CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF AUSTRALIAN AND CANADIAN VERSE - A SURVEY

Man's social behaviour by and large is moulded by his beliefs, notions, prejudices, presuppositions and certain ideas he holds dear to him. Even countries with vast differences in flora and fauna and in climatic conditions may show similarities in outlook, temperament or attitude. This is particularly so in the case of countries like Canada and Australia which are erstwhile colonies of settlement with close ethnic connection with Britain.

With the dissolution of the British Empire began the growth of literatures in English. Naturally, the greatest legacy left by the British Empire is the English language which is the most important medium of communication at the global level. As R.K. Dhawan, P.V. Dhamija and A.K. Shrivastava have rightly observed, "The English speaking world has now come to realise that English literature is a creative endeavour of many countries and cultures including some of the older civilizations
of Asia and Africa and newly formed nations such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada” (1:7). In countries like Australia, New Zealand or Canada where English is an inherited language, it has been exploited for creative expression in diverse cultural contexts thereby attaining a texture and resonance often excelling those seen in the purely Anglo-Saxon idiom and usage. The writers from these Commonwealth countries are on a vantage ground because they can readily experiment with form and technique as they are open to free forms and to new amalgamations of experience and expression.

In common parlance, the term “Commonwealth” is a body of erstwhile British Colonies who share, apart from their one-time allegiance to the British Crown, a familiarity with the English language. “Commonwealth Literature” is therefore a blanket term covering all literatures written in English in the erstwhile colonies. The Empire, a colonial entity comprising the colonizer and the colonized, therefore suggests the contradiction between the hegemonic and ‘the other’ literature. While the former has always been the mainstream, the latter has mostly been sidelined. But when the Derridean reversal of roles in this binary opposition is applied, one finds that the literature of the periphery is gaining precedence over the literature in the mainstream. This is evident from the wide critical acclaim
and popular appeal that Commonwealth Literature is receiving of late.

Braj Kachru, the famous American linguist, has distinguished between "the inner circle" and "the outer circle" nations of the Commonwealth (Hussain et al. 161). Canada, Australia and New Zealand belong to "the inner circle" while India, Africa and the Carribeans belong to "the outer circle". A writer from "the inner circle" has the language for creative expression, English, already chosen for him. There are hardly any linguistic alternatives available to him. For an "outer circle" writer however, the process of writing in English is more complex. The success of writers from the "outer circle" nations, like R.K. Narayan, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, however, shows how they can express themselves through a language that is not entirely their own. As Frank Kermode has pointed out: "There can be only one English literature... there cannot be a British or American literature" (15). Colonial history has rendered conservative Anglo-centricity no longer tenable, thus preparing the ground for the flowering of an American literature, an Australian literature or a New Zealand literature. Writers from " the outer circle" who write in an almost alien milieu, a predominantly unEnglish linguistic and cultural environment, have no other option but to decolonize.
English so as to grasp the deeper structures and configurations of native cultures. The Canadian writer or his Australian counterpart who is part of "the inner circle", however, seldom meets with such a predicament. Very rarely is he called upon to make radical adjustments in language and style. Their challenge lies rather in exploiting the already available and inherited forms of language for depicting human nature and relationships in a new landscape than in producing a new kind of English.

The central premise of the literatures emanating from the Commonwealth is the logic of cultural transition which inevitably necessitates new ways of self-differentiation and new forgings of identity, continuity and affiliation. The rich corpus of literatures coming from these countries represents a healthy blend of authority and experience in a complex human situation and predicament. Many Canadian and Australian critics have stressed the need for a comparative study of Canadian and Australian literatures saying that though there was little direct contact between the two countries, they share a common ancestry. John Mathews has observed in Tradition in Exile: "Comparisons are most effective and helpful when they deal with divergences that spring from a common base" (vi). He further contends that "more may be discovered about both
Canadian and Australian letters when they are compared than when they are studied in isolation” (viii).

