

## A Critical Survey of Select Poems of Archibald Lampman

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### Abstract

Archibald Lampman is endearingly called ‘the Canadian Keats’ owing to the large repertoire of Nature poetry produced by him. Lampman’s poetry had a characteristic element of being timeless. Also, more, perhaps, than that of any other Canadian poet, it is objective; and his vignettes of the outward Canadian scene will always have a present value. Traditional and Native American life was frequently portrayed in Lampman’s writings. His primary interest in Romanticism had its most elaborate expression in his early poems. However, if one looks at the philosophical inclination of this Canadian poet who had death and mortality as themes featuring quite often in his short yet fruitful oeuvre, one could identify Archibald Lampman as an Existentialist thinker. Lampman wrote about the frivolity of life - its uncertainty and the hopelessness that ensues as one matures, and also about the inevitability of death. This research article attempts to critique a few poems by Archibald Lampman.

**Keywords:** Canadian Literature, Poetry, Archibald Lampman, Existentialism, Romanticism

*"I am not a great poet and I never was. Greatness in poetry must proceed from greatness of character — from force, fearlessness, brightness. I have none of those qualities. I am, if anything, the very opposite, I am weak, I am a coward, I am a hypochondriac. I am a minor poet of a superior order, and that is all."*

- Archibald Lampman

In order to approach the corpus of literature produced by a nation, especially one, that has had a colonial aspect tethered to it for a reasonable amount of time, it becomes the urgency arises to begin from the beginning, which is to say, by means of a closely understanding of the history and geography of that particular piece of land. Considering the geography of Canada, the foremost concern that appears to have had a definite impact on the literature of Canada is that, in spite of being the second largest country of the world, it is sparingly populated, with large tracts of land under forests and Tundra. Canada is surrounded by the Arctic, Atlantic and Pacific oceans on three sides and the United States of America on the fourth.

In terms of the history of Canada it needs to be remembered that before being colonised by the European empire, it was home to a number of indigenous peoples. In the sixteenth century, this North American country was invaded by the British and the French, who settled themselves along its Atlantic coast. Thus, it is a problematic undertaking to fathom what must have transpired in the minds of the people of a country that has been colonised by a host of Empires - first France, then Britain, and later United States, which, though from a distance, ruled it in economic terms. It is interesting to note that although in 1867 Canada became a separate nation, apparently with an identity of its own, American money and technology still continued to dominate this land for a long time. It cannot be emphasised enough that Canada has been a victim of Neo-colonialism in essence. Northrop

Frye goes to the extent of declaring that Canada is the only country to be truly colonised both in psychological as well as mercantile terms. (Staines 18)

During and after the war against the United States in 1812-15, when Canadian militia and Native Americans fought on the part of Britain, the literary endeavours of the Canadians were put on aside for the cause of the nation. The entire state was either directly or indirectly involved in the battle. However, French and British writers kept on contributing to the literature of the nation meanwhile. It was only after their proper settlement that the English-speaking Canadian writers took the plunge into creative writing per se. However, the progress was rather slow and the writers that emerged seemed to be preoccupied with pertinent political concerns of those times. (Hopkins 191-192)

Prior to delving into the works that represent Canada, it becomes significant to first understand what Canadian literature essentially comprises. It is interesting to note that 'Canadien' was initially an adjective for the French-speaking inhabitants of the country. The term 'Canadian literature' does not encompass the entire oeuvre of literature produced in Canada whatsoever. Rather it only serves as an indication towards that literature which is typically Anglophone in nature. (Blodgett 904)

Another concern that faces a scholar of Canadian literature, as he embarks on this adventure of reconciling multiple facts, is whether one should look at the literature of this place as national or regional. While some thinkers contend that writers contributing to this country's literature are regional first and become national later, there are quite a few others who argue that it is indeed important to look at each individual writer from the beginnings to the present time as causal to the formation of the shape and contours of the existing complex body of this literature. Carole Gerson explains this phenomenon in her paper by positing her stance that the identity and culture of English Canada was constantly being affirmed and determined by the writers of that time and place. It was being appropriated as multicultural, and at the same time, multifaceted as well. She writes, "A literature initially cast as monolithically Anglo-centric and generically dominated by poetry and novels is being reconstructed as multi-cultural and multi-generic" (888). Merron Chorny also terms Canada as an "international microcosm" (428). However, in the little of recent upsurge in postcolonial studies in respect of Canadian Literature being taught in Canadian schools Chorny expresses his anxieties and fears pertaining to the "tendency to intellectualise Canadian literature in the curriculum" (434) of schools and the institutionalisation of Canadian literature.

