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DURING THE PAST fifteen years the world has witnessed a swiftly rising wave of interest in the literatures of the British Commonwealth. Half a dozen North American libraries are rapidly acquiring extensive collections; bibliographies have appeared in the literatures of Australia, Canada and New Zealand, as well as on Indian fiction in English; and every week sees new titles in fiction and poetry not only from these countries but also from such regions as the West Indies and Africa. Each of these emerging literatures can be considered a tributary to a larger stream—the stream not of English literature, to be sure, but of literature in English. The literature of the United States—which happens to be outside the Commonwealth—is increasingly influential everywhere, even in Great Britain itself. But the stream is steadily widening. If few signs exist as yet of mutual influences among these newer literatures, there is certainly an increasing awareness of one another, and before long the readers and writers of one Commonwealth country will recognize that they can profit much from fuller acquaintance with the literatures of the others.

In this paper I shall concern myself only with the two senior members of the overseas Commonwealth, Australia and Canada, and consider the backgrounds of their two literatures as reflected in a few significant philosophical and social themes current in the fiction of the two countries. Despite some similarities both superficial and profound, Australians are not Canadians, and Australian fiction

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reflects the thoughts and feelings of a people whose land, history and way of life differ significantly and emphatically from the Canadian.

In literary studies national characteristics are often discounted if not entirely disregarded. Yet the physical, social, and spiritual environment surrounding a writer must inevitably enter into the substance of what he says and also affect his very manner of expression, his style and form. Therefore, when readers assume, as they often do, that an Australian or Canadian writer is trying to do what an English or American writer would try to do ("and not succeeding so well" is the stock inference), the conclusion may be ignored but the erroneous assumption on which it is based must be challenged. Two essays by Arthur A. Phillips in his *The Australian Tradition* suggest the needed corrective. Analyzing the work of Henry Lawson and Joseph Furphy, Mr. Phillips refutes orthodox critics by demonstrating that what they had called "weaknesses" in the fictional techniques of these two writers were actually brilliant adaptations of imported forms to native substance, and completely integrated with their essentially Australian subject matter and point of view. The critics who had uncritically applied alien standards were making erroneous assumptions about work whose unique nature they had not seriously tried to understand. The same errors flourished in the United States a century ago when uniquely American writers like Thoreau, Whitman, and Twain won far less favour from contemporary academic critics

than skilful but unimportant imitators of the then dominant British tradition and practice.

When American literature was struggling out of its adolescence, Ralph Waldo Emerson posed a question: "Why should not Americans enjoy an original relation to the universe?" A few years later, Walt Whitman was to assert that his countrymen were at fault when they looked at their country and their literature through eyes distorted by foreign values and interests. By doing so they saw only that the United States lacked much that Europe had, whereas unimpeded vision might more usefully detect what the States had that Europe lacked.

It is not too soon to ask whether Canadians and Australians also enjoy original relations to the universe, possess some things with literary implications which other countries lack—not entirely, perhaps, but relatively. The originality might be some special point of view towards aspects of human life which may exist everywhere but are observed nowhere so clearly or profoundly as in Canada or Australia. To consider such a possibility means that for at least a little while we should stop listening to complaints that our young literatures lack certain dimensions of the human spirit found abroad: certain types of intellectual complexity, for example, or certain nuances of sensitivity and refinements of emotions, or certain aspects of spiritual and religious intensity. Such stock complaints are never accompanied by a relevant question: have these approved qualities been gained in older literatures only after the loss of other desirable qualities? Are they, in short, gains counterbalanced by losses?

Remembrance of things past is more frequent in those with a brighter past than future, nuances in sensitivity are treasured most by those whose senses have become jaded, and some forms of intellectual complexity seem substitutes for an enfeebled imagination or atrophied muscles. Are the processes of age necessarily better suited to literature than those of youth? Is *The Wasteland* so obviously superior to *The Canterbury Tales*? Admittedly, both Australian and Canadian literatures are frequently concerned with exploring the spirit or character of our peoples as national groups and with attempting to discern and absorb the essential characteristics of our geography and history. Why not, since the possibility exists that something new in the world may be discovered? Every national literature seems to have gone through a comparable process and period. Youth is not directly in competition with age, for youth may be doing things that age has forgotten how to do, or has never done, or has done differently. Every young nation may find itself enjoying an original relation to the universe.

