

# Pioneering young

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When the Canadian West was described as “a land of brave and conquering men,”<sup>1</sup> the women were overlooked and so were the children. Three books, two old — *Pioneer girl*<sup>2</sup> and *Clearing in the West*<sup>3</sup> — and one new — *The journey of the shadow bairns* — proclaim the brave and conquering children. Maryanne Caswell, Nellie Mooney, and Elspeth MacDonald, like their elders, were inspired by dreams of a better and happier future while they laboured valiantly for survival in the present. The first two wrote detailed factual narratives of their experiences; the third is the protagonist of a children’s novel that shapes the substance of pioneering narrative into absorbing plot. All three present a variant of immigrant experience, a journey from the security of established society into a new, strange life.

Each book is defined by an individual point of view and written for a different audience. When Maryanne wrote a series of diary letters to her grandmother, she had no idea she was writing a book that would be called *Pioneer girl*.<sup>4</sup> She writes as an involved reporter giving an eyewitness account of a family in the process of beginning a new way of life. She describes, explains, observes, her usual objectivity often richly enlivened with personal and emotional responses. On the other hand, Nellie Mooney, more widely known as Nellie McClung, is writing, as a professional, an autobiography for an audience that knows her and her work. Although a large proportion of *Clearing in the West* is about the Mooney family, Nellie’s primary focus is on Nellie as she chronicles her own responses to pioneer life and her struggle for personal development. Setting and action are vividly recreated, but the viewing eye is retrospective and, the reader suspects, more than a little interpretive. Margaret J. Anderson, a Scottish author now living in the United States, recounts *The journey of the shadow bairns* from Elspeth’s point of view, but not in the first person. The story gains, in consequence, a degree of irony and a greater breadth of vision. The reader experiences beyond Elspeth as well as experiencing with Elspeth. Maryanne and Nellie record the day-by-day actuality of pioneer life; Margaret Anderson translates the actuality into a story of adventure and, through Elspeth, explores the psychology of the young person who must exchange a known identity in a known land for a new land and, ultimately, a new self.

The letters of *Pioneer girl* describe the experiences of the Caswell family

from the time they leave their home in Palmerston, Ontario, on 11 April, 1887, until New Year's morning 1888. In the interim they have travelled from Southern Ontario to Clark's Crossing, north of Saskatoon, in what was still called the North West Territories, have planted and reaped their first crop of White Russian wheat, and have moved from their temporary shanty into a sod house. Although the Mooneys preceded the Caswells to the West by seven years, they chose as their destination the junction of the Assiniboine and Souris Rivers in Manitoba; so the wilderness part of their journey took only two weeks compared to the four weeks less a day of the Caswells' trek. Nevertheless, the accounts of the journeys and early days of homesteading of the two families are alike in the pictures they present of the hopes and dreams of the pioneers and the uncompromising realities of their continuous struggles for survival. The list of hardships faced by pioneer families was formidable: separation from families and friends, arduous travel, inadequate shelter, isolation with its accompanying fears, and unending physical labour.

The call of the West in the 1880s was, however, a siren's call. There was the appeal of new opportunity; James Caswell left Palmerston and his established position as a storekeeper to take the first herd of Shorthorns into what is now Saskatchewan. There was the appeal of vast lands; the Mooneys were won from the grudging fields of Grey County by tales of their fertility and richness. Nellie's oldest brother could not resist the pictures painted by a young expatriate of Grey County, Michael Lowery:

He had many tales to tell of good hunting, big game, narrow escapes, friendly Indians, and above all in fascination for the dwellers along the Garafraza, hundreds of acres of land, without a stone, or a bush, waiting to be taken. There were strawberries so plentiful and luscious, that his oxen's feet were red with them as he ploughed the willing sod, young Michael said; and there were wild plums and cranberries, spilling on the ground, with no one to pick them (CW, 30-31).

For the elders, the move to the West in 1880s was, indeed, a move to another country where they must undertake a new life style. Farewells to families and friends were tearful and "permanent." It was unlikely, given the difficulties of travel and the expense, that there would be visits "back home." At a particularly trying period during the Caswells' first summer

Martha [Maryanne's sister] was sure mother would return to Palmerston. But where was the money coming from for the railway fare from Moose Jaw and how would she get to the railway; one cannot fly without a feather (PG).

