

## Review Articles

### *Australian and Canadian Poetry*

To a casual eye most colonial literatures seem to go through much the same stages of development: first one of provincial dependence on the home country; next one of provincial self-assertion or "nationalism"; and lastly one of secure establishment and acceptance in which it ceases to be a colonial literature and becomes a national one. The literature of the United States is a good example.

But when one begins to compare any two colonial literatures it is often the differences that seem more striking and important than the likenesses. Reading Professor Matthews's pioneer study\* of the development of poetry in Canada and Australia I found myself wishing that I had had it before I went to Canada in 1958. Confident that the similarities between the development of writing in the two countries would have resulted in similar attitudes and demands among the writers, I began my lectures on Australian writing with an attack on the nationalism, amounting almost to jingoism, which has been so characteristic of literature and criticism in this country in the last half century. The reception of these ideas was polite but unenthusiastic. I was told that Canada's problem had been one of finding a national outlook and sense of identity, of encouraging writers to be Canadian enough, of a country divided into regions with local characters more strongly marked than the national character as a whole.

Professor Matthews's study has received some criticism here on points of detail and interpretation. Its author, though an Australian, has now been in Canada for ten years and it is a decade which has seen a good deal of scholarly work in a subject which when he left the country was comparatively neglected, and this has obviously placed him at some disadvantage in his treatment of the Australian side of his theme. To mention only two recent works of importance in the field which do not appear in his bibliography,

---

\**Tradition in Exile: A Comparative Study of Social Influences on the Development of Australian and Canadian Poetry in the Nineteenth Century.* By JOHN PENGWERNE MATTHEWS. Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire, in association with the University of Toronto Press, [Toronto: Toronto University Press], 1962. Pp. 208. \$5.00.

it is perhaps a pity that George Nadel's *Australian Colonial Culture* and Russell Ward's *The Australian Legend* had not been in existence before Professor Matthews completed his study. But whatever criticism may have been levelled at the book on points of detail, and I am unable to estimate how just they may be, it seems to me an important and illuminating thesis on just those broad lines of general comparison between the two countries which it sets out to establish. It certainly illuminates just those problems which I faced in trying to account for the different ways in which the poetry of the two has developed. The comparatively egalitarian nature of the society that arose from early Canadian settlement in contrast with the egalitarian spirit which arose from the fierce class-struggle in Australia at a similar period of settlement; the early emergence of a flourishing middle-class in Canada and its comparatively late appearance in Australia; the regionalism of Canadian culture and the lack of significant regional differences in Australia; the pressure of the cultures of Great Britain and the United States on Canada at a period when nascent Australian culture was protected by the isolation of the country: all these differences in the social settings of the two new literatures are admirably described and persuasively related to the sorts of writing that emerged in each country. On the literary side, the difference in the nature of the landscape and its flora and fauna, as Professor Matthews points out, had an effect on poetry out of proportion to its importance as a subject for poetry. The Australian poet had to wrestle with a scene that was totally unfamiliar and as yet "unacclimatised" in the idiom of poetry that he inherited. From the start he was faced with the choice of being deliberately and consciously Australian or seeming second-hand or inappropriate in his diction. The Canadian poet facing a scene that was more like that of Europe in its birds, beasts and vegetation, its seasons and its natural habits, felt less compelled to choose to be deliberately and distinctly Canadian. Partly as a consequence of the social and political nationalism of Australia, of the demands made by the local scene, and even more, of the educational and social level of the writers who established the literary tradition, criticism operated in a different way in the two countries. In Australia the emphasis was on the national and the local and the tendency was to establish a parochial standard; in Canada the emphasis was on general literary standards and the national features of local writing received less attention.

