



The Journals of Susanna Moodie

Margaret Atwood , Charles Pachter (Illustrator)

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Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), regarded by many as her most fully realized volume of poetry, is one of the great Canadian and feminist epics. In 1980, Margaret Atwood's longtime friend, the distinguished Canadian artist Charles Pachter, illustrated, designed, and published a handmade boxed portfolio edition of 120 copies of the poem with silkscreen prints, created as an act of homage to the poet. Atwood herself has said of Pachter's work, His is a sophisticated art which draws upon many techniques and evokes many echoes. The poem and the prints inspire one another. This is the first facsimile edition of the original, as well as the first one-volume American edition of the poem, with an introduction by Charles Pachter and a foreword by David Staines.

The Journals of Susanna Moodie Details

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Author : Margaret Atwood , Charles Pachter (Illustrator)

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From Reader Review The Journals of Susanna Moodie for online ebook

Liz says

This 25th anniversary facsimile edition of the original silk-screened, limited run of "The Journals of Susanna Moodie" is a beautiful book to read. There are no page numbers so you just get lost in Atwood's evocative poetry and Pachter's gorgeous illustrations.

How do you describe a fictionalize biography written in poetry? Because that is what Atwood has done here--she has taken the life of Susanna Moodie, a renown Canadian pioneer--and turned it into a story known to all women. The story of life: when marriage removes agency, pulls you across countries, and decides your fate.

Rebecca says

Hard to say if this is 3 or 4 stars in my book. An excellent, short collection of poems reflecting on the life and times of Susanna Moodie, a British woman who emigrates to Canada and lives in the bush for years with her husband and family. I read this initially because it's related to the Alias Grace story. The poems stay with you and I had to remind myself that they weren't really written by Susanna Moodie but by Margaret Atwood imaging Moodie's life and experiences as she wrote about them in her diaries. I was left wanting more of the story than just the darkness and dirt of the poems but that could be considered a good thing.

Amélie says

Un recueil de poèmes délicieusement étranges, où Atwood part des mémoires de Susanna Moodie, pionnière récalcitrante de l'Ontario au XIXe siècle, pour faire exploser une certaine vision romantique des grands espaces, des premiers colons, de l'amour du pays d'adoption. Susanna n'est ni emballée par l'aventure, ni particulièrement douée pour sa nouvelle vie : *got used to being / a minor invalid, expected to make / inept remarks / futile and spastic gestures* ('First Neighbours'). Même après avoir quitté le fin fond du bois, même en ville, même morte, elle ne se réconcilie pas avec le territoire. Atwood en fait un regard perçant qui ausculte le progrès, une présence sèche qui gratte la surface de Toronto & y retrouve la même forêt qui encerclait ses terres, plus loin au Nord. L'ensemble est mordant & éminemment troublant -- surtout quand Atwood fait dire à Susanna, de son garçon noyé : *I planted him in this country / like a flag* ('Death of a Young Son by Drowning').

mwpm says

In the Afterword, Margaret Atwood states: "These poems were generated by a dream. I dreamt that I was watching an opera I had written about Susanna Moodie. I was alone in the theatre: on the empty white stage, a single figure was singing." And later, about her poems: "I suppose many of these were suggested by Mrs. Moodie's books, though it was not her conscious voice, but the other voice running like a counterpoint

through her work that made the most impression on me."

THE JOURNALS OF SUSANNA MOODIE is divided into three "Journals". The first journal spans 1832 - 1840, the years described by the real life Susanna Moodie in her book *ROUGHING IT IN THE BUSH*; the second journal spans 1840 - 1871; and the third journal spans the years 1871 - 1969, surpassing the death of Susanna Moodie (8 April 1885). In the words of Margaret Atwood: "After her death she can hear the twentieth century above her, bulldozing away her past, but she refuses to be ploughed under completely.... Susanna Moodie has finally turned herself inside out, and has become the spirit of the land she once hated."

Atwood states that "Most of Journal III was written after I had come across a little-known photograph of Susanna Moodie as a mad-looking and very elderly lady." In addition to Journal II, the photograph in question seems to have influenced some of the earlier poems - in particular, an unnamed poem that precedes Journal I: "I take this picture of myself / and with my sewing scissors / cut out the face. / Now it is more accurate: / where my eyes were, / every- / thing appears" - as well as the artwork that appears throughout the book. The artwork is part collage and part watercolour, lending to a divide that Atwood Acknowledges in the afterword...

"Susanna Moodie is divided down the middle: she praises the Canadian landscape but accuses it of destroying her; she dislikes the people already in Canada but finds in people her only refuge from the land itself; she preaches progress and the march of civilization while brooding elegiacally upon the destruction of the wilderness; she delivers optimistic sermons while showing herself to be fascinated with deaths, murders, the criminals in Kingston Penitentiary and the incurably insane in the Toronto lunatic asylum."

