



International Research Journal of Human Resource and Social Sciences

ISSN(O): (2349-4085) ISSN(P): (2394-4218)

Impact Factor 6.924 Volume 9, Issue 01, January 2022

Website- www.aarf.asia, Email : editoraarf@gmail.com

Nature, Narrative, and Verse in the Canadian Poetry

Dr. Kshamata Chaudhary

HoD, Dept. of English

Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, Kota

God is an artist of Nature;
He paints in colors, so rare,
The bursting bud in the Springtime,
The lovely trees everywhere:
Autumn leaves so very gorgeous,
In colors of every hue,
The fleecy clouds, so pure and white,
That sail in the skies of blue.

~Gertrude Tooley Buckingham, "God is an Artist of Nature"

Canada's vast prairies, the freezing winter and the fierce summer portrayal of Canadian landscape in Canadian literature are scintillating and impressive. In Canada, multilingual situations, transnational experiences and syncretism literary genre prevail which seem to be the strong fountainhead providing an atmosphere of natural poetic creations.

The Canadian women poets like, Isabella Valancy Crawford, Margaret Atwood, Anne Marriott, Catherine Owen, Margaret Avison, Dorothy Livesay, and P.K. Page have beautifully portrayed the scenic beauty of Canada. Their poetry is quite in tune with the country's climatic surroundings. There is ambience and

milieu of the land commingles with the creative urge of these poets before shaping the contours of their literature. This paper examines how the women poets in Canada “have from time to time returned to the landscape for the soul of their poetry.” (Narasimhaiah 150)

Canada, is in harmony and enchanted by nature. Literature is a great link for human life. It is a bonding factor, which helps people to identify themselves by presenting similar experiences in dissimilar climatic and living conditions. If geography acts as an inspiration for the poetic imagination, it is certainly true of Canada as the landscape and climate have played a pivotal role in shaping the poetry. Canada, the land of prairies, with extremity witnessed in winter and summer have always inspired poets to run their poetic thought wild. From the year 1867 when Canada became a nation, many poets emulated British and American models of poetry but still evolved a style and attitudes which marked the beginning of new Canadian poetry.

Isabella Valancy Crawford an Irish-born Canadian writer and poet was one of the first Canadians to have received particular attention for “eternal springs gushing forth and dancing out in the luxury of jubilation.” Her poem "Old Spookses' Pass" is set in the Rocky Mountains, regarding a trance visualisation of a night-time cattle stampede towards a black abyss that is stilled by a whirling lariat.

In ‘Malcolm's Katie’ Crawford adapted to the setting of pioneer Canada the domestic idyll as she learned it from Tennyson. Prominent and original, however, is Crawford's location of Max and Katie's “conventional love story within a context of Native legends — Indian Summer and the battle of the North and South Winds.” (Fyre 1957) She beautifully presents the longing and yearning “If hearts are flow’rs, I know that flow’rs can root—Bud, blossom, die—all in the same lov’d soil; They do so in my garden. I have made, Your heart my garden.” Her love is everlasting portrayed as if she was a rose plant,” Tho’I be a bud, My roots strike deep, and torn from that dear soil “Would shriek like mandrakes—those witch things I read Of in your quaint old books.” (I, 37-47) There is beauty of nature rendered as feelings.

In the long mythopoeic passage from Isabella Crawford's ‘Malcolm's Katie’, beginning ‘The South Wind laid his moccasins aside,’ we see how the poet is, first, taming the landscape imaginatively, “The Land had put his ruddy gauntlet

on of harvest gold, to dash in famine's face and like a vintage wain, deep dyed with juice. Even the great moon falter'd up the ripe, blue sky, drawn by silver stars—like oxen white and brightened with rays of light.” When settlement tames it physically, by animating the lifeless scene with hope, “the rich land of Malcolm's small valleys is filled with grain, and when on the hill the moonlight falls it looks as if wine-kiss of its ruddy light.” And, also, integrating the literary tradition of the country: “A cusp'd, dark wood caught in its black embrace, The valleys and the hill, and from its wilds, Spic'd with dark cedars, cried the Whip-poor-will. A crane, belated, sail'd across the moon. On the bright, small, close-link'd lakes green islets lay, Dusk knots of tangl'd vines, or maple boughs, Or tuft'd cedars, boss'd upon the waves.(VI,19-35)

The picture of shining moon, lonely valleys and hills, the lustrous green cedar forest with rich scenic lakes all sketched by the poet quite in tune with the country's natural surroundings.

