

Material Culture Review Revue de la culture matérielle

Material Culture Review
Revue de la culture matérielle

Anna Dawson Harrington's Landscape Drawings and Letters Interweaving the Visual and Textual Spaces of an Autobiography

Loren Lerner

Volume 86, 2017

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1062475ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1062475ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Cape Breton University Press

ISSN

1718-1259 (print)

1927-9264 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Lerner, L. (2017). Anna Dawson Harrington's Landscape Drawings and Letters: Interweaving the Visual and Textual Spaces of an Autobiography. *Material Culture Review / Revue de la culture matérielle*, 86.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1062475ar>

All Rights Reserved © Loren Lerner, 2019

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Research Report

Rapport de Recherche

LOREN LERNER

Anna Dawson Harrington's Landscape Drawings and Letters: Interweaving the Visual and Textual Spaces of an Autobiography

In biographies of esteemed members of her family, Anna Dawson Harrington (1851-1917) is described as the helpful eldest daughter of John William Dawson (1820-1899), geologist and first principal of McGill University, the devoted wife of Bernard James Harrington (1848-1907), McGill professor in mining and chemistry, and the caring sister of George Mercer Dawson (1865-1901), scientist and surveyor (Michel 2003: 174-84; Michel 1992: 33-53; Ouellet 2003; Sheets-Pyenson 1996; Winslow-Spragge 1993). As mother of nine children, her homemaking skills are well documented in "Health Matters: The Dawson and Harrington Families at Home," a perceptive architectural analysis, by Annmarie Adams and Peter Gossage (2010), of the ways Anna arranged and experienced the interior spaces of her home to manage her children's health, especially the health of her son Eric, who died of tuberculosis in 1894. In his introduction to Anna's unpublished memoir of her father, Robert Michel writes that she "illustrated many of his geological books and articles, assisting in many ways until her father's death.... She inherited her father's intelligence and spiritual and rational attributes yet, like many educated women, she had to spend most of her energy looking after her family. A few generations later, she might have become a scientist herself" (2003: 180).

The objective of this study of a Canadian Victorian woman is to understand the relationship between material landscape and identity through the evidence found in her drawings and the letters she wrote to her husband Bernard. The drawings are mainly watercolour landscapes that span a period of forty-five years, from 1869 to 1914.¹ Housed at the McCord Museum, they depict numerous scenes of Little Metis, Quebec, on the lower Saint Lawrence River, where Anna and her growing family spent their summers while Bernard was often in Montreal working at McGill or engaged in fieldwork in other parts of Canada or in England. Since Bernard was away so much of the time, the majority of Anna's letters were written from Little Metis, though a few of interest were written from the family home in Montreal and from Saint Andrews, Quebec, where Anna's father-in-law had an estate. She also wrote from other places she visited such as Kinsey Falls in Quebec, Toronto and London in Ontario, and from her travels while visiting the United States and England. Anna's letters are carefully preserved in the McGill University Archives.²

Informing this investigation is the notion that autobiography and landscape can be so intricately entwined that they constitute a single self-narrative (Edwards 2009: 297-315; Egan 1996: 166-88; Finley 1988: 549-72). This means that the material forms of the landscape when sensually

and thoughtfully experienced by a person can become imbued with autobiographical meaning (Tilley 2006; 2010). Tilley defines the relation of landscape and identity this way: “When people think about social or cultural, or their individual, identity, they inevitably place it, put it in a setting, imagine it and feel it in a place. Ideas and feelings about identity are inevitably located in the specificities of familiar places together creating landscapes and how it feels to be there” (2004: 25). As such, to say that the materiality of landscape is autobiography assumes that Anna’s drawings are uniquely connected to her identity and to what she wanted to convey about her thoughts, feelings, and values. The fact that Anna titled and dated each landscape drawing and stored them protectively indicates her desire to preserve and reveal what mattered most to her as defined by what she saw. Thus, Anna’s drawings are the infrastructure of her autobiographical project perceived by her and then transformed into art to illuminate and encapsulate her life.

However, a collection of drawings cannot alone function as an autobiography. Anna’s letters to her husband are significant in that they help to communicate what she is trying to say through visual imagery. While her landscape drawings can be regarded as the core of her self-expression, the narrative frame of the written word renders the mental geography of her visual representations comprehensible. As Kim L. Worthington explains in *Self as Narrative* (1996), individuality involves constructing a “narrative of the self” that is embedded in community, and hence in language: “Selves are already always in community, and cannot simply choose or contract to enter the social context in which they have meaningful being.... Personhood is always embedded in the social (and, significantly, linguistic) context in which one has meaningful being; selves are constituted in and by a society and that society’s history” (1996: 56).