In all these ways Professor Matthews's book shows a sensitive and perceptive grasp of the problem and a critical and balanced estimation of the parts played in each instance by autonomous literary impulses and by social conditions. It is a pioneering and exploratory study on a hitherto neglected aspect of comparative literature. Because it is a pioneering work his task has been complicated by his having to establish the patterns as well as to discuss their implications for literature, and in establishing his patterns he has perhaps been limited by accepted historical attitudes which apply more happily to the growth of nations than to the growth of literatures. Because the past two hundred years have undeniably seen the mutation of colonies into a number of independent nations, it is assumed that this is also the pattern of the development of colonial literatures and

that they will continue to become more and more distinctive and independent. In a book like *Tradition in Exile*, which looks mainly at the nineteenth century, this view may seem both plausible and supported by the facts. But there is another way of looking at the whole scene which may be equally plausible. If we regard the expansion of England and the English speaking peoples from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century as part of one continuing, though not necessarily continuous movement, we may broadly regard the literature of the overseas regions of British colonization as the "frontier literature", to use an American concept, of a single literary tradition. The comparative isolation of these frontier areas will lead, for a time, to emergence of local traditions with a strong national flavour and bias as national sentiment develops. It will be a provincial literature depending on the homeland and initiating little itself because of the lower level of culture in the "frontier" regions. But with the emergence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of prosperous and politically independent populations, with a level of culture, education and civilized institutions comparable to those of the home land, with vastly improved communications between and within the different parts of the English-speaking world, there is perhaps a tendency towards the re-integration of the culture and the literary tradition of the whole area as a common literature in their common language. Regional differences continue to exist, but as the centre of culture is no longer the British Isles, they tend to lose their importance as differences that divide, and to lose their separative force. They become more like the differences recognized in the writers of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, differences which do not prevent W. B. Yeats and Dylan Thomas, W. H. Auden and Hugh MacDairmid from being recognized as representatives of a common literature rather than as representatives of the separate literatures of Ireland, Wales, England, and Scotland. The major writers of the United States and Great Britain are read and exert their influence throughout the whole English-speaking world today. Those of Canada, Australia, South Africa and the rest will do so tomorrow. It is only the second-rate writers who remain purely regional.

Such a view is obviously beyond the scope of Professor Matthews's study of the development of poetry in Canada and Australia in the nineteenth century, but it is relevant to it just the same. For it would call for some change of emphasis and interpretation. Under the view that these countries were bound in time to develop completely independent and strongly individual national literature, there is a tendency to regard Canada as less fortunate and somewhat more retarded in literary development than Australia, slowed up by its own regionalism, hampered by the less spontaneous and more artificially promoted sense of national identity and bedevilled by the more powerful influences of Great Britain and the United States on its cultural life. Under the second view Australia might seem less fortunate, subjected to a larger isolation and condemned to a more intense form of provincialism before taking its proper place in the common tradition.

That Professor Matthews, in spite of his perspicacity and commonsense, is limited

by his basic assumptions is shown by his remarks about the general attitude of criticism in the two countries he considers. It is easy, he says, "to see why Canadian poetry in the nineteenth century is more impressive than its Australian counterpart. Poets and critics in Canada adopted more rigid standards, and assessed the *poetry* rather than the Canadianism or appropriateness of the poetry. A national Canadian poet did not have to be distinctly Canadian at all, but he did have to be recognisably a poet. This may seem to be a very happy state of affairs . . . there is no more depressing tendency than the one to praise local products because they are local rather than because they are good. But there is a middle ground, and it is the only one for the critic of Dominion literature to adopt." Yet, Professor Matthews concludes, the Canadian critics' standards imposed a false set of values on their poets. While he recognizes that "the question of the manner or degree of relation to the physical environment is, in a sense, independent of the ability of a poet", he argues that it is wrong not to take it into account in judging Canadian or Australian poets in a way that would be irrelevant or out of place in judging the work of English poets.

In Canada the separation of the two was not recognized, while in Australia poetic ability was judged in terms of "local colouring". It is obvious there are no Canadian or Australian poets great as Milton and Pope and Wordsworth and Keats are great. There is only a succession of figures who, small by the standards of the world stage, are comparatively large in their own small spheres. But admitting that these are all minor poets, it is surely more enriching to the tradition of the language for them to be minor figures within their own frame of reference, working as a part of their own environment, which no one else knows as well as they do, than it would be for them to be minor English poets'.

There is something in this, of course, but it is a more persuasive argument if we assume that these poets are the pioneers of what must inevitably become a separate and independent literary tradition than if we take the view that they represent a temporary and regional stage in what was already moving towards a single re-integrated literary tradition.

