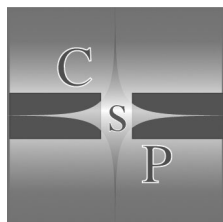


Diversity and Change
in Early Canadian Women's Writing

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Edited by

Jennifer Chambers



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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For Dave and Zoë

I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in; and, thinking of the safety and prosperity of the one sex and the poverty and insecurity of the other and of the effect of tradition and the lack of tradition upon the mind of a writer, I thought at last that it was time to roll up the crumpled skin of the day, with its arguments and its impressions and its anger and its laughter, and cast it into the hedge.

—Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations ix

Introduction 1
“Has Anyone a Following?": Diversity and Change in Early Canadian
Women's Writing
JENNIFER CHAMBERS

Part I: Seeds of Social Change: Reckoning with the Empire

Neither Here nor There: Mary Gapper O'Brien writes "home,"
1828-1838..... 8
KATHRYN CARTER

Finding the Words: Form and Language in *Canadian Crusoes* 22
DAVID COPELAND

Colonial Space/Imperial Identity: How Sara Jeannette Duncan
Navigated Victorian Canada, Americanization, and the Empire
of the Race by Herself 36
CECILY DEVEREUX

Part II: Diverse Readings: Voices of Femininity and Feminism

A Woman's Will: The Dissonance Between Life and Art in May
Agnes Fleming's Formulaic Domestic Fiction 56
JENNIFER CHAMBERS

"*I inquired rather delicately*": Femininity as Strategy in Sara Jeannette
Duncan's Interviews 80
JESSICA LANGSTON

"The Grim Fact of Sisterhood": □Female Collectivity in the Works
of Agnes Maule Machar, Nellie L. McClung, and Mabel Burkholder..... 100
KATJA THIEME

Part III: Reading Alternatives: Intersections of Art and Life

Re-evaluating the Literary Reputation of Isabella Valancy Crawford..... 120
 KATHERINE SUTHERLAND

“The Larks, Still Bravely Singing, Fly”: Clara May Bell’s *Psyche*
 and Women Upholding “the bright torch” of the Arts at the University
 of Alberta 1914-1918 139
 MOIRA DAY

The Fitness of Things: *Anne of Green Gables*, Social Change,
 and L.M. Montgomery’s “Discerning Extraordinary Observer” 170
 BENJAMIN LEFEBVRE

Works Cited..... 194

Contributors..... 211

Index..... 214

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 7-1 Portrait of Isabella Valancy Crawford (1850-1887) as a young woman.

Fig. 7-2 Portrait of Isabella Valancy Crawford circa. 1885.

Fig. 8-1 “The Evolution of the ‘Co-Ed’” Cartoon *The Sheaf* (Dec. 1917)
Vol. 6.1 University of Alberta.

INTRODUCTION

“HAS ANYONE A FOLLOWING?”: DIVERSITY AND CHANGE IN EARLY CANADIAN WOMEN’S WRITING

JENNIFER CHAMBERS

“The main question for us is to probe the lasting influence of those of the past and to enquire how we of the present are reflecting or re-creating the life, the temperament, the trend of our own time, in the literary medium in which we work. Has anyone a following? Has any been uniquely, distinctly, unalterably herself as an artist?”

— Katherine Hale, “Some Women Writers of Canada,” 1933

These words of Katherine Hale, originally delivered to a literary gathering of women, and later published in *The Author’s Bulletin* echoed the hunch I had about early Canadian women writers. Nearly seventy years later, buried deep in the archives, Hale sounded the very question that had been bothering me. Why had they made so little impact, these early women? Working on “rediscovered,” “recovered,” and “recuperated” early British and American women writers (language of the archaeologist, the patient, and the medic, but recently the literary historian as well), I could hardly help wondering where were the early Canadian women writers, and why did we know so little about them? As is so often the case with ideas, once I began digging through archives and reading what had been published, I discovered a lot more work has been and is being done, but it all felt in the initial stages, as though it were waiting for its moment to take off.

In her speech to the literary gathering, Hale bridges the past and the present. She acknowledges literary foremothers and considers English-Canada’s literary heritage by way of its women writers. There is British author Frances Brooke’s inaugural Canadian novel, *The History of Emily Montague* (1769), which gives an early impression, through its epistolary narrative, of life in Canada. There are travel journals, like *Winter Studies*

and *Summer Rambles in Canada* (1838), by British writer Anna Brownell Jameson who came to the colony because of her husband's vocation, and seized the opportunity to record her impressions. The pioneering narratives of "sisters in the wilderness" Catharine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836), and Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852) and *Life in the Clearings versus the Bush* (1853) are probably the best-known early writings by 'Canadian' women. Hale also lists many women writers of her generation, from Isabella Valancy Crawford to Marjory Pickthall to L.M. Montgomery (two of whom are covered in this collection.)

She further notes that women journalists deserve acknowledgment. Concerned with the lack of recognition for women writers, Hale says, "The hall-mark of genius is as difficult to define as it is rare to meet. Perhaps it defies imitation. It has little to do with national spirit and nothing to do with bogus tradition" (Hale 10). Hale challenges the notions of the small market, and young nation of Canada, and charges not only that it has a chance to produce genius, but that it may already have done so (for, she argues, we cannot always see what is of value in the current moment, but sometimes need the passage of time to help elucidate it). She puts no stock in opinions that dismiss Canada, its women writers in particular, of having what it takes to write remarkably, to write with genius, and she challenges women writers to consider how they write, and how they consider themselves as artists.