WHEREAS CANADA is merely the northern half of a continent, Australia is geographically unique, and isolated as no country has ever been, except New Zealand. Far away from distracting influences and freed from close supervision or control, the Australians were able to construct their own national myths and prototypes well before the first world war. Canada has never enjoyed any period at all comparable. To Canada, the mother country was always close, and the United States even closer, with neither geographical nor linguistic barriers between. Within the precarious present we have become sharply aware of the nuclear squeeze from above and below. Since infancy, then, Canada has been unlike Australia, in being always beset by varied external pressures and influences. We have never been isolated enough.

Australian literature, around the turn of this century, displays a widespread Utopian faith that a new and better society might be built in the Southern Hemisphere, far away from the wars and miseries of the Old World. Similar aspirations are found in American literature beginning with the first settlement and long continuing. Canadian literature reveals no such optimistic dream-time, for Canadians have never been able to dream—or dream for more than a moment—that they were in full control of their total destiny. Far from expanding in untrammelled visions of the future, Canadians have been advancing one step at a time, balancing this gain against that loss, this promise against that threat, the horizontal British attraction against the vertical American one. Such a way of life has its own exhilaration, but not the exhilaration of rhapsodic vision or of any “damn the consequences” type of heroic adventure. More goes on in the mind and muscles of the tightrope walker than meets the eye of the casual onlooker, and this fact is quite in keeping with the world’s opinion that, by contrast with either Australians or Americans, Canadians appear to be a pretty sober if not colourless body of people—at least outwardly. Our literature, too, shares the contrast, for it tends less towards either exuberance or violence than towards lonely endeavour, introspection, and ironic undertones.

In history, too, Australia and Canada possess soil for distinctive literary harvests. I am not referring to dramatic incidents or heroic individuals which are to be found in the history of each country and which supply each literature with specific subject matter or allusions or symbolic imagery. Instead, I wish to examine one or two examples of what might be called “sensitive areas” or, perhaps better, “sensitizing factors”, which seem to have produced original responses in both the life and literature of each people. They are “sensitive areas” because

they are subjects we are sometimes touchy about, sometimes deliberately exclude from our consciousness. Yet they are also "sensitizing factors" because they refine or colour our outlook, affect subconsciously perhaps our interpretation of things. To literature they can be like the irritant grains of sand that produce the pearls.

First but not the most important of these sensitive areas is our treatment of the original native inhabitants of our two lands. Neither Canadians nor Australians find much comfort in this subject, even though our current efforts may mark a great advance over those of our ancestors. Nevertheless, rationalize all we will, reiterate endlessly that if it hadn't been us it would have been someone else, we still cannot wholly erase our hidden knowledge that, by our own ethical code, might is never right, and therefore we have no legitimate moral claim whatever to the lands from which we displaced the original inhabitants. To be sure, such displacement has happened in most if not all countries—usually so long ago that no discernible trace is left on the conscience of present generations. Victor and victim have long since assimilated. But in a handful of countries, including ours, the event is so recent that it is still a sensitive and sensitizing fact.

I am not at all concerned here with advocating or disapproving the literary use of Indian or aboriginal myths, terminology, or cultural customs or symbols, though one might perhaps mention, in passing, that Canadian literature has never had a literary movement like that of the Jindyworobaks, a group of Australian writers who consciously sought to absorb and express in literature their extensive awareness of aboriginal lore and language. What interests me more is the literary treatment of the interrelationships, past and present, between original inhabitants and white intruders.

In North America the Indians were often a highly formidable enemy, unlike the far more primitive aborigines of Australia, and the violent feelings they provoked in generations of white North Americans have notably affected the literary treatment of the subject. North American Indians have provided the substance for a host of "adventure" stories of all the popular sorts, but they have occasioned little true literature. American and Canadian treatment of the Indian in both life and literature has, however, by no means been identical. That "the only good Indian is a dead Indian" was an American, not a Canadian, aphorism. Our history contains the names of many good Indians who were neither traitors to their own people nor sycophants of the white man's way of life, and our literature, in turn, tends to avoid the diabolized stereotypes of American frontier fiction. Nevertheless, surprisingly few Canadian novels of literary merit have been written about Indian-white relationships of either yesterday or today.