Some people failed to take even the first step in adapting to pioneer travel. Mrs. Mooney saw to it that her family were properly dressed for their wilderness journey. The girls had "dark print dresses and straw hats lined with the same print as [the] dresses and banded with a fold of it, dark gray ribbed woollen stockings, hand knit, and good stout boots (CW, 57). But they met a family

so ill prepared for the new way of life that they had turned back at the first experience of rough terrain:

It was the wife who had broken down. She wore a black silk dress and lace shawl and a pair of fancy shoes, all caked with mud. . . She hated the country, she sobbed, it was only fit for Indians and squaws and should never have been taken from them (CW, 58).

For the young people, the trip west was a glorious adventure. Maryanne was fourteen and the oldest child, while Nellie was seven and the youngest. If their roles and responsibilities were quite different, they express the same excitement and enthusiasm at the beginning of the great adventure. Nellie describes the thrill of the trail:

Never had I experienced as great a moment as came to me, when the oxen's heads were turned west on Portage Avenue and the long trail received us unto itself. I felt that life was leading me by the hand and I followed on light feet (CW, 56).

Maryanne's comment in her first letter, written 12 April, 1887, admirably expresses the ambivalence of leave taking:

At the station were Knowles, Alexanders, Watts, Fawcetts. . . everybody near and dear. But the girls' lamentings and the misgivings of the old ones made us feel not so jubilant because it seems perfectly splendid to ride, eat, sleep on a train for a week (PG).

Although the train was the travellers' best means of transportation, the colonist cars provided only minimal comforts; seats and beds were wooden slats and meals had to be prepared by the colonists with food they carried with them.

The reality of travel along wagon tracks that bore no resemblance to roads soon dispelled Maryanne's image of the West as a "fairylke country." Progress was painfully slow, sometimes no more than a mile a day, as the settlers faced the hazards and frustrations of dragging heavily laden carts through the thawing marshy land. (They usually sought out their homesteads in the early spring to give them time to plant and reap a crop before the first winter.) Nellie writes of the struggles of the wilderness trail from a seven-year-old's distance

Sometimes it took three yokes of oxen to draw a wagon out of a bad spot and even then the long grass beside the road had to be cut and thrown into the slippery, gummy mud to give the oxen a foot-hold. . . it was like a nightmare to see the oxen go down, down into the mud, sprawling helplessly in its treacherous depths. But they did not get excited as horses would have and they did their best without urging (CW, 64-65).

Maryanne's experience is more immediate. The family had taken to the trail wet and cold after a sudden spring snow storm and Maryanne was driving the oxen across an alkali flat when oxen and wagon began to disappear in the soft mud:

The oxen were unhitched and pulled and driven and coaxed to extricate themselves. They did. Then the wagon-riders clambered down and ranged around while father, mother, Martha and I laboriously unloaded and carried to safety the various things of the load (PG).

A plank from the bottom was used as a lever under the hubs with the keg of nails for a pivot. Finally about three o'clock we were out of the muck. The oxen, hitched to the wagon tongue, pulled the wagon out with much haw-geeing. We began to carry and reload for the third time (PG).

At the end of such a day, the travellers had nothing to look forward to but camping beside the trail and eating monotonous meals of the food carried with them, varied occasionally by the addition of a game bird or a rabbit. As the Caswells' supplies dwindled, Maryanne's mother carefully cut the eyes from their potatoes — these were to be planted when they reached their homestead — and fed her family what was left.

Throughout the long four weeks of the Caswells' journey, Maryanne had the responsibility of driving the sheep and the herd of Shorthorns, a task she found both difficult and frustrating. She admits that one Monday morning her patience ran out: "It was cold and the cattle were contrary, running any direction but the desired one. In exasperation I cried and Martha was sent to help me." Maryanne comments repeatedly that the cattle were "contrary," "irksome," and "pesky." When, at last, Uncle Joe came to meet the family and she was told to drive his team, she says with delight. "What an honor to drive horses and at the same time be relieved of those nuisances of Shorthorns! What care I if they are pedigreed and worth a lot of money!"