Anna’s letters to her husband recount not only daily events, but also impressions, ideas, and beliefs. Her emblematic passages concerning family and communal attachments affirm her “relational autonomy,” a concept of personhood introduced by feminist scholars in the research literature of the past fifteen years. In a shift away from the familiar duality of “self” and “other,” the self in feminist thought has been redefined

as a consciously social and historical being who evolves through interconnections with people (Friedman 2003; Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000; Meyers 1997; Stanley 1992; Whitbeck 1989: 51-76). This was certainly the case in the Victorian period, as Linda Peterson (1999) explains in *Traditions of Victorian Women’s Autobiography: The Poetics and Politics of Life Writing*. At a time when women were expected to situate themselves within the domestic space of family and home rather than follow the masculine ideal of individualism and self-determination, women’s writings stressed the ethics of interrelations.

In Victorian society letter writing was a private activity viewed to be an accurate reflection of a woman’s character and critical to the formation of female identity (Amigoni 2005: 1-18; Mahoney 2003: 411-23; Nestor 2010: 18-35). At a time when letters were the only means of communication between people who were separated geographically, women were expected to be the family’s principal letter writers. Working within the framework of good manners, refined taste, courtesy and correctness, women were encouraged to write “lovingly” to absent family and friends, to be thoughtful in their compositions, and to express their emotions. The purpose was to produce letters that engaged their recipients by being conversational in tone while conveying information, answering inquiries, posing questions and generally exciting interest. In essence, the etiquette of letter writing offered women the opportunity to create content that was autobiographical in nature.

Because I am interested in exploring how autobiography can be represented through the material medium of landscape, I have interrelated two genres not usually considered together: the visual space of landscape and the textual space of letter writing. My starting point was to pair the feminist concept of relational autonomy with a recent examination of its relevance to artistic autonomy. Lambert Zuidervaat, a specialist in social philosophy and the philosophy of art, uses the idea of relational autonomy to explain how 1) interpersonal, 2) societal, and 3) internal autonomy are closely interlinked with the autonomy of the artist (2015: 235-46). In my interpretation of relational autonomy, which couples images and language, I have organized my analysis according to Zuidervaat’s three-part schema.

Interpersonal Autonomy

Interpersonal autonomy means that a person's agency is formed through interactions with others. With this in mind, the places Anna depicts in her drawings can be studied in terms of her connections with the people in her life. Simultaneously, her individuality comes from assimilating these experiences of people and places into images that interpret what she sees. For Anna, the landscape is the infrastructure both for participating in interpersonal relations and expressing her preoccupations and reactions. The special nature of this duality appears in her everyday pictures of Le Metis, where memories of personal and communal events intertwine. Anna writes: "Today Eva, Kate and I went down to the beach ... bye and bye I deserted and wandered off into the nearest woods and found some beautiful cedar which now adorns my room. I also took observations with regard to a certain clump of trees, which I hope soon to sketch" (July 1877).

Anna's drawings express the inner quiet she felt in relation to the people around her, a feeling that evidently existed in harmony with the natural landscape they occupied. This was Anna's emotional relationship with landscape as sensuous material form in how she inhabited the landscape with her friends and family. Frequently she drew small human figures dwarfed by the magnitude of the land, sea or sky (Fig. 1). They often appear to be absorbed in contemplating the surrounding scene. Other compositions that strike a more solitary note suggest a close-up viewing of the scenery and betray the artist's

intense observation of the forms and surfaces of things (Fig. 2).

In this narration Anna is not only the "I" who envisions the here and now but also the "I" who recalls the places she experienced during her own childhood when she revisits them with her young children. In August 1878 she writes to her husband, "Yesterday we had a perfect sea-side, cool clear fresh and full of sea-savour. I was on the shore all the morning as usual, and had several little walks up and down the rocks with mamma and Mrs. Wilson. The baby was as good as usual playing in the sand, paddling a little rain pool on a rock, and climbing over a prostrate log with unwearied energy." In the drawings of her children at play in the meadows, forests and rivers she frequented as a child, Anna evokes not only her special bond with the natural environment but memories of herself in that landscape.

Indeed, Anna is intent on imparting to her children her multiple readings of and relationships with the places they visit together. For example, we learn that she feels she needs to explain to her young son what she sees and draws: "I began a sketch yesterday of a sort of bog-hole, which I am sure would astonish the

Fig. 1 below
Anna Dawson
Harrington, Turiff's
Beach, Little Metis,
August 1882.
Watercolour on
paper, 16.4 x 24.5 cm.
Montreal: McCord
Museum, M982.579.9.