In Australia, on the contrary, the results have been much richer. Only there has it been possible to observe and interpret the consequences of juxtaposing the stone age and the 19th or 20th centuries. Latent are many original interconnections of space and time and spirit of hardly less significance than exploring the jaded sensibilities of bohemians in flight from suburbia. Relationships between the intruder and the dispossessed in Australia encompass implications and complications of greater literary effectiveness, perhaps, than those in North America. One reason may be that the sensitive Australian conscience cannot be so easily calcified by the ready rationalization of self-defence; another that because the stereotypes of embattled conflict were clearly impossible the subject attracted only authors of higher abilities. Moreover, the greater disparity between aborigine and white, the formidable racial, social, and cultural barriers to be scaled, also make for power and poignancy. Consider simply the subject of sexual love. In Canadian fiction, a white man who rejects or deserts an Indian girl must be either a snob or a cad, both stock figures who cannot seriously engage the sympathetic self-identification of a reader for long. I do not recall a single good Canadian novel about an Indian-white love affair. The same interracial situation in Australia forms the substance of several excellent works, including Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo*, Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia*, and Mary Durack's *Keep Him My Country*.

TO AUSTRALIANS, a sensitive area and sensitizing factor of far greater significance than their relation to the aborigines is what has been called convictism, a term which not only embraces the historical facts about the transportation and treatment of convicted felons but also implies certain complex social and psychological consequences which long outlived the ending of the system. There was a time when Australian sensitivity about this portion of their history was such that both historians and the general public tended to minimize the alleged consequences upon Australian life, and to deplore the fascination the convict system exerted upon producers and consumers of popular fiction. Within recent years the attitude has changed to one that is both less emotional and more profound. Convictism is indeed far from providing the whole explanation of Australian characteristics, but it cannot be ignored for its share in creating certain features that distinguish Australian society from societies lacking this historical factor.

Leaving aside the colourful possibilities for romantic and realistic literary treatment of the convict system itself, one may still look for surviving consequences of great literary significance. For example, what were the lasting effects upon the life and outlook of the *free* settlers of having for two or three generations in their midst and under their control convicted persons as servants and laborers? Again, what was the effect upon the convicts themselves of serving out their sentences not within walls, as in other societies, but in the open air, doing things of indispensable social usefulness instead of routine drudgery, and in continuous daily contact with free people who could hardly survive without them? Though the convict's present was certainly bound up with his master's, his ultimate future was not, for he was not a slave; nor was he distinguishable by colour, education, or culture. The convict's wife (or husband) might be a free settler to whom the convict was assigned for the duration of the sentence. In any event the children of convicts, whether legitimate or illegitimate, were born free. For the first forty years of Australian settlement, free settlers were outnumbered by persons either still under sentence or emancipated on completion of their sentences.

Obviously, this unique situation must have occasioned reflections of an original sort about the nature of society, of justice, of crime and punishment; about the authority of those in control yet dependent upon the controlled; about the rights and social status of those who made laws, those who enforced laws, and those who violated laws; about the privileges of property and the powers of property-less workers. Though the convict system existed for not more than two or three generations, the results of this sensitizing factor in Australia's formative years are still discoverable.

In his recent book *The Australian Legend* Russel Ward has clearly demonstrated some of these consequences. They are not all to be found, however, in overt social patterns, for such a unique historical experience can sensitize or colour a people's outlook and give a different aspect to common human situations. The "universal" theme of the individual's relation to his community frequently becomes in Australian fiction notably different from the way it appears in British, American, or Canadian writing. And unless such differences in point of view are recognized in criticism, and properly weighted, an author's characters may easily be judged as "weak", or "confused", or "implausible" simply because they behave differently from the supposed norm of the critic's own society.

In Great Britain, for instance, the class structure of society has been a sensitizing factor of great literary significance. Among other things, it has motivated much reflection about the "universals" of human nature which transcend distinctions

based on birth or family. Consider the recurrence in British literature of the concept that "a man's a man for a' that", or that Judy O'Grady and the Colonel's lady are sisters under the skin, or that a girl of the lower classes such as Pamela or Tess merits treatment enjoyed as a matter of course by a girl of the upper classes. In the literatures of the United States, Canada, and Australia we are not expected to feel astonishment at so original a moral discovery. In these three societies a colonel's lady could quite easily be Judy's sister in fact as well as femininity. In Britain the obvious social differences have impelled a quest for similarities or universals, whereas in the other societies the obvious similarities have invited a search for differences.