For long, there raged a question as to whether a distinct Australian or Canadian literature existed. But by fate, there has emerged a general consensus that these literatures have attained a maturity which is self-assured but never aggressively nationalistic. A clear progression in three stages is noticeable in the development of literature in the erstwhile colonies, a progression from colonial insecurity to colonial self-assertion leading ultimately to the attainment of a self-assured maturity. There is however a major problem that still baffles the colonial writer. He is fated either to stand inside his slowly emerging and sparsely defined culture and look around him or stand outside and judge it using the parameters of the English parent tradition. Northrop Frye in Canada has identified the colonial “garrison mentality” and exposed the colonial’s misplaced desire to meet standards rather than make them (225). Many critics in Australia point to the absurdity of the Australian tendency towards making needless comparisons of their own writing with others. But P.R. Stephenson comes nearer the truth when he suggests that “Art and literature are nationally created, but become internationally appreciated” (207).
Much like our Indo-English writing, Australian literature too is a relatively new literature, its evolution spanning a period of just 200 years. A land meant primarily for the convict settlers from England, Australia had its earliest miscellaneous writings produced by convicts, emancipators, travellers and explorers. The first Australian novel, significantly enough, was the veiled autobiography of a convict, Henry Savery’s Quintus Servinton. But present day Australia houses many eminent writers who have received international acclaim. Literary historians like H.M. Green, MaCartney and G. Dutton and anthologists like Douglas Stewart and Judith Wright have made solid contributions towards popularising Australian literature, particularly Australian poetry at an international level. The Nobel Prize for literature awarded to Patrick White the novelist in 1973 brought immediate critical attention to the Australian literary scene. The fine crop of poetry produced by poets like Shaw Neilson (1872-1942), Hugh MacCrae (1876-1958), Christopher Brennan (1870-1932), Dame Mary Gilmore (1865-1962), Kenneth Slessor (1901-1971), R.D. FitzGerald (1902-1987), A.D. Hope (b1907- ), James McAuley (1917-1976), Judith Wright (b1915- ) and the aboriginal writer Kath Walker (1920-1993) matches in quality with the best poetry produced elsewhere in the world. Drawing their sustenance from a living present as well as the nourishing past, writers in
Australia no more turn to England for imitation, models or a nod of approval. They have learnt to stand on their own. Prof. Alec King has passionately challenged the claim that local writing has developed clear and distinctively Australian characteristics. In his view, Australian poetry is essentially English poetry, exhibiting only a regional difference, and its Australianness is no more than its indirect expression of the isolation and loneliness of Australia. "It is poetry made out of English, with all its inherited genius, not out of some offspring language called Australian", says King (52). His further contention is that "the only really authentic poetry is the poetry of our aborigines totally unintelligible to all but a handful of white Australians" (52).

The publication in 1976 of *Contemporary Australian and American Poetry* by Thomas Shapcott was a pioneering event and it heralded the flowering of a distinct Australian poetry. This does not mean that Australian poetry deals only with Australian themes. As stated already, the poetic expression of most Australian writers is Australian only in its basic ingredients and is otherwise universal. To quote Alec King again, using Australia only as "a reservoir of images", modern Australian poetry has been steadily becoming universal in themes and vocabulary (54).
There are four well-defined stages in the history of evolution of poetry in Australia. The first one is the colonial period extending from the beginnings to the mid and later nineteenth century. Harpur and Kendall belong to this tradition. The second stage is marked by the achievement of an independent and consciously Australian accent in literature in the 1880s and 1890s, a phase extending up to the First World War. Louisa Lawson and Brennan came out with their best poems during this phase. The third phase, during which the Angry Penguins and the Jindyworobaks reigned supreme, denotes the flourishing of literature from the 1920s to the Second World War. The fourth phase covers the period from the end of the Second World War to the present when Australian poetry came of age. Among the major poets of this phase are Judith Wright, A.D. Hope, McAuley and Buckley, poets who have been instrumental in bringing Australian poetry on par with other “poetries” elsewhere. Dawe, Harwood, Murray, Beaver, Mudroroo, Nyoongah and Kevin Gilbert are but a few of the other major writers from Australia.

Right from the days of Michael Massey Robinson, the first versifier on Australian soil, poets in Australia have shown certain preoccupations. The rather antithetical love-hate relationship with the land, the immigrants’ apprehension that they only partially belong to their parent country, a guilt-
complex for having dispossessed the Aborigines and a very meaningful and passionate response to the environment are some of the major themes in Australian poetry. Commenting on the role poetry has played in shaping the Australian ethos Dilip Kumar Sen has said,

Poetry has played a very important part in the task of making Australia articulate. It has helped Australians to come face to face with themselves and showed them the qualities that characterise them – qualities like independence, daring and the love of fair dealing. (30)

