

“Underskin Journals of Susanna Moodie” Atwood Editing Atwood

“**H**usband, in Retrospect” is one of a handful of unpublished poems that can be found among Margaret Atwood’s drafts and revisions of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto.¹ The poem was included in an early version of the manuscript before being excised from the final collection, and it exists in four drafts in the archives: a handwritten version in a notebook and three typed drafts, two of which are marked up in Atwood’s handwriting. The fourth version is clearly her final attempt. “Husband, in Retrospect” provides insight into Atwood’s creative process during her work on the *Journals*, a poetic reimagining of early Canadian pioneer Susanna Moodie’s memoirs, *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852) and *Life in the Clearings Versus the Bush* (1853). Atwood has been vocal about the rationale behind her adaptation of her source texts. Finding Moodie’s tone to be opaque and overly genteel, Atwood wrote her cycle of poems in an attempt to express what Moodie left unsaid in her works. In her exploration of the pioneer’s psychological experience, Atwood focuses on what she perceives to be the earlier writer’s ambivalence about her new country. In constructing this unspoken narrative, Atwood’s project does not aim to resolve but to expand on existing fissures and moments of doubleness in Moodie’s texts.

In “Husband, in Retrospect,” Atwood’s Susanna Moodie dwells on the changes that her husband, John Dunbar Moodie, has undergone since the family moved from the bush to a comparatively civilized life in Belleville, Ontario. Susanna² characterizes her husband as distant and circumscribed

by civilized life in the clearings, but she reflects that his complex relationship with his new country had made him a multi-faceted and dynamic man in the bush. In their home in the wilderness, the characters' individual ambivalent experiences provided the basis for their intimacy. Reading the four drafts of the poem in succession reveals that with each new draft, Atwood worked to make the husband more emotionally and physically distant from the speaker by removing concrete images and using increasingly abstract language. Finally, Atwood cut the poem from the collection. A consideration of this double movement of development and effacement demonstrates that, while "Husband, in Retrospect" presents a thorough portrait of John Dunbar and resolves the Moodies' individual experiences of pioneer life, Atwood's editing and her final exclusion of the poem point to her decision to avoid this moment of narrative resolution. Instead, the published collection puts forth an ambiguous representation of Susanna's husband, and the Moodies remain detached from one another. The pair experience "doubleness," as they remain unable to resolve their conflicted relationship with the land and with each other. In this way, Atwood's editorial process in the drafts of "Husband, in Retrospect" is representative of her creative project in the *Journals* as a whole, shedding light on the poet's effort to enhance rather than reconcile moments of contradiction and ambiguity in Moodie's memoirs.

These drafts provide a glimpse into what appears to be Atwood editing Atwood without the apparent interference of any third parties. They offer a portrait of a poet whose work begins with simple and expository drafts and who then edits her work to increase its complexity. In order to share Atwood's composition process and to elucidate its significance for research on the *Journals* specifically, and for Atwood scholarship more broadly, we have included all four drafts of "Husband, in Retrospect" from the archives as well as a compiled genetic edition of the poem that incorporates all four drafts as appendices to this article.³

Like much of the scholarship on the *Journals*, this article begins with a consideration of Atwood's "Afterword" to the collection. In her short essay that comprises the final pages of the first edition of the collection, Atwood outlines her interpretation of the historical Moodie, based on her experience of reading *Roughing It in the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings*. She claims that

Mrs. 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. (62)

Atwood also observes that Moodie's response to her new country is representative of Canada's national identity, that "the national mental illness . . . of Canada is paranoid schizophrenia" (62). Atwood's observations have provided the springboard for criticism of the collection that explores the character of Susanna and her transformation in Canada. Early scholars of the *Journals* used Atwood's reading of Moodie in the "Afterword" to argue that the Susanna of the poems initially denies her divided identity but eventually comes to accept what Atwood calls "the inescapable doubleness of her own vision" (63).⁴ Yet recent studies are more critical of this straightforward application of the "Afterword" to the poems and of Atwood's conclusions about Moodie.⁵ Susan Johnston, for example, argues that the "Afterword" has not only distorted criticism of Atwood's poems but has also strongly influenced analyses of *Roughing It in the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings* (28). In order to counter the authority of the "Afterword," Johnston examines Atwood's reading of Moodie, discussing the moments of rupture in Moodie's texts that inspired Atwood's own poetic project.

Indeed, several critics have shown that the "Afterword" offers a glimpse into Atwood's creative process and functions as an interpretive model for the poems as a responsive form—Atwood is as much a reader of Moodie in this collection as she is a creator of a new work.⁶ Atwood recalls that she felt compelled to read Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings* only after dreaming that she had composed an opera based on the life of Susanna Moodie. She was disappointed with what she found in the two memoirs, reflecting that "the prose was discursive and ornamental and the books had little shape: they were collections of disconnected anecdotes" (62). She was, however, immediately attracted to the contradictions that she perceived in the texts. Of these instances of conflicted expression, Atwood has since noted:

What kept bringing me back to the subject—and to Susanna Moodie's own work—were the hints, the gaps between what was said and what hovered, just unsaid, between the lines, and the conflict between what Mrs. Moodie felt she ought to think and feel and what she actually did think and feel. (Staines xi)

This narrative that Atwood crafts about her composition process provides an entry point for understanding Atwood's project as she adapted Moodie's work. Atwood suggests that the uncomfortable relationship between Moodie's sense of decorum and her fraught experience of her new country resulted in writing that is filled with inconsistencies. Yet Atwood's project does not involve simply trying to tell Moodie's story as if Moodie had not

been limited by the decorum of her upbringing; instead, she aims to expand on the schizophrenic ambiguities in the source texts, and to emphasize the clash between Moodie's sense of propriety and her sense of despair.

In the box that contains the manuscript of the *Journals*, there is a title page that offers two tentative titles for the collection: "The Underskin Journals of Susanna Moodie," which is typed, and the "Unspoken Poems of Susanna Moodie," which is written underneath the first title in Atwood's hand. While Atwood chose neither as the final title for her collection, they are nonetheless significant, as they signal the poet's interest in the silences in her source texts.⁷ One such "gap" in *Roughing It in the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings* is Moodie's curious omission of a thorough portrait of John Dunbar Moodie.⁸ In the *Journals*, Atwood draws attention to this absence in her development of a narrative about Moodie's husband. In "The Planters" and "The Wereman," he appears to be caught, like his wife, between the customs of his old life and the challenges of his new life. In "The Planters," Susanna watches her husband and several other men as they tend to their meagre rows of crops on a barren stretch of cleared land. As she observes the men attempting to cultivate the earth, she reflects, "I know / none of them believe they are here. / They deny the ground they stand on, / pretend this dirt is the future" (10-13). The men do not see that the wilderness is affecting them as long as they continue to believe in their power over the land. In contrast, Susanna has "[opened her] eyes . . . to these trees, to this particular sun" and is aware that the land is acting upon her (16-17).

In "The Wereman," John Dunbar appears to have let go, in part, of the illusion that he has control over the land. Like "The Planters," this poem is about Susanna's growing perception of the ways in which the land is changing her and her husband.⁹ She recognizes that her husband is beginning to transform, to merge with the land, as she wonders, "Unheld by my sight / what does he change into / what other shape / blends with the under- / growth" (6-10). Yet Susanna allows for the possibility that John Dunbar's perception is beginning to alter as well, as she muses, "He may change me also / with the fox eye, the owl / eye, the eightfold / eye of the spider" (18-21). As Roslyn Jolly notes, "in 'The Wereman' the warping of perception becomes multiple. The choice is not merely between a reassuring illusion and a devastating reality, but among a whole array of forms and guises which familiar things may assume" (307). Jolly notes that this "plurality of existence (or non-existence) is exciting" but ultimately frightening for Susanna; the title of the poem "conjures the terrifying image

of intimacy become dangerously strange as the husband is identified with a monster” (307). While other poems in the collection suggest that Susanna is experiencing an internal division that is analogous to her husband’s transformation, she cannot relate to him. She imagines him as “an X, a concept / defined against a blank” (2-3). She acknowledges that when he returns from the forest, “it may be / only [her] idea of him / . . . returning / with him hiding behind it” (13-17). Neither “The Planters” nor “The Wereman” provides any narrative closure about the relationship between Susanna and her husband; this is in stark contrast to the accounts of Susanna’s children, whose lives are discussed with a tragic finality.