The origins of rich Canadian Literature can be traced from the ancient French annals of discovery, travel, and adventure. The histories of the nation and chronicles of voyages served to construct an exclusive identity for this glorious patch of land. The multicultural policies of the federal government of Canada allowed the burgeoning of a plethora of several literatures all at once. This is also what distinguishes this 'New World' literature from other American literatures apart from its recognition of French and English as official languages. In the beginning, the writings by Canadian authors were consistently infused with a deep sense of patriotism. The histories of the initial struggles of the nation, the biographies of the leaders, its triumphs and accomplishments, its landscape and scenery, formed dominated the Canadian literary scene. Interestingly, romance was a subject highly neglected by most of the Canadian writers early on. Only later novelists identified it as a significant theme to be incorporated in their narratives, some of whom were Eugene l'Ecuyer, Patrice Lacombe, Joseph Marmette, P. A. de Gaspe, Gerin-Lajoie, P. J. O. Chauveau, Napoleon Bourassa, Jean Talon-Lesperance, and Real Angers.

Poetry was also a major genre, but unfortunately it was never accorded the regard that was due to the fine art. J. Castell Hopkins offers his opinion in his umbrella article on Canadian poetry, “In poetry Canada has always deserved, though it has not always received, a high place” (204). Until 1929, English Canadian poetry showed considerable influence of European and American styles of writing. Evidently, Romantic and Victorian elements of British literature have had a lasting import on the Canadian canon.

The ‘poets of the Confederation’ or the ‘Maple Tree School’ was a group of “first generation university-trained Canadian literature specialists” (Bentley 4) writing in English language between 1880 and 1895 based on the theme of ‘national consciousness.’ Employing classic form in their works, all of these poets drew on the Confederation of 1867 for inspiration, with transcendentalism and love for Nature being their most recurrent themes. Charles G.D. Roberts was a forerunner of the movement. Bliss Carman, Archibald Lampman and Duncan Campbell Scott were the other members of this popular group in Canada.

One of the popular poets from ‘the group of sixties,’ Archibald Lampman, was born on 17 November 1861 in Morpeth, Ontario, a village near Chatham in Canada, to European parents - Archibald Lampman (German) and Susannah Charlotte Gesner (Dutch). His father was an Anglican clergyman. In 1827, he married Sarah Stewart, daughter of Scottish emigrants from Ulster. Apart from being a poet, Lampman served in the post office department of the Canadian civil service which he rather detested. In 1895, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. He was also conferred the title of Person of National Historic Significance in 1920. (“Archibald Lampman,” *The Public Health Journal* 253)

His prolonged career of literary activity commenced from May 1881 and rose to prominence in 1895. Lampman was a prolific writer having scribbled “more than 300 poems in this last period of his life, although scarcely half of these were published prior to his death” (McDougall). The Canadian Encyclopaedia refers to him as the finest English Canadian poet of the nineteenth century. (Marsh) The major themes found in his works were love for nature and transcendentalism. This classed him among the Romantic poets of Canada. Considered as the most gifted and the most adventurous of the Confederation poets, Archibald Lampman is endearingly called ‘the Canadian Keats’ owing to the large repertoire of Nature poetry produced by him. In such moments it does not come as a surprise to know that Lampman somewhat himself believed that Keats had had a sort of “faint reincarnation” in him. It is sad to note that he had a short and unhealthy life. He had contracted rheumatic fever in 1868 when he was a child which led to his early death of a weak heart at the age of 37. He is buried at Beechwood Cemetery, in Ottawa, with only ‘Lampman’ inscribed on his tombstone and a nearby plaque has the last four lines from his poem “In November”:

The hills grow wintry white, and bleak winds moan  
About the naked uplands.

I alone Am neither sad, nor shelterless, nor gray

Wrapped round with thought, content to watch and dream. (Lampman 144)

Archibald drew his inspiration to write poetry from *Orion and Other Poems* – a work of another Canadian writer Charles G.D. Roberts. He was exposed to this great piece of literature by a copy of it being handed to him by someone at Trinity College. Duncan Campbell Scott was another good friend of Lampman. Akin to most British Romantic poets, Lampman sought respite from the common din of the urban life by withdrawing himself and taking refuge in the countryside. He often used to retire to the serene environment of Ottawa and the Gatineau countryside of Quebec to follow his true vocation of composing poems.

