness of this pedagogical method halfway through the book, by voicing the child's desire to reverse the educational process by telling a story to her nurse. Little Mary asks Mrs Frazer to guess what the story will be:

Mrs Frazer: "Is it 'Little Red Riding Hood,' or 'Old Mother Hubbard,' or 'Jack the Giant-Killer'?"

Mary: "Oh, nurse, to guess such silly stories!" said the little girl, stopping her ears. "Those are too silly for me even to tell baby! My story is a nice story about a darling beaver. Major Pickford took me on his knee and told me the story last night." (132)

Mary proceeds to relate the story, demonstrating the progress of her learning and her understanding of the natural world.

The figure of Mrs Frazer herself merits some consideration. The daughter of Scottish settlers, she is unlike little Mary in being Canadian born. She is an excellent intermediary – the reader learns that she was born in a log-shanty near Rice Lake (where the Traill family had resided for several years until the house fire of 1857), "among woods, and valleys, and hills covered with flowers, and groves of pine, and white and black oaks" (*Afar in the Forest* 16). Mrs Frazer debunks the myths with which little Mary has come to Canada and assuages some of the child's fears about the "backwoods," countering the reputed viciousness of the Canadian wolf, for example (*Afar* 17). Indeed, Mrs Frazer may have been modelled to some degree on Traill herself. Mrs Frazer refers to her botanist father teaching her plant names as a child (*Afar* 155-56), mirroring Traill's gratitude to her own father for "early implanting in my sisters and myself a love for flowers [...] his teaching on the subject of botany and the excellence of Gods [*sic*] works" (Traill, MS, MG 29 D81, 2: 2947). Not only demonstrating nostalgia for her English childhood, Traill elevates her father's fireside method of education as an effective one.

The extent to which Traill's natural histories for children can be considered scientific, then, lies in the multifaceted forms of knowledge communicated within them and the ways in which it was intended that the "little readers" should engage with them. The ways in which Traill interwove understandings of nature – both traditional and "scientific" – into her didactic and fictional texts can be usefully considered within the context of what Anne Secord has identified as "the ways in which scientific authors – especially botanists – adopted and adapted such practices [interleaving and marginalia] in order to promote specific practical skills." Secord considers botanists as guides "by drawing attention to an awareness of a large lay audience that the compilers of these texts wished to prompt into action in specific ways" (283). Traill, in this sense, effectively sought to train her readers to think botanically, but expressed that intention in terms that could be understood by readers with a range of educational experience. Her interpolations of calls to moral action – asking her readers to consider their interactions with Canadian nature – are amalgamated with natural historical epistemologies by at once intricately connecting both forms of understanding and expressing to children a natural link between Christian morality and appreciating nature through intimacy (knowledge). Her natural histories for children encapsulate her simultaneous concerns for the settlement and Christianisation of Canada and its ecological consequences (such as deforestation). From her earliest publications, she encouraged her young readers to adopt a caring attitude towards animals in particular, advocating the keeping of pets as fostering kindness and responsibility, offering "useful lessons of morality and industry" (*Sketches from Nature* vi) and introducing them to the study of nature. Furthermore, keeping pets and taming wild animals formed part of the process of familiarization of Canadian nature occurring throughout her publications. Sixty-five years after the publication of *Sketches from Nature* (1830), Traill's *Cot and Cradle Stories* (1895) continued in a similar vein. Rather than simply teaching natural history, the book encourages children to appreciate, respect and enjoy the natural world, and is to that end full of examples of children paying close attention to the birds and animals living in their gardens and around their homes, learning by observation. Furthermore, Traill's intertwining of morality and natural history perpetuates the Romantic ideal of the natural world as morally and physically healthful for children, and Traill's idealization of her own childhood educational experiences.

The extent to which her texts can be considered scientific is also illustrated by comparing *Lady Mary and Her Nurse* and *Afar in the Forest*. Four substantial footnotes were removed in the preparation of *Afar in the Forest*. These notes provided detail on appearances of the *aurora borealis*, the diet of bears, and an account of the beaver quoted from the Ojibwa missionary Pahtahsega's (also Peter Jacobs, 1807-90) account of a journey to Hudson Bay (1853). The children who came to *Afar in the Forest*, then, missed out on this greater detail and broader perspective, and on the opportunity to mediate second- or third-hand information for themselves. *Afar in the Forest* retained a small number of footnotes providing Latin names for plants and additional information about the diets of some animals (115, 117), and the main text contains some references to settler and First Nations' traditional knowledge. The most notable addition to *Afar in the Forest* is an appendix listing 28 "Indian words," mostly relating to plants and birds (206-07). The knowledge of Canada presented in the text, then, is a form of cross-genre nature writing distanced from Western science and located more closely to the operations of knowledge on the ground in the backwoods.