Atwood’s attempt to capture that which hovers “just unsaid” in Moodie’s sketches of John Dunbar Moodie involves the construction of a narrative of the couple’s growing estrangement that focuses on the fictional Susanna’s inability to fully understand or represent her husband in their new life in Canada. Crucially, “Husband, in Retrospect,” a poem that depicts the exciting aspects of plurality and the shared experience of multiple perception as an opportunity for intimacy, was left unpublished. Our ensuing interpretation of the final draft of “Husband, in Retrospect” explores the closure that the poem provides; we then demonstrate, however, that Atwood’s composition process in the four extant drafts reveals her resistance to such narrative resolution. Just as Atwood was interested in what Moodie left unsaid in her work, we are concerned with the penumbral aspects of character in Atwood’s text, carrying on a reading practice of seeking out the shadows lingering in the text.

A close reading of the final draft of “Husband, in Retrospect,” followed by an examination of the revisions made in the preceding three drafts, demonstrates that Atwood creates narrative resolution in the poem, and then obscures the markers of that resolution. In its fourth and final version, “Husband, in Retrospect” suggests that division—within the self and in relation to the environment—need not be equated with separation; it may occasion an intimacy between individuals that makes room for difference and multiplicity. While in the published *Journals*, John Dunbar’s psychological complexity emerges through Susanna’s inability to represent him, “Husband, in Retrospect” allows Atwood to have Susanna express her growing understanding of her husband’s transformation in the bush and depict the intimacy that the couple experienced in that space. The opening stanza begins with a movement out of the wilderness, as Susanna describes an unnamed “they” who “[take] over” her husband and invite the couple out

of the bush (1-2). As this movement away from the wild landscape takes place and the husband and wife turn toward civilization, Susanna watches him

diminish
to a signer of important papers
whose eating is rimmed by our decent plates
who has many waistcoats
and plays the flute after dinner. (3-7)

This image of a diminished man permeates the rest of the poem as the speaker turns nostalgically to look back at the husband and lover she knew in the bush. As the poem enacts the retrospective look its title promises, what else is lost in the shift from hardship to decent plates, waistcoats, and after dinner melodies becomes clear.

In the third and fourth stanzas, an image of the husband in the past materializes. He is defined by action and exertion, and he is remembered as overturning and feasting on the rural landscape. Although his exploitation of the land appears to be boundless, the earth does not sustain him; in Susanna's recollection, he "fed at a crude table / on dandelions and was left empty" (11-12). This image of the husband's failure to be satisfied suggests that he is unable to fully control the land and it is that lack of mastery that creates a space for the wilderness to begin to alter him. As in "The Wereman," the husband of this poem is undergoing a transformation in the bush, beginning to experience a version of double selfhood that parallels Susanna's own psychological journey. The shift between the opening stanza and the poet's retrospective gaze describes a man snatched from the natural world, whose rugged intensity and strength is domesticated through this departure. As the poem proceeds, the reader is led further away from the chastened husband of the present moment and is confronted with the rough and vital man in the bush.

The reader also begins to glimpse the dynamics between husband and wife in the final section of the poem, as Atwood elucidates the fraught and complex space of their connection. In these stanzas, a vivid parallel is drawn between the couple's relationship with the land and their relationship to one another. Susanna describes a man "who was early in history," as if to suggest not merely his status as an early Canadian pioneer, but also as one who exists (in time and in disposition) closer to a state of nature rather than to the burgeoning colonial establishment in the clearings. Susanna's description of her husband's relation to time is followed by a description of their physical relationship:

who pioneered across my body
and spaded children
out of me like potatoes
who whistled in the plank rooms
whose love was avid with poverty (14-18)

Here, the earlier image of the husband clearing the land is conflated with his sexual labour, a cultivation of his wife's body. The image of a lover who "pioneered across my body" suggests an intimacy that is fertile but is also a violent colonization. He harvests Susanna's body along with the earth but remains somehow impoverished, an image that recalls his relationship with the land and suggests that an exchange is taking place between husband and wife: Susanna continues to affect and alter him. Atwood allows this tension between detachment and intimacy to remain, the duality between love and violence to linger. This reading is further reified by the poem's final lines, which illustrate the mutual vulnerabilities of the couple in a setting characterized, paradoxically, by proximity and distance.

