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Display of Romantic Imagination in the Poetry of Archibald Lampman

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Abstract:

The paper aims at to Prove Archibald Lampman as romantic poet with reference to Romantic Movement, English Romantics and American Transcendentalism. The major Romantics like Wordsworth, Keats and Shelly and their influence on Canadian nature poet Archibald Lampman is discussed in the paper. The main influence is that of American poet Emerson as Lampman followed him very closely. Archibald Lampman was a great poet of nature. He like Wordsworth was a worshipper of Mother Nature and enjoyed greatly in her company. Certain poems of Archibald Lampman are discussed in the paper to prove his Romantic imagination.

Keywords: Emotions and Intellect, Romanticism, Transcendentalism, Nature, Sentiments, Feelings, Confederation, Reason.

With the English Romantic Movement, however a single book is cited as the impetus in 1798, two young poets, William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge needed money to finance a trip to Germany, so they pooled some of the verses into a book, *Lyrical Ballads*. The collection was amazingly popular and it enjoyed numerous reprinting. Most of the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* were penned by Wordsworth. These two poets are usually referred to as the first generation Romantic poets. Romantic Movement spread from France, England to Germany and then to rest of Europe and across to the western hemisphere. Certain themes and moods often intertwined because the concern of almost all 19th century writers was desire to free conventions and tyranny and the new emphasis was on the rights and dignity of individual. Earlier Rousseau had written view that people were born free but civilization put them in chains. This feeling of oppression was frequently expressed in poetry of Blake and Wordsworth. But basic to all such sentiments was an interest central to the Romantic Movement: the concern with nature and natural surroundings. Perhaps no other age has loved nature in her variety of appearances, watched her through all her caprices, observed her in her changing moods and established a purposeful communion with her as has the nineteenth century-the age of Romanticism. Delight in unspoiled scenery and innocent life of rural dwellers is their first recognizable as a literary theme as in such works as the Seasons by Scottish poet James Thomson. The work is commonly cited as formative influence on English Romantic poets. The Movement arrived in U.S.A. about 1820. The Romanticism fosters a return to nature and also values the imagination over reason and emotion over intellect. Emerson, Thoreau along with Margret Fuller are Romantic self consciously part of literary, philosophical, theological movement known as Transcendentalism. American Romantics tend to venerate nature as a sanctum of non- artificiality, where self can fulfill its potential. American Romantics are usually radically egalitarian and politically progressive. The main transcendentalists were Emerson and Thoreau. Emerson was an American essayist, poet and philosopher and began his career as a Unitarian minister in Boston. Emerson believes that the scholar is educated by nature, books and actions. Nature is the first in time,

since it is always there and is first in its importance of three. Nature's variety conceals underlying laws are the same time laws of human mind.

Archibald Lampman is Canada's greatest nature poet. Born in November 17th 1861 at Morpeth Canada west. Lampman attended Trinity college Toronto and after completing education he joined post office department. Lampman belonged to a group of confederation poets which includes Charles G.D. Roberts, Bliss Carman and Duncan Campbell Scott. Lampman is Canada's greatest nature poet and was influenced by the English as well as American Romanticism. His American influence is clear because he liked Emerson's writings. Barrie Davis in 1976 says, "Lampman is somewhat of escapist and optimist, because he is in fact transcendentalist in his philosophical outlook." Like Emerson, Lampman also finds satisfaction and greatest delight in contemplation of fields and woods and this relationship with nature is a source of eternal pleasure and better emotion. Lampman's every moment and hour comes to him laden with some unique enjoyment. When Lampman says that, "there is nothing fashioned by nature herself that is not beautiful" he seems to be echoing Emerson. On November 1892, he published in *The Globe* his first poem which is Emersonian in its theme and style, "Vision". Lampman evidently admired many Emersonian qualities and tried to imitate them. Lampman's best nature pieces are often description of nature's extreme reflections, the actual climatic conditions in Ontario. In the early poems of *Among the Millet*, Lampman echoes Emerson on the topics of poet and nature. In the very first poem, 'Among the Millet' he says that "the sweetest poets I will dream". In this poem he becomes one with nature. A lover of nature, Lampman assumes a tone of life and mirth and feeling of pleasure and warmth. There is image of "dew and grass", which is gleaming on the clouds. It is beauty, peace and truth received by the poet as he dreams in nature,

the dew is gleaming in the grass
 the morning hours are seven
 and I am fain to watch you pass
 ye soft white clouds of heaven
 ye stray and gather part and fold
 the wind alone can tame you
 I think of what in time of old
 The poets loved to name you.

'An Impression' is a poem written in Emersonian style. Lampman had Emerson's poem, 'Time' in his mind when he wrote this poem. For Emerson 'time' is important because the great "All" is beyond it. Lampman however hears the time-bell whereas Emerson did not. Lampman is extremely pessimistic in his tone.

No I heard the city bells call
 Far-off in hallow towers

And one by one with measured falls
 Count out the old dead hours
 I felt the march the silent press
 Of time and held my breath
 I saw the haggard dreadfulness
 Of dim old age and death.

The longest and most important poem is 'Winter Store'. In its opening stanza's the poet seems to lift experiences right out of Emerson's work. Just as Emerson sees man a part of 'All', so also Lampman says that human beings cannot see that change or evolution which is constantly taking place in nature and that all men and all things are signs of a great and perfect whole that awaits. One can see through life's ordinariness and vicissitudeness and can experience the transcendental union with universe. The poem describes the poet's wandering in great nature. The poet communicates with nature and nature also speaks to him.