Fig. 2 right
Anna Dawson
Harrington, Metis. Aug.
21st, 1877. Watercolour
on paper, 27.0 x 17.9
cm. Montreal: McCord
Museum, M982.579.91.



eye of the uninitiated, but it may turn out to be pretty. Having to explain everything to Eric while I worked used up nearly all my time..." (July 1882). In these two sentences she reveals her interest in training her eye to see the world more clearly and her maternal obligation to teach her son to discern the analogies between sight and representation.

While landscape drawing for Anna is self-reflective and self-directed, it is a shared value in that it is formed and nurtured through relationships with others. In her letters she frequently tells her husband not only the time period she is engaged in a particular drawing, but whether or not she is drawing with friends or teaching them to draw, and if the children are present and are making pictures too. Here are a few examples: "Sketching meets with Eric's warmest approval.... It is wonderful to see how closely he observes and how accurately he remembers..." (June 1882); "Janie and I are bent on sketching..." (September 1 1882); "Miss Gardner, who I find is making great efforts to sketch, I am going to take in tow, and try to do a little myself by the way..." (July 9 1898). For Anna, the material character of the landscape constituted fundamental social values and identities. With this sensibility she characterized landscape as the site of communal experience and drawing as fundamental to the visual expression of these experiences.

Societal Autonomy

The second part of relational autonomy is societal autonomy, which is to say that being a person is to be socially and culturally formed, able to participate with a blend of independence and interdependence in the multidimensional character of society. A society's character is defined by the norms and ideals that are upheld by its members and the social relations and practices in which they participate. In good measure Anna's social and cultural formation was an outgrowth of her education. She learned to draw in an era when such learning was fundamental to the upbringing of young women.³ We can discern from the archival records of school attendance and prizes that she took drawing lessons in 1861 and 1862 with Mrs. Tate and Miss Tate at the Establishment for the Education of Young Ladies, and again

in 1863 at Mrs. Simpson's Ladies School.⁴ She continued to take art courses until 1867, when she was awarded the first prize for drawing at the Midsummer Examination. By 1875 she was devoted solely to art making, and writing to her fiancé Bernard that she "must be off to the Art School."

Landscape drawing, which involved an intense visual comprehension of the forms and surfaces of nature, was thought to foster moral vision, well-being, and an awareness of the relationship between the personal, the social, and the spiritual. The well-known British poets Milton and Tennyson, who Anna refers to in her letters, believed in the personal and social relevance of art and in a spirituality rooted in the physiology of nature.⁵ For Milton in particular, good citizenship and social responsibility depended on a harmonious relationship with rural culture and the natural world, as well as on peaceful states brought about by meditating on nature. Anna gives visual imagery to Milton's pastoral ideal in charming, pleasingly peaceful drawings of rivers, fields, and mountains (Fig. 3), and her letters reveal a belief similar to his, for example, when she writes: "I wish you could be out here too and rest while the frogs sing, and the beautiful stars shine so serenely—God seems so near in the country, and everything is so lovely—I must try and take in all the beauty and restfulness, till I can carry an atmosphere of peace back to you." We can imagine that with the stanzas of poems such as Milton's *L'Allegro* (1875) as her guide—"Mountains on whose barren breast/The labouring clouds do often rest.... Shallow brooks and rivers wide"—Anna chose to reconfigure these sentiments in the landforms of rural Quebec.

Tennyson, who explored interior landscapes and psychological spaces, is likewise suggested in Anna's drawings. These are her landscapes of isolated locations, sea and shore, sunrises and sunsets, and views of the horizon that mirror the recurrent forms Tennyson uses to give expression to states of human consciousness (Fig. 4). Occasionally Anna writes about how her imagination can turn natural appearances into supernatural revelations:

You know I often think I am seeing visions!
And shall I tell you what I saw today?
All the wise men of this world standing

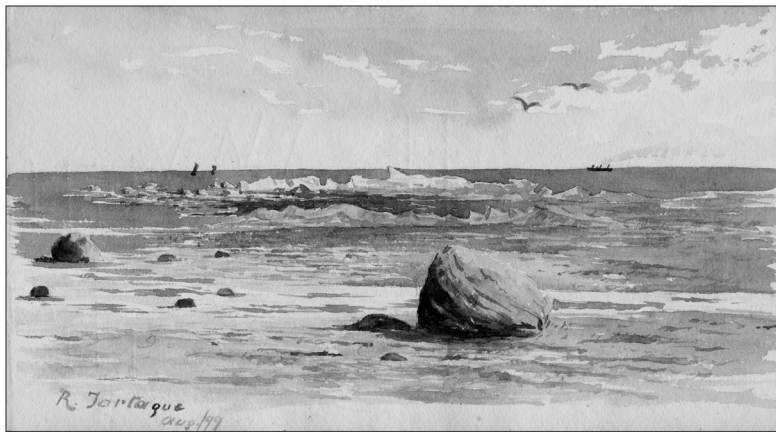


Fig. 3 top
Anna Dawson Harrington, Bic Hills, August 1882. Watercolour on paper, 16.5 x 24.6 cm. Montreal: McCord Museum, M982.579.38.