Atwood refers to Moodie's fascination with the "incurably insane in the Toronto lunatic asylum" in one of her poems, *VISIT TO TORONTO, WITH COMPANIONS*, a poem that begins: "The streets are new, the harbour / is new also; / the lunatic asylum is yellow." Unlikely that Atwood could have discerned the colour of the lunatic asylum from a B&W photograph or an account. More likely she used the opportunity to reference *THE YELLOW WALLPAPER*, a feminist text that directly addresses madness or "hysteria".

With her novels (such as *THE EDIBLE WOMAN* and *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*) Atwood has been categorized (or marginalized) as a Feminist writer. She is a Feminist writer, and this is proud title. Otherwise I have trouble (perhaps because I haven't read enough) placing her among the Modernists or Postmodernists - in part because her writing career began in the 1960s, that grey area between Modernism and Postmodernism.

THE JOURNAL OF SUSANNA MOODIE is in many ways a postmodern text: the appropriation and re-interpretation of an existing text (the writings of Susanna Moodie); the abstraction of form (a poetry collection disguised as a journal); the premise that the book is another book written by another author - though the epistolary form is pre-modern, often used in "Gothic" novels (in fact, Margaret Atwood has been labelled a "Gothic" writer grouped among other Canadian writers as "Southern Ontario Gothic"), what distinguishes the text from Gothic novels and poems is this premise, that the author is not a character but someone living (or dead), as in the case of Gertrude Stein *AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ALICE B. TOKLAS* (though the texts may be a departure in form and execution, and certainly to a different effect, the respective authors share a veil, a veil that detaches and distances them from the subject - all the more pertinent in the case of Gertrude Stein, who is the subject of *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY*...)

The closest comparison to *THE JOURNAL OF SUSANNA MOODIE* is Michael Ondaatje's *THE COLLECTED WORKS OF BILLY THE KID*. The name alone betrays a similarity. Both authors have chosen an existing person to serve as a conduit for a strange poetic undertaking. What's remarkable is the

fact that both poetry collections were published in the same year (1970). Atwood and Ondaatje seem to have been possessed by the same inspiration that would eventually elevate both writers to international acclaim.

Alannis Flese says

2.5

Patricia Snell says

excellent...through the pictures and poems I felt like I was there and felt the suffering...

Michele says

SFPL big book sale 2017.

that. was weird? interesting. but weird. I don't read a lot of poetry. everytime I do, I wish I was taking a class on it because I cannot, for the life of me, extract all the packed meaning that I ASSUME exists beneath the surface. I have taken English lit classes that study poetry in any case and I remember that being the result.

this poetry is supposedly inspired by a dream Atwood had about this early Canadian settler named Susanna Moodie. Moodie wrote two books about being a Canadian pioneer. Atwood read them once and then a couple years later decided to condense her impressions and her own consciousness into poetic derivatives of Moodie's life.

her life seems troubled and difficult beset by other settlers, the wilderness, fire, and death. the writing is haunting and mournful. there are some lines that are stand out beautiful.

I've never read Moodie's books and probably never will but I very much appreciated encountering her in this form.

Marianne Søliland says

Nå har jeg lest *Roughing it in the Bush* av Susanna Moodie før denne diktsamlingen. Det kan være en fordel. Atwood har klart, i få men effektive dikt, å gjenskape følelsen til pionerkvinnen Moodie da hun kom til Canada for første gang og ble i 7 år. Anbefales nok helst til dem som har lest Moodie, selv om Atwood i etterordet skriver at det ikke er nødvendig å lese Moodie først. Sikkert ikke nødvendig, men jeg ser jeg fikk mye mer ut av diktene med bakgrunnen i sekken. Kanskje fordi jeg ikke er såå bevandret i poesiens verden? God, sånn erre bare!

Diana says

¿Sabían que Margaret Atwood también escribió poesía? Encontré este libro por casualidad y me lo llevé tras reconocer el nombre de la autora sobre su portada. Algunos de sus versos son realmente preciosos...

(...)

**Necesito los ojos de los lobos
para ver la verdad.**

Renuncio a reflejarme en un espejo.

**Que el desierto sea
real o no
depende sólo de quien viva en él.**

Otras llegadas (páginas 11-13)

(...)

Qué es esto

**(sólo hallas
la forma que ya eres,
pero qué
si has olvidado ya en qué consistía
o descubres que
nunca lo has sabido)**

Frente a un espejo (páginas 31-33)

(...)

