



Truth and Metaphysical Aesthetics in A. J. M. Smith's Selected Poems

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Abstract

Arthur James Marshall Smith, (1902-1980), a Canadian poet, critic, and professor who played a vital role in shaping the modern Canadian literary landscape, is known for his preoccupation with metaphysical aesthetics and truth that revolve around exploring deep philosophical themes. Through his keen observation and meticulous craftsmanship, Smith quests for unconcealing the potential truth and inherent beauty beneath the surface of human existence and the universe. Doing so, Smith explores the relationship between external beauty and intrinsic hidden truth that may transcend human understanding. His main concern is to reveal truths behind themes, notions, and the physical world rendered in a unique philosophical voice. Metaphysical aesthetics is the creativity of philosophical inquiries and debates of concepts where the vocalization of philosophical ideas wields poetic language and creative artwork. The present paper aims to examine the metaphysical and philosophical aesthetics in Smith's selected poems and essays, arguing that there is a whole aesthetic realm behind the poet's philosophical voice. This very realm reveals a tension between the endeavor to be hermeneutic to uncover the most fundamental metaphysical dimensions of human existence and harnessing unique aesthetic elements simultaneously. Employing Nietzsche's notion of the will to power and Heidegger's surrealistic outlook, this paper addresses Smith's poetics of philosophy that deals with themes such as death unity, transcendence, the dynamics of spiritual transition, and the ideal nationality. Smith drags the reader's attention to speculate the wonders of existence, the power of the mind, its interconnectedness with the cosmic essence, and the poetics of truth.

Keywords: A.J.M. Smith, metaphysical aesthetics, truth, Heidegger, Nietzsche, philosophical poetry

Introduction

Smith is appreciated as an evocative voice in philosophical inquiry through his poetic expression. His contemplative verse aligns with thematic complexities, revealing insights into the interplay between existential reflection, social comment, and human consciousness. Through his abundant concern with essential themes about man's inner thought in the modern urbanized society, his poetry and essays are written to coin new concepts about the poet and poetry embraced by both metaphysical and aesthetic approaches. