"A Glorious Madness": Susanna Moodie and the Spiritualist Movement

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The essay is divided into three major sections. The middle contains three letters written by Susanna Moodie in Belleville in the late 1850s to Richard Bentley, her English publisher. These detail her growing interest in and resistance to the spiritualist movement, an interest which culminates in her active involvement, described in the final letter. Section I provides information about the movement's origins and development as well as about Moodie's reading and her acquaintance with the famous Kate Fox. Section III locates early signs of Moodie's interest in matters spiritual in her English writing prior to 1832 and in certain parts of *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852).

Le présent article se divise en trois sections principales. La deuxième comporte trois lettres de Susanna Moodie, composées à Belleville dans les années prochain 1860 et destinées à Richard Bentley, son éditeur anglais. Ces lettres mettent en lumière l'intérêt qu'elle portait de plus en plus au spiritualisme — aussi bien que la résistance que ce mouvement lui suscitait en même temps — intérêt qui aboutit à sa participation active, comme témoigne la dernière lettre. La première section traite de la genèse et de l'évolution du mouvement, des lectures de Moodie et de sa connaissance de la fameuse Kate Fox. La troisième section relate dans les écrits anglais que sortit Moodie avant 1832, ainsi que dans certaines parties de *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852), les premières indications de l'intérêt qu'éveillait en elle le spiritualisme.

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In Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* there is an undercurrent of fascination with man's inner or spiritual life which sometimes surfaces in explicit passages. In "The Charivari," for instance, Moodie discusses prophetic "voices of the soul" in which few persons "have had the courage boldly to declare their belief" but which, she testifies, have functioned "truly" in various periods of her life, including the years immediately preceding her departure for Canada. In "Of a Change in Our Prospects" she writes of another manifestation of such voices, emphasizing the "mysterious intercourse between the spirits of those who are bound to each other by the tender ties of friendship and affection," even when they are physically distant from one another. The stimulus for her remarks in this chapter was her recollection of the curiously exact coincidence of communications between herself and her husband during the winter of 1838-39, while she remained in the bush and he was away serving as paymaster to the militia in the Victoria district. Having grounded her subject in personal experience, she writes generally about the potential of man's "inner life":

A purer religion, a higher standard of moral and intellectual training, may in time reveal all this. Man still remains a half-reclaimed savage; the leaven of Christianity is slowly and surely working its way, but it has not yet changed the whole lump, or transformed the deformed into the beauteous Child of God. Oh, for that glorious day! It is coming. The dark clouds of humanity are already tinged with the golden radiance of the dawn. . . .

This expectation of millenium is not only representative of Moodie's long-standing optimism, it is also very much in accord with the temper of the time and may even be seen as her personal response to a remarkable social, religious and scientific movement of mid-century North America, the rise of spiritualism.

Although we do not know exactly when "Of a Change in Our Prospects" was written, well before *Roughing It in the Bush* was sent to England for publication Moodie would have been aware of the growing momentum of spiritualist movement through the American papers which she read regularly, the New York Tribune and the Albion. She may also have known of the Fox family's connection with the Belleville area. The two youngest Fox daughters were credited with initiating the movement in 1848 in the United States and were much in the news thereafter. In any case, Moodie's fascination with spirit manifestations, her reading on the subject, and her acquaintance with at least one member of that famous family became the subjects of extensive commentary in her correspondence with her publisher, Richard Bentley.

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