Though Australia was used primarily as a colony for its convicts and outlaws, the white settlers later braved all odds to found a hospitable colony in this new continent. A vital and passionate response to the land has remained a theme of perennial interest with most Australian writers. No wonder, Thomas Inglis Moore has called the poets of Australia “the epiphanies of the genius loci” (viii). A.D. Hope’s “Australia”, James McAuley’s “The True Discovery of Australia”, Chris Wallace Crabbe’s “Terra Australia” and Randolph Stow’s “The Land’s Meaning” are some of the notable poems on Australia. As a crusading conservationist, Judith Wright has made the Australian continent, with its rich flora and fauna one of her passionate themes. As Ken Goodwin
has observed, even as a young poet, Wright had “set about her life-long quest to define Australia as a land, a nation and a metaphysical entity in language that showed awareness of contemporary overseas writing in English but also recognised the unique environment and society of Australia” (126). Even while displaying all the inherent horrors and tyrannies of the land in her poetry, her unique vision as a poet makes her quite at peace with her landscape.

Martin Leer, in his thought-provoking essay, “From Linear to Areal: Suggestions Towards a Comparative Literary Geography of Canada and Australia” discusses the part played by geography in Anglo-Canadian and Anglo-Australian literature in both the colonial and the post-colonial phases of culture:

Transplanted literary cultures have been confronted by an alien natural environment and already established native cultures, and a main preoccupation of culture and literature has been the process of ‘coming to terms’, of learning to depict and describe, even to see the ‘new world’ that comes into being in this confrontation. (75)
A main problem with both Canada and Australia as transplanted literary cultures is that they have been confronted at once by an alien natural environment and the already established native cultures. Thus a major preoccupation of culture and literature in the two nations has been the process of "coming to terms", of learning to see the new world that has originated from this confrontation. This process has been clearly illustrated by Rudy Wiebe whose *Playing Dead* introduces a speaking voice who in the beginning is seen looking down on his country from a plane and at the end is seen down amidst the landscape, experiencing it on foot. This movement from outside to inside the landscape, this reflective transformation, requires the finding of the right terms for thinking about and living in the new environs. In Australia, this process of adjustment has produced one of its first scholarly achievements — Bernard Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific*.

With the first settlement hardly two centuries off and their present abode only hundreds of miles away from the main world, most Australians tend to feel isolated historically, geographically and even socially. The Eliotian metaphor of the "wasteland" which has been central to modern global thinking, sums up the sense of loneliness peculiar to the modern educated Australian ethos. But Judith Wright seldom expresses any personal anguish
of loneliness in her poetry. Her Bullocky (the central character of her poem of the same title) suffers from loneliness which even drives him to the brink of dementia. But his sufferings are certainly on the dramatic level and not on the subjective. Her pre-occupation with themes like time, death, love, evil, war and nature actually prevent the feeling of isolation from riding her nerves. Thomas Inglis Moore, while analysing the Australian desire for mateship as found in its diverse social groups, has projected it as the answer to loneliness. Mateship comes handy for most Australians in combating the fear of loneliness and in meeting the challenges posed by certain local hazards. But this ideal of mateship, once a dominant theme in Australian poetry, is less frequently treated in Australian poetry these days. With the attainment of nationhood and the introduction of faster means of communication, greater stress is laid on friendship and alliances with the world outside. The many poems on socialism and democracy available in Australia today seem to have their origin in this mateship ideal. Socialism, as understood by a layman, is the ideal of living together in harmony and brotherhood.

Thus, though Australians still cherish the coastlines, as Canadians hug the Southern borders, both nations are beginning to come to terms with their continentality and nordicity. The
elements have made the coming to terms with the new environment a matter of life and death and the crux of the meditative transformation is the reconceptualization of time and space. This spatio-temporal reconceptualization is a main preoccupation of both Canadian and Australian literatures in recent times.

"Australian poetic tradition, by and large and till today, has remained obsessed with attempts to define, to interpret and reinterpret the Australian landscape and to relate it to prevailing human condition", says Jagdish Rai (228). The peculiar topographical, ecological and psychological conditions under which Australian poetry took root and subsequently attained its present state of maturity and universality, compare favourably with the Canadian case. The early settlers in Australia saw in the landscape a reversal and a perversion of nature. Poets like Henry Kendall and Harpur wrote poems which betray a high sense of disenchantment. But gradually, the Australian landscape began to assume a unique charm and it began to release its latent secrets to the poetic imagination. "What in the past was uncongenial to poetic inspiration became romantic in its own way", avers Rai (231). This willingness to accept Australia and to identify with it is the cornerstone of the Australian poetic tradition.
The Australian landscape, more or less, determines the idiom and image of Australian poetry. It also influences the choice of themes and the nature of the emotions contained therein. In order to survive a landscape like that of Australia, one needs vigour, power and the capacity to struggle. So anything that embodies these characteristics will enkindle confidence in the Australian imagination. This explains the interest shown by a poet like Judith Wright in the kite and the Australian peasant. A similar interest is shown by her Canadian counterpart, Dorothy Livesay, in her poetic concerns.