Also a lover of camping, Lampman was a nature lover in true sense of the term. His initial poetry was hence centred on these spaces of repose. The seven years he spent with his family residing near Rice Lake had a considerable impact on his aesthetic sense and can be held responsible for shaping his Romantic bent of mind. However during his later years, he became concerned with the social issues surrounding him and his poems and essays eventually began to be punctuated by his critical outlook on organised religion and social injustice. (Luebering)

Lampman was not only a poet, but also philosopher indeed. Apart from analysing the beauty of the landscape about him, he also brought life under his keen observational lens. This might remind one of Indian mystical writers Rabindranath Tagore and Jiddu Krishnamurti in whose writings, life and landscape are often inextricably interlinked to each other. While comparing him with another Canadian poet Irving Layton, Rowland Smith tries to discern the philosophical inclinations of both in his own context:

Layton's philosophical and political interests (Marx, Nietzsche, Jewishness) are obviously different from Lampman's Emersonian and Wordsworthian affinities. What the poets share is to be found in the progress of the poem itself (from observation to thought to statement) and in the easy relation between the observing poet, the natural scene, and the smallest observed details in that scene. (283)

Lampman's poetry had a characteristic element of being timeless. Also, more, perhaps, than that of any other Canadian poet, it is objective; and his vignettes of the outward Canadian scene will always have a present value. Traditional and Native American life was frequently portrayed in Lampman's writings. His primary interest in Romanticism had its most elaborate expression in his early poems.

In her article titled "Archibald Lampman's 'Nature' Poetry as Reflecting the (Im)possibility of Construing Canadian Identity," Martina Domines Veliki illustrates how William Wordsworth and Archibald Lampman converge and diverge on the subject of Nature. Akin to Wordsworth, Lampman had a soft corner for solitary subjects. Another point of similarity between the two is that both of them preferred emotion over reason as the "vehicle of poetic communication" (144). However, even though the Romanticism of Lampman was borrowed from British poets, it was rather an amalgamation of the old and the new. In terms of the sensibility of Thomas Stearns Eliot, tradition clearly crossed paths with individual talent in his works on the relationship between man and Nature. There was a subtle touch that made his Romantic poems exclusively his own. *Among the Millet* demonstrated Lampman's technical mastery as well as his unique way of observing and contemplating Nature – the ultimate romantic subject. Veliki also claims that a veritable similarity between the two poets also lies in the fact that they do not only deal with Nature but also delve into the human psyche to unravel its myriad colours.

There comes a point of divergence between the teacher and the taught when Veliki expounds that whereas Wordsworth is invariably concerned with all things bright and beautiful in Nature, Archibald also looks at the Nature "red in tooth and claw" in Tennysonian terms:

For Wordsworth, man's identity is built and re-built on the basis of his close contact with nature that soothes him and brings comfort for the years to come. On the other hand, most of Lampman's poetry speaks about the difficulty of coming to terms with nature, of taming the unpredictable, cruel and often meaningless landscape. Yet, there exists in Lampman's poetry an attempt to reconcile with nature and to seek guidance from it as a kind of Mother-Nurse – a prominent Wordsworthian trait which is

juxtaposed to the feeling of being swallowed up by nature's unconscious cruelty and bareness. (144-45)

There is a clear case of juxtaposition between love and nurture of Mother Nature and its cruelty and crudeness that one comes across as he reads Lampman.

Lampman produced three volumes of poetry in his lifetime that attracted critical attention from readers from far and wide – *Among the Millet and Other Poetry*, *Lyrics of Earth* and *At the Long Sault and Other New Poems*. In this paper, there is a set of four poems selected for practical criticism. They are “In November,” “Heat,” “April in the Hills,” and “The Clearer Self.”

### “In November”

This poem is of the kind of a Petrarchan sonnet. The octave rhymes as abba acca and the sestet rhymes as abccba. Enjambment is pronounced. The sentences continue to the next line. It is written in iambic tetrameter. There is no refrain in the poem.

In Canada, the winter season falls in November. This indicates that there is a pervading sense of bareness and loneliness in the atmosphere. In winter, things become cold and lifeless. There is stillness all around. The air is filled with peace.