I have perhaps given undue weight to one aspect of what is a valuable and illuminating exploration of new territory and one in which the author's unusual command of two literatures enables him to reveal things which the merely Australian or merely Canadian critic has usually failed to notice. In particular, I would mention Professor Matthews's interesting discovery in Canada of a counterpart to the popular poetry which is so much a feature of the Australian tradition.

*Australian National University, Canberra*

A. D. HOPE

## The Eye Altering

While it may be clear to students of Blake that his poetry makes unusual demands on his readers, it has not always been equally clear that interpretation of his work is exciting and illuminating. Professor Fisher's book\* is an admirable example not only of his erudition and penetrating perception as a reader but also of his gift for the exposition of Blake's clarity of vision. In Blake, as Fisher points out, how the human condition is seen is a direct reflection of that condition, or is that condition: "As the observer is, such is the field of his observation." This is as apt a description of Fisher's interpretative method as it is of Blake's artistic one. The poet's concern with the conditions of human perception forms the central core of his work and its significance.

This article will consider some of the conditions of human perception, first in an analogy and second in a brief analysis of one of Blake's shorter prophetic books. The use of the analogy will, it is hoped, help to clarify the significance of Blake's central concern with perception. For sake of illustration, then, imagine a man standing in a square room one wall of which is entirely a mirror. The man is facing the mirror, and he observes his image or reflection standing facing him in the reflected room at the same distance from the mirror wall as he is. To the man, the room in which he stands is actual, and the reflected room and his imaged form in it are reflections and no more. In addition, our knowledge of elementary physics tells us that the reflected situation reverses the actual one; thus if the man raises his right arm the figure in the mirror raises his left. Conditions in the two rooms are reversed just as stage left and right are the reverse of the audience's left and right.

The man's eye, a lens, shares the reversing characteristic of the mirror. Thus his mind is like a room which images forth what the eye sees external to it. Like the imaged figure in the imaged room, the man sees this mental image as a reflection and no more. The actual room becomes unreal to him when it is seen either in the mirror or in his mind. In his mind, therefore, the actual becomes an image and the image becomes actual. His eye is the cause of the reversal and is also the medium which joins the external, visible world and the world of his mind. Just as the eye joins these two worlds, so the mirror joins the actual world (the room in which he stands) and the reflection of that room.

This description of the man's eye in relation to the mirror can now be extended to describe the qualities of the eye in the imaged man. Perhaps Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* would help to clarify the imaged eye, for its seeing is a reversed reflection, in every detail, of the eye described previously. In other words, the mental or internal room of the imaged eye is the reverse of his external imaged room and so is identical with the actual room of the man standing before the glass; just as the imaged eye joins the

---

\*Peter Fisher, *The Valley of Vision*. Ed. Northrop Frye. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961. Pp. xi, 261. \$6.00.

reversed external and internal rooms, so the mirror joins the imaged room to the actual room.

In effect, therefore, we have an interlocking, reversed relationship. What the man in the actual room sees as actual is an image to the imaged man. If we designate the seeing of an image as vision, and the seeing of the actual as sight, then the man's sight is the imaged man's vision and *vice versa*. The world of vision, as opposed to that of sight, is the immortal world; and the world of sight, as opposed to that of vision, is mortal. In our analogy, therefore, we find immortal sight corresponding to mortal vision and immortal vision corresponding to mortal sight. It should be emphasized that the man's internal vision is the imaged man's external sight and *vice versa*, and that we have seen a four-fold concept of perception in this analogy: two minds, or internal visions, and two external scenes, or external sights, joined by the eye-mirror or lens-mirror which both fuses the two views and is the source of the reversal which divides the internal from the external.

In describing the qualities of perception in this way, it might be well to point out that we have observed the man's way of seeing from a point outside of the room in which he stands. We have, therefore, investigated a man's way of seeing and have thus seen the quality of his eye itself which forms a unitive-divisive relationship between the external and internal view which the man himself could not see, just as he can not see the eye by means of which he sees. Thus the identity between the mirrored image and the actual man is concealed from him, while the difference between his actual form and his imaged form is known to him. The man in the room sees division, or twoness, in what is seen to be unity, or oneness, by an observer outside the room. The way the man sees is what he sees, or his quality of perception is his existence. The significant point in our observation of the man is that we are seeing him by virtue of our separation from him. This separation is the condition which permits us to see him clearly. Thus our separation in order to observe is the reverse of the man's sense of the separation between his actual form and his image. The man in the situation sees division, but the observer outside the situation sees unity or fusion. We are now aware of the man's quality of perception in a sense in which he is not. In other words, we have achieved, it is hoped, our purpose by dividing ourselves from it, and have manifested in our very observation the identity of the two states by means of the eye which is our existence and manifests the creative divisive energy of the Creator himself.