The Jindyworobaks, under the leadership of Rex Ingamells, strove to free Australian art of every extraneous influence and link it with the aboriginal culture of the land. The term "Jindyworobak" means "to annex, to join" and is very much in tune with the spirit behind the movement. The Jindyworobak movement sought to rehabilitate the Australian landscape in the realm of poetry. The poets turned to the myths and the lore of the Aborigines. Among the other prominent exponents of this movement are Max Harris, Ian Mudie, Victor Kennedy, Nancy Cato and Roland Robinson who had emigrated to Australia from Ireland. The Jindyworobak movement gave almost a jingoistic fervour to Australian poetry during the Second World War.
Impatient of the mediocre nationalism, a group of poets under the patronage of Jack Lindsay challenged and opposed the cult of the Jindyworobaks. These “Angry Penguins”, called so after the movement’s journal, *Angry Penguins* decried all kinds of parochial national feelings and heralded a new wave of internationalism in Australian poetry. Poets like James McAuley, A.D. Hope and Arnold Stewart revolted against the domination of the landscape theme in Australian poetry. However, the fact remains that Australian poetry cannot dispense with its landscape.

Though a staunch supporter of the causes of the Aborigines Judith Wright has never allowed herself to be dragged into the petty squabble of the Jindyworobaks or the Angry Penguins. True to the spirit of an avowed eclectic, she allows herself to be benefitted richly by both the western and the eastern influences. There is a growing tendency in other poets, especially the younger ones, to accept not only western, but also oriental influences, for displaying a broader vision of life.

Norman Lindsay, primarily a painter and cartoonist, was instrumental in shaping the course of Australian poetry over a period spanning around fifty years. Many speak of a vivid physical imagination as one of the national qualities of Australia. It originates in all probability from the juvenile vivacity and materialistic well-being of the Australian nation as also from
its unending struggle against the vagaries of nature. Lindsay, who appealed to his countrymen to respond physically to the environment in the twenties, remained a popular figure for nearly half a century. Lindsay’s “Vitalism” upheld by other leading writers like Kenneth Slessor, R.D. FitzGerald, Douglas Stewart and Hugh McCrae, in fact gave a tremendous thrust to the physical imagination of the Australian poets. As Shapcott has commented, it could “stimulate a delight in clear, colourful surface detail, and a celebration of the overwhelming vitality of the masculine life force” (105). The pictorial effect, created by some poets of the “Vitalistic” group with its pre-Raphaelite echoes, was also introduced in Australian poetry by Norman Lindsay. He however had a powerful critic in Geoffrey Dutton who vehemently denounced his evil influence on twentieth century Australian poetry.

War has been a major concern for Australian poets during the twentieth century as is evident from the many poems that resulted from the two World Wars, the Boer-War, the Vietnam War and the other minor wars fought in the world. These wars have produced many war-poems in Australia as elsewhere. The First World War produced two important soldier-poets — Vance Palmer and Leon Gellert. Their poetry which celebrates their battle experiences is not marred by any foolish sentimentality
and it attains its grandeur through understatement. The war poems produced in the aftermath of the Second World War are, by and large, of topical significance. In 1944, Ian Mudie published an anthology *Poets at War* containing poems by those serving in the Australian forces. But unfortunately most of these hardly attract any readership now. The Second World War poems that are likely to stand the test of time are those written by poets like Judith Wright, Kenneth Slessor, David Campbell, Geoffrey Dutton and James Picot. Judith Wright’s poems reveal her chagrin at the working of the primitive instinct of bellicosity inherent in man at an international scale.