The experience of the poem is complex. The entire poem is loaded with imagery and metaphors. There are layers of meanings that can be discerned from it. A group of images define the arrival of snowfall. Winter has just begun and therefore the trees in the forest are ‘leafless.’ Nature is an indispensable part of this poem. However, this also comes to reflect the general temperament of Archibald Lampman that is known to be melancholy due to his fatal illness that had Lampman occupied for a considerable part of his short life, and eventually led him to his death.

The poem appears to be based on the popular theme of death. It seems as though Lampman, in his last years of life, is looking at death. The morbidity of winter season implies the departure of the good old days when the poet was young and life was bright and wonderful. The sun of happiness is covered in clouds now and refuses to shine upon the poet's life.

Since there is a sense of ‘slowly’ yielding to the snow, it appears that the poet is not prepared to grow old. The forests are unwillingly being invaded by the ‘thick-driving snow.’

The scene being talked about is of daytime since night is yet to come. Dark times are approaching fast. The blissful time of the poet's youth is over now.

Since the poet is in a sombre mood, every common sound around him seems to irritate him and seems to test his patience. The ‘woodmen's carts’ that pass by him while returning home appear to make pestilent sounds that add to the vexation of the poet. The cacophony produced by the wheels pierces the silence pervading the winter atmosphere and adds to his agitation.

Lampman is reminiscing the sunlit past and is anxious about the bleak future that lies ahead. He is unable to comprehend that this season too shall pass.

The poem reminds one of “After Apple Picking” by Robert Frost. In this similarly themed poem, the poet wearily ruminates on his past and expresses his thoughts over his life spent so far as he waits for death.

Through this poem, it seems that Lampman is implicitly inviting the reader to identify with him and sympathise as well as empathise with his feelings.

The juxtaposition of ‘black furrows’ and ‘whitening field’ depict the land that was going to be sown with seeds but is now laden with snow that has rendered the whole place virtually barren. Due to the snowfall, there can be no cultivation. This might be a metaphor



representing the awful disease of Lampman that took away his physical strength before his age was ripe leading him to lead a life of less accomplishment.

However, in the midst of all the despair and discomfort of illness and disease, Lampman does not seem to be totally disheartened. Though far away, 'the village lamps' beginning to gleam appear to cast a ray of hope towards the poet to let him dream. They can be connotative of his power to write poetry.

The metaphors of the hills being 'wintry white', the 'bleak winds' moaning and the uplands being 'naked' connote the prevalent theme of gloominess and desertion. The hills are usually laden with trees and are green with spots of snow, but since snowfall has happened, they are smeared with white colour. The winds reflect the mood of the poet which is dismal. The epithet of gloom is transferred to the wind which seems to moan. The wind is personified to depict the emotions of the narrator. The colours golden and gray also seem to be juxtaposed as he describes the 'thin fading stubbles.' Golden is one of the brightest colours and grey belongs to the monotonous family of black and white shades.

'No man comes this way' also tries to capture the feeling of loneliness within which the poet seems to be engulfed. This seems to add to the melancholy state of his mind. Lampman feels like an island in the middle of such adversity.

It is interesting to make note of the fact that the poet has used his poetic license to change the commonly used term 'homeward-bound' to 'homeward-wheeled' as he describes the movement of the woodmen's carts. This shows the fine command that Lampman has over the language of English.

The poem starts with the winter scenery being described in all its finery with discontentment and bleakness spread around, but ends with the poet being quietly satisfied and thinking, observing and dreaming. Though it begins on a distraught note, the poem has an optimistic and peaceful closure. It seems as though the poet has had a realisation that he is not alone who is gloomy and without a home, but the entire landscape is resonating with his sentiments. He is at one with the environment.

It also appears that the poet is somewhere looking for refuge in his world of poetry and philosophy. It is a well-known fact that Archibald Lampman was not happy working as a postal clerk and felt better expressing himself through the medium of creative writing. As he puts it at the end of the poem, "Wrapped around with thought | Content to watch and dream," it appears as though the poet is comforted by thoughts and dreams and his power to contemplate his observations.

### **"The Clearer Self"**

The poem is contained in six stanzas with four lines in each. It follows a simple rhyme scheme of abab in each stanza.