Dorothy Livesay another Canadian poet, critic, editor, scriptwriter, and journalist records the passage of the season in rural society and one can see the beauty even when she says in her poem “On Looking into Henry Moore”. Her literary anxieties vary from the political to the intensely personal and psychological, and echo her years as a social worker, and the strong influence of T. S. Eliot and the imagists. Her verse is lyrical and sensuous; characteristically perceptive, musical, and rhythmically inventive like that of Canadian nature, “The message of the tree is this:/Aloneness is the only bliss/

Self-adoration is not in it/ (Narcissus tried, but could not win it)/ Rather, to extend the root/ Tombwards, be at home with death/ But in the upper branches know/ A green eternity of fire and snow.”(II)

Later again she points out the bleakness of the solitary rustic life “And now the chill/ Raw sun/Goes greener still- The sky”, cracks like an icicle: but vividness of landscape is worth mentioning ‘ a cry lashes the sky-these dreams abound, through her poem ‘Prelude for Spring’:

Frozen, foot-locked

Heart choked and chafed

Wing-battered and unsafe,

Grovel to ground! (91-94)

Canadian landscape, particularly the prairie landscape, became the subject of the poetry of **Anne Marriott**. In the 1930s, during the years of drought and economic depression on the prairies, she lives on a farm about a hundred miles of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and saw what people suffered when there was “no rain, no crop, no feed, no faith, only wind.” “Prairie Graveyard” reflects the same sense of melancholy or elegiac tone. The drought pictured is so intense, “Wind mutters thinly on the sagging wire,/Binding the graveyard from the gouged dirt road,/ Bends thick-bristled Russian thistle,/Sifts listless dust/Into cracks in hard grey ground.” She brings alive the emptiness and desolate surroundings.

Empty prairie slides away

On all sides, rushes towards a wide

Expressionless horizon, joined

To a vast blank sky.”(6-9)

And later, again one can see there is stillness and isolation all around when “Wind raises dead curls of dust, and whines/ Under its harsh breath on the limp dragged wires,/Then leaves the graveyard stiff with silence, lone/ In the centre of the huge lone land and sky.” There is silence enveloping the land and sky of death.

In her another poem “The Wind Our Enemy” though starts with delight at the advent of spring season, “The wheat in spring was like a giant's bolt of silk

Unrolled over the earth.”and how spring with its eternal hope and joy :

When the wind sprang

It rippled as if a great broad snake

Moved under the green sheet

Seeking its outward way to light.(II,18-21)

Later, one sees moments of despair in the morning when the air is peppered thick with dust, and all the night's happiness seems far away, unreal like a lying mirage, Or the icy-white glare/Of the alkali slough.(VII)

And in the end her cry to God, and questions which arises in, “will it never rain again? What about those clouds out west? Find the answers, “No, that's just dust, as thick/ and stifling now as winter underwear./No rain, no crop, no feed, no feed, no faith, only wind.(VIII) .Thus,this poem indeed expressed inarticulate sufferings of the prairie farmer who saw his land and hopes blowing away in a cloud of dust.

Canadian poet **P.K. Page** rightly showcased in her poems how nature has acted as her teacher. Nature unfolds her treasure to human’s search, unseals his eyes, illumines his mind, and purifies his heart; an influence breathes from all the sights and sounds of her existence. Page’s poems are truly a vehicle for that inner weather of a deeper emotional and intellectual exploration that enlarges in another way the sense of life in open space. In her poem ‘*Adolescence*’ the poet pictures the teenage atmosphere of nervousness and uncertainty as :

“In the park she fed the swans and he
whittled nervously with his strange hands.”(77)

And even the movements of lovers are called “savage and swift as gulls”. One can see the empty and dreamy relationship, avenues in the dark, partly sculptured stone, etc. all exhibiting the diminishing aspects of nature getting reflected naturally upon human life in general, the modern man aspiring more than his capability. He creates or destroys and lives in accordance with his relative emotions. The speaker of the poem refers to an undisturbed time in "spring," known as the archetypal time of growth, the beginning of gleeful pureness, when the playful "love they" enjoyed took place in the "park."

In ‘*Autumn*’ Page brings back alive the trick of Autumn season. Throughout the poem, the speaker addresses autumn as if it were a person. In the first stanza, he notes that autumn and the sun are like best friends plotting how to make fruit grow and how to ripen crops before the harvest. The ripening will lead to the dropping of seeds, which sets the stage for spring flowers and the whole process starting over again. He tells us about the bees that think summer can last forever as they buzz around the flowers. But the speaker knows better.

The period described after the harvest, when autumn just hangs out around the granary where harvested grains are kept. Most of the hard work has already been done, and autumn can just take a nap in the fields, walk across brooks, or watch the making of cider.