I shall hear the grasshoppers
 From the parched grass rehearse
 And with drowsy note prolong
 Evermore the same thin song

After the long company of nature, however the poet turns his thought to darker days to the "vision after and the high" that makes over his attention and sees the laboring world, 'those in me' and he begins putting up ugly and realistic impression of human world around him.

Another critic Early focuses on three Romantic poets who are the most popularly present in the Lampman's works, Wordsworth, Keats and Shelly. If there was anything to establish Lampman as the finest Canadian poet of his time, it was certainly the first collection of his poems; *Among the Millet* (1888) demonstrated Lampman's technical mastery as well as his unique way of observing and contemplating nature-the ultimate Romantic effect that locates the essential poetic experience in relationship between man and nature. Lampman's poetry is an attempt to reconcile with nature and to seek guidance from it as a kind of mother-nurse, a prominent Wordsworthian trait which juxtaposes to the feeling of being swallowed up by nature's unconscious cruelty and bareness. The poem, 'April' is a poem written in Wordsworthian style. The poet depicts the month of April. The day is not so sunny but we can see flowers and trees happy, green and colorful. The month is the sweetest month of all seasons. The poem is exquisite lyric greatly admired for its style and diction. Just like Wordsworth, Lampman is constantly drawn to solitary figures of memory as being both place and process in Romantic poetry. The 'Ballad of Summers Sleep' tells of the story of the coming winter. The poet sees a living malevolent being operating behind the scenes of nature. The poet depicts very vividly the eradication of light, by darkness the ending of life, the spreading of malevolent shadow and a huge spirit of death and nothingness that looms immanent. At the end of the poem, the poet curiously and clumsily talks onto an already whole piece of an afterthought by mentioning the

returning of spring. He will not let go the hopes of rebirth. The poem reminds us Shelly's, 'Ode to the West Wind'. The hopelessness turns into hope. There is something profoundly sincere, innocent and childish in Lampman's nature poems that may be different from Wordsworth's experience.

Sweet summer is gone they have laid her away
The last sad hours that have touched with her grace
In the hush where the ghosts of the dead flowery play
The sleep that is sweet of her slumbering space
Let not a sight or a sound erase
Of woe that hath fallen on all the lands
Gather ye dreams to her sunny face
Shadow her dead with your golden hands
The woods that are golden and red far a day
Girdle the hills in a jeweled case
Like a girls strange mirth, ere the quick death lay
The beautiful life that he hath in chase.

The poem, 'Life and Nature' is a very beautiful poem written in Wordsworthian style. The poet passes through the gates of city and streets which were strange to him. The doors the highways, the mummer of the prayer all were strange to him. But ultimately he heard the small birds sing and saw depth and bloom of mellows and popular fanned him with shadows and he could see the heavens above him were blue and the earth was green and the world which in the opening lines was strange was now sweet.

I passed through the gates of the city
The streets were strange and still
Through the doors of open churches
The organs were moaning shrill...
Blue blue was the heaven above me
And the earth grew above my feet
Oh! Life life I kept saying
And the very word seemed sweet.

Another poem, 'Comforts of the Fields' is written in a very Romantic style. The poet like Wordsworth feels the beauty in the lap of nature. The fields, the meadows, the insects all creatures of nature give solace to the disturbed soul. All agonies pains are, gone when the poet is in the company of nature.

By hills and water, farms and solitudes
To wander by the day with willful feet
Through fielded valley with yellowing wheat
Along gay roads that run between deep woods.
In the poem, 'Freedom' the typical quest begins, out of heart of city
Out of the heart of city begotten
Of labor of men and manifold hands
Where souls that were spring from earth in her morning
No longer regard or remember her warning
Here hearts in the furnace of case have forgotten
Forever the scent and hues of her hands
He heads for the arms of our mother
Our broad strong mother, innocent earth
Who is mother of hope and mirth

For the next three stanzas the poet travels over swamps, meadows and fields to get the heart of grand nature. Finally he goes into nature, but its description is very curious in the beginning beauty and innocence, light and mirth are nature, at the end the beauty innocence and light are vision of nature. The poem runs in ambivalent feelings. Lampman has attempted the Emersonian quest for unity with nature but once too close to nature is frightened by its inexplicable gloom and ominousness style. Lampman turns to nature as a child to mother in this poem. His mother nature is strong, innocent and blameless; a refuge for the regenerating power of nature. Nature or at least reminiscences of nature is not those for Lampman all alone, as it was for Wordsworth in his Cambridge or London year. The return of man to nature will happen someday. The poet attempts the transcendental quest for unity with nature. He leaves the city and comes to the country for the spiritual solace.

Thus to conclude there is something, profoundly sincere, innocent and childish in Lampman's nature poems. Lampman's mind acquires rather a sense of nature's greatness. The visible tension in Canada's landscape and the overwhelming sense of silence and stillness induce in the poet the feelings of numbness and stupefaction and in the end he has to wake "as it from a dream". In fact, the poems of Lampman indicate how he, in the light of Canadian landscape, adapted and refined a Romantic concept.

I hope that this paper has proved that Lampman is genuinely a Romantic poet. Nature becomes something that disturbs his mind and sets it into motion.

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