Fine as the land might be when the families arrived at their homesteads, the first shelters offered little comfort and less protection from the weather. The Mooneys' unchinked log house had only one window, but it did not lack for ventilation: "One window might be thought insufficient for a house that must lodge eight people, but light and air came in unbidden through many openings" (CW, 73-74). Indeed, during the first bitter winter snow sifted through the walls. John Caswell, knowing the temper of the prairie climate, had planned a concrete house for his family:

The men have built a shanty or shack for us [Maryanne reports] with the lumber intended for our house which will be built as soon as possible. The kiln is already in the ravine with wood cut sufficient to burn the limestones which father prepared last year (PG).

But there was no time during that first busy summer to burn the limestones and so, when fall came, like many other prairie pioneers, the Caswells built a sod house. Maryanne describes the process and the result:

The walls are three sods thick. The door and a window in the east, a large window in the south, a door jam in the west filled with sods, but to be removed in the spring and a milk house built on to the main building (PG).

They placed sods on the roof "overlapping them as shingles to make the roof

weatherproof." A sod house provided a warm haven during the cruel prairie winters, but its protection was unsatisfactory in wet weather: "a three-day rain outside, as a Pioneer saying put it, meant a five-day rain inside."<sup>5</sup>

The first homes were not only primitive, they were also isolated. The Mooneys' cow died during their first winter and could not be replaced until the spring. Then Will walked to Portage la Prairie, a distance of eighty miles and "brought back two red cows" (CW, 81). Such immense distances and emptiness could be both depressing and frightening. During the Caswells' journey to the homestead, Maryanne observes, "Thursday, travelling was very tiresome. It was hot and the country was vast and bare except for grass, with never a break 'twixt earth and sky, just the straight horizon." Later, after the family was settled, Maryanne was sent on a newly purchased pony to look for their runaway sheep. The pony shied repeatedly throwing her to the ground: "She did this five times during our 52-mile ride. At first I was terrified that she might run away and that I might be left all alone far from home on this stretch of trackless prairie." Adults felt other fears born of their isolation. Nellie quotes a poignant letter written by her mother to a friend in Grey County:

I get worried sometimes about my own health and wondering what would happen to the little girls, if I should be taken. . . There's no doctor closer than Portage which is eighty miles away. . . It's at night, when every one is asleep and this great prairie rolls over, so big and empty, and cruel (CW, 78).

Isolation was felt even more keenly when there was an emergency. Nellie tells of their despair when her oldest sister seemed to lie dying while outside a fierce March blizzard made travel impossible. Then their isolation became a matter of life and death and her mother cried bitterly, "My little girl is dying for want of a doctor, in this cursed place — that never should have been taken from the Indians. . ." (CW, 79). It was the Methodist minister who found his way to them through the storm bringing medicines and new courage. Fortunately, under his care, Lizzie recovered. The different outcome of a similar situation in *Pioneer girl* demonstrates how vulnerable they all were to illness, particularly the children. Maryanne's cousin Andrew, who had not been well, vomited blood after lifting a sack of potato cuttings. A few days later he was dead. Maryanne was not insensitive, but her comments respond to the practical necessity of the situation:

Tuesday afternoon we buried him [Andrew] in a small coffin Uncle Rob made and covered with white embroidery which Aunt Patience gave to use. On our quarter-section we all stood about repeating together the Lord's Prayer led by Uncle John. We put some stones about him, one dark, mottled grey with fern-like marking at his head. Sorrowfully, with heart-broken parents, we turned to resume our several duties with a determination to do all we could courageously to help them (PG).

Even in grief, the endless struggle for survival of the living could not stop.

Nellie, as the youngest, was spared some of the pressures of work, but it became her duty too to herd the cows on a farm without fences. For a time she had to absent herself from the school she loved to keep them out of the fields of precious grain. Maryanne, as the eldest, was her father's assistant. She guided the harrow while her father sowed the seed and, later in the summer, she helped with the haying:

I was shown how to turn the winnows with a long pole that the other side of the cut hay might be exposed to the sun to cure. Then how to smooth the rake heaps into rain-proof haycocks. It was unbearably lonesome, hot work by myself with father cutting or raking in other dry sloughs (PG).