Lampman in this spiritual poem touches upon the subject of the all-pervading and immortal human soul in whose existence he firmly believes. This soul is not affected by life and death. Lampman is aware that even after he would depart this life, his soul would continue to exist. This great soul has some 'marvellous work' at hand. This soul continuously puts in effort and being the Almighty it exercises its powers.

Lampman is evidently dealing with metaphysics in this poem. There is an incomprehensible, unfathomable, unknowable and immeasurable reality with which mortals are incapable to be acquainted. Lampman is enthusiastically chasing it. There is a 'serene and pure' Energy that is above all whose light only seems to increase with every passing moment.

This poem also seems to address the moving away from a dreadful past towards a blissful future, beginning afresh with renewed strength and vitality – from weakness to might,

from darkness to light, from temporality to permanence. This might remind one of the Indian philosophical schools of Vedanta which recognises the pursuit towards the realisation of the ultimate Truth as its highest goal.

The poem showcases a high point in the Lampman's life. The poet seems to be extremely spiritual – to the extent that – he is not afraid of death and till the last moment of his life wants to explore the unknown and the incomprehensible. He is eagerly praying to the Almighty to grant him the courage to be able to walk on this path of self – knowledge. He wants to evolve from his previous condition of being 'waste and blind' to a 'clearer self, the grander me.'

Archibald is also aware that he might be having only a short span of life left for him. His disease is making him sound worried about the inevitable. His undying quest for clarity and attainment of a solution is indelible and he is ready to face his infinite and immeasurable Self and know it as much as permissible and possible. In a nutshell, the poem carries Lampman from the temporary and the finite to the eternal and the infinite; it showcases his journey from worldliness to spirituality.

It appears as though Lampman was influenced by the *Advaita Vedanta* School of the Upanishadic tradition in Indian philosophy. This particular school deliberately considers the Self – the one higher and true Self – to be the be-all and end-all of all existence. All existence is merely understood to be a reflection of one real Self in its own consciousness. It deviates from the Western concept of reality in some ways, while in others, joins hands with it and walks along on the path of wisdom. It could also be related to the Buddhist understanding of the Self.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, a great American poet in his celebrated poem "Brahma," takes up a similar subtle subject of spirituality and talks about the oneness of everything – of treating the one and the other alike – towards a dissolution of the mental binaries that classify the world for one into the 'slayer and the slain,' 'the doubter and the doubt,' 'shame and fame,' and 'shadow and sunlight.' Adi Sankaracharya, believed to be the greatest of the Indian philosophers, has written extant treatises on the idea which several Canadian and American writers have drawn inspiration from, since time immemorial. Among the British poets, Thomas Stearns Eliot is undoubtedly the finest example. East is no longer only East, and West seems no longer to be only West. It becomes important to keep in mind that only such exchanges of words, thought, ideas and faiths turn a nation's most prized literature into world literature.

In some places, however, the poem seems a bit different from his other poems. It seems a little contrived. The words "gradual victory secure" make the piece sound clumsy. There could have been a better choice of words by the poet to ensure the lucid flow of this otherwise well-crafted and well-meaning poem.

#### **"The Islet and the Palm"**

The poem is of 12 lines and three stanzas. It follows a simple rhyme scheme of aabb in each stanza. Its preciseness and conciseness make the poem special. It does not drag about the central idea for a long time. As soon as the point of the poem is driven home, the poet is quick to put his pen down.

The Keatsian aspect of Lampman is principally noticeable in this poem that promises to lead anyone by the hand into the lap of Nature to delight in the love and joy that emanates thereof. In a similar vein to the previous poems discussed herewith, this poem speaks of the inner spiritual calm that Lampman experiences as a "gentle sister spirit, when you smile." It

might be that Lampman is addressing his guardian angels. It could also be a muse. The poem is based on what and how he feels after this happens to him.

There are ample personifications to be taken note of – the water speaks, the wind also speaks and murmurs, the ocean roars, the sun has a life of its own, and the beach is charmed.

The poem draws a serene picture of a quiet coral island in which Lampman seems to be seeking a sense of peace and security – it being far from the madding crowd. The isle is not a physical location but only a mental space imagined to be akin to his soul by the poet. This poem might remind one of William Butler Yeats' exquisitely crafted poems, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." In a similar quest for peace and aloofness from the noise of the city, Lampman looks into the deepest recesses of his Self. The difference lies in the fact that while Yeats is looking for a physical geography to attain peace and quietude, Lampman, on the other hand, is looking into his own soul and deriving pleasure from it.