Hale's positive reckoning with the steep competition of the big market U.S.A., and the long-standing literary traditions of Britain, resounds with the possibilities within Canada, and she looks to women writers as the key to "the present moment." Since Hale's day, many early Canadian women writers have been mired in the dust of literary annals and archives, and many scholars have sought them out in the hopes of discovering that "diamond in the rough." What had begun emerging, it seems to me, was a surprising sense of diversity in the writings—in terms of genres, styles, subject matter—and the often powerful social ideas engrained in the texts. Surprising, because so much had gone by the wayside. In the recovery projects on early British and American women writers, social change has become a common theme, but early Canadian women's writing has been slow to earn a reputation for championing causes.

This is a collection of nine essays about eight early Canadian women writers (Sara Jeannette Duncan gets double billing, but in two very different papers). It is thematically arranged, and is intended for all those readers who were as sure as I was that there have to be diverse, interesting, socially relevant voices in early Canadian women's writing. It is, equally,

for sceptics, who will, I think, find that early Canada is not bereft of women writers, or of writing of substance. As keen as literary historians and critics have been to assess the contributions of women to Canada's early cultural scene, this collection seeks to move beyond listing which women were writing in early Canada, and to bring together a study of their journalistic and literary works. For a nation so caught up in projects to enhance nation-building, and so concerned with the development of its national literature, we need to reconnect with its early literary works and attempts.

Sometimes when people learn I am working on early Canadian women's writing, they ask me to name a few writers. I usually explain that the ones I'm working on are out-of-print, not yet known, as I like to put it. Still, when pressed, I mention May Agnes Fleming, Susan Frances Harrison, Ethelwyn Wetherald, Helena Coleman, Gwethalyn Graham. Inevitably, most people have not heard of them. Their surprise at not knowing has proven inspiring. When asked for further details about these women, what strikes me is how easy it is to make a good story out of their lives and their work—even, arguably, works that are out of the current literary spotlight or fashion. So much so that I have taken to telling the story of May Agnes Fleming—the prolific New Brunswick writer of domestic fiction for American readers, who married a ne'er-do-well, had four children by him, wrote about forty novels and died at the age of thirty-nine—in the introduction to a course on Women's Writing. I find that even a bare-bones introductory lecture that includes the story of Fleming's life, the titles of some of her works and the social agenda in them often succeeds in generating the spark of interest in students I hope to ignite. My paper on Fleming included in this collection considers her complicated private life, and the ways she uses the genre of domestic fiction to imagine social change, particularly for women in marriage.

Of course other people are less enthusiastic about work in this area. I have been asked, "Was there even paper in Canada during the nineteenth century?" It may have been a flippant comment, but actually, it is a valid question, or leads to one, as Kathryn Carter's essay, which opens the collection, discusses the difficulties for early colonial women in having the materials necessary for writing. Carter makes a fascinating case study out of the innovative strategies one woman used to ensure her transcripts made it back to Britain in the days before a reliable postal service existed in Canada. Perhaps, after all, what most vexes Canadian writers and critics is that our early literature is conventional, often British-influenced and conservative. What the papers in this collection show are unconventional ways of reading such works, or insight into the innovations of the writers

working within genres, as well as under material conditions that were at times limiting, to forge a unique vision that might appeal to the greater literary markets as Canada developed her own.

The collection begins with a section entitled “Seeds of Social Change: Reckoning with the Empire.” Being (English-) Canadian means rooting ourselves in our colonial past, and the collection opens with two essays about British-born writers living in Canada. Carter’s paper addresses Mary Gapper O’Brien’s journal letters and her idea of “home” as a shifting landscape with mutable meanings. Carter considers how diaries and letters ought to be recognized for having consequences, both real and imagined, in the project of empire. David Copeland’s essay considers Catharine Parr Traill’s lesser-known *Canadian Crusoes*, and examines how Traill adapts the *Crusoe* genre by putting a Canadian stamp on it. He argues that social change can be acknowledged in generic shifts Traill makes through setting, First Nations–English Canadian relations, and the representation of women. Copeland shows how Traill makes a contribution to the adventure story by providing an inter-ethnic model for Canadian society while avoiding the more typical marketing of the New World to the Empire. Cecily Devereux’s paper considers Sara Jeannette Duncan’s position as a representative of “Victorian Canada,” and complicates this notion by showing her contradictory identification with Britain and America, sometimes with the deliberate omission of Canada. She makes a case for Duncan’s Americanization, as Duncan identifies her first successes with making it in the States, even though she had been successfully publishing in Canada much earlier, and some of these early works are anti-American. The essays in this section show how women writers eked out a balance between the empire, the republic next door, and the developing Canada.

The essays in “Diverse Readings: Voices of Femininity and Feminism” consider specific authors and their works, and show the many ways in which women writers considered “the woman question.” Two of the papers, my own and Jessica Langston’s, consider the performative nature of gender, femininity in particular, and how it can be perceived as a narrative strategy. My own paper shows how May Agnes Fleming’s life infused the subject matter of her novels, and yet how complicated the matter of genre becomes in terms of private life, public writing, and appealing to the masses, particularly when concerns about women and marriage are at the centre. Jessica Langston’s paper concerns Sara Jeannette Duncan’s little-examined newspaper articles to show both the substantial subject matter therein, her journalistic persona, and her ingenuity in exposing sexism while using her femininity as a strategy to

invoke it. Katja Thieme's essay looks at early feminism in novels by Agnes Maule Machar, Mabel Burkholder, and Nellie McClung. She shows how feminist depictions work as a way of renegotiating female roles within a patriarchal society. By imagining a female collectivity in fiction, these writers expressed social consciousness about improving conditions for other women while upholding their own class status. Thieme highlights the importance, and the problem, of social class to conceptions of gender.