After the Second World War, Australians shifted their loyalty from London to Washington and earned in Ian Turner’s words the “defence insurance” in bargain (49). They had by then become aware that they lived in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, close to Asian neighbours, and had to reckon with Asia. But this “defence insurance” and loyalty to America landed them in trouble when America got embroiled in Vietnam. Australia was left with no other option but to toe the American line. “Perhaps the chief influence on poetry here will soon be that of the Americans; events seem to be forcing us in this direction, rather than towards the Asian cultures”, predicted Wright as early as 1968 (*A Book of Australian Verse* 11). Australians
had to act, rather willy-nilly, in accordance with the dictates of the American masters. The poetry written during the Vietnam War depicts the anguish felt and the trials faced by the thinking people of Australia. Naturally, a good many of the poems written during this period betray a confessional tone. Judith Wright's poem "Fire Sermon" with the Eliotian echo, is a clear case in point. This is how she addresses a child left an orphan by the war: "This Land, this sinister power/ and this one here on the right side/have blackened your rice-fields/ my child, and killed your mother" (WCP 279).

Love, time, life and death are themes of perennial interest. There is certainly a rich crop of poetry in Australian literature too dealing with these universal themes. While the earlier ones smack of foolish sentimentality and shallow emotionalism, the later ones, especially those written by poets like Christopher Brennan, A.D. Hope, Judith Wright and a host of others can legitimately match their greatness with that of poetry produced elsewhere in the world. In a number of her poems, Judith Wright speaks candidly of womanhood, the man-woman relationship, the act of conceiving, gestation and childbirth. A full chapter has been set apart for her treatment of love which is at once physical and mystical.
The elegiac tone comes naturally to many an Australian and therefore there is no dearth of fine elegiac poetry in Australia. Personal losses and the thought of death have driven poets like Kenneth Slessor, A.D. Hope and John Manifold to write some of the most beautiful elegies in modern Australian poetry.

The themes outlined in the preceding pages of this chapter are not peculiar to Australian literature alone. However, the fact remains that the idiom and sensibility with which these have been treated by modern Australian writers render them a distinct and rich colouring typical of the Australasian genius. And, it is these pre-occupations and propensities which form the cultural basis of the thought and writing of a poet like Judith Wright.

Canadian poetry too has developed remarkably from its beginnings at the end of the eighteenth century to its renewal of power in the revolutionary world of today. While some poets have concentrated on what is individual and unique in Canadian literature, others have chosen to deal with what it has in common with life everywhere. While the former attempted to describe and interpret whatever is essentially and distinctly Canadian, the latter from the very beginning has made a heroic endeavour
to transcend colonialism by entering into the universal, civilizing culture of ideas. Originally an extension of the British and American traditions, Canadian poetry cannot claim to have a history of more than a century and a half in the written forms. Yet in its variety it challenges the best that is written anywhere in the world today.

Russell Brown and Donna Bennett in their introduction to *An Anthology of Canadian literature in English* has identified three large movements in the development of Canadian literature:

i. The first stirrings of a literary culture before Canada attained nationhood,

ii. The flowering of a national literature and

iii. The initial stage of literary modernism in Canada (xii).

The writers who became prominent even before Canada became a nation, the "pre-Confederation" poets as they are better known, had to struggle with the language and the available forms to describe new experiences in a new landscape. Their themes were generally an immigrant's sense of loss and displacement or an explorer's excitement of discovery. Indeed no poet of outstanding ability had emerged on the literary scene until after the nineteenth century had reached the halfway mark. Joseph Howe,
Charles Sangster, Charles Mair, Charles Heavysege — none of these “pre-Confederation” poets had succeeded in creating a poetry that was clearly and definitely “Canadian”. In the preface to the first Canadian anthology of poems, Selections from Canadian Poets, its editor the Rev. Edward Hartley Dewart has called Sangster the first of Canadian poets. Among the “pre-Confederation” poets, special mention must be made of two poets both of whom died very young-Isabella Valancy Crawford and George Federick Cameron. Some of Crawford's poems with their sweeping vivacity and freshness of imagery recall the poems of E.J. Pratt. Cameron's themes are political, personal and universal.

A major problem with the poets of the pre-Confederation days was their belief that theirs was a country without a mythology. But later, after the work of anthropologists and scholars like Sapir, Barbeau and Alfred Bailey it was proved that genuine poetry can be produced out of the native mythology of Canada. The translations of the Haida poems by Hermia Harris Fraser and the poems of Alfred Bailey and John Newlove are good examples. Frances Brooke and Catherine Parr Trail too had expressed concern over the lack of an indigenous mythology and of a native stock of images, metaphors and forms. But there is no denying the fact that a literary mythology has
been emerging for sometime. One myth that seized the imagination of the Canadian poets is the myth of the machine, the machine as a means of transportation and an agent drawing Canadians together. While Pratt came out with the poetry of steamship and transcendental railway, F.R. Scott and Birney celebrated the airplane in their poems. The label "A Country Without a Mythology", given to Canada by Douglas Lepan therefore is no more tenable (Brown and Bennett 1:654).