In her final letter, she sums up the tasks of a winter's day:

It is shovelling snow, bucking, cutting or sawing wood, mending ox-harness, setting and sharpening the bucksaw, driving cattle to the river watering-hole, cutting and cleaning it out, hauling water out of the well, feeding the stock, cleaning the stable and chicken house, riding the pony on the threshing floor, helping unload hay, teaching the pups to heel and "lie down dead," reading out loud in the firelight, seeing pictures in the flames, off to bed and sleep to be up early to begin the new year of 1888 (PG).

Clearly, the pioneer life was very hard and the labour demands of homesteading were endless, but there were compensations. One of these is contained in the title of *Clearing in the West*. The obvious meaning applies to the actions of the pioneers and the setting they thus created for their lives. The second meaning promises the brighter horizon, the happier future in which the pioneers believed. For some the promises meant greater freedom or a new beginning; for others, a land of their own or more land in greater measure; for many, like the Mooneys, a better life for their children. Mrs. Mooney says, with conviction, "We came here, John, for the children's sake, not ours, and we'll do our best for them every way" (CW, 52). Whatever their particular goals might be, the pioneers looked forward with optimism.

This optimism was fed by love of the land. The feelings that Nellie and Maryanne express are not influenced by any satisfaction in ownership or expectation of profit; they are spontaneous responses to their new environment. While the prairie could be monotonous and frightening, it could also be very beautiful. Again and again there are references to the clear, free-flowing rivers, the magnificent sunsets, and the annual profusion of wild flowers from "the furry-nosed blue anemones that pushed the snow aside in early April to the wealth of golden rod and purple sage and blue fringed gentians that embroidered the headlands in the fall" (CW, 115). In autumn and winter there was the dance of the Northern Lights. Both girls respond to their grandeur, but they reach for different images in their efforts to describe the eye-filling colours of the phenomenon. Nellie says:

It was not only in the north that they flickered and flashed and rolled and marched, for their bright banners ran up into the highest parts of the sky right over our heads . . . pale green and rose and lilac streamers fluttering and dancing like long lines of fairies' petticoats hung out to dry on a windy day (CW, 77-78).

Maryanne's words are less literary and stronger:

The whole heaven at times is lit up with these uncanny lights, dancing in and out, whimsically up and down, in variegated sheets of colours of the rainbow. Once this fall they were as if the heavens were an umbrella sploched with red ink from the centre running in rivulets to the horizon, caught up and away again as if in measured time of notes. There's beauty here, Grandma (PG).

Another compensation was the comfort and security to be found in a strong family unit. For the children who had left their familiar worlds behind them to venture into a new land and a new life style, their parents were not only guides and protectors, they also provided continuity. Through the period of transition, mother and father were both parents and home. Twice in *Pioneer girl*, the children are separated from their mother. On the first occasion, Mrs. Caswell left the standing train to speak to her husband who was on the accompanying "stock and settler's effects" train; the resulting situation is comic:

In the meantime the train moved and frightened us, for what could we do with baby Mabel, no money nor tickets. Frantically I told the conductor of our predicament. He pulled a rope and had the train backed up to the platform . . . What joyous relief to see mother smiling from the station (PG).

The second occasion was much more serious. The oxen so essential to the survival of the family had wandered away on the unfenced prairie, and Mr. and Mrs. Caswell set out separately in search of them. James Caswell returned in the evening, but his wife did not. At first the children thought fearfully of their mother "lost on the great lonely prairie with Henrietta station the only habitation in 100 miles"; their father was frantic, blaming himself for moving the family so far from civilization. As the search went on through the night, Maryanne says:

Our hearts ached of the terrible calamity without mother. Life just could not go on. Jen developed an earache, Mabel could not understand. John bravely kept the fires burning. Martha and I took turns going out to listen for wind messages to end our terrible suspense (PG).

Mrs. Caswell's safe return was marked with a prayer of "grateful thanksgiving," and the children "kissed her trembling lips almost to pieces."