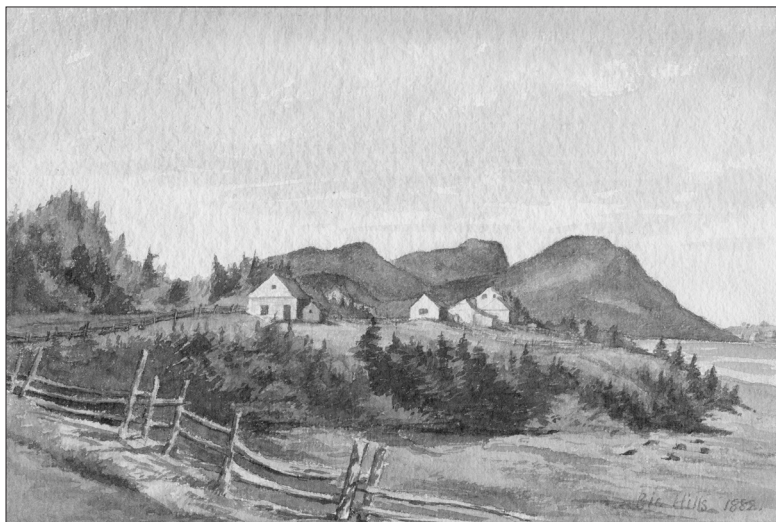
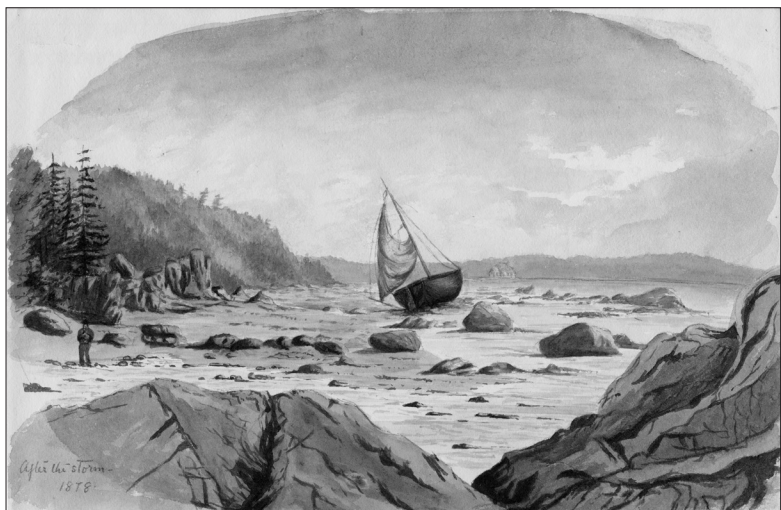


Fig. 4
Anna Dawson Harrington, Mouth of River Tartague, August 1899. Watercolour on paper, 9.8 x 17.9 cm. Montreal: McCord Museum, M982.579.21.

Fig. 5
Anna Dawson Harrington,
Metis, After the Storm, 1878.
Watercolour on paper, 17.9 x 27.3
cm. Montreal: McCord Museum,
M982.579.3.



on a little spit of sand dressed as little children, and trying with eyes, and hands to search the mysteries of the ocean, they had neither boats nor could they swim, and the few strange things they saw and caught pleased them much, but scarcely touched the great mystery they longed to solve. While God leads his children far out, they themselves must seek His presence in order to understand the fullness of His mysteries. (August 4, 1876)

This description reflects the human and transcendent qualities found in Tennyson's poetry and in her drawings, where the world is intimate and real, yet distant and unknowable.

The strong spiritual quality of Anna's landscapes is made legible through the thoughts and emotions that emerge in her letters.⁶ For instance, she writes in detail about a dreadful storm that occurred in 1878 on July 21. But rather than depict the struggles of the men as they tried to bring their schooners ashore, she captures its aftermath in a drawing of a small boat: "the oars were gone, and the upper part of the boat broken a bit... the helpless craft was rolled and tossed and mumbled by the waves, till it was finally tossed up on the shore..." In *After the Storm* (Fig. 5), Anna places the broken boat in the centre of the composition, revealing the attention she pays to its loneliness. The boat was powerless against the storm's strength, yet managed to survive.