In "Reading Alternatives: Intersections of Art and Life," the papers explore biographical, textual, and historical links between writers' lives and their works. Katherine Sutherland's paper on Crawford shows how the poet was celebrated upon her death as a nationalist poet, and yet how the responses to Crawford from contemporary critics are vast and contradictory, making her an ever-interesting, elusive Canadian literary figure. Sutherland makes the case that Crawford was revolutionary—a renegade, even—in her day. In Moira Day's essay, she examines the prairie universities' policies on gender and education in the early twentieth century. She shows how women such as Clara May Bell contributed to the arts on campus, and how they capably participated in all aspects of campus life before and during the First World War, only for that social moment to be shifted in the aftermath of war. Benjamin Lefebvre's essay on L.M. Montgomery uses excerpts from her journals and biography in order to show how Montgomery worked autobiographical incidents into *Anne of Green Gables*. The incidents are significant in the way Montgomery alters them, often to empower her young heroine, and maybe also to alter the course of her own memories. He considers the implied reader, the ideas of power and agency, and the ending of the novel in his analysis. These essays also reflect on literary reputations—how they are formed (or not), and what they mean in the moment of the writer's existence and beyond.

The women writers represented in this collection are English-speaking, white and British in heritage. These women wrote in a variety of genres and styles. Their concerns and their subject matter bespeak diversity. Gapper O'Brien wrote letter journals, Parr Traill a children's adventure story, Duncan both novels and newspaper articles, Fleming, Machar, Burkholder and McClung novels about social change, Crawford poetry, Bell a one-act play, and Montgomery an iconic novel. Some of the papers discuss forgotten women writers, or recover forgotten texts, or both. Some of these women writers will be familiar to those interested in the field; others probably not. This collection brings together new material, and new ways of considering tried-and-true authors and their works, with the

themes of diversity and social change in early Canadian women's writing as the thread uniting them.

For those discouraged by Katherine Hale's question—"has anyone a following?"—with regard to women writers in Canada, we have the advantage of looking back in time as we continue along the road ahead. When Lorraine McMullen published the collection of essays *Re(dis)covering Our Foremothers* in 1990, she considered the area of early Canadian women's writing one "in which scholarly work [had] only begun" (1). She called for both "scholarship and activism" to uncover and recover our literary heritage, and to give it its rightful place in the Canadian canon (McMullen 4). Arguments about the canon have shifted somewhat in the ensuing years, as postcolonialism opens the way for diverse voices and differences of opinion on what is of literary merit. Publications like the New Canadian Library and the Centre for Editing Early Canadian Texts have been followed by series with Tecumseh and Broadview Presses, for example, and Early Canadiana Online, making so much early writing formerly buried in archives accessible to the public and for teaching purposes. Not surprisingly, early Canadian literary studies are becoming more prominent on campuses and at conferences. There is, one might say, an academic renaissance for early Canadian writing. The conference and subsequent publication of *ReCalling Early Canada* (in 2003 and 2005 respectively) shows the variety of work being done in the field overall.

Eighteen years after McMullen's, this collection shows the progression along the path that her "manifesto" invited. Perhaps a new manifesto is not exactly needed, but the will to persevere, to keep digging in archives, reading and critically analyzing early Canadian women writers is; to keep making the cases for their writing, and to keep listening to what for so long has gone unnoticed, that is, voices working for social change and improved conditions in Canada. In the words of Katherine Hale, "Nothing can remain haphazard and succeed" (10).

I would like to acknowledge the participation of all of the contributors to this collection, who were a pleasure to work with, and unwaveringly willing to share this vision with me.

PART I

SEEDS OF SOCIAL CHANGE: RECKONING WITH THE EMPIRE

CHAPTER ONE

NEITHER HERE NOR THERE: MARY GAPPER O'BRIEN WRITES "HOME," 1828-1838¹

KATHRYN CARTER

Literary scholar Gillian Whitlock notes the rather surprising productivity of colonial women such as Mary Gapper O'Brien, Susanna Moodie, and Catharine Parr Traill considering that "the conditions for writing in the backwoods were poor: money for paper and postage was scarce as was time, for these women laboured harder with fewer servants than did their English peers" (47). Like other emigrants, and despite their shared difficulties, Mary Gapper O'Brien did have a supply of paper and began recording her migration shortly after leaving Bristol harbour, as soon as home receded into the distance.² Like many British settlers, she posted home a journal letter in the decade between 1828 and 1838, leaving a rich record that has been used to understand the history of nineteenth-century Upper Canada.

However, examining O'Brien's seemingly simple act of correspondence reveals a dynamic culture in which she and other early settlers wrote, as evidenced by a diverse and widespread network of readers, writers, and postal carriers. It demonstrates how she reckoned (and collapsed) the distance separating and unsettling her homes and how the act of corresponding was embedded in the process of accommodating to change. Because O'Brien's journal letter consistently imagines and anticipates the routes of circulation it must traverse within the networks of empire, because it addresses the material conditions of exchange between colony and empire, her text is uniquely well placed to highlight a communication circuit linking reader and writer, centre and margin, laying the groundwork for contemporary historians and literary scholars to imagine a new and more dynamic colonial geography in the days before Canadian confederation and before postal reform. This study of

Gapper O'Brien's journal letter contributes, then, to the larger discussion of women's writing in colonial settings³ because a close look at the postal system navigated by Gapper O'Brien when dispatching her journal letter suggests how socio-technical apparatuses such as the postal system can shape the way that colonial spaces are imagined.