In our observation of the man's condition of perception we find a direct parallel to Blake's use of a *persona* or observer who reveals the actions and words of the Eternals. It is through this *persona* that Blake creates his artistic manifestation of the human condition. Thus his *persona* is most frequently the poet who bears the same relationship to the Eternals as the man does to his image in the mirror-lens room. This is seen in Blake's *persona* acting as a recorder of the Eternal's dictation, much like the traditional relationship between poet and Muse from Homer to Milton. By this means he creates the mir-

rored identity of actual and image, sight and vision, flesh and spirit. The four conditions of perception referred to in the analogy, two for the external scene and two for the mind, correspond to Blake's four-fold vision. This four-fold vision fuses mortal sight and immortal vision in the actual room, or mortal vision and immortal sight in the imaged room. Thus the Eternals would see as vision or dream what the mortal would see as visible nature, and *vice versa*. It is this interlocking, and the total reversal which embodies it, that figures forth not only Blake's four-fold vision but the paradoxical unity that is found in it by virtue of the division through which it is manifested, i.e., the eye-mirror itself. Thus the *persona's* separation is his means to fusion, just as our separation allows us to observe the man and so become aware of a fusion that is otherwise hidden from us. The observer's separation from the situation permits him to see himself, to see how he is seeing. It is the creative power in separation that leads to the reversed view that the Creation is the Fall and that the Fall is the Creation, or that beginning and end are reversed. This view is clearly enough the immortal view of Creation and Fall, reversing the order of events as well as their significance and once more forcing us to take into account the eye-mirror and its effects. Thus what is seen is identified with how it is seen or from what state it is seen; how something is seen *is* the state in which it is seen, and Blake's Los, Urizen, and Albion, as well as his Biblical figures and poets and philosophers are, as Fisher points out, not the individual men or gods only, but are also embodied ways of seeing which signify both state and perception. They unite external and internal, visible nature and mind through the eye which sees and the fleshy form which serves as a dividing wall and a unifying bridge between the two states, paralleling the union of visible nature and mind, or state and vision.

This interlocking, eye-mirror reversal of two states or conditions is found throughout Blake's poetry and is the central core of his artistic creation manifesting itself in his states of Innocence and Experience, Heaven and Hell, Reason and Energy; in his embodied ways of seeing such as Adam and Noah, Urizen and Los, Orc and Fuzon, Enitharmon and Ahania, Milton and Newton; in his states such as Albion and America, Africa and Asia, Albion and Jerusalem, London and Golgonooza; and finally, in the dramatic use he makes of various *personae* such as the Piper and the Bard, or the *persona*-poet, embodying the qualities of the eye-mirror itself and therefore apparently unobtrusive, reporting the events among the Eternals. Blake's art asserts the actuality of the separation as it asserts the actuality of the unity which that separation embodies. It is the eye-mirror, the unseen seer, embodied.

A brief consideration of *The First Book of Urizen* will serve as an example of Blake's use of the *persona*-poet and the immortal views of the Eternals. The *preludium* suggests the *persona*-poet's view and defines the condition of the Eternals. The *persona* hears their "call" and states his willingness to record their dictation, assuring them not to fear "to unfold your dark visions of torment." Thus the Eternals are apparently confined and their respite comes through the *persona's* ability to rescue them. The