In both families, the Caswells and the Mooneys, the children as far as they were capable assumed the physical responsibilities of pioneering, but they remained, because of their isolation, particularly dependent on their parents for direction, encouragement, and love. The family gave them a strong structure

within which each one had responsibility, an accepted identity, and room to grow. As the settlements expanded and the families became part of a larger social pattern, the children were identified with the family, as it was known in the community, until they achieved autonomous status.

Elspeth and Robbie, the Shadow Bairns, have none of these supports. They board the *Lake Manitoba* with no country, no family, and no identity. In making thirteen-year-old Elspeth the protagonist of *The journey of the shadow bairns* and giving her an adult role to play, Margaret Anderson draws a searching picture of the emigrant/immigrant experience in the context of the young person's quest for maturity. She tells a story of challenge and adventure, tracing both the geographic and the emotional distances the children must travel. In the first chapter, their father gives his analysis of their characters:

"Rob's going to make a fine farmer. He's good with animals, and he accepts what happens and makes the best of it. . . . You, Elspeth, would sooner bend things to your own way"(JSB, 9).

As the story develops, his analysis is borne out. Robbie's natural temperament is threatened by the events of their journey, Elspeth's is modified.

When the story begins, Elspeth and her mother and father are already displaced persons in Glasgow. Unable to support his family on their Highland croft, Duncan MacDonald has found work in the Glasgow shipyards, but only four-year-old Robbie, who has no memory of Loch Nevis, is happy in the city. In November 1902, Duncan brings home a pamphlet written by Isaac Moses Barr<sup>6</sup> extolling the opportunities and challenges offered by the new colony to be established under his leadership on the banks of the North Saskatchewan River in Canada. The family is caught by Barr's idealism and his description of Canada as "a land of brave and conquering men."<sup>7</sup> Even Margaret, the tubercular mother, is heartened by this chance to escape their unhappy lives and make a new beginning.

But before the spring departure date, Duncan has been killed in an accident at the shipyard, and Margaret, in grief, has succumbed to pneumonia, leaving only this final injunction to Elspeth: "You are to stay together. . . . You mustn't let them take him [Robbie] away"(JSB, 13-14). For the children who have no other relatives or friends in Scotland, the deaths of their parents are not only traumatic, but they also effect a painful break with their world. Robbie can neither understand nor accept the fact that his parents will not return, and Elspeth is bereft both of her parents and their dreams of emigration. In the limited lives of the children, their parents have been home, security, and future; without their parents, the children are adrift belonging nowhere.

Overcome by her grief and sense of dislocation, Elspeth is indifferent to the plight in which she and Robbie find themselves until the social worker comes with a plan to separate them. Two significant experiences common to adult emigrants, disaffection from country and fear of authority, then come together

for Elspeth.<sup>8</sup> She sees the social worker as the first embodiment of the “they” of her mother’s warning and seeks an escape. She thinks initially of Loch Nevis, but discovers another possibility in the steamship tickets purchased by her father and the money carefully hoarded for a homestead in Canada. By leaving their native land, she and Robbie can escape the forces of authority they cannot resist and make a new beginning with Uncle Donald and Aunt Maud who went to Manitoba. Consequently, when she finds the tickets, she does not hesitate. Much later, when they have reached the colony, Mrs. Galbraith says to her, “‘There’s a lot of things to weigh one against the other when you take a step like we did, and you’re still left wondering if you did right.’ . . . [Elspeth] thought about Mrs. Galbraith’s words. For her there hadn’t been many choices — only one” (JSB, 144-145).

Although the journey the children take is full of exciting experiences, it is full of hardships too. The *Lake Manitoba* was a converted troop carrier intended to transport 900 soldiers. On it were crowded 2,684 colonists. Elspeth and Robbie, accustomed to the squalor and overcrowding of Glasgow tenements, are almost unconscious of conditions that the adults around them are finding intolerable. They are aware, however, of the contrast between the red plush and gilt lamps of the train on which they travelled from Glasgow to Liverpool and the slat seats and bunks provided for the colonists. Before they have travelled many miles, they understand the difficulties of the colonists who can prepare food on the train, but purchase none. In their ignorance, they would have fared very badly without the help of the fatherly conductor. Their journey is long and Saskatoon, when they reach it, means only harassed, uncaring immigration officials — whom Elspeth recognizes immediately as new manifestations of “them” — and the chilly hospitality of a government tent.