Jane Harrison says in her dissertation on Canadian postal history that nineteenth-century correspondents "operated within a culture of communications that linked elite correspondents and members of the broader community in a complicated web of mutual obligation and assistance" (ii). I am interested in the "culture of communications" present in the days before mid century, and one part of this paper attends to the mechanics of transatlantic correspondence: how did letters get "home" before the advent of a systematized postal service in 1851? However, I also want to stretch the phrase in order to begin thinking about women settlers creating a sense of "home" in their epistolary writing and to argue that the transatlantic routes of the letters and their inability to precisely demarcate "home" lend credence to the observation by Rita Kranidis that "the study of Victorian women's migration to the colonies and dominions contributes to present examination of how cultural boundaries get negotiated by calling into question their very existence" (1). O'Brien's correspondence and the material contexts of its production presents to readers an evidentiary terrain where we can trace pathways connecting colony to imperial centre and back again. In other words, tracing the postal routes in place before the formal institutionalization of the postal system in 1851 suggests new ways to imagine colonial geographies, new ways to conceptualize a settler space in which subjects wrote without relying on the metaphor of the nation as a spatially bounded place. In addition, concentrating on the material contexts of the journal letter's transmission offers a way of reading that does not search for representations of the emigrant "finally settled" in a new home with whatever varying degrees of ambivalence; rather, I am reaching toward a new way of reading the material and literary practices of this 1830s journal letter in order to open up the possibility of using transatlantic correspondence as one component in an un-teleological process of "writing home."

In taking this approach, I heed the message from the editors of *Epistolary Histories* that "future epistolary studies will need to attend to transatlantic correspondences" (14) and take up Mary Favret's injunction in *Romantic Correspondence* "to read the envelope of contingency that surrounds any letter" (56). Transatlantic journal letters were written and circulated by settlers who were acutely aware of the material conditions affecting the transmission of those letters (the "envelope of contingency"), and I hope my comments here might begin to answer Gerald MacLean's call for "a more

fully historicized account of epistolarity than we are likely to get from critical approaches developed from and for the elucidation of epistolary novels" (Gilroy and Verhoeven 190). Epistolarity in general offers a useful metaphor for thinking about the permeability of national and cultural boundaries but journal letter correspondence by emigrants in particular highlights a process of defining/refining home as an activity that never ceases and whose rhetorical uses and discursive practices are subject to ongoing revision. The journal letter's reflexivity about the process of writing itself beckons scholars to imagine new ways of reading both diaries and letters, and to recognize that transatlantic correspondence has consequences both real and imagined for the project of empire as it is entangled in the imaginary concept of "home."

Mary Gapper moved from England to Thornhill in Upper Canada in 1828 and married Edward O'Brien in May 1830. In 1832, they moved again to a farm near Shanty Bay (located in present day Oro-Medonte Township, Ontario) because Edward O'Brien had taken up a position as emigrant agent for Oro Township in 1831; in particular, he was expected to oversee a proposed Negro settlement, but the project failed to generate much interest (MacPherson). They remained in the area however, for the rest of their lives. An educated woman fluent in Italian and French, hailing from landed gentry, Mary Gapper was among an early group of emigrants whose wide-ranging reading habits may well have introduced them to the idea of migration through the rash of books on Upper Canadian settlement published in England during the 1820s (Miller xi). And she was a writer. Original letter journal manuscripts by O'Brien, which continued from 1828 until 1838, and two typescript versions are located at the Provincial Archives of Ontario. In 1968, a version edited by Audrey Saunders Miller was published as the "journal" of Mary O'Brien.

What Miller calls a journal in 1960s parlance would be different than what O'Brien actually wrote: 119 individual journal letters whose format is hybrid, blending what present day readers regard as two separate genres: the daily diary and the letter. O'Brien herself recognized a difference between journal letters and shorter epistles. Once settled in Upper Canada, O'Brien explains how she is "going to write a short journal and a long letter" to her brother (105) thus indicating that this thing called the journal letter is different than a long letter. Anne Langton, who arrived in Ontario from Lancashire, signaled the same difference in 1839, in correspondence with her family: "As this is not a letter but a journal, I must give you some of the doings of the week" (104). Writing for a limited audience of friends and family, correspondents of the 1830s adopted a particular and uniform method of journal letter writing. Although the writers may call these documents journals (which calls to mind for contemporary readers a more private

undertaking), recent scholars prefer the term journal letter because they are publicly oriented diaries that get posted as letters. Diary scholar Harriet Blodgett offers an explicit definition: "an on-going daily dated letter, addressed to a recipient which functions simultaneously as diary and as correspondence" (24). Australian diary scholar Andrew Hassam looks at shipboard diaries as "a kind of journal-letter . . . unlike letters both because of their more public nature and because they were conceived as books" (xv). The term used by Blodgett, Hassam, and myself is "journal letter," the term preferred by the *OED* which describes a journal letter as "a letter written as a diary."

It is a form worth studying because the journal letter was the predominant form for correspondents of the 1830s. Settler Lucy Peel is typical: she wrote a running dialogue between 1833 and 1836 when her relative-by-marriage Robert Peel was prime minister of England in what she calls, simply, a journal. Some of these are published; some remain in manuscript, and while they don't circulate widely, the kind of writing they represent has come to acquire a kind of canonic status in Canadian literary history. Frances Halpenny, the editor of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, notes "it has been customary in Canadian studies to bring within the purview of literary history at least if not always literature as such, a good deal of material that originally had a private purpose (such as the records of explorers)" (39). However, despite the proliferation of journal letters in the period before 1850, they have escaped sustained notice by those who work on either diaries or letters. Even less commentary addresses the way in which epistolary conventions can illuminate a networked writing culture endemic to the material conditions of an early Canadian settler society.