Lastly, the speaker notes that the music of spring is a distant memory, but that autumn's music is pretty cool, too. This music includes images of clouds and harvested fields at sunset, gnats flying around a river, lambs bleating, crickets singing, and birds whistling and twittering. All of the sights and sounds produce a veritable symphony of beauty. It's like nature has to be endured and predicted:

'Once-glycerined green leaves

Burned by a summer sun

Are brittle and ochre

Night enters day like a thief'(22)

But the poet is full of hope as she feels that only those who strive to work hard can look for future as God helps those who help themselves, "Even though there is bounty, a full harvest/ That sharp sweetness in the tea-stained air" As it is reserved for those who have made a straw, fine as a hair to suck it through- fine as a golden hair.

Wearing a smile or a frown

God's face is always there.'(23)

In '*The First Neighbour*' Page brings the language of life through the nature's dark forest:

'The forest can still trick me.' (29)

It is like a malevolent face flickering over her shoulder. She tries her best to take clue from the 'chapped tarpaulin skin'. She learns that things have got to be endured and prediction impossible. She draws image of birds which symbolize her ardent hope for a life of acceptance and adaptability amidst the land unknown yet hers. Her dilemma and conflict becomes obvious and it becomes hard to decide between certainties and uncertainties, 'the branches quivered' reflect her fear and fright in this alien home. This alienation from culture and language makes her situation even worse.

In this area where my damaged

knowing of the language means

prediction is forever impossible.

(37-39)

Famous Canadian poet, **Margaret Atwood**, in her poem 'Journey to the Interior', through the dreary and dark landscape presents her inner bleakness. She feels bitter and is perturbed from the turbulences of wilderness. She seems lost in a world of no hope: "...that the hills/ Which the eyes make flat as a wall, welded/Together, open as I move /To let me through; become /Endless as prairies; that the trees/Grow spindly, have their roots/Often in swamps; ..."

She sketches a visual image of a world of directionless. The picture of the erratic movements of sun, changing the surrounding too, the solitude and loneliness making the atmosphere looming and ghost like. As the poet moves ahead she feels "Whatever I do I must /keep my head." the landscape looms like visions with its utter bleakness of being lost.

In her other poem "Death of a Young Son by Drowning" one can see how dexterously poet has expressed the visual image of nature "It was spring, the sun kept shining, the new grass/leapt to solidity; my hands glistened with details," merging with her lamentation on the death of the young son, "After the long trip I was tired of waves./My foot hit rock. The dreamed sails/collapsed, ragged./I planted him in this country /like a flag."

Margaret Avison has often been praised for the beauty of her literary language and images in her poems. Reviewing Avison's posthumous collection, *Listening: Last Poems* (2007), poet Judith Fitzgerald wrote of her: "An original, an authentic visionary,..." Avison praises "Creation in all its transplendent awesome/awful mutations." She is so fascinated with nature that there are bountiful of imagery while presenting Death, along with the vitality, energy, force and the dynamic action of nature. In her poem 'Not The Sweet Cicely Of Gerardes Herball' from the collection 'Winter Sun' she never fails to mention the movements in the world of nature befitting the Canadian landscape. On the onset 'No beetles move./ No birds pass over' is sketched wherein the gardens here or fields are weedless and Sun is described as 'purifying, harsh, like sea salt' in the month of November:

'Sour unfructifying November gutters,
From winds that bore no fennel seeds.
Finally, from a sun purifying, harsh, like
Sea-salt.'"(15-18)

Everywhere her emotions are displayed denoting the timelessness of nature :“Time has bleached out the final characters/Of a too-open Scripture./Under the staring day/This rabbinical gloss rustles its/Leaves of living darkness.”

In her another poem ‘Sunblue’ the nature brings forth the thin thread of optimism with the stream running with clear water but at the onset we see the bleakness where Otter-smooth boulder lies under rolling black river-water stilled among frozen hills and the still not breathed blizzards aloft:

silently, icily, is probed

stone's secret.(7-8)

But by the end the poet’s artistic blending of thoughts and emotions with symbolic imagery can be witness with anticipation and confidence within words and peace will brim up, "like a river and the/ glory...like a flowing stream."

Some of all people will / wondering wait /until this very stone /utters.” Her poems are colloquial and have a sharp and ironic insight into a simple situation that expands in the mind with an existence of its own.

Her poem ‘ The Summer’s Moment’ emanate hope, from the magnitude folds of the dark concretes hope emerges thus echoing everything into a state of glory.She sings hopefully of better tomorrow with spread of knowledge, Of those who dare the knowledge/ Many are whirled into the ominous centre/ That, gaping vertical, seals up/ For them an eternal boon of privacy,/So that we turn away from their defeat/With a despair, not for their deaths, but for ourselves, who cannot penetrate their secret Nor even guess at the anonymous breadth

Where one or two have won, “ The silver reaches of the estuary.”

