

Classic Poetry Series

Susanna Moodie
- poems -

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Susanna Moodie()

Susanna Moodie was born in Bungay, on the River Waveney in Suffolk, the younger sister of three other writers, including Agnes Strickland and Catharine Parr Traill. She wrote her first children's book in 1822, and published other children's stories in London, including books about Spartacus and Jugurtha. In London she was also involved in the Anti-Slavery Society, transcribing the narrative of the former Caribbean slave Mary Prince. On 4 April 1831, she married John Moodie, a retired officer who had served in the Napoleonic Wars. In 1832, with her husband and daughter, Moodie emigrated to Canada. The family settled on a farm in Douro township, near Lakefield, north of Peterborough, Upper Canada, where her brother Samuel worked as a surveyor, and where artifacts are housed in a museum. Founded by Samuel, the museum was formerly an Anglican church and overlooks the Otonabee river where Susanna once canoed. It also displays artifacts concerning both Samuel and Catharine Parr Traill.

Moodie continued to write in Canada and her letters and journals contain valuable information about life in the colony. She observed life in what was then the backwoods of Ontario, including native customs, the climate, the wildlife, relations between the Canadian population and recent American, and the strong sense of community and the communal work, known as "bees" (which she, incidentally, hated). She suffered through the economic depression in 1836, and her husband served in the militia against William Lyon Mackenzie in the Upper Canada Rebellion in 1837.

As a middle-class Englishwoman Moodie did not particularly enjoy "the bush", as she called it. In 1840 she and her husband moved to Belleville, which she referred to as "the clearings". She studied the Family Compact and became sympathetic to the moderate reformers led by Robert Baldwin, while remaining critical of radical reformers such as Lyon Mackenzie. This caused problems for her husband, who shared her views, but, as sheriff of Belleville, had to work with members and supporters of the Family Compact.

In 1852, she published *Roughing it in the Bush*, detailing her experiences on the farm in the 1830s. In 1853, she published *Life in the Clearings Versus the Bush*, about her time in Belleville. She remained in Belleville, living with various family members (particularly her son Robert) after her husband's death, and lived to see Canadian Confederation. She died in Toronto, Ontario on 8 April 1885 and is buried in Belleville Cemetery.

Her greatest success was *Roughing it in the Bush*. The inspiration for the memoir came from a suggestion by her editor that she write an "emigrant's guide" for British people looking to move to Canada. Moodie wrote of the trials and tribulations she found as a "New Canadian", rather than the advantages to be had in the colony. She claimed that her intention was not to discourage immigrants but to prepare people like herself, raised in relative wealth and with no prior experience as farmers, for what life in Canada would be like.

Recognition

Moodie's books and poetry inspired Margaret Atwood's collection of poetry, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, published in 1970. It was also an important influence on one of Atwood's later novels, *Alias Grace*, based on an account of murder convict Grace Marks which appeared in *Life in the Clearings Versus the Bush*. She has also been a source of inspiration for Carol Shields, who published a critical analysis of Susanna Moodie's work, *Susanna Moodie: Voice and Vision*. Additionally, the central character of Shield's novel, *Small Ceremonies*, is working on a biography of Moodie.

Commemorative Postage Stamp

On 8 September 2003, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the National Library of Canada, Canada Post released a special commemorative series, "The Writers of Canada", with a design by Katalina Kovats, featuring two English-Canadian and two French-Canadian stamps. Three million stamps were issued. Moodie and her sister Catherine Parr Traill were featured on one of the English-Canadian stamps.

Fancy And The Poet

Poet --

Enchanting spirit! -- at thy votive shrine
I lowly bend a simple wreath to twine;
O Come from the ideal world and fling
Thy airy fingers o'er my rugged string;
Sweep the dark chords of thought and give to earth
The thrilling song that tells thy heavenly birth --

Fancy --

Happiness when from earth she fled
I passed on her heavenward flight --
"Take this crown," the spirit said
"Of heaven's own golden light --
To the sons of sorrow the token give,
And bid them follow my steps and live!" --

I took the crown from the snowy hand,
It flashed like a living star;
I turned this dark earth to a fairy land
When I hither drive my car;
But I placed the crown round my tresses bright,
And man only saw its reflected light --

Many a lovely dream I've given,
And many a song divine;
But never! -- oh never -- that gift of heaven
Shall mortals temples twine --
Hope and love in the circlet glow!
'Tis all too bright for a world of woe --

Poet --

Hist -- Beautiful spirit! -- why silent so soon?
My ear drinks each word of thy magical tune;
My lyre owns thy touch -- and its tremulous strings

Vibrate beneath the soft play of thy wings;
Resume thy sweet lay, and reveal, ere we part
Thy home lovely spirit -- and say what thou art?" --

Fancy --

The gleam of a star thou cans't not see --
Of an eye 'neath its sleeping lid,
The sound of a far off melody
The voice of a stream that's hid;
Such must I still remain to thee
A wonder and a mystery! --

I live in the poet's dream
I flash on the painter's eye;
I dwell in the moon's pale beam,
In the depths of the star lit sky;
I traverse the earth, the air, the main,
And bind young hearts in my magic chain --

I float on the fleecy cloud
My voice is in ev'ry breeze;
I speak in the tempest loud,
In the sigh of the waving trees --
To the sons of earth -- in a mystic tone,
I tell of a world more bright than their own! --

Susanna Moodie

My Autograph

What -- write my name!
How vain the feeble trust,
To be remembered
When the hand is dust --
Grieve rather that the talents freely given
Were used for earth -- not treasured up for Heaven!