At the end of the poem, Susanna describes her husband in terms that capture the duality that was engendered in their relationship in the bush. He was a man

who was close to me as moss
who was faceless and unspoken
and without a shape and vague, a far
night shore (19-22)

These final lines demonstrate that, while Susanna's relationship with the land remains entirely separate from her husband's psychological journey, the Moodies are drawn together through their parallel experiences of double selfhood. Their distance draws them closer to one another instead of violently dividing them, for it parallels the contradictions they face together: settlers in a new land and exiles from the old, cultured colonizers cum frontier farmers in unforgiving terrain, and, finally, the dualities that are innate in intimate relationships. As well as revealing the complexities of the immigrant experience, "Husband, in Retrospect" lays bare the multiple and fluid nature of human relations. The wife's experience of her husband in the bush is at once full and empty, vital and bare; he is "close as moss," while at the same time, "unspoken," "vague," and "a far night shore."

The intimacy shared between the husband and wife is avid, vulnerable, and strong—much like their troubled and complex connections to the wild land. These are the very contradictions and moments of multiplicity mourned by the poetic voice. The poem's title "Husband, in Retrospect"

suggests an elegiac reflection on, perhaps, a deceased husband. Yet it is not death being lamented here; it is the loss of a multi-faceted and dynamic lover. Life in the clearings has domesticated and flattened the man who once appeared to be everything at once; a “faceless” possessor of an ardent love, he once teemed with contradictions and was a fully affecting force of and in nature. In the clearings, Susanna is able to realize the extent to which her husband was also trying to adapt to the wildness of the Canadian frontier.

In “Husband, in Retrospect,” Atwood offers a detailed exploration of John Dunbar Moodie that is absent in *Roughing It in the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings*, fulfilling her stated objective of investigating what Moodie leaves unsaid in her writings. Yet Atwood’s many edits to the poem reveal that her project is twofold: she is not only interested in creating an unspoken narrative, but she simultaneously aims to enhance the conflicts that arise from Moodie’s efforts to express her experience. Indeed, the drafts of “Husband, in Retrospect” provide insight into Atwood’s creative process as she approaches her source texts, as well as elucidating her reading of Moodie. Atwood begins by focusing on what Moodie does reveal about her husband in her memoirs, and then works to imagine Moodie’s possible unspoken feelings surrounding her relationship. Finally, Atwood attends to the second part of her project as she begins to make cuts to sections of the poem in which the character Susanna approaches a more capacious understanding of her partner. With these edits, Atwood renders John Dunbar more distant from both the speaker and the reader, drawing attention to what she perceives as the historical Moodie’s inability to fully reflect on and portray her relationship with her husband.

The earliest versions of “Husband, in Retrospect” can be found in a series of notebooks in the Atwood archives, alongside other first drafts of poems that would later comprise *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. These initial verses appear to be poetic notes, penned in the earliest stages of composition while reading *Roughing It in the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings*. In many ways, these notes may be read as an imaginative transcription of the texts; Atwood extracts details and episodes articulated in the memoirs as the basis for her own narrative. For example, one untitled poem in the notebooks, which is clearly an antecedent for “Husband, in Retrospect,” begins with the stark announcement,

My husband was Dunbar Moodie
 who ~~could~~ can play quite well upon the flute
 & who got me into all this in the first place
 By being a youngerson [sic] & consequently thus penniless. (1-4)

Here, Atwood explores details of the husband offered in the source texts and begins to translate them into poetic character. Susanna describes his musicality, his history, and his poverty. In another poetic sketch, the speaker reflects on the material wealth that has accompanied life in the clearings. She reflects,

We are comfortably
off, and my husband
is the sherriff [sic] of Belleville,
and I possess again
a decent set of china. (13-17)

In the initial stages of composition, Atwood gleans details of pioneer life and personal struggle from the source texts. Throughout these expository notes, Atwood toys with what is expressed in the source texts and reveals her nascent ideas surrounding Moodie's unspoken perceptions of her husband. She then slowly transforms the historical figure into a poetic re-creation.