"visions of torment" are an account of two creations: first, Urizen and the "assumed" power of this usurper, and, second, Los whose creation mirrors Urizen's. Urizen's creation, fusing the conditions of both Creation and Last Judgment, is achieved in the name of unity by means of separation from the Eternals, and is recorded in "the Book of eternal brass" which contains Urizen's desire "for a solid without fluctuation" or "One King, one God, one Law." Thus his creation is the reverse of our concept of Creation and is manifested by chaos, conflict, invisibility, and death. Urizen's creation *is* his way of seeing; unity is achieved by division, and he is confined by this concept. Urizen's world is gradually formed from its beginning in a fiery cloud to its end in a "roof" which is "like a womb"; we observe the reversal of head and womb which binds the would-be absolutist's assertion of unity through division. Thus in the name of freedom he confines himself, an Eternal, in the natural form which is a vision to the immortal eye and visible nature to the mortal. In Chapter IX Urizen is enclosed in this natural world which confines him, just as the net of Religion, a female in embryo, encloses him, and he laments the confinement which was implicit in his original search for freedom in the name of unity as his creation began.

Los, on the other hand, parallels in reverse Urizen's attempt to establish a unified creation. He seeks to confine Urizen's "formless immeasurable death", or his creation, by giving it form, thus restricting its "dark changes". Just as Urizen's creation was "like a womb", so Los confines the "changes of Urizen", in a human form. Urizen's separation from Eternity is described through a parallel with Eve's creation by separation from Adam. Thus Urizen and his creation may be seen as an image of Los himself, just as Eve was Adam's image. As Los encloses Urizen's "changes", the process is reflected in a Litany-like chapter in which the Eternal view of creation as "a state of dismal woe" is repeatedly emphasized. Thus the emergence of the human form is seen by the Eternals as a source of misery, woe, and destruction, and the reversed view of creation is apparent.

Los's creation in the name of separation and confinement, reversing Urizen's in the name of unity, ends in Los's confinement with Urizen: "a cold solitude and dark void The Eternal Prophet and Urizen clos'd." Thus, once again, Los's view *is* his condition. As he confines, so he is confined. Los becomes, to the Eternals, what Urizen was to them as Urizen's creation began. Los is "divided / Before the death image of Urizen" after Los feels pity for the confined one. Pity, suggesting a separation between the pitiable and the pitiful, is realized in Los's divided state, in which Enitharmon is created and appears before Los, to the horror of the Eternals. Los, beginning with the desire to confine Urizen, ends in closing with him to figure forth his own previous action in the very division and eventful confinement in the "Tent of Science" which the Eternals construct around him and Enitharmon, his emanation. This clearly parallels Urizen's creation—beginning with his emergence from Los's side, then his withdrawal, and finally his creation. It may be seen that the identity between the creations of Urizen

and Los is unseen by the Eternals, or the immortal eye which views creation as both divisive and destructive, since the mortal world or the world of generation is a vision to the immortal. This vision, however, takes human form and is reminiscent of Adam and Eve and their relationship as the image of God, and, in addition, Eve as the image of Adam just as Adam alone was the original image of God. Thus Los, the Eternal Prophet, becomes an embodiment of the divisive unity of creative power which reflects the unitive division of the power which Urizen manifests. The reversal of the concepts of Creation and Fall in Genesis is clearly apparent in this relationship; what I have called the immortal vision corresponds to the mortal sight described in the analogy, and this event figures forth a unity through the eye-mirror fusion of *persona*-poet and the Eternals.

In the second half of the poem (Chapters VI-IX) the conditions in the first half are reversed, with Chapter V forming the turning point of the poem, just as the eye-mirror embodies the point of reversal between the external and internal views. In Chapter VI Los and Enitharmon, separated from the Eternals by the "Tent of Science", unite to produce Orc, their son. This creation by unitive division and eventual confinement (Orc is bound by "chains of Jealousy") echoes Urizen's earlier fate. Further echoes appear at the end of the poem as Urizen is confined by the "Net of Religion", a "female in embryo," just as Los was confined earlier by the "Tent of Science". Thus the spiritual and the material tents confine their embodied opposites in each case, suggesting a further reversed identity and divisive fusion. As Los hides his female emanation by "fires of Prophecy", so Urizen is confined by the embryo female form, suggesting another quality of the relationship between the two creators. Urizen's female is "like to the human brain" and Los's is like the Earth (VI, 8). The two female forms represent the internal and external states as well as Los's and Urizen's relationship to these states: Los hides the Earth in prophetic fires, and Urizen is confined within a likeness of the human brain; Los, the external, and Urizen, the internal, figure forth their ways of seeing and *are* those ways of seeing, one the reverse of the other, joined in divisive unity embodied in the eye which joins and divides them. Urizen's children are embodiments of the four elements and Los's are "an enormous race" of Eternals springing from his union with Enitharmon.