The trek from Saskatoon to Battleford yields many experiences in common with those of the Caswells and Mooneys twenty years earlier: the deplorable roads, the backbreaking difficulties of taking heavily loaded wagons across sloughs still sodden with thawing snow, the makeshift camps along the trail, and the unfamiliar freedom of unbounded space. These realities are dealt with more briefly than in the factual narratives, but the context of exciting story and identification with the children intensify the impressions they make on the reader. At first Elspeth is exhilarated by the space and freedom. Later, as her tumble into the icy river takes its toll, her feelings about these new surroundings alter:

All the time she wondered how the world could have changed so suddenly. The emptiness of the land made her feel puny now, not important; the long, straight trail surely led nowhere; the wind carried threats, not promises (JSB, 107).

The psychological and emotional isolation that began with the deaths of her parents is increasingly externalized. Surrounded as she has been by people from the time the children’s travels began, Elspeth has been as isolated from them

by the burden of her secret as she could be by geographic distance. Because she has not dared to tell anyone the truth, she has not been able to ask for the help she needs. Again and again she longs for the presence of her parents and the comfort and help *they* could have given her. Little more than a child, she has hastily chosen an adult's responsibility that she cannot later renounce and must learn painfully to grow into. Unlike Maryanne or Nellie, she is the adult in the journey, carrying the adult's responsibility. She is the one who has to take both the male and female roles, guarding their welfare in the present and making the decisions that will shape their future — decisions that apply to unfamiliar circumstances in an unfamiliar land.

The first symbol of her altered role is appropriately the battered suitcase which is too large and too heavy for her to carry without difficulty. With it she carries two fears: first, that she will lose Robbie and second, that she will lose the money required to secure their future in Canada. Robbie's disappearance in the Glasgow station is her initiation to fear, and his illness on board ship reveals her own limitations in the role she has undertaken. Despite her misgivings, she is forced to take chances with the money so carefully sewn in the bodice of her skirt, giving a portion to Matthew Galbraith to have changed into Canadian dollars, and advancing fifty of those dollars to Arthur and Geoffrey Whitcomb to pay for transportation to Battleford. But her forced maturity is incomplete and she is caught between two worlds — sometimes, as on the ship, able to join the children in play and sometimes, as with Violet, confided in as an adult; but, like the immigrant she now is, she belongs to neither. It is the child's impulsive attempt to rescue Robbie's beloved Pig-Bear that leads to her near drowning and its disastrous consequences. She loses Robbie, the money, and very nearly her life.

Elspeth's near fatal illness is the major crisis of the story and it brings to a climax the theme of identity that is implicit in the title of the book. Created as both a protective device and an entertainment for Robbie, the game of Shadow Bairns tells the truth about the children and their situation:

"We'll play that we're Shadow Bairns," she said. "And we must always stay together and keep quiet." "Shadow Bairns," Robbie whispered. Elspeth smiled, satisfied that she'd found a way to keep him quiet whenever she needed to, but the words left a lonely echo in her mind. She saw herself and Robbie always alone, hiding in the shadows, not really knowing where they were going (JSB, 29).

From the moment they leave their tenement home, they become shadows without identities. They board the train in Liverpool pretending to be part of an unidentified family. In the crush of boarding the *Lake Manitoba*, no one checks their tickets or acknowledges their existence, and at St. John they slip past the immigration officials unrecorded. As a "lost child," Elspeth gives their names and those of their parents to the train conductor, but neither they nor their parents will be "found." In Saskatoon they are almost caught in the im-

migration net, but once again they escape. The fiction that they are to meet Uncle Donald and Aunt Maud in Battleford legitimizes them with their fellow travellers and frees the travellers from any sense of responsibility for the children. When Dr. Wallace, in his search for Robbie, questions the settlers about the children, their memories of them are vague and impressionistic, consistent with the children's shadow roles. Having abandoned their old identities in Scotland, they have yet to replace them with new ones in Canada.<sup>9</sup>

Elspeth's feelings that she has begun to build a new place for herself during the wilderness journey disappears after she is pulled from the water:

Even worse than the numbing cold was the memory of the sharp, angry voices shouting at her as they dragged her from the river. They had shouted at her more to release their own tension than in anger. . . . But Elspeth felt that the closeness, the feeling of belonging, was gone (JSB 106-7).