Catherine Owen is a modernist poet with a romantic gothic dramatic bent, perhaps best expressed by the fact that she chooses the crow as her totem animal. Most recently, she writes as a river dweller from an apartment above the Fraser River in south Vancouver, thriving on the juxtapositions between destructive human activity and the irrepressible drive of animal and vegetable life to flourish and continuously grow in the face of every effort of human civilization to contain and bury it:

Thick winch of ripped rope at the base of a rusted bolt,
Beside it, a skimpy alder sapling,
all sprouting from a relic of fallen log,
saw marks chunked with dirt & clover.
These the juxtapositions I live for....

(Fraser River, Thanksgiving 2011)

However, in the poem 'Nature Writing' has used many forms of imagery. Canadians as perceived by Catherine Owen have perforce to engage the environment, the outer storm, simply to survive; they endured hardship and displayed courage and tenacity. The poet vividly portrays the future hardship which shall be experienced due to its geographical displacement: "Our minds can assimilate all horrors./Is the problem./The animals will disappear and those small, strange invertebrates,/the bees will vanish & in the well-oiled waters, fish will surge their deaths over the sand bags." One finds a unique continuity of sublime thoughts and untainted emotions throughout her poem. The immortality of nature, and her dreams regarding hope and promise which echos and re echos in her poems.

Tom Marshall (Narasimhaiah 150) in his critical study of the four stages of Canadian poetry, significantly titled '*Harsh and Lonely Land*' writes:

"Canadians began as cultural half-breeds,... They had perforce to engage the environment, the outer storm, simply in order to survive...They have looked on openness while passing through the outer as well as inner storm and perceived that the void is really a Heraclitean flux in which the glory and darkness co-exist and balance one another..."

One can see how all the above poets have grappled to ascertain themselves with the unique indigenous nature mosaic. They have reconciled with the surroundings and found settlement within the inevitableness of the absolute

nature. A common ground in the love of nature and its beauties belongs to all these poets. Having presented the different panoramic view of Canada as seen by representing poets, it is possible to conclude that poets are governed by the dichotomy of the glory and the darkness, the shining and diminishing aspects of nature getting reflected naturally upon human life in general. Canadian literature thus, with all its form and techniques, reflects the affectations and the affected in its own panoramic style to insist on human endeavors. The basis of human nature pierces its root into the innermost recesses of the minds of the people through nature and its geographical setting and also seeks a universal appeal through its literature.

References:

1. Campbell, Wanda (2000). "Isabella Valancy Crawford". *Hidden Rooms: Early Canadian Women Poets*. London, Ontario: Canadian Poetry Press. ISBN 0-921243-43-X. Retrieved 31 March 2011.
2. Frye, Northrop (1971). "The Narrative Tradition in English-Canadian Poetry". *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*. Toronto, Ontario: House of Anansi Press. pp. 147–148. ISBN 0-88784-572-X. Print.
3. Narasimhaiah, C.D. *An Anthology of Commonwealth Poetry*. Chennai: MacMillan, 1990. Print.
4. Benson, Eugene. and William Toye, eds. *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997. Print.
5. Livesay, Dorothy. *Anthology of Commonwealth Poetry*, 1990. Print.
6. Keller, Wolfram R. "Of Prairies and Empty Pages: Geoffery chaucer's House of Fame, David Williams' The River Horse-men, and the Hermeneutics of the Blank." *Mosaic to Salad Bowl Essays on Canadian Writing*. New Delhi: Bookshelf, 2011. Print.
7. Scott, Peter Dale. *Essays on Canadian Writing*. No.44, Fall 1991.
8. Ross, Malcolm (1960). "Introduction". *Poets of the Confederation: Carman, Lampman, Roberts, Scott*. Toronto: McLelland and Stewart. p. vii. Retrieved September 23, 2015.
9. Rao, T. Nageswara. *Inviolable Air: Canadian Poetic Modernism in Perspective*. New World Literature Series: 79. Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1994. Print.
10. Atwood, Margaret. *Survival: A thematic guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Anansi, 1972. Print.

11. Adams, John Coldwell (2007). "Sir Charles G.D. Roberts". *Confederation Voices: Seven Canadian Poets*. Canadian Poetry Press. Retrieved March 2, 2015.
12. Williams, David. "Imagined Worlds: Various Cosmopolitans." *Mosaic to Salad Bowl: Essays on Canadian Writing*. Ed. R.P. Singh. Delhi: Bookshelf, 2011. Print.
13. Bentley, D.M.R. *The Gay Grey Moose: Essays on the Ecologies and Mythologies of Canadian Poetry, 1690-1990*. Ottawa: U Ottawa P, 1992. Print.
14. <http://www.canadianpoetry.ca/longpoems/Malcolm's%20Katie/MALCOLM%27S%20KATIE.HTM>