What Traill offered her "little readers" (*Afar* 36), then, was not an academic knowledge of Canada – the opening words of *Studies of Plant Life*, "this little work [...] is not a book for the learned" (i), confirm her intention – but rather a "friendly" and deep knowledge of Canadian ecology, an overview presented with the detail and appreciative tone of one intimately familiar with it. Her vision of nature as one interconnected system was informed both by the science current in her early career – in the publications of Humboldt, for example – and by her innate curiosity. Agnes Fitzgibbon's biographical introduction to *Pearls and Pebbles* reveals that Traill and her sisters were, as children, fascinated by the books in their father's library, particularly atlases and geographies (xi). These sources operated in complement with Traill's explorations of nature in their childhood garden and the surrounding fields. Traill's books, therefore, offer the possibility of knowing "something beyond the mere name" and encourage the reader to "seek for higher knowledge, which may be found in works of a class far above what the writer of the present book can aspire to offer" (*Studies of Plant Life* i). She offers a deeply personalized and experiential account of Canadian nature, with books like *Pearls and Pebbles* (1894) comprising a series of reminiscences from her own life, her fondest memories of learning about nature and natural history, and her experiences of nature in England and in Canada. These were her responses to the need of "some familiar work" on Canadian plant life.

The final chapter of *Pearls and Pebbles* is entitled "Something Gathers up the Fragments" (235-41). Traill references the French chemist, Comte de Fourcroy (1755-1809) as having stated, "something gathers up the fragments, and nothing is lost," and draws a connection between this and the biblical phrase: "Gather up the broken pieces which remain over and above, that nothing be lost" (John vi:13) (*Pearls and Pebbles* 235). *Pearls and Pebbles*, Traill's penultimate published work, itself set out to gather up the fragments of her reminiscences and observations made over six decades. Elizabeth Thompson has considered this chapter in terms of Traill's cyclical vision of nature and her internal conflict about the destructive place of the settler in that cycle. It is also Traill's reflection on, and consideration of, the position or role of her work as a whole. Walking the reader through the Canadian forest, Traill demonstrates how nature (or God, in her worldview) ensures that nothing is lost or wasted. Just as pine needles and other detritus feed the soil in a continuous process of renewal, Traill saw a role for her work in the generation and dissemination of knowledge, and its transmission to the next generation. That knowledge was to be a synthesis, like the trees in the forests she so admired, of traditional indigenous, settler, "amateur" and "professional" epistemologies and understandings to create an economy of Canadian nature that not only justifies settler destruction of the forest (see: Thompson, "Catharine Traill's Ecological Vision") but also places the amalgamation of knowledges of Canada into one systematic whole, for communication to the Empire's youngest subjects and its future guardians.



## Notes

1. For a complete bibliography of Traill's works, see: [www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/moodie-trail/027013-2203-e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/moodie-trail/027013-2203-e.html). Web. 28 May 2015.
2. Fitzgibbon provided botanical illustrations for *Canadian Wild Flowers* (1868) and *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* (1885); the six colour illustrations in *Studies of Plant Life* were made from specimens, some of which Fitzgibbon had collected herself (*Studies of Plant Life* 62). Her watercolours can be viewed online at: [chamberlin.library.utoronto.ca](http://chamberlin.library.utoronto.ca)
3. Five of these pieces had been previously published in *Sharpe's London Journal* in 1848-52, and, in all, the pieces were originally intended as a sequel to *Backwoods*, only sold as articles when no publisher could be found for the volume (Floyd 93). Floyd suggests that "the process and outcomes of gleanings may provide a useful framework within which to understand the ways in which emigrant experience may be written and represented" and that this series of articles "were gleanings indeed: the scraps and left-overs gathered up after the first and best harvesting of writerly experience; fragments recycled in search of much-needed cash" (Floyd 93).
4. Frances Stewart (1794-1872), Irish immigrant to Canada (from 1822), was related to the Anglo-Irish writer, Maria Edgeworth.
5. Zeller's work includes a fascinating and detailed account of botany in early Victorian Canada (183-268) and paints a picture of a lively Victorian botanical scene in eastern Canada in particular. Indeed, Traill made use of the HBC network through her sons, Walter (1847-1932) and William Edward (1844-1917), both of whom were HBC traders, and *Pearls and Pebbles* refers to information gathered from fur-trade sources, for example (86). Editions of their letters were published respectively by Mae Atwood (*In Rupert's Land*) and K. Douglas Munro (*Fur Trade Letters of Willie Traill*).
6. The MS note quoted here is the basis for Traill's thoughts on traditional remedies in *Studies of Plant Life* (84).
7. John Macoun (1832-1920) was a member of the Geological Survey of Canada and author of botanical treatises, and Traill studied a copy of his *Catalogue of Canadian Plants. Part I: Polypetalae* (1883) which he had gifted to her, in her preparation of *Studies of Plant Life in Canada*; he also helped her to find a publisher for the volume (Peterman 175).

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