Wind and water are subtly personified and produce sound images which anyone can easily connect with. Due to the inner peace that Lampman is conscious of, he is not befuddled by the clamour of the foam of the ocean continuously colliding with the reef though it is surrounding him on all sides. His troubles though engulf him, are unable to affect him in any way. Like a lotus leaf, he floats on the scum and slime, yet unaffected, unperturbed.

In this philosophical poem, the poet also seems to point towards the fact that every pain and every sorrow in this world is ultimately transitory. Even the personified sun runs out of "all his life and all his light," when the night falls. Day and night keep coming and going. But, as Tennyson in his celebrated poem "The Brook" admits, "I go on forever." The Self is ever eternal, untainted, unchained, and infinite.

If this poem is considered to be one delivering a complex experience, it can be discerned that the island that Lampman is talking about is his own mind. The poem is actually in a process of introspection when he is gently listening to the wind and the water. The personified ocean's roar seems harmless to him owing to the tranquillity he has successfully found within him. Peace and chaos – both are typically just two states of the mind that seems to no longer able to play tricks on the spiritually elevated writer. This can be further ascertained by the line where Lampman deliberately addresses the 'outer shore' as his own, "I see far off beyond mine outer shore." This can be also observed as he describes the palm by the end of the poem, "The wind still murmurs in my slender tree."

The imagery in the title itself is quiet profound. The islet and the palm complement each other in a perfect manner thus bringing out the picture beautifully. The single palm with its shadow falling on the island also denotes the oneness – the way the poet is collected and calm. His thoughts are no longer running wildly in vicious circles. There is a unity – a definite sense of clarity in the mind of Lampman – that appears to supersede his ills. Also his troubles seem puny in the light of this giant truth in the shape of the palm.

Though the theme of the poem is 'silence,' the entire poem is filled with sweet, enchanting sounds that the reader is bound not to miss. The speech of wind and water, the 'harmless roar' of the ocean, the 'murmurs' of the wind, and even the waves softly moving as the moon is reflected in them.

As soothing it is to the ear and the eyes, this poem is also intensely optimistic - right from its beginning till the very end – where it describes the reflection of the moon swivelling on the 'silver' sea. Even when the sun has exhausted all its fire and has retired for the day, Lampman seems unaffected. There is still the wind that slowly moves the palm on the beach, "And shakes the moonlight on the silver sea."



At this point, the poem does not fail to remind one of the brilliant haikus that the great Japanese poet-cum-Buddhist monk Matsuo Basho wrote such as “Ah, tranquillity!” and “To an old pond.”

It needs to be mentioned that in both the poems. “The Clearer Self” and “The Islet and the Palm,” Lampman is seen to commune with a spirit. There is also a clear shift of the poet’s temperament from worldliness towards spirituality. Here lies the similarity between the two poems, therefore. An observation that comes to mind just by looking at the two poems on the surface is that, whereas on the one hand in “The Clearer Self,” Lampman appears to be seeking the assistance of this spirit to guide him on his path towards “The clearer self, the grander me!” on the other hand in “The Islet and the Palm,” he appears to have reached the goal he was on the lookout for. These two poems also showcase a shift from his attitude of hopelessness and destitution perceptible in “In November” to one of optimism and grace. The theoretical framework employed in this paper, to analyse the poems of Archibald Lampman, is Existentialism.

As J. B. Coates quotes Dr. Brunner in his eponymous article on Existentialism, for contemporary humanists, existentialism is blasphemous to the positivists. While on the one hand, the positivists are of the view that philosophy should have a domain of its own and should not be intermingled with other branches of knowledge such as aesthetics, religion, ethics, and psychology, on the other hand, the proponents of existentialism believed that it can infringe upon the boundaries of other fields which according to positivists must remain within the confines of certain disciplines. Heidegger was foremost accused by positivists on this account for his work on metaphysics. However, this war of ideas is not one-sided:

If the positivist accuses the existentialist of perpetrating "nonsense" in a technical sense, the latter retorts by accusing the positivist of reducing philosophy to nonsense in a pragmatic sense. Most positivists would indeed agree with Wittgenstein that philosophy, as they understand it, is concerned with Nothing, that it tells you nothing about the world. (229)

Even though the roots of existentialism are assumed to be morality and ethical affirmation, this appears to be quite a simplistic view of existentialism as such. Coates claims:

The existentialist affirmation is as to the value of the ‘authentic’ in human personality. All the thinkers of the school distinguish between the authentic and the inauthentic in human beliefs and attitudes and give a detailed analysis and description of the modes of personal existence that are involved. (230)

Nevertheless, a common theme to be found in both the schools of thought is that of life and death, being and nothingness. The object of study in the two schools is particularly that of existence.