The four main drafts of "Husband, in Retrospect" emerge from these notes. After composing an untitled first draft in a notebook, Atwood gives each of her subsequent drafts a different title: the second draft is entitled "Looking Back on the Bush," followed by "Looking Back on her Husband," and a final version called "Husband, in Retrospect." Each draft shows evidence of revision. As Atwood moves from the notes to the untitled first draft, her distance from Moodie's texts increases and a fascination with what is left unsaid grows; she hunts for "the hints, the gaps between what was said and what hovered, just unsaid, between the lines." Atwood's creation of an unspoken narrative in the ensuing drafts involves removing referents to the source texts, including historical context and exposition, while imagining Moodie's suppressed responses to the events that she narrates. Through this process of composition, Atwood creates the poetic persona Susanna, a figure whose emotional state and charged relationship with her husband and the landscape emerge from the poet's interpretation and manipulation of Moodie's memoirs.

As Atwood constructs her own account of the character Susanna's experience, she also edits her narrative. Her revisions reveal a resistance to the closure that emerges when she begins to voice Moodie's omissions: an examination of the editing process reveals that Atwood has both developed the characters' relationship and obscured the details surrounding it. With each draft and its revisions, the figure of the husband is rendered more distant from the speaker and the reader, and the unspoken narrative of alienation that Atwood has sought out in Moodie's original is amplified.

For example, the prior intensity of the relationship between Susanna and her husband is hinted at when she recalls in the first three drafts of the poem how his “tallow candle / fever smoked through the rasped / plank room” (“Looking Back on her Husband,” 21-23). These lines evoke the material conditions of pioneer life that Moodie focuses on, but if “fever” can also be read figuratively as a symbol of fiery intensity, these lines become an evocation of their life together and the intimacy they once shared. The “fever” that once smoked through the rooms of their home evokes a permeating and constant heat between them, a fire, a longing that has since dissipated. This stanza, however, is removed completely from the final version. Also, in the earlier drafts, there are images of the husband’s intensity and unconstrained energy that are muted in the poem’s final version: while in the first three drafts, the husband is a hungry, consuming figure who “gorged at a table / of earthenware and scant propriety,” (14-15), his later incarnation is stripped of this power: he simply “fed at a crude table / on dandelions and was left empty” (11-12). These revisions reveal Atwood’s movement away from a concrete and dynamic version of John Dunbar and toward the inaccessible and shadowy husband of the published collection. Atwood’s choice to excise “Husband, in Retrospect” from the final collection may be understood as a reification of the theme of thwarted intimacy with which the poetic speaker grapples. This last editorial excision is the culmination of a composition process that has exponentially effaced the details of the source texts and looked to exacerbate the schisms between Susanna and her husband provoked by the move from the bush to life in the clearings.

The only hint as to the intended position of “Husband, in Retrospect” within the collection is the number nine written in the top corner of the second draft, which might indicate that the poem was meant to be the ninth in the second journal alongside poems set during Susanna’s years in the clearings when she is dreaming and reminiscing about the bush. The other poems in this particular draft of the *Journals* are also numbered in a sequence that roughly resembles the order of the final collection, with some minor differences. “On the Death of her Other Children” is numbered ten, suggesting that Atwood planned to have “Husband, in Retrospect” contribute to the theme of loss that is present in this section. In her decision to cut the poem, however, Atwood withholds the closure that “Husband, in Retrospect” may have provided. Ultimately, she is more interested in the fraught communion between the speaker and her readers. In “A Bus Along

St. Clair: December,” the final poem of the published *Journals*, Atwood offers a resolution that is reminiscent of the communion between husband and wife in “Husband, in Retrospect.” She explores an acceptance of openness and the possibility that Canadian people are connected to one another through their divided experiences of the land. The ghost or spirit of Susanna haunts the city of Toronto and reflects: “Right now, the snow / is no more familiar / to you than it was to me” (15-18). In this moment of recognition of a common relationship with the land, Susanna becomes “the old woman / sitting across from [the reader] on the bus” (22-23). She lingers among the living in Canada because they share her experience of divided selfhood. In this way, she is both distant from and close to those who have inherited the country.