Through this picture, which is dominated by an expanse of foggy sky, reminding us of human frailty, distress, and submission, Anna transforms a descriptive text into symbolic awareness. It is

“something quite out of the ordinary” (July 1878) she writes to her husband about this drawing, which connotes a personal and philosophical identity that is consistent with her spiritual view of herself and life.

Anna was a product of her time, affected by numerous social and symbolic constructions of the landscape. When she writes to Bernard that she “took observations with regard to a certain clump of trees, which I hope soon to sketch,” she acknowledges an interest she had in common with her geologist father and the many landscape painters whose enthusiastic study of geology led to a new language of landscape that evoked spiritual, ethical, and philosophical ideas (Bedell 2001). In asking “why people don’t sing hymns” upon experiencing a “wonderful sunset ... with glowing sky,” she not only affirms the love of music she shared with her husband (who was an accomplished pianist and songwriter), but the popularity of hymns in the evangelical circle to which she belonged and the belief that God’s goodness is observable in the natural world (Harding 1995). In naming the flowers in the woods beyond Mrs. Redpath’s house (June 1880)—the “carpets of pigeon berry blossoms, clumps of veronicas, wild lilies, linæa, and little wild white violets”—and asking her husband about an “odd flower which looks like a mitella” (June 1880) that she had pressed to send him, she recognizes Bernard’s expertise as the president of the Natural History Society of Montreal. She also confirms her own participation in activities associated with the study of natural phenomena. This included, most importantly, according to the norms of the Victorian era, the socially acceptable female pursuits of botanical preservation and illustration (Fig. 6).⁷

Internal Artistic Autonomy

Finally, Anna’s landscapes evoke her internal artistic autonomy. This is the third part of relational autonomy, wherein the aesthetic dimensions of life and art are closely linked through the processes of exploration, creative interpretation, and presentation of the landscape. From this perspective, landscape is a material form with varied colours, textures, and patterns, and diverse surfaces such as wet, arid, flat, hilly or forested.



Fig. 6
Anna Dawson
Harrington, Ladies'
Slippers. Metis. Aug.
1883. Watercolour on
paper, 26.8 x 20.1 cm.
Montreal: McCord
Museum, M982.579.93.



Fig. 7
Anna Dawson
Harrington, Bic. Aug.
1882. Watercolour
on paper, 23.6 x
36.4 cm. Montreal:
McCord Museum,
M982.579.129.

This is the visual imagery of the landscape that Anna responds to as an artist.

On occasion Anna inserts herself into her compositions—the artist who sits by the water absorbed in the imaginative act of creating works of aesthetic value (Fig. 7). Again and again in her letters, in a romantic language that discloses her vision of place, she sees the “tinted clouds” (1875), the “little curls of the ferns coming up” (1880), the “golden autumn fields that continue to fascinate me” (1882) and the “great hills of cumulous clouds making endless reflections and shades in the water” (1885). As she explores, interprets and

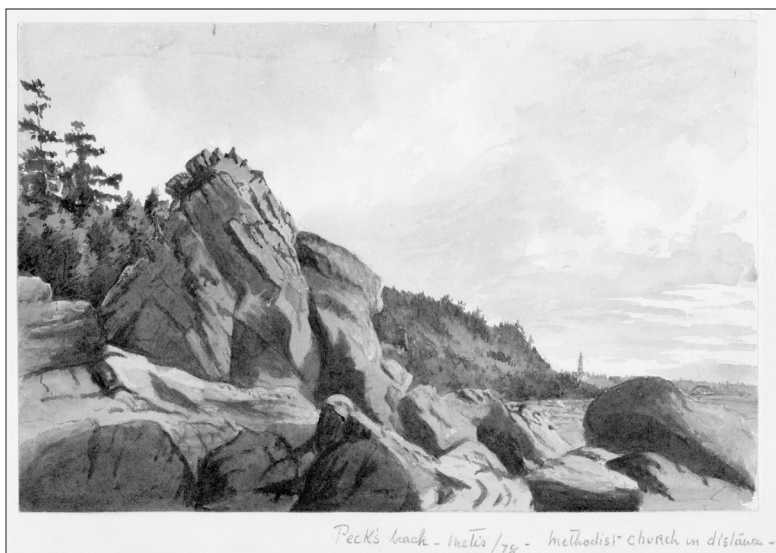


Fig. 8
Anna Dawson
Harrington, Peck's
beach. Metis 1878.
Methodist Church in
Distance. Watercolour
on paper on supporting
paper, 17.9 x 27.4 cm.
Montreal: McCord
Museum, M982.579.2.