**Llegó la nieve. Fue de gran ayuda
el trineo; quedaba atrás su rastro
como si me empujara a la ciudad**

**y una vez rodeada la primera colina, me encontré
de repente
deshabitada: ya se habían ido.**

**Hubo algo que casi me enseñaron
y que al irme no había aún aprendido.**

Salida de la maleza (páginas 35-37)

Barbara McEwen says

I have no idea what makes good poetry and have no right to rate it but I found this a very enjoyable

collection. It was a cohesive collection, you can feel the theme running through it. I like Margaret Atwood's thoughts at the end too. I appreciate learning where the author was coming from. A pleasant experience for me.

BookMavenInTheMaking says

In my opinion, this remarkable book has given me an intimate and moving interpretation of Susanna Moodie's pioneering years in the Canadian wilderness from 1832-1839.

Atwood's power of sight (or insight) helped to channel the “feelings” of how difficult and alienating pioneer life must have been for new immigrants to this vast Canadian geography in the earlier parts of the 19th century. These poems had me wondering if Moodie suffered from mental health issues before she immigrated from England to Canada or did her schizophrenia develop as a result of so many years of living out in the “myth” of the wilderness? When one has too much time on their hands to think of their hardships and the negative aspects of what they “feel” they've lost or left behind...hmm...

Atwood's depiction of Susanna, as we the reader find her throughout the journals, seems to indeed be a victim of paranoid schizophrenia.

In Journal 1, Atwood describes Susanna as she first arrives on Canadian land. At this point, she is fully formed by reason, civilization, and man-made order. When she encounters the world of nature, where man's definitions of good and bad and order and chaos no longer exist to the way in which she had been previously accustomed to, she begins to be psychologically tormented it seems.

In Journal 2, Atwood presents Susanna as she reaches a kind of comprehension of the nature of the duality from which she suffered in Journal 1, and she realizes how and why she has adapted to the physical environment of Canada.

Finally, in Journal 3, Atwood gives us a fully self-conscious Susanna, one who tells us that she is now able to communicate to the rest of society what she has learned about man's destructive refusal to abandon his reason-dominated ways of perceiving all things that surround him.

It definitely felt like a book of poems about man's/woman's consciousness.

The structure of the poems seems to me to be based upon a psychological form of madness to sanity, a journey for Moodie which consisted of the existence of an unhealthy duality in society between the conscious and the unconscious, reason and emotion, mind and body, civilization and nature, men and women. It seemed like Atwood believes that modern man has repressed his animal nature and exalted his reason, she often allegorizes this journey into the unconscious in terms of an actual physical journey into the Canadian wilderness. Consequently, she finds in the experiences of Mrs. Moodie the perfect metaphor for a psychic journey in search of the self-knowledge that is necessary to achieve the integrated personal self.

I, without a doubt, wish that I had of been fortunate enough to have taken a few literature course in my younger years, if for no other reason than to have gained a better understanding of how to interpret poetry. Regardless of that, I enjoyed this boiled-down version of poems based on Moodie's journals.

Of them all...the following one went beyond “my sight”... something about it goes “DEEPER”...

.....

WISH: METAMORPHOSIS TO HERALDIC EMBLEM by Margaret Atwood

I balance myself carefully
inside my shrinking body
which is nevertheless
deceptive as a cat's fur:

when I am dipped in the earth
I will be much smaller.

On my skin the wrinkles branch
out, overlapping like hair or feathers.
In this parlour my grandchildren
uneasy on sunday chairs
with my deafness, my cameo brooch
my puckered mind
scurrying in its old burrows

little guess how
maybe

I will prowl and slink
in crystal darkness
among the stalactite roots, with new
formed plumage
uncorroded
gold and

Fiery green, my fingers
curving and scaled, my

opal
no
eyes glowing

.....

Now that it's all said and read, I'm giving this pint size book 3½ Stars.

Annie says

I really enjoyed this collection of poetry by Margaret Atwood based on real-life Canadian emigrant, Susanna Moodie, a pioneer in the early 1800s who penned autobiographical accounts of her adventures and trials in the Canadian wilderness.

At first, I felt compelled to read Moodie's own work, *Roughing It in the Bush*, but upon reading Atwood's "Afterword," abandoned the endeavor. Suffice it to say, Atwood's artistic rendition in no way matches the tone of Moodie's writing, which I can only describe as a stoic optimism peppered with pretentious, affected lyrical poetry. I got to Chapter 8 of *Roughing It* and was so disheartened by the complete depravity and

meanness of nearly every human being that Moodie encountered that I simply quit.

Though Atwood's interpretation is much darker in mood, I enjoyed it so much better than the source work. While Moodie's autobiography is largely anecdotal, Atwood's poems strive to express Moodie's personal experience - to imagine what she was thinking and feeling about her ordeals from the depths of her subconscious - from her soul. It is interesting that Atwood was inspired to write these poems through a dream she had of watching an opera she had written about Susanna Moodie.