In the United States a principal factor has been slavery, with manifold but still largely unexplored consequences in American society and general outlook. For over two hundred years Americans lived with slaves in their midst before Lincoln gave them legal freedom, and this historical experience has marked their society as indelibly as convictism has done the Australian. In American literature one consequence has been an incessant concern with questions of liberty in all its ramifications: free will versus determinism, individual freedom versus social and moral conventionalism, untrammelled "free enterprise" versus "socialized" or public enterprise. The generations following the war that freed the slaves saw the rise of the literary movement called "Naturalism", the philosophic centre of which concerns the problem of personal freedom, or lack of it, amidst a variety of environmental controls. A frequent theme in American fiction has long been the individual gripped by a situation for which he is not responsible and from which he wishes to free himself, often by severing his bonds and running away physically or spiritually to search for a new life elsewhere. The parallel to the fate and hope of one born into slavery is obvious.

This kind of theme is rare in both Canadian and Australian literatures. Unlike a slave, a convict was born free, was responsible for his own servitude, and in time would regain his original freedom. In neither Australian nor Canadian literature has Naturalism been an important movement. Vertical relationships between God and creature, master and slave, have been of less concern than horizontal relations between equals and potential equals. Problems of fate and freedom give place to problems of fraternity and isolation.

Neither slaves nor convicts were significant in Canadian historical experience, but we have a sensitizing factor uniquely our own, with far-reaching consequences in our national life and literature. From our earliest years, we have had a large French-speaking group anxious to maintain its identity against influences

from the conquering British and the neighbouring Americans. In the 1780's these original Canadians were joined by the Loyalists who had been expelled from the new-born United States but who had no wish to cross the Atlantic and become Englishmen. These newcomers might be separated by language from *les canadiens* but they were firmly united with them in wishing to be something different from either the English or the Americans. Since then, apart from some invasions during the War of 1812 and the Fenian border raids half a century later, Canada has never feared for her national liberty but has never been free of fear for her separate identity.

From the beginning Canadians have lived within a complex network of circumstances and influences internal and external, historical and geographical, not of our own making, to be sure, but certainly of our own choice. Escape from the tensions we experience has always been possible but never chosen. Although hundreds of thousands of individual Canadians have migrated south of the border, the remarkable thing may well be not that the number is so great but that it is not far greater! To remain as we are and become what we want to become in our own way has always cost Canadians more in both money and effort than if we accepted the apparent logic of geographic, economic, cultural, or military arguments.

To the onlooker, there may well be something pathetic or even absurd in the incessant Canadian desire to feel and assert a difference between ourselves and our American brothers; our difference from the English no longer needs argument. The outsider readily sees the many "American" similarities but few if any of the alleged differences. But while feelings are not visible, they can be profoundly important, regardless of whether or not their foundations may appear dubious or illusory. The feeling of difference, even the mere wish to be different, can have consequences, and some of them may be found in our literature.

With unusual frequency our authors depict individuals struggling to achieve some personal goal while resisting pressures or attractions of various kinds from their environments. The characters are not shown as seeking escape *from* a shackling situation, however; rather they are shown as attempting to achieve or preserve some separate purpose or identity *within* the social complex. In this light consider the central characters of such varied novels as Birney's *Turvey*, Callaghan's *More Joy In Heaven* or *The Loved and the Lost*, MacLennan's *The Precipice* or *The Watch that Ends the Night*, Grove's *The Master of the Mill*, Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*, Peterson's *The Chipmunk*, Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, and Gabrielle Roy's *The Cashier*. It should

not surprise us that even a popular novelist like Mazo de la Roche should employ the same theme as the basis of the entire *Jalna* series; the characteristic family identity of the Whiteoaks is shown persisting through more than a century despite changing social and economic pressures of various kinds and despite inter-marriage with Americans and British through the generations.