In the era following Confederation, writers such as Wilfred Campbell, Charles G.D. Roberts, Bliss Carman, D.C.Scott, and Archibald Lampman came to the literary scene thereby marking the emergence of a distinct national literature. With a desire for self-definition always at the back of their mind, they wrote largely regional, national and lyrical poetry. Drawing heavily on the Romantic and Victorian heritage of Britain and America, they aimed at creating a new kind of Canadian literature encompassing such diverse themes as a consciousness of exile and isolation and a sense of inchoate identity. Some poets, with their ambivalent feelings about nature, even went to the extent of questioning their place in a universe that seemed hostile and unfeeling. As Shirin Kudchedkar and Jameela Begum have pointed out these poets brought to Canadian poetry "a richness
that rested not purely on the regional and realistic but on the
plane of the mystical and transcendental" (4).

The seeds of literary modernism which started blossoming
with the advent of writers like E.J. Pratt, A.J.M. Smith, F.R.
Scott and Morley Callaghan on the scene, had already been
sown at the time of G.D. Roberts. Two of the major concerns
of modernism, namely the alienation of the individual and the
loss of a teleological vision were part of the Canadian literary
tradition right from the beginning. Northrop Frye speaks of
an "imaginative continuum" — a milieu in which "writers are
conditioned in their attitudes by their predecessors, whether
there is a conscious influence or not" (Brown and Bennett 1:xii).
Because of this continuity they shared with their predecessors
and the typically Canadian dislike for revolt, the revolutionary
character of European and American modernist tradition to break
sharply with the past is less evident in the work of Canada's
first modernists. They rather concentrated on the formal aspects
of modernism like the relation between the author and the text,
freedom of subject matter and innovations in language and
technique. W.W.E. Ross, who described the Northern Ontario
scenery with scientific precision, brought Imagism into Canada.
The poetry of A.J.M. Smith, F.R. Scott, A.M. Klein, Leo Kennedy
and Leon Edel shows an obvious shift from emphasis on the theme to that on style.

Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster in the 1940s sought to express through their poetry a distinct North American consciousness as against the European allegiance. *Preview* and *First Statement*, two magazines that appeared at the same time spearheaded this group which stressed the use of the Canadian rhythms of life and language. P.K. Page, Ralph Gustafson, Margaret Avison, Miriam Waddington and John Glassco were the other leading exponents of this group.

Finding a literary model in the theorizing of Northrop Frye, James Reaney and Jay Macpherson, two Toronto-based poets, sought in the 1950s to achieve universality through the conscious use of myths and archetypes. This mythopoeic tradition represented best by Leonard Cohen's suggestive title, *Let us Compare Mythologies*, had poets like Annie Wilkinson and Eli Mandel as its followers.

With an outspokenness fit to shock even the puritanical and the bourgeois, Irving Layton came out with a poetry which is neither purely intellectual nor spiritual. In his celebration of life with all its vivacity, he feels no qualms about speaking of the carnal as well as the metaphysical in man. An unpretentious
writer, Al Purdy writes poems that are easy in diction and relaxed in tone. For him, the past is a living thing and a perpetual source of strength. One of his goals, therefore, is to recover and respond to the past thereby bringing to his poetry a sense of the historical in terms of tradition, myths, artifacts and memories.

With her substantial body of writing—poetry, fiction and criticism—Margaret Atwood has won an international reputation. With her deep geographical consciousness and a strong social commitment she stands apart. Her *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* is an important book on Canadian literature where she mentions Livesay’s *Collected Poems* in connection with Milton Acorn’s *I Have Tasted My Blood*, bill bissett’s *Nobody Owns the Earth* and Dennis Lee’s *Civil Elegies*: “These are four extremely different poets, but all have two things in common: they connect individual oppression with group oppression and individual liberation with group liberation and they connect social liberation with sexual liberation...” (242).

The 1960s saw strengthening of nationalist feelings especially with the immigrant flow and the resultant rise in population. Phyllis Webb, a poet from British Columbia who had begun
writing before the literary nationalism of the 60s, seems to suggest that the individual must seek protective isolation and silence. Though her poetry tends to be pessimistic, it is seldom morbid because it is always couched in wit. Her poetry is not entirely introspective either, because many of her poems betray a wide range of interests in the world around her. Though this pessimistic note is carried over to John Newlove, he now finds it possible to perceive a universe which can offer a profound experience of beauty.