In the conclusion Orc remains in "chains of Jealousy" and Fuzon, Urizen's "first begotten, last born" son, rebels against his creator. He leaves Urizen's world behind, having "call'd it Egypt and left it." Thus it may be seen that a broad view of Urizen's movement in this poem takes him from rebellion, emergence, and eventual confinement in the name of freedom and unity, or from what he chose to call or see as a Promised Land, to slavery and confinement, or Egypt, which signifies not only a geographical location but a state and a way of seeing. Los's progress is readily seen as the opposite of this, and, once again, the eye-mirror reversal and embodied identity emerge. Fuzon's rebellion and emergence from Egypt renews the cycle of *Exodus* and further suggests the

reversed identity of the two creators and their offspring. Fuzon's further progress as the fiery cloud is treated in *The Book of Ahania*, which embodies the mirrored reflection of *The First Book of Urizen*. As is true in any attempt to interpret Blake's work, this brief consideration of the poem is far from complete. I have simply tried to suggest some examples of Blake's central concern with the eye-mirror, the unseen embodiment of the *persona*-poet.

Perhaps it is the full implication of fusion, or the welding of contraries, that Fisher has to some extent overlooked in *The Valley of Vision* when he says, "By the end of *Jerusalem*, he had brought together the world of Los which was that of Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton and the world of Urizen which was that of Bacon, Newton and Locke into one vision." But this bringing together is seen in bodily terms in the poem; Blake's fusion is, therefore, realized through a physical "vision", the welding of the contraries of prophetic and rationalistic views, immortality and mortality, which are contraries only to the eye of the man in the actual room. Recalling the observer of the man in our analogy, it is through the *persona*-poet in *Jerusalem*, who is awakened by his "theme" of movement from the "sleep of Ulro" through Death to "Eternal life" to report the events and views of the Eternals, that we have the divided observer whose "physical" being is an image and whose "vision" is physical, the fusion of Los and Urizen, Milton and Locke, the Eternal and the Mortal. It is a "vision" (Fisher's term), only from one standpoint: to the immortal, eternity is realized in the vision of mortality, i.e., a "physical" vision; to the mortal, eternity is realized in the vision of immortality, i.e., a physical "vision." As we have suggested above, immortal sight and mortal vision or mortal sight and immortal vision fuse. The vision is the sight, and the division between them is found in the eye or the body which unites or divides, depending on whether the eye is blind and the body sees, or *vice-versa*. Fisher's account of Blake's treatment of the Fall might be mentioned here to emphasize this quality of fusion: "Blake's 'fall' is a fall in perception, or a fall in the relationship of the observer and the observed." Is it not possible to question whether Fisher has accurately evaluated Blake's concept of the Fall, since the poet's reiterated emphasis on the relationship of observer to the observed not only denotes a Fall but also a Creation; the *persona*-poet is divided from the Eternals and it is this division which fuses the mirrored reversal of views and of existence. Blake's view of the Fall rests on the centrality of perception, but the relationship of the observer and observed is constant and is realized in that perception just as the man and his mirror-image or Adam's unfallen or fallen state is seen in Blake as being entirely dependent on the conditions of perception. The central issue is the eye itself, or the mirror-lens, revealing the *persona*-poet and the Eternals he hears and sees as the image of his creator—that is, the man himself, that "immortal hand or eye" which both dares and is able to frame the "fearful symmetry" or to fuse the two states through the mirror-eye. Thus the eye-mirror is not only the source of "vision"; it is also the source of sight, of reversal, and of division, qualities which it shares with the body that contains it. The mirror-eye *is* the body.

It is this central fusion that Fisher only partially accounts for, but his book is not fully revised nor is it finished in the form in which he left it. Perhaps we might say that Fisher sees the unseen profoundly, but that he is not always aware that he is seeing it, or that Blake unremittingly forces us towards awareness of the unseen, the eye in and through which human existence is consummated.

*Dalhousie University*

H. S. WHITTIER