The haunting final image of the collection is Susanna’s revelation of the reader’s schizophrenic inheritance of a divided selfhood. The speaker describes the old woman’s destruction of the walls and the ceiling and exclaims,

Turn, look down:
there is no city
this is the centre of a forest
your place is empty. (25-31)

The stark image of emptiness that closes the *Journals* is evocative of Atwood’s larger composition process. This process, as it unfolds in the four drafts of “Husband, in Retrospect,” reveals Atwood’s attraction to an unspoken narrative that is compelled by Moodie’s own crisis of representation in her memoirs. Although Atwood’s artistic and editorial choices give rise to poems that have a distant relationship to their source texts, they nonetheless return, in their final lines, to “the centre of a forest,” retreating to a lost frontier.

Appendix A: Drafts 1-4 of "Husband, in Retrospect"

Untitled

When the Establishment took over my husband
 [and ~~took~~ invited us ~~from the~~ out of the bush]
 I watched him harden
 Into a solid ~~2-dimensional~~ official figure
 a daytime signer of papers, 5
 Who eats ~~nonchalant~~ easily
~~dines~~ from the ~~new plates~~ china decent plates
 [Putters in the ~~garden~~ among the ~~nonchalant~~ shrubbery]
 and plays (tolerably) the flute after dinner.

who spread himself once through the clearing acres 10
 of ~~like~~ energy
 an energy, an effort
 uprooting the stumps of trees
 who gorged at a table
 of earthenware + scant propriety; who was 15
 early in time, who
 pioneered across my body
 and wrenched children ~~from me~~ out of me
 like potatoes; who made crude music,
 whose fever burned smoked through the rasped wooden 20
 rooms, a cheap candle

who as close to me
 as moss, who was faceless and unspoken
 and vague as a night shore

Looking Back on the Bush

When the Establishment took over
my husband
and invited us out of the bush
I watched him harden
into an official figure, 5
ceramic solid,
a daytime signer of papers

who eats with choice from the decent plates,
putters among the shrubberies
and plays (tolerably) the flute after dinner; 10

who spread himself once through the clearing acres
an energy, an effort
uprooting the stumps of trees

who gorged at a table
of earthenware and scant propriety 15

who was early in time
who pioneered across my body
and wrenched children
out of me like potatoes

who made crude music 20

whose fever smoked through the rasped wooden
rooms, a cheap candle

who was close to me
as moss who was faceless and unspoken
and without a shape and 25
vague as a night shore

Looking Back on her Husband

When they took over
 my husband
 and invited us out of the bush
 I watched him harden
 into an official figure, 5
 ceramic-solid
 a daytime signer of papers

whose eating is rimmed by our decent plates
 who putters among the shrubberies
 and plays (tolerably) the flute after dinner; 10

Who spread himself once through the clearing across
 an effort
 uprooting the stumps of trees

who gorged at a table
 of earthenware and scant propriety 15

who was early in history

who pioneered across my body
 and wrenched children
 out of me like potatoes

who made crude music 20

whose tallow candle
 fever smoked through the rasped
 plank room

whose love was avid with poverty

who was close to me as moss 25

 who was faceless and unspoken
 and without a shape and vague, a far
 night shore

Husband, in Retrospect

When they took over my husband
and invited us out of the bush
I watched him diminish
to a signer of important papers

whose eating is rimmed by our decent plates 5
who had many waistcoats
and plays the flute after dinner;

Who spread himself once through the clearing across
an effort
uprooting the stumps of trees 10

who fed at a crude table
on dandelions and was left empty

who was early in history

who pioneered across my body
and spaded children 15
out of me like potatoes

who whistled in the plank rooms

whose love was avid with poverty

who was close to me as moss

who was faceless and unspoken 20
and without a shape and vague, a far
night shore

Appendix B: Husband, in Retrospect (genetic version)

Words or phrases that have been changed from earlier drafts are indicated in footnotes demarcated by line numbers, while words or phrases that have been completely excised from the final draft are integrated into the poem, demarcated by square brackets. The letters A, B, C, and D refer to the four drafts of the poem: “Untitled” (A), “Looking Back on the Bush”(B), “Looking Back on her Husband” (C), and “Husband, in Retrospect”(D).