Dennis Lee sets out to explore the multiple voices, public and private, that an individual assumes in life. Lee’s experiment with the complex blend of authorial and narrative voices in his poetry has received enough critical attention. He is known at once as a writer of complex social commentaries and as an author of popular children’s verse. In his introduction to The New Canadian Poets 1970-1985, Lee prefers to call the English Canadian poets who published their first books between 1970 and 1985 “a wonderfully eclectic generation, unprecedented in its diversity and depth” (xvii). In the last three decades Canada has witnessed a gradual but steady escalation in poetic debuts. While in 1959, there were just three first books of poetry, in 1964 there were eight, in 1965 twelve and in 1967, seventeen.
The production, after 1970, is such that it is nearly impossible to keep track of the count any longer. Often denouncing the hard-earned wisdom of the earlier masters, the new generation poets choose to tread their own path. At the same time, they tend to draw heavily from their predecessors in Canada and elsewhere. This is what makes them a truly eclectic generation.

Lee has identified a few distinct schools of thought among these poets. The first is the "Prairie Documentary School" to which even earlier poets like Anne Marriott, Dorothy Livesay and John Newlove belonged. Autobiography, family politics, smalltown lives and yarns, immigrant experience, native life, Canadian history, the relation between folk art and poetry -- everything is fit subject for poetry of this school. Leona Gom, Gary Hyland, Robert Kroetsch, Kim Maltman, Monty Reid and Dale Zieroth have brought out many documentaries of enduring value.

A second conscious school manifests many of the concerns and approaches raised in the women's movements of the last few decades. This "feminist" school is represented by poets like Bronwen Wallace, Mary de Michelle, Robyn Sarah, Anna Szumiglaski and many others. Dorothy Livesay also belongs to this school.
The third school refers to the many poems written about the immigrant experience. A good many poets in Canada are immigrants themselves or at least the children of immigrants. These poets share a common sense of loss that is attached to a specific place abroad, the place from where they or their forebears have migrated to Canada. Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, Raymond Filip, Kristjana Gunnars, Andrew Suknaski and Dale Zieroth are the major poets belonging to this group. There is a fourth conscious school, "the Work Poetry", the major spokesperson of which is Tom Wayman who has written many poems dealing with work, the lot of most people irrespective of their class. Howard White, who has written extensively about lumbering, fishing and even truck driving also belongs to this school.

There is yet another group who show certain similar thematic concerns like ecology, peace and war and a clear chagrin at the destruction of the environment. They write mostly from some strong ideological conviction which sustains their career as well as life. Some of Livesay's poems are a clear indication of her interest in the above mentioned issues. A few poets like Al Purdy and Gary Hyland write poems in a language drawing mostly on the resources of daily speech in Canadian
English. Laying aside the literary reservoir, they write in a way that approximates daily speech. Their "vernacular" voice is at times very bare as in the case of Andrew Suknaski and at other times swerves into a racy, substandard "folk" diction as in the case of Howard White.

In line with the label "eclectic", generally attached to these new generation poets, these poets have been influenced by a host of writers. Pablo Neruda, Cesar Vallejo, Rilke and Cesare Pavese are but a few who have influenced them. Many have openly acknowledged their indebtedness to poets as diverse as Chaucer, Rimbaud, Olson, Larkin, Milosz, Atwood and Ondaatje. Generally speaking, Canadian writers of a postmodernist cast like Robert Kroetsch and others are somewhat older than the so called new generation poets of the "eclectic" tradition.

It is a difficult exercise to label Canadian poets as modernist or postmodernist and try to fit them into European or American moulds. Many technical features characteristic of postmodernist writing can be traced in the modernist avantegarde movement. However, writers like Robert Kroetsch, George Bowering, Fred Wah, Michael Ondaatje and bp Nichol can easily be categorised as post-modernist.
Laying aside traditionalism and upholding the oral and at times chaotic forms of expression, George Bowering, Frank Davey, Lionel Kearns and Fred Wah, through the Vancouver magazine *Tish* challenged the dominance of East Canada in literary activities. This West Coast group had its counterpart in Ontario where bp Nichol, Joe Rosenblatt, David McFadden, Victor Coleman, Gwen Mac Even, Michael Ondaatje and others came out with poems written using exotic imagery and hitherto untried typographical devices.