Like others writing before 1851, O'Brien faced difficulties simply writing and transmitting journal letters, but she managed to leave a voluminous account of life in Upper Canada. She knew, for example, that she would not find paper in Upper Canada. Although the first Upper Canadian paper mill was established in 1826 in Flamborough (MacLaren xxviii) this was about ninety seven kilometres away from her home in Thornhill, and I have no evidence that she knew or used this source. Mary came prepared with "a large quantity of paper, double foolscap in size" (Miller xix). "The paper she obtained this way," explains the editor, "was of very good quality and the original letters are still in excellent condition" (Miller xix). Having examined the originals, I can attest to the fact that they are in excellent condition except where damaged by sealing wax. Certain segments of some of the journals have been cut away and when asked, archivists were unsure as to why or when this happened. A watermark visible on one of the original letters bears a remarkable resemblance to a watermark used by the famous paper mill at

Laverstoke in Hampshire,⁴ not too far away from Gapper's home county of Somerset. This supports the editor's assertion that when Gapper "came to the end of her initial supply she sent back to England for more of the same"(Miller xix). Each sheet of paper is 19 by 31 inches and is then folded in two so that it measures 9.5 inches by 15.5 inches. "Mary squeezed as much as she could on each large sheet," says editor Miller, and then folded the sheet into a kind of envelope, leaving a fourth side open for an address. On the address face of the letter, there were additional hand-written instructions about where the letter should go and hand-written traces of its journey too, evident from old addresses scratched off and new addresses added on. Often the letters proceeded from "Mrs Sharpe"—her sister Lucy—to "Mrs. Pulsford," who was her close friend Cara, or vice versa. Within these letters, she marked entries for the day of writing, like a diary. Each "journal" is limited by the size of the paper on which she worked, so she sometimes resorted to cross writing in order to squeeze as much as she could into the space she had. She would turn the page ninety degrees to begin cross writing; this, in conjunction with the small scale of her penmanship, proves the adage from Lewis Carroll that "cross-writing makes cross reading."⁵ Once they reached England, O'Brien's journal letters circulated on a predetermined route, sometimes specified within the journal letter itself: initially sent to her sister or a close friend, they went on to various friends and family. This could vary by posting, but all of the journal letters were routed to more than one recipient. After her 1830 marriage, some went to her mother-in-law in Ireland. O'Brien writes: "Edward is very anxious that my journals should find their way to his mother, if you can send them as they arrive. He would like them back from the time of our marriage. Direct them to Mrs. Lucius O'Brien, Cork Ireland" 7 February 1831 (154). When O'Brien's journal letters had made the rounds, they returned to her sister who filed them in order. On her death they were sent to Mary O'Brien's oldest daughter who was living by that time in Orillia, Ontario (xx). O'Brien came to the colonies with supplies so that she was prepared to write, ready to figure out the postal networks that would link her to Great Britain, and she clearly saw herself as part of a larger culture in which this kind of writing was practiced; she even encouraged it in others. Her brother, Anthony, for example, was implored to begin a journal (June 15) when he travelled with a military group to Penetanguishene, Ontario (Miller 53).

O'Brien accommodated her writing to what was, in the opinion of Jane Harrison, a predictable if not yet institutionalized postal system in the days before 1851 that relied on the shared knowledge of postal hubs, shipping schedules, commercial networks, and the travel plans of acquaintances. The address face of O'Brien's journal letter gives evidence, in the hand writing

and ink stamps of various postmasters, of the routes her mail followed to reach England. The early letters follow routes that were by now fairly well established. It is common, for instance, to see them routed to Lewiston via New York and then on to Liverpool by way of Ship Letter. Shortly thereafter, the letters go from Niagara to New York and then by Liverpool Ship Letter. Some of these are stamped as "packet letter." On 6 January 1829, a post office was newly established at Thornhill (Miller 292 n. 8). Therefore, the journal letter of 24 June 1829 bears a proper postmark for Thornhill U.C. and from there it went to Niagara, New York, and then Liverpool. Mail was sent and received between Thornhill and York via a Yonge Street stagecoach line; it went once a day to and from York (about to be renamed Toronto in 1834).

The topic of how and where journal letters would get circulated seemed to transfix all the writers of the 1830s who frequently dwell on the variables of paper supply and postal systems. Letters from writers such as Lucy Peel, Frances Simpson, Anne Langton, Catharine Parr Traill, Frances Stewart, Jane Ellice, Millicent Mary Chaplin, Ellen and Millie Steele (who co-wrote their journal letter), and Mary Gapper O'Brien offer proof of Jane Harrison's claim that many "begin or end with a detailed inventory of mail sent and received, which often includes detailed discussions of routes, costs, and the dangers of delay and miscarriage" (16). Lucy Peel, writing in the Eastern Townships of Quebec comments that routes of communication narrow during winter months when ships cannot ply the St. Lawrence: "We sent off a letter to you yesterday by Quebec and it is the last you will receive till next spring by that route as the river will be closed" (64). Summer brought its own concerns about poor inland roads, as she writes on 17 July 1833: "Mr Felton and his two daughters go to Three Rivers tomorrow and Mr Felton will go on to Quebec, I shall send this by him, he says in the summer months it will go safely that way and I have no postage to pay by Quebec." (51). The possibility of poor weather and shipwrecks delaying or destroying the mail was an ongoing concern, and multiple copies of letters were sometimes retained in the event that the original came to a bad end. Even much later, in the winter of 1848, Frances Simpson, wife of Hudson's Bay Company Governor George Simpson, worried about the safety of a mail ship in a letter to her sister: "The last mail had a very long passage, so much so that the most serious apprehensions were entertained for her safety" (m.s. 12 December 1848) And Lucy Peel resigns herself to lost mail in a letter to her parents, "I shall never have your next journal, the Post Office and many more buildings at New York were burned down, it was a dreadful fire" (Little 179). Correspondents of the time might make off-handed comments about the mail such as "Edmund rode to Sherbrooke on Monday to take my last letter to the Post office" (Little 112) or they might offer explicit instructions: "The next