The five days of her illness are a kind of death when everything is stripped away from her, including Robbie and their money. As she returns to consciousness, the first thing that Kate Morgan, the hotel keeper, says to her is this: "What we want to know is, who are *you* and what are you doing here" (JSB, 114)? Elspeth finds that the identity of Robbie is also in question. At first, neither Kate Morgan nor Dr. Wallace believes in his existence.

Slowly and grieving for Robbie, Elspeth regains her hold on life and her belief in her place in Canada. The original dream evoked by Isaac Barr's idealistic words and reinforced by her brief encounter with Barr on board ship has travelled with her, though often obliterated by the hardships and difficulties she has faced. Debating whether she and Robbie should leave the train in Winnipeg and search for Uncle Donald and Aunt Maud somewhere in Manitoba, Elspeth remembers Barr's words and stays on the train:

She believed in Mr. Barr. After all *she* had spoken to him, and he had said that she was the sort of person the colony needed — young and willing to learn. And Papa had been so excited about being part of this venture. . . . As long as she stayed with the Barr colonists there seemed to be a thread linking her to Papa's dreams (JSB, 72).

After her illness, depressed as she is over the loss of Robbie, she angrily rejects Dr. Wallace's suggestion that she return to Scotland: "Well, I'm not going! I'm going to stay right here till Robbie comes back, because this is where he'll expect to find me" (JSB, 129). Even though she cannot be whole in Canada without Robbie, Elspeth knows that she cannot return to the past. It is Dr. Wallace, not Elspeth, who has unfinished business in Scotland.

Elspeth's new identity grows first through her sorrow:

Yet it wasn't the dress that made Elspeth look older. It was more the expression in her eyes. After Papa's and Mama's deaths, she still had something to hold on to — Papa's dream and her own promise to Mama to look after Robbie. With Robbie gone, she had failed them all. The empty ache of missing him was always there (JSB, 130).

And as the weeks and months pass by she grows through work. At first she works for Kate Morgan, "waiting on tables, making beds, washing dishes," (JSB, 121) using the work and the indifference of the people around her as an anodyne. Subsequently, when she agrees to help Mrs. Galbraith with her family, she must recognize her suppressed emotions again. The twins, Rebecca and Rachel, who played with Elspeth and Robbie the game of Shadow Bairns on board ship, are constant reminders of Robbie even when they do not talk about him.

In the end it is Isaac Barr who restores her dream. He comes to the Galbraith's farm when the parents are away, a fugitive, hunted by a rough group of the disillusioned colonists. In a suspenseful sequence, the girls hide him in the root cellar and, using the lessons they learned as Shadow Bairns, direct the angry men elsewhere. At the mention of Shadow Bairns, Barr remembers a little boy who had also talked about them — a four-year-old with blond curly hair — Robbie. His words unlock the memory of her feverish parting with Robbie and Mrs. Beattie that Elspeth has so often struggled to recapture. She rides with him in the early morning to the Beatties' farm, and at their parting, Barr repeats the words he used to her on the *Lake Manitoba*, adding a new direction for the future:

"It's people like you that this land needs," he said. "Young, adaptable, willing to learn. Do something worthwhile, lass, and I'll have a part in it too. Make a place for yourself here" (JSB, 161).

The Robbie that Elspeth finds with the Beatties is growing into a new identity too. Delighted as he is to see her, he is happy with the Beatties and is helping them to recover the capacity for happiness they lost with the death of their son. The maturing Robbie is in the barn teaching a calf to drink while his clean and mended Pig-Bear lies on a shelf in the house.