presents rocky coasts, cascading waterfalls, dense forests and delicate flowers, Anna meditatively caresses forms and shapes (Fig. 8). With broad brushstrokes and thin lines she emphasizes the repetition found in visual elements such as the texture of a brittle stone, the curves of low-lying clouds, the rhythm of twisted branches and the colours of earth and grass (Fig. 9). In each artwork she imaginatively depicts her own experience of seeing and at the same time the internal demands she makes on the pictures themselves.

Within this context Anna Dawson Harrington's letters at the McGill Archives and drawings at the McCord Museum not only demonstrate the interpersonal and social aspects of relational autonomy, but an artistic vision of landscape that is also private, particular, imaginative and autonomous, revealing her personal landscape as the material locus of her self-exploratory autobiography.

Fig. 9
Anna Dawson
Harrington, Metis
Shore, 1877.
Watercolour on paper
on supporting paper.
Montreal: McCord
Museum, M982.579.18.



Notes

1. The McCord Museum has approximately two hundred of Anna's watercolours. For a list of ninety-six of these works, see Nicolas de Jong (1971), Assistant Archivist, Guide to the Watercolors of Anna Dawson Harrington on Color Microfilm, 1869-1914, Accession no. 1138, McGill University Archives, February, Montreal, P.Q.
2. The letters consulted for this article were transcribed and compiled by daughter Louis Winslow-Spragge. See Anna Harrington, *Early Life at McGill by a Professor's Wife, 1876-1907*, edited by Lois Winslow-Spragge (1970), typescript, Dawson Family Archives, McGill University Archives, accession 1138. From these writings I culled brief mentions of her drawing activities, such as the sentence in italics (my emphasis) in this letter, from July 7, 1885: "Edith has some hives, and is involved in great confession on the subject- she said to me 'those bad bees like to eat little children don't they mama?' ...*I have been dabbling with Eva's oil paints today with what result you will see when you come....* I am never going to report baby's goodness again, for he was so fidgety last night, it was because of mosquitoes, such small ones but very noisy." The letters are part of Anna Dawson Harrington's papers, accession 1138, containers 61-64. The archives also include correspondence with John William Dawson (1868-1896), Margaret Mercer Dawson, (1870-1902), George Mercer Dawson (1865-1901), her children (1892-1913), friends and associates (1867-1911), a girlhood diary (1866-1871), and some notes for biographies of John William Dawson and George Mercer Dawson.
3. In this emphasis on drawing Anna was following the precepts of an influential steward of socio-cultural solidarity, the British art critic and educator John Ruskin, who sketched extensively and occasionally taught drawing. In *The Elements of Drawing* (1857) he explains that learning to draw from nature trains the eye to see the world more clearly. He was convinced that accurate, penetrative perception affected other forms of understanding, and that by comprehending reality directly as visual experience, children learned not to separate the visual from the emotional or the aesthetically pleasing from compassion for humankind. In effect, Ruskin believed that seeing landscape, which involved an intense visual comprehension

of the forms and surfaces of nature, fostered moral vision and spiritual well-being. See also: Loren Lerner (2009), William Notman's Portrait Photographs of the Wealthy English-speaking Girls of Montreal: Representations of Informal Female Education in Relation to John Ruskin's 'Of Queens' Gardens' and Writings by and for Canadians from the 1850s to 1890s, *Historical Studies in Education* 21(2): 65-87; Dinah Birch (2002), 'What Teachers Do You Give Your Girls?': Ruskin and Women's Education, in Dinah Birch and Francis O'Gorman, eds., 121-36, *Ruskin and Gender* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan); David C. Hanson (1989), Ruskin's Praeterita and Landscape in Evangelical Children's Education, *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 44 (1): 45-66; Phillip Mallett (1997), John Ruskin and the Victorian landscape, in J.B. Bullen, ed. *Writing and Victorianism*, 219-33 (London and New York: Longman).

4. Anna Dawson Harrington, McGill University Archives, MG 1022 container 64. Also in this container is the 1882 catalogue of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts exhibition which lists two works by Mrs. A. L. Harrington, no. 130: *Martyrs to the Bush Fire*, and no. 208: *Boule Rock, Little Metis*. Anna's letters suggest that although her artistic pursuit of drawing is important, her priorities are being a mother and wife. This is in concert with the expectations, described by the author of *The Ladies Book of Useful Information Compiled from Many Sources* (1896): "God has made you a woman; and believe me, as there is no fairer, so there is no nobler creature than woman. She is formed to be her husband's helpmate and the mother of his children, and the all-important work of training these for heaven depends mainly upon her" (76). At times, however, Anna expresses her frustration at not being able to devote more time to studying nature and drawing. On July 18, 1881, she writes: "After the downpour on Saturday, I went down to the shore in the quiet evening, I enjoyed it so much, tide full in, and sunset glow in the west—I wish I more often could get away quite alone, I always feel so much better for it, the trivial pettiness that so often crusts over one's life, melts away and the better thoughts can rise to the surface, and the eyes catch glimpses of the land that is far off—and of that kingdom God which though so nigh is often invisible to us. The one thing I envy in man's estate is his power to walk out of the house made with man's hands, into the living temple of nature, whenever he pleases night or day." Always busy with her children and household tasks, she could only produce a small number of drawings each summer. On June 1880, she writes: "...my bottle of Chinese white which is on my desk I need as I am trying to finish the Glen's falls. I begin to cherish the hope that they will look like something. If I could take home about four pictures just to assure myself that I had not quite fallen away, from the love of the brush, I should be satisfied."
5. Anna on July 9, 1878, writes: "Some of the people here have got up a reading twice a week—subject Tennyson, I was asked to go and trotted up to Mrs. Redpath's this afternoon, work in hand. About 10 were there." On July 1881, she writes: "Reading Clubs—and all sorts of intellectual pursuits are on the *tapis*, the first afternoon 'read' begins Thursday, with Macaulay's essay on Milton." For a discussion of landscape imagery in the poetry of Milton and Tennyson see Roger Ebbatson (2013), *Landscape and Literature 1830-1914: Nature, Text, Aura* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, (see <https://www.palgrave.com/it/book/9781137330437>); Karen L. Edwards (2005), *Milton and the Natural World: Science and Poetry in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge University Press); John D. Rosenberg (1974), Tennyson and the Landscape of Consciousness, *Victorian Poetry* 12 (4): 303-10; James Donald Welch (1976), Tennyson's Landscapes of Time and a Reading of 'The Kraken,' *Victorian Poetry* 14 (3): 197-204.
6. An excellent later example of Anna's spiritual writing is from 1902: "Your last long letter deserves more reply than it got—I have no doubt spare time is rare with you, as it seems to be most places—would you not like to go to a great wilderness where we might quietly realize ourselves and grow great in listening to the harmonies of nature, and thinking God's great thoughts. The next best thing is to do as Catherine of Siena did making a cell and oratory in her heart, so calm and secure that, in the midst of the most distressing occupations she could ever retire to it, and rest in peace." Anna also reveals her religious thoughts in the references to the literature she is reading or requests for books for herself and her children: June 1880, "I have left behind the little book of F.R. Havergal's 'Royal Commandments.' It will do very well when you come—I wish you would take it for morning readings, I found it so helpful, I have the companion vol. of evening meditations, and enjoy it so much."; July 19, 1889,

"I find I am very short of all sorts of books for the children, especially for Sunday reading—I will enclose a list, and if you can lay your hands on any of them I would be most glad to have them. I intended to bring 'Tales of Alsace' and 'Sketches of Christian Life in England' for Eric, for he reads a good deal now, and the Sundays here are long."; July 19 1890, "I also wish that Eric would bring me down half a dozen French gospels, and two copies of the psalms, and one each of the English gospels, they are about 5 cts each and can be got at the Bible House of St Catherine St."; November 10, 1894, "I have got another book about Savonarola, who was a most astonishing man, I have always been interested in him, but never had a chance to read him up before. It is the same story all through history -the man who consciously stands in God's sight, with the simple purpose of doing His will, is an irresistible power in the world."