box you send to Montreal, I wish Mr Atkinson might be directed to send it to Mr Henry who would forward it immediately to us” (Little 122). A traveller named Elizabeth Foster wrote to a friend in Ireland that her disappointment in moving from Kingston to Quebec in 1815 was alleviated by the fact that she would “receive their letters in a much shorter period from their date than we have hitherto done” (m.s., Irish Emigration Database). Her letters would no longer face the difficult journey overland between Kingston and Quebec although they still faced difficulties traversing by land from Quebec to Halifax after it became established as a year-round packet port in 1815 (Arnell 41). Catharine Parr Traill, in *The Backwoods of Canada*, explains to her readers the material conditions that frame and limit her writing in a letter dated 1 May 1833: “I must now close this epistle; I have many letters to prepare for friends, to whom I can only write when I have the opportunity of free conveyance, the inland postage being very high; and you must not only pay for all you receive but all you send to and from New York.” Lucy Peel offers details of the colonial postal system when she writes “Tell Mama we pay 2s 1d [two shilling one pence] for all letters from England, 1.11d [one shilling eleven pence—or almost two shilling] for those we sent to England by New York and 9d [pence] for those we send by Quebec” (Little 75). Mary Gapper O’Brien paid one shilling one pence for letters going from Thornhill to England (Miller xix). All of the writers detail such factors because they are crucial.

Nineteenth-century letters from emigrants and travellers have fuelled a variety of research projects such as Janet Myers’ literary analyses of letters from women involved with the Female Middle Class Emigration Society, the voluminous study of the Petworth Emigration Scheme by Wendy Cameron and colleagues, or indeed D. F. McKenzie’s seminal article “The Sociology of a Text.” Generally, however, such studies have contrived to overlook discussions of the specifics of mail as being beside the point, extraneous to the “real” content of the letters, even when writers keep drawing our attention to the topic.⁶ “The innumerable complaints of failure or delay on the part of correspondents” that David Fitzpatrick finds in letters written by Irish emigrants to Australia must demonstrate at the very least he says, “the importance of letters in nineteenth-century lives” (23). Though Jane Harrison focuses on an earlier period, she concludes, as I do, that “in the absence of a formal postal system, these references are the inevitable record of correspondents efforts to despatch their letters” (16). Those references and complaints are worth paying attention to because they are recorded in a form known for imposing limits. As Helen Buss and Judith Beattie remind readers in their collection of undelivered letters to Hudson’s Bay men, “mail was costly and families used various methods to cut costs, including limiting the

number of sheets and filling them completely with writing, even cross writing messages on the page" (5). Readers should take seriously any matter considered important enough to merit attention on those precious scant sheets, even if it involves reflections on the circulation of said sheets. The preparation and circulation of mail is not a topic to be skipped over in search of content "more historical."

Details that describe methods of creation and transmission consistently appear in journal letters I've read, so I was struck by the absence of such references in the published version of O'Brien's journal letter. This seemed anomalous, though I thought it possible that O'Brien was an exception to the general rule. I couldn't know until I had seen the originals. There, as I suspected, were the multiple references to writing and transmitting of text that I had expected to see. The original of O'Brien's journal letter is riddled with references to the availability of paper and to the possibilities of circulation, especially as it relates to the mail. From the very first entry, she reflects in her writing on the tenuous communication link between herself and home as if she could cement those connections by writing. On 2 September 1828, she writes: "the only disadvantage of this road is that there are no certain post offices—but the Capt. has promised to send my letter should any opportunity occur" (m.s. Journal 1). Letters could be posted at sea, but the method was anything but reliable. An Australian diarist cited by Andrew Hassam describes the method when he explains how passengers would take journal letters, attached to lumps of coal, and throw them at passing ships headed back to England and Ireland (27). Being at sea complicated postal transmission, but being aboard a moving vessel presented further challenges that interrupted the very act of writing. On 6 September, recovering from a first bout of sea sickness, Gapper writes: "All this time writing was out of the question but to-day, Monday, I am better; and again able to hold up my head and find by fixing myself firmly between a chair & a box I manage again to wield my pen" . . . "and now I hope my journal will proceed regularly." On 20 September, she faces the problem of water in the cabin, noting "The effect of which you may see on my paper—only think if [it] had destroyed the manuscript which by the way has just incurred another risk for whilst examining my disaster a breeze caught some papers out of my hand and gave them a tour of the deck." If her writing was impeded by sea travel, it also faced the limits of a postal system that mandated writing on the single sheet: "I have given up all hopes of keeping my journal within post limits, so I go on now with all manner of gossip." She perseveres because it is an activity which brings her pleasure, as she admits on 10 September: "My highest enjoyment is that of writing my journal for then I feel that Ivey & Cara & perhaps a few other stray friends are in some sort partaking my pleasures."