Elspeth's first reaction is that the Beatties have taken Robbie from her and once more she looks for an escape; but Isaac Barr has said, "Make a place for yourself here, and the new Elspeth heeds his advice. In the end it is with the Beatties, not Uncle Donald and Aunt Maud, that the children find their Canadian home:

"I don't want to find Uncle Donald," Robbie said, fighting back tears. "I don't want to be a Shadow Bairn again. I want to stay here" (JSB, 169).

Once again they have a family and a home — symbols of their achieved place in their new land.

In *The journey of the shadow bairns*, Margaret Anderson has assimilated the documentary substance of books like *Pioneer girl* and *Clearing in the West* and translated it successfully into the truth of fiction. In her hands a uniquely Canadian story has been given universal appeal. The immigrant themes of isolation and loss, acceptance and renewal, as old as the story of Ruth and Naomi,

are made accessible to children through her orphaned protagonists. The happy, accepting Robbie made fearful by threats of the nameless "they," the courageous, determined Elspeth paralyzed by isolation and loss triumph over their difficulties and deserve to be numbered among the brave and conquering children. The prototypical events of immigrant experience are shaped by a plot of steadily building action, enlivened by suspense and the emotion-charged mystery of Robbie's disappearance. The succession of characters the children meet, although they are representative of the spectrum of people impelled by diverse motivations who were attracted to the Canadian West, are also individualized with economy of phrase and understanding. A time, a people, and a challenge are recreated for the reader to enjoy. Few Canadian children will find and read *Pioneer girl* or *Clearing in the West*, but many children internationally will taste the reality of the Canadian pioneer experience when they read the story of the Shadow Bairns.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Margaret J. Anderson, *The journey of the shadow bairns* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), p. 10. (Further page references will be inserted in the text with the abbreviation JSB).

<sup>2</sup>Maryanne Caswell, *Pioneer girl* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1964). The omission of page numbers, letter numbers or dates (with the exception of three letters) in this text makes page citations impractical. (Further references will use the abbreviation PG).

<sup>3</sup>Nellie McClung, *Clearing in the West* (Toronto: Thomas Allen & son Limited, 1976), pp. 30-31. (Further page references will be inserted in parenthesis in the text, with the abbreviation CW.)

<sup>4</sup>In the preface to *Pioneer girl*, Grace Land explains how the transition from personal letters to book occurred: "Fortunately her grandmother preserved the letters, and after Maryanne grew up and became Mrs. Thomas Hilliard, they were returned to her. Toward the end of her life Eric Knowles, editor of the Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix*, discovered them and published them in the Jubilee edition of that paper, September 11, 1952. It was then that I fell in love with Maryanne. Ten year's [sic] later, as Women's Editor of *The United Church Observer*, I serialized them under the title, 'Adventure Lies West'. Now, in this book, they have found the permanent form they deserve."

<sup>5</sup>Douglas Hill, *The opening of the West* (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 214.

<sup>6</sup>The Reverend Isaac Moses Barr was an Anglican clergyman who had great talents of persuasion, but little talent for organization. As the result of his speeches and pamphlets extolling the glories of the Canadian North West, 2,684 colonists from the United Kingdom boarded the *Lake Manitoba* for Canada 31 March, 1903. Some of the problems that beset the colonists during the crossing and later in Canada could be attributed to Barr's ignorance and ineptitude, but some were clearly the result of his attempts to exploit them. Fortunately, George Exton Lloyd, chaplain to the colonists and a man on integrity and genuine ability, took over the leadership of the community, now called Lloydminster, when Barr disappeared.

<sup>7</sup>Words and phrases from Barr's pamphlet are used by Margaret Anderson as chapter titles throughout the book.

<sup>8</sup>The basic elements in Elspeth's situation are the same as those facing the protagonists

of Barbara Smucker's two novels, *Underground to Canada* and *Days of terror*, although the manifestations are not violent or overtly cruel.

<sup>4</sup>Many immigrants lost their original national identities because of the ignorance or indifference of Canadian immigration agents: "Were the newcomers Galicians, Ruthenians or Bukowinians — were they to be called Austrians, or were they Russians? Any of these names might have been put on the documents. Some agents included Ukrainians as Hungarians, or Poles — or simply avoided the difficulty by calling them all 'Slavs'." *The opening of the Canadian West*, pp. 228-29.

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