When they¹ took over my husband
and invited us out of the bush
I watched him diminish
to a signer of important papers

whose eating is rimmed by our decent plates 5
who had many waistcoats
and plays [(tolerably)]^{A,B,C} the flute after dinner;

Who spread himself once through the clearing acres
[an energy,]^{A,B} an effort 10
uprooting the stumps of trees

who fed at a crude table
on dandelions and was left empty

who was early in history

-
- 1 they] A,B: the Establishment.
2 invited us out of] A: took us from the
3 diminish] A,B,C: harden
4 to a signer of important papers] A: into a solid 2 dimensional / figure a daytime signer of papers B,C: into an official figure, / ceramic-solid / a daytime signer of papers
5 whose . . . plates] A: who eats ~~nonchalant~~ easily / dines from the new plates B: who eats with choice from the decent plates
6 who had many waistcoats] A: putters in the garden nonchalant among the shrubbery B,C: who putters among the shrubberies
11-12 who fed . . . empty] A,B,C: who gorged at a table / of earthenware and scant propriety
13 history] A,B: time

who pioneered across my body
and spaded children 15
out of me like potatoes

who whistled in the plank rooms

[whose tallow candle
fever smoked through the rasped
plank room]^C 20

whose love was avid with poverty

who was close to me as moss

who was faceless and unspoken
and without a shape and vague [as]^{A,B} a far
night shore 25

15 spaded] A,B,C: wrenched

17 whistled . . . rooms] A,B,C: made crude music

18-20 whose . . . room] A: whose fever burned through the rasped wooden / rooms, a cheap
candle B: whose fever smoked through rasped wooden / rooms, a cheap candle

NOTES

- 1 Grateful thanks is due to Margaret Atwood for permission to reproduce her poem, "Husband in Retrospect," and to her assistant Sarah Webster for her invaluable assistance. "Husband in Retrospect," by Margaret Atwood. Copyright Margaret Atwood. Reprinted with permission of the author. From the Fisher Rare Book Library, Atwood Archives at the University of Toronto, MS Coll 200 Box 12. We would also like to thank Jennifer Toews and the staff of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, as well as Heather Murray, Marlene Goldman, Colleen Franklin, and Melissa Auclair for their editing, input, and support. Finally, we would like to thank David Galbraith, for helping spark this work.
- 2 Atwood's characters in *The Journals* will be referred to throughout the article as Susanna and as John Dunbar to distinguish them from the historical individuals.
- 3 Helmut Reichenbächer's (2000) genetic analysis of the early drafts of *The Edible Woman* helps demonstrate that Atwood's tendency to favour ambiguity is consistent throughout her early writing career: Reichenbächer detects "a gradual elimination of material from the six extant drafts. This process results in gaps which the reader is expected to fill while interpreting the text" (266). Thank you to the anonymous reader of this article for pointing us to this work.
- 4 R. P. Bilan's "Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*" (1978) is an example of this kind of uncomplicated application of the "Afterword" to the poems.
- 5 Diane Relke (1983) rejects the "Afterword" as "a convenient interpretive crutch that has encouraged critical laziness" (35); Jacqui Smyth (1992) argues that the "Afterword" is a part of the *Journals*, but that it should be subject to analysis alongside the poems.
- 6 See Sherrill E. Grace (1980), Laura Groening (1983), Ann Boutelle (1988), Kim Stringer (2002), and Faye Hammill (2003).
- 7 Other titles that Atwood considered and are found in her drafts include "Unspoken poems of S. Moodie, recorded by Margaret Atwood," "Susanna Moodie Autobiography from an Undetermined Location," and "Susanna Moodie: Autobiographies From an Unknown Location."
- 8 Hammill (2003) notes that the edition of Moodie's text that Atwood used for her poetry collection was likely the abridged 1962 New Canadian Library edition of *Roughing It in the Bush*, which for a long time was the most widely-available edition. John Dunbar Moodie has much more of a presence in the unabridged version, published by Virago in 1986. For example, in its original entirety, *Roughing It in the Bush* has four chapters and several poems by John Dunbar Moodie (see Gray 2006).
- 9 For other discussions of "The Wereman," see Judith McCombs (1981), Susan Johnston (1992), Erin Smith (1993), and Faye Hammill (2003).

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