The pleasures would be increased were it not for the distressing time lag between writing and reading, as she notes on 17 September: "If I could only transport this nonsense to you before it has ceased to be of interest to me I should still feel our intercourse unbroken—I try to forget that this is not the case & hope even against hope that when I reach the termination of our journey that I may find some friendly hand has satisfied my cravings." These are just a few of the many many references to writing that Miller omits from the published text, and these are only from the first journal that ends when O'Brien hits land. At that point, she commits her packet to the captain who will return it to England.

She begins the second installment with references to the uncertainty of the post: "I am going to close this letter & journal if my next should be long of coming be not surprised as it is probable that I shall send it thro the Quarter Master—be not dismayed also if the two predecessors of this are long on the road as they have been sent by private hands." O'Brien acknowledges too that changing the material conditions of circulation changes textual format. She writes for example: "we have just made a new plan for our house. It may yet be altered but as I am to send my journals in future in the Government bag, I am the less careful of my paper, so I will give it as well as I can" (Miller 135). On 21 May 1829, she offers advice to her correspondents when she writes "your plan of sending by the government packet frightens me; the letters will be so long in coming that I do not know how I shall bear the delay" (Miller 51).

During an excursion to Lake Simcoe, Gapper takes with her the "journal apparatus," held in a container at the front of her saddle, necessary to continue writing (Miller 55), and she explains later the difficulties of writing in a cabin in the woods: "sitting on the floor because I cannot sit upright anywhere else, I write this by the light of a lamp composed of a strip of rag & some pork fat in a saucer" (m.s. version; also Miller 60). When she gets back home, she notes that "after the bustle of our excursion, the quiet routine of home seemed to give me nothing to write. I had, besides, lost my key, & though I could write well without any of the accustomed means & appliances in the canoe, yet at home I fancied that I could not go on with my journal without opening my writing desk" (July 1829 m.s. journal 18). This passage, omitted from the published version, gives a glimpse at the material conditions for writing in Upper Canada whether in the wilderness or at home. Another such passage (also omitted from Miller's version) occurs shortly after when Gapper writes "I will try to go on with my journal—I was up at five this morning to finish my letter which Fanny took to the post for me" (8 August 1829 m.s. journal 18). The act of writing and transmitting the journal letter preoccupied Mary Gapper O'Brien and many other writers before 1851.

O'Brien's journal letter and its many references to how she wrote and circulated the text alerts readers to a culture of communications: there is Fanny taking her letter to Post, there are the friends and family redirecting the journal letter in Britain; she wrote for an audience who must have been tacitly interested in the vagaries of trying to write on a ship; there are her directions to Anthony to record his journeys. Most importantly, there is the similarity between her comments and the other journal letters written in the 1830s in which they all ruminate on the act of writing and posting.

O'Brien's journal letters have been recently recalled to scholars of book history by Heather Murray who uses them for evidence of an Upper Canadian reading culture. As proof, Murray points to O'Brien's attempts to develop a book society, modeled after a book society in Stowey, O'Brien's home county (Murray 27). Indeed, reading was an important topic for O'Brien, who also turned her hand to teaching in Upper Canada. The reading societies of early Canada that Murray names were "a system for generation, printing, distribution, reading, reviewing, and feeding back to the authors" (165), but surely the same could be said for the writing of journal letters and their dissemination among friends and family, along with the reading, the reviewing, and the feeding back to the authors in return letters to Upper Canada. The original journal letter (as opposed to the published journal) by O'Brien shows that far more emphasis was placed on the act of writing and transmitting the text than on almost any other topic. To be fair, the originals are so large that it would have been impossible to publish them as a whole. However, what Audrey Saunders Miller chose for the edited version in 1968 offers only part of the story about how the circulation of journal letters in and of itself provides evidence of a kind of writing society that connected settlers to home and helped them to establish the domestic ties of nationhood. Certainly, journal letters and their preoccupation with modes of transmission reveal historical conditions that limit the free exchange of correspondence, but more importantly, the journal letter's reflexivity about the process of writing itself beckons scholars to imagine new ways of reading both diaries and letters, and to recognize that transatlantic correspondence has consequences both real and imagined for the project of empire as it is entangled in the imaginary concept of "home."

Helen Buss, a noted Canadian scholar of autobiography, emphasizes the importance of women's journal letters in the narrative of colonial settlement when she describes them as "a public record of travel and settlement [and] a private record of their own development in the course of the new experiences offered them in the new land" (37) but the significance of the many comments on circulation I believe has implications for the establishment of nationhood and the construction of history. Nationalistic impulses were part

of the impetus for colonial postal reform, summarized in a *Globe and Mail* editorial from March of 1848, as being “prompted by a growing conviction that the social and commercial interests of the Colonies were intimately connected with the extension of their postal intercourse and that they truly regarded it . . . as the means in a new country of extending civilization” (News, 1). Kathleen Venema, a literary scholar who studies the correspondence of the Hudson’s Bay Company, argues along the same lines when she notices the importance of correspondence between men in the field and their headquarters. “The HBC’s unique geographical workplace,” she writes, “required equally unique discursive maintenance—specifically the exchange of hundreds of thousands of letters between men at the Company’s far flung posts and between those posts and headquarters in Montreal and London. Although the Hudson’s Bay Company’s extraordinary business success could, arguably, be attributed to its employees’ constant epistolary activity, little attention has yet been paid to . . . the actual letters” (2). Actual letters have been ignored in favour of a model of reading that attempts to ferret out historical truths. As Venema says in another article on epistolary practices in 19th century Canada, letters need to be read as “a unique technology for managing family relationships and kinship ties across vast distances in space, time, and ideological orientation” (147). Letters are not transparent windows onto historical moments, but are themselves a technology for managing social relationships and are embedded in an ideological process of nation and home making.