Canada, unlike Australia, has two major languages and two literatures. Like English Canadian poetry, French Canadian poetry too has passed from periods of nationalist or social commitment to periods of reflections solely on the world of art. The different schools — the romantic, the modern and the postmodern — found in English Canadian literature are found in French Canadian literature too. In the 60s, much political poetry came from Quebec inspired by the separatist movement, the terrorist outbreaks and the stringent War Measures Act. However, a major school of poetry which left a tremendous impact on English Canadian poetry, was led by poets like Madeleine Gagnon, Nicole Brossard and France Theoret whose work often called “writing in the feminine” sought to show
that male writing reflects a mode of experiencing and thinking unknown to women.

Another significant body of writing which has come to be recognised as a distinct strand in Canadian literature is South Asian Writing. Finding both the physical and social environments cold and hostile, South Asian writers prefer to record the nostalgic experiences of the past or the unpleasant experiences of living in Canada. In a language different from the Western literary tradition, writers like Rienzi Crusz, Uma Parameswaran, Lakshmi Gill and Cyril Dabydeen produce poems in an attempt to establish an identity based on their traditional values and culture.

The emergence of what is now known in critical parlance as Native Protest Literature is yet another landmark event in the evolution of Canadian poetry. Reacting against the misinterpretation of their culture, poets like Harold Cardinal, George Manual, Howard Adams, Duke Redbird and Wilfred Pelletier try to rewrite the typical White Canadian view of the Native Canadian. In their endeavour to maintain cultural integrity, these writers are forced to challenge the existing conventions and writing styles.
A.J.M. Smith holds that Canadian poetry is "altogether too self-conscious of its environment, of its position in space and scarcely at all of its position in time" (33). This is true, to a considerable extent, in the case of Australian poetry as well. And curiously enough, one of the most popular Australian historical novels is called *The Timeless Land*. Despite the differences in landscape and climate, Australians and Canadians tend to perceive the nature of their relationships to their environments on identical lines. Unlike in America, there aren't many poets in Canada barring perhaps a Carman, who have embraced the cult of the rugged outdoor life which idealises nature and tries to accept it. To the Canadian poets nature appears consistently sinister and menacing. No wonder Northrop Frye has remarked, "... Canadian poetry is at its best a poetry of incubus and 'cauchemar' the source of which is the unusually exposed contact of the poet with nature which Canada provides" (142). Similarly, Judith Wright too believes that "... in Australian writing the landscape seems to have its own life hostile to its human foreground. Sometimes it takes up an immense amount of room; sometimes it is so firmly pushed away that its very absence haunts us as uncomfortably as its presence could" ("The Upside Down Hut" 332).
In *Technology and Empire* George Grant, the great Canadian philosopher, shows how the settler is trapped in the middle of a chain of exploitations in which he is at once a conquering agent on the one hand and a cast-off from European society on the other. "When you go into the Rockies we may have the sense that gods are there. But if so, they cannot manifest themselves to us as ours. They are the gods of another race, and we cannot know them because of what we are and what we did", says Grant (17). Judith Wright also perceives this dilemma in a similar way:

Our attitude to this continent has always been that of the masters, intent on profit and the quick dollar, our emotional homeland was for very many years not here at all, but thousands of miles overseas, and hence we have usually regarded this country as a property to be exploited, rather than an inheritance to be cherished. ("Inheritance and Discovery in Australian Poetry" 3)

Canada is not a bad environment for the author as far as recognition is concerned. Scholarships prizes and university posts await dedicated writers. Much of Canada's best poetry comes from professors or others in close contact with universities.
One major advantage is the diversifying of the literary tradition by a number of scholarly interests. Margaret Atwood says in her introduction to *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English*: "Canadian poetry must now be judged by achievement; it does not need to be criticised for not being like other poetries. It is not American or English poetry 'manque', but a unique organism: spiky, tough, flexible, various and vital" (xxxix). Ralph Gustafson echoes her words when he observes, "It is becoming increasingly apparent that Canada has a poetry that is distinctly her own" (31).

I have touched on the interactions between the literature, the dominant critical assumptions and the sense of nationality of the two countries, Australia and Canada, because they form an essential basis for comparative studies. My attempt in the succeeding chapters will be to seek some of the affinities and to identify the differences between two of the most distinguished but relatively less-explored Commonwealth writers — Dorothy Livesay, a daring Canadian writer with a unique vision and voice and Judith Wright, one of the first Australian poets to have been read and appreciated by Indian writers.