The philosophy of existentialism is believed to have been constructed by French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre. The philosophical concepts of *Being and Nothingness* as pondered over by Jean Paul Sartre in his book of the same name are of central significance in the theory of existentialism. He seems to have been influenced by Edmund Husserl’s theory of phenomenology but came to later sharply deflect from him in terms of his methodology, the conception of the self, and an interest in ethics which became the pillars on which stood the entire theory of Sartre’s existential phenomenology. Instead of attempting to makes sense of the world, this ontological theory was directed towards human existence. Søren Kierkegaard also delved in detail into the idea of the individual as opposed to the idea of the universal in his celebrated work *Fear and Trembling*. He recognised the universal as ethical and the individual as aesthetic. (Onof)

If one looks at the philosophical inclination of this Canadian poet who had death and mortality as themes featuring quite often in his short yet fruitful oeuvre, one could identify Archibald Lampman as an Existentialist thinker.

Archibald Lampman wrote about the frivolity of life - its uncertainty and the hopelessness that ensues as one matures, and also about the inevitability of death. Death is, undoubtedly, a recurrent theme in most of his poems. Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett and Franz Kafka were such existentialists whose works first come to mind as one begins to locate the existentialism of Lampman on the canvas of understanding what it takes to exist as a human. Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* revolves around the inanity of human life. Through this novel, Camus explores, in detail, the absurdity and futility of existence. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* also is based on a similar theme of existential crisis, wherein men are confused as to what to do "now that we are happy." *Metamorphosis* by Kafka also delves into the human self to identify the points of struggle that it undergoes in the light of an indifferent society.

In the poem "In November," Lampman tries to encapsulate in a few words, how the twilight of life approaches in slow steps to turn the merriment of summers into the dreariness of the winters. The existential angst is evident as Lampman is clearly aware of the possibility of life being devoid of meaning. There is sadness and gloom, desolation and sterility. But, it is peculiar that amidst such a mixture of emotions, Lampman is "content to watch and dream."

In "The Islet and the Palm," Lampman comprehend existence in a slightly different manner. Romanticism is highly pronounced in this piece of art. The poet is aware of the healing properties of the natural elements in his environment – the wind, the water, the sun, and the trees. His inner sense of calm is drawn from these constituents of Nature that nurtures and nourishes his spirit thirsty for harmony and solace.

Similarly, in the case of "The Clearer Self," the inward eye of the Wordsworthian is opened to the untold wonders of his spirit. He looks at his existence in terms of something being permanent, immortal and eternal, one which is untainted and unencumbered by the unavoidable predicaments of daily life. The body simply becomes a physical component not to be attached to, in the grand scheme of things. Finally, a search for the true meaning of life reaches an appropriate conclusion for Lampman as the poem closes.

For Archibald Lampman, poetry was not a mere practice of his passion, but also at the same time a means of cathartic release. Though the deteriorating condition of his health and his despairing demeanour thereof could be well interlinked, his emotions and feelings carry universality with them and resonate with everyone regardless of one's own situation. His existentialism, as Malcolm Ross puts it, is not of the kind that interprets and understands human existence, rather it was of the kind endlessly grappling with the construction of the self – thus indicating a Hegelian sort of enquiry.

Lampman gathers inspiration from his environment. Natural scenery and beautiful landscapes educate him on life. He realises the beauty of life in all its splendour through his interactions with Nature firsthand. However, it is equally interesting to note that apart from being a Romantic and existentialist writer, Lampman, in his later years, also turned into a social critic and feminist. He became involved in the social movements of the day which is palpable in his later poems. Nevertheless, even his socially conscious poems are imbued with a sense of tenderness and compassion that is unsurpassable. The aesthetics of life and literature become inextricably intertwined for him. From the depths of his spiritual experiences poetry emanates and finds consolation in resonating with the feelings of a

nonchalant reader ready to drink life to the lees. It is for these simple reasons that, at the end of it all, it becomes difficult to class him into any particular category of poets that have ever existed. Archibald Lampman was a poet far ahead of his time.

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