Susanna Moodie

The Dying Hunter To His Dog

Lie down -- lie down! -- my noble hound,
That joyful bark give o'er;
It wakes the lonely echoes round,
But rouses me no more --
Thy lifted ears, thy swelling chest,
Thy eyes so keenly bright,
No longer kindle in my breast
The thrill of fierce delight;
When following thee on foaming steed
My eager soul outstripped thy speed --

Lie down -- lie down -- my faithful hound!
And watch this night by me,
For thee again the horn shall sound
By mountain, stream, and tree;
And thou along the forest glade,
Shall track the flying deer
When cold and silent, I am laid
In chill oblivion here.
Another voice shall cheer thee on,
And glory when the chase is won.

Lie down -- lie down! -- my gallant hound!
Thy master's life is sped;
Go -- couch thee on the dewy ground --
'Tis thine to watch the dead.
But when the blush of early day
Is kindling up the sky,
Then speed thee, faithful friend, away,
And to thy mistress hie;
And guide her to this lonely spot,
Though my closed eyes behold her not --

Lie down -- lie down! -- my trusty hound!
Death comes, and we must part --
In my dull ear strange murmurs sound --
More faintly throbs my heart;
The many twinkling lights of heaven
Scarce glimmer in the blue --

Chill round me falls the breath of even,
Cold on my brow the dew;
Earth, stars, and heavens, are lost to sight --
The chase is o'er! -- brave friend, good night! --

Susanna Moodie

The Sleigh-Bells

'Tis merry to hear, at evening time,
By the blazing hearth the sleigh-bells chime;
To know the bounding steeds bring near
The loved one to our bosoms dear.
Ah, lightly we spring the fire to raise,
Till the rafters glow with the ruddy blaze;
Those merry sleigh-bells, our hearts keep time
Responsive to their fairy chime.
Ding-dong, ding-dong, o'er vale and hill,
Their welcome notes are trembling still.

'Tis he, and blithely the gay bells sound,
As his sleigh glides over the frozen ground;
Hark! He has pass'd the dark pine wood,
He crosses now the ice-bound flood,
And hails the light at the open door
That tells his toilsome journey's o'er.
The merry sleigh-bells! My fond heart swells
And trobs to hear the welcome bells;
Ding-dong, ding-dong, o'er ice and snow,
A voice of gladness, on they go.

Our hut is small, and rude our cheer,
But love has spread the banquet here;
And childhood springs to be caress'd
By our beloved and welcome guest.
With a smiling brow his tale he tells,
The urchins ring the merry sleigh-bells;
The merry sleigh-bells, with shout and song
They drag the noisy string along;
Ding-dong, ding-dong, the father's come
The gay bells ring his welcome home.

From the cedar swamp the gaunt wolves howl,
From the oak loud whoops the felon owl;
The snow-storm sweeps in thunder past,
The forest creaks beneath the blast;
No more I list, with boding fear,
The sleigh-bells distant chime to hear.

The merry sleigh-bells with soothing power
Shed gladness on the evening hour.
Ding-dong, ding-dong, what rapture swells
The music of those joyous bells!

Susanna Moodie

The Step Mother

Well I recall my Father's wife,
The day he brought her home.
His children looked for years of strife,
And troubles sure to come --
Ungraciously we welcomed her,
A thing to scorn and blame;
And swore we never would confer
On her, a Mother's name

I see her yet -- a girl in years,
With eyes so blue and mild;
She greeted us with smiles and tears,
How sweetly too she smiled --
She bent to kiss my sullen brow,
With woman's gentle grace;
And laid her tiny hand of snow
On my averted face --

"Henry -- is this your son? She said --
"Dear boy -- he now is mine --
What not one kiss? --" I shook my head,
"I am no son of thine! --"
She sighed -- and from her dimpled cheek
The rosy colour fled;
She turned away and did not speak,
My thoughts were with the dead --

There leaped from out my Father's eyes
A jet of swarthy fire;
That flashed on me in fierce surprise --
I fled before his ire
I heard her gentle voice entreat --
"Forgiveness for her sake" --
Which added swiftness to my feet,
A sad and strange mistake --

A year had scarcely rolled away
When by that hated bride;
I loved to linger half the day,

In very joy and pride;
Her voice was music to mine ear,
So soft its accent fell;
"Dear Mother now" -- and oh, how dear
No words of mine can tell --

She was so gentle, fair and kind,
So pure in soul and free from art;
That woman with her noble mind,
Subdued my rebel heart --
I just had learned to know her worth,
My Father's second choice to bless;
When God removed her from the earth,
And plunged us all in deep distress --

Hot fever smote with burning blight
Stretchd on a restless bed of pain;
I moaning lay from morn till night
With aching limbs and throbbing brain --
Four weary weeks beside my bed,
She sat within a darkened room;
Untiring held my aching head,
Nor heeded silence -- cold and gloom --

And when my courage quite gave way,
And fainter grew my struggling breath;
She taught my stricken soul to pray
And calmly meet approaching death --
"Fear not God's angel, sent by Him,
The weary spirit to release;
Before the mortal eyes grow dim,
Floats down the white winged dove of peace" --

There came a change -- but fingers small,
No longer smoothed my matted hair;
She sprang not to my feeble call,
Nor helped to lift me to my chair --
And I arose as from the dead,
A life for her dear life was given;
The angel who had watched my bed
Had vanished into Heaven! --