Some correspondents long for the home they left behind. Jane White writes to Eleanor Wallace in Ireland from Goderich, Ontario: “I wish I had you to walk beside, I would like one of those long walks with you up the Belfast road, sometimes when alone and I begin to think, I often wish for my old home and then change again in my notion and try to fancy myself happier here, we are never contented in this world it would seem.” Elsewhere the same writer says: “the letters I receive from Ireland seem to come from some land of dreams, it is so long since I left.” (1 August 1857). Home fades while she establishes a new home. More moving is a letter written after the period of this study by an Irish woman named Mrs. Thomas Welch which was sent from the Brockville post station to a Mr Hunter: “Mrs Welch wants to know if you are Margaret Gage’s son if you are will you oblige me by writing a few lines to me to let me know if she went home she was married to Daniel Hunter a soldier of the 4th regiment of foot he died in Sydney Australia I am Margerat [sic] Gage sister – be good enough to write at once and let me know if she ever went home.” Home is where she is not.

More often the writer attempts to put down roots. Lucy Peel writes optimistically in October 1833, “ We shall have been in our house a week

tomorrow and I already begin to feel more at home" (Little 64). Others seemed to settle in right away: Mary O'Brien writes in October 1828 that her arrival in New York City is not startling because "everything and everybody looked so perfectly English" (Miller 10). When she settled in Vaughan county in 1830 after her marriage, she sketched out the floor plans for her new home, conceding "domestic arrangements, I must confess are not much to my fancy, either in theory or practice" (Miller 105). Peel and O'Brien both felt they had a special duty to help establish the colony even though they express degrees of ambivalence. Peel would not feel completely settled until, following a Susanna Moodie-esque plot pattern, she buries her first-born child in Canadian soil, reminding us that the ties that bind are sometimes forged from tragedy. O'Brien aided her husband in his mission to provide homes for Negro settlers even though this scheme was not particularly successful.

Material realities shape discursive strategies, and so the process of negotiating the postal system becomes analogy for those settlers who seek to locate themselves at home. Home is open-ended: initially destabilized, always in process, and perhaps never finalized. While settlers sometimes exhibit complacency about the unified nature of a colonial community, the necessity of emigration, or the benevolence of imperial expansion, the journal letter conveys—both in material and literary practices—a dynamic evasion of closure on the issue of "home." This is true for writers of both sexes, but I have concentrated particularly on female correspondents in this paper for the reason that "colonialism took shape around the Victorian invention of domesticity and the idea of the home" (36), as Anne McClintock says, at precisely a point in history when women were figures as the special guardians of the realm. D. M. R. Bentley pays attention to the specifics of settler subjectivity in his analysis of Catherine Parr Traill when he says that "accommodation in both its senses of housing and adaptation has been a nodal point at which, for many female emigrants especially, aesthetic and domestic concerns coincide as part of the work of reconciling imprinted assumptions with new realities, and vice versa." The journal letters of female settlers, shuttling between two homes, open up two possible colonial readings which would have us realize either the un-locatability of empire or the elasticity of its connective webs. It is tempting to read the nuances and shades of meaning that separate the Irish settlers from the English in their reflections on home and on the necessity of colonial expansion, but it seems to me that all the writers complicate the issue of women's participation in furthering colonialism through domesticity. All writers seem to evade closure on the issue of "home" meaning that they are not able to simply and easily transfer the notion of home to a colonial space.

At the margins of empire in the days before Victoria, Mary Gapper

O'Brien was scribbling away, one of a group of educated women negotiating the circulation of their letters through a web of personal favours and shipping and commercial networks to form the kind of interconnected community that begins to create a home and a nation. In a way, these informal postal networks are much like present-day virtual communities, which have been described as "unified communities. . .not imagined through particular mass media texts, but rather lived through negotiating particular locations and relationships within texts that migrate through particular socio-technical apparatuses" (Mizuko Ito 341). 1830s writing culture is shaped by the socio-technical apparatus of the postal system. In daily or weekly practices of writing and dispatching, Gapper O'Brien and correspondents like her forged a unified community by "negotiating particular locations and relationships within texts"; the correspondents construct or write a home at the margins of empire. O'Brien, for one, could not leave the margins empty. She writes: "I have just remembered Cara's injunction to leave margin which in my desire to make the most of my paper I have hitherto forgotten." The margins of the letter, the margins of the empire are not an empty space but filled in a way that is dictated by the constraints of their material conditions.

Focusing on the material conditions of the circulation of journal letters can help us "conceive of the empire as a series of historically (*and I would add materially*) contingent networks that connected disparate localities into circuits of exchange and debate" to quote Toni Ballantyne in her article on the role of archives in the empire (Ballantyne 104). As Rita Kranidis says in her study of Victorian women's emigration, "the study of Victorian women's emigration to the colonies and dominions contributes to present examinations of how cultural boundaries get negotiated by calling into question their very existence" (1). Journal letters move in a circuit of impermanent postal routes and thereby unsettle the clear divide of home and elsewhere, departure and arrival, centre and margin, public and private, empire and colony. Journal letters circulate in an epistolary space that is neither here nor there. The fluid notion of "home" that emerges from reading both the material and literary practices of these letters serve to undermine the concept of the geographically-bounded nation state used to underwrite histories of colony and empire; it works to open up the idea of "nation" and "home" to a more critical reading by reminding us of their uncertain place within a transnational network of correspondence and a dynamic traffic of information that once worked to weave together an empire.