7. Anna's letters confirm her strong interest in botanical studies. For instance, she writes on July 23, 1903: "Yesterday Ruth, Will (Poppy) ... found quantities of the Indian pipe, and also a number of yellow flowers evidently of the same kind, we looked it up, and found it to be the pine sap, the botanical name being very impressive, *Monotropa hypopitys*." She also assisted her father in his work on fossil plants

with her drawings of paleobotanical plants and landscapes. See *Dawson Teaching Sheets Exhibition*, Redpath Museum, Fall 2007. Karen M. Morin (2008) contextualizes women's interest in natural history during this era in *Frontiers of Femininity: A New Historical Geography of the Nineteenth-century American West* (Syracuse University Press): "Amateur-based natural history did create space for women to study natural phenomena on the equivalent moral grounds of self-improvement.... Victorian natural history operated far more in the private domestic sphere than did the professionalized scientific experimental botany and zoology that replaced it. Even within the strictures of middle class Victorian social norms, women's naturalized affiliation with the private sphere permitted them access to learning natural history along with most of its practices: membership in most field clubs, development of specialized private botanical gardens and greenhouses, correspondence with other naturalists, preservation of specimens, authorship of books and papers, and botanical illustration" (9). See also Jeanne K. Guelke and Karen Morin (2001), *Gender, Nature, Empire: Women Naturalists in Nineteenth Century British Travel Literature*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 26 (3): 306-26.

References

Primary Sources

Harrington, Anna (1876-1907), *Early Life at McGill by a Professor's Wife, 1876-1907*, Lois Winslow-Spragge, ed., 1970, typescript, Dawson Family Archives, McGill University Archives, accession 1138, containers 61-64.

Secondary Sources

Adams, Annmarie Adams and Peter Gossage. 2010. *Health Matters: The Dawson and Harrington Families at Home*. *Fontanus* 12: 41-62.

Amigoni, David. 2005. Introduction: Victorian Life Writing: Genres, Print, Constituencies. In *Life Writing and Victorian Culture*, ed. David Amigoni, 1-18. London: Ashgate.

Bedell, Rebecca. 2001. *The Anatomy of Nature: Geology and American Landscape Painting, 1825-1875*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

De Jong, Nicolas. (1971). Guide to the Watercolors of Anna Dawson Harrington on Color Microfilm, 1869-1914, accession no. 1138, McGill University Archives, February, Montreal, P.Q.

Edwards, Hilary. 2009. Protecting Life from Language: John Ruskin's Museum as Autobiography. *Biography* 32 (2): 297-315.

Egan, Susanna. 1996. Emily Carr and the Landscapes of Autobiography. *Essays on Canadian Writing* 60 (Winter): 166-88.

Finley, Stephen C. 1988. Scott, Ruskin, and the Landscape of Autobiography. *Studies in Romanticism* 26 (4): 549-72.

Friedman, Marilyn. 2003. *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harding, Bruce. 1995. Canadian Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Church Music Prior to 1925. In *Presbyterian, Methodist and*

- Congregational Worship in Canada Prior to 1925*, ed. Thomas Harding and Bruce Harding. Toronto: Evensong. Available from: http://www.hymnology.ca/Canada_pre-1925.htm
- Lambert, Zuidervaat. 2015. Creating a Disturbance: Art, Social Ethics, and Relational Autonomy. *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 90 (4): 235-46.
- Mackenzie, Catriona and Natalie Stoljar, eds. 2000. *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mahoney, Deirdre M. 2003. 'More Than an Accomplishment': Advice on Letter Writing for Nineteenth-Century American Women. *Huntington Library Quarterly* 66 (3/4): 411-23.
- Meyers, Diana T., ed. 1997. *Feminists Rethink the Self*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Michel, Robert H. 2003. Anna Dawson Harrington's Memoir of Her Father Sir William Dawson, 1900. *Fontanus* 11: 174-84.
- . 1992. Diaries from the McGill University Archives—A Sampling. *Fontanus* 5: 33-53.
- Nestor, Pauline. 2010. New Opportunities for Self-reflection and Self-fashioning: Women, Letters and the Novel in mid-Victorian England. *Literature and History* 19 (2): 18-35.
- Ouellet, Danielle. 2003. Harrington, Bernard James. *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 13 University of Toronto/Université Laval. http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/harrington_bernard_james_13E.html
- Peterson, Linda H. 1999. *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography: The Poetics and Politics of Life Writing*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Sheets-Pyenson, Susan. 1996. *John William Dawson: Faith, Hope, and Science*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Stanley, Liz. 1992. *The Auto/Biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Tilley, Christopher. 2004. *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology*. Oxford: Berg.
- . 2010. *Interpreting Landscapes: Geologies, Topographies, Identities*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- . 2006. Introduction: Identity, Place, Landscape and Heritage. *Journal of Material Culture* 11 (1/2): 7-32.
- Whitbeck, Caroline. 1989. A Different Reality: Feminist Ontology. In *Women, Knowledge, and Reality*, ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall, 51-76. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- Winslow-Spragge, Lois. 1993. *No Ordinary Man: George Mercer Dawson*. Toronto: Dundurn.
- Worthington, Kim L. 1996. *Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Continuity in Contemporary Fiction*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.