The hero of an American novel may be an implausible weakling if he doesn't cut loose from his social shackles and take to the open road to seek his private New Jerusalem, whereas the Canadian may well prove himself a weakling if he does. The Australian character who seeks a personal goal by deserting or resisting his former companions or their values is seldom the hero but often the villain. Instead of people entangled in inherited or environmental social patterns beyond their control, Australian literature tends to present people in interdependence within a group, which may of course be at odds with another group; it explores such problems as limitations on authority or privilege, forgiveness of sins, the nature of justice, of loyalty, of "mateship". Neither Canada nor Australia have folk heroes like Washington and Lincoln who established national liberty and personal liberty respectively, for such achievements were unnecessary in our societies. In Canada, Montcalm who resisted is as much honoured as Wolfe who overcame him. As we begin to understand Sir John A. Macdonald better we see him as the quintessential Canadian who maintained and achieved his dream by adroit manœuvrings through a welter of pressures and influences, and in defiance of apparently unanswerable logic. Canada has no folk hero remotely like Australia's Ned Kelly, the outlaw who was unshakeably loyal to his mates and his class, but implacably hostile to the police, who in their turn appear to be less the arm of society than an alien third power. The chief folk hero in Australia, however, is no particular individual but rather a composite or type figure of the foot-loose workman, going where and when he lists, sure of the necessity for and value of his skilled labour when he chooses to work, sure also of assistance from his "mates" when personal misfortune strikes. For decades, the overwhelming majority of Australians have lived in large urban centers, but their folk hero is still the nameless swagman, the independent, propertyless but skillful rural itinerant burdened only with his blanket roll or waltzing matilda. He wears no man's collar but he is always spiritually, socially, and culturally supported by the sense of fraternal community with his fellows. He feels no need either to compete with them or to resist their influence upon him.

MORE DIFFERENCES in national attitudes towards "universal" human situations can be found than I have been able to touch on here. Examination of the humour or the poetry produced in Canada and Australia would provide further evidence. To describe all the national peculiarities and trace their genesis will require a far more wide-ranging study than anyone has yet made, but not until their intrinsic character is understood can the literary accomplishment of either country stand revealed for whatever it may prove to be worth. Meanwhile, the most useful hypothesis, I believe, derives from Emerson: that Canadians and Australians, like the Americans, may enjoy an original relation to the universe. Our task is to discover what this is.

Still to be answered is why our two literatures have only recently begun to attract attention. If "originality" is what matters, why has world interest been so tardy and so tepid? In reply one might fairly point out that literary history contains many examples of inadequate appreciation resulting from faulty understanding. To their contemporaries, Gower seemed as important as Chaucer, Longfellow more important than Whitman. When eventually the direction of a new development is perceived, the true worth of the early pathfinders can be understood and acknowledged. Only then do most readers and critics really scrutinize the work with sufficient care and humility to discover what has all along been its essential quality. What is most original in the outlook, assumptions, and values of an emerging literature or pathfinding author is often the very feature that provokes contemporary misjudgment or dismissal.

Taking possession of a new land psychologically is a far slower process than merely occupying it physically. In the United States more than two centuries had to elapse before the imported literary tradition was sufficiently transformed to begin producing a native literature, and the fact that a new and different literature was indeed emerging was not recognized, even by many Americans themselves, until the present century. That such a development was even a possibility was quite inconceivable to an English critic in 1820, the year Sydney Smith asked his rhetorical question: "In the four quarters of the world, who ever reads an American book?"

I am not for a moment trying to insinuate that within a century Canadian or Australian literature will be as firmly established, as important, or as well known as American literature now is. Neither country will then be as populous, as rich, as powerful as the present United States. Yet little gift of prophecy is required to claim that in the world of nations the status of the two Commonwealth countries

will continue to rise, and that attention will be increasingly accorded to their literatures. However, those literatures will require, I believe, a longer time than American literature needed to emerge to full maturity. The intellectual climate of their adolescence, for one thing, has been far more complex. Even if we could disregard the vastly increased cultural interrelationships with the non-English-speaking world, the fact would remain that in Canada and Australia an emerging literature must reconcile and transform literary importations from not one but two established literatures in English.

One advantage is nevertheless possessed by those Canadians and Australians who desire a mature literature for their countries. The American example has shown that the way of growth is likely to be found in differences from the imported stock rather than in similarities. Whether it comes from one or many sources, whatever is imported is likely to be sterile until it is transformed to suit the new geographical and historical and social environment. Therefore the sooner we begin to understand the original nature of our own relations to the universe, the sooner we may learn in what directions lie our literary futures.