Here is one of my favorite poems:

FURTHER ARRIVALS

After we had crossed the long illness
that was the ocean, we sailed up river

On the first island
the immigrants through off their clothes
and danced like sandflies

We left behind one by one
the cities rotting with cholera,
one by one our civilized
distinctions

and entered a large darkness.

It was our own
ignorance we entered.

I have not come out yet

My brain gropes nervous
tentacles in the night, send out
fears hairy as bears,
demands lamps; or waiting

for my shadowy husband, hears
malice in the trees' whispers.

I need wolf's eyes to see
the truth.

I refuse to look in the mirror.

Whether the wilderness is
real or not
depends on who lives there.

Heidi Bakk-Hansen says

A beautiful illustrated edition, and lovely reading.

Vicki says

Margaret Atwood's poetic reimagining of the hardscrabble life of Susanna Moodie, a British settler who emigrated to Canada in the 1830s, is vivid unto itself. It groups Moodie's experiences into three sets of poems: the first covers her arrival in Canada and primitive subsistence on a farm near what became Peterborough, Ontario, the second covers her somewhat more civilized existence in the town of Belleville, and the third is actually a posthumous set of reflections that concludes with her spirit inhabiting that of an old woman on a bus travelling along St Clair Avenue in Toronto in the late 1960s. Throughout, Atwood gives Moodie a grittier and more emotional voice than what comes through in Moodie's prim accounts in *"Roughing it in the Bush"* and her subsequent memoirs.

While Atwood's poetic account of Moodie's adventures and experiences is vibrant by itself, it is further enhanced and animated by the typographic and graphical innovations of artist Charles Pachter, a longtime friend and collaborator of Atwood's. Interestingly, Atwood and Pachter originally applied for a grant in 1970 to allow him to design a special edition of the collection of poems, but the application was turned down by the Canada Council. Atwood went ahead and got the poems published by Oxford University Press, but she and Pachter held onto the hope that they could one day collaborate on a more fully realized rendition incorporating his ideas and work. Several years later, the University of Toronto Library financed a venture that saw Pachter and two Spanish master printers, Abel and Manuel Bello-Sanchez, bring Atwood's poems to life in a 120-copy limited edition that combined complex silkscreening, calligraphic and typographical effects. In the early 1980s, examples of this unique work were exhibited at the Art Gallery of Ontario and the National Gallery of Canada. By the early 1990s, it had also been translated into French.

Finally, in 1997, an edition was produced capturing the original text and graphics, with an account by Charles Pachter and a foreword by noted University of Ottawa English professor David Staines. This edition effectively encapsulates the history and collective heft of this work, and puts it in context with Staines' enthusiastic framing of the work as a uniquely Canadian *livre d'artiste*. Topping it all off is Pachter's ebullient account of being inspired by the genius of his friend Margaret Atwood to produce a work of genius of his own, to which the poems are inextricably linked.

Julie says

This is Margaret Atwood at her best.

In this work, Atwood re-imagines the Canadian landscape through the eyes of one of Canada's first settlers, Susanna Moodie (1803-1885). The collection of poems, Atwood writes, were generated by a dream. "I dreamt I was watching an opera in the theatre: on the empty white stage, a single figure was singing."

The book presents a physical presence of absence, if you can imagine the meaning of it: a small book, with plenty of white space, and a small white voice on each page, resounding as clear as a clarion call across the

bleak landscape. Atwood's dream incarnate.

Within the book, a few dozen poems and a few thousand words, at best, describe all the lives Susanna lived: from a comfortable class-conscious gentlewoman of the Strickland family in England, to a hinterland trailblazer in the wilds of Canada; and in the end, to writer of pioneer literature, a trailblazer of a different kind.

Atwood slices through all the layers: gentlewoman, pioneer, writer while she manages to capture the soul of a gentlewoman, captive in this harsh land. How harsh is the plight of the immigrant soul, in the end: when one relinquishes everything one has ever known and held dear in order to carve a different life from alien soil. Impossible to imagine at its deepest level. While we can comprehend the conditions, from a physical perspective, would we ever understand what it did to the soul? The wilderness, Atwood writes, is within and without. In order to survive, and prosper, one needs to reconcile the two, or all is lost; perhaps lost in madness. It takes the heart of a poet to understand that.

Further Arrivals

After we had crossed the long illness
that was the ocean, we sailed up river

On the first island
the immigrants threw off their clothes
and danced like sandflies

We left behind one by one
the cities rotting with cholera,
one by one our civilized
distinctions

and entered a large darkness.

It was our own
ignorance we entered.

I have not come out yet

My brain gropes nervous
tentacles in the night, sends out
fears hairy as bears,
demands lamps; or waiting

for my shadowy husband, hears
malice in the trees' whispers.

I need wolf's eyes to see
the truth.

I refuse to look in a mirror.

Whether the wilderness is
real or not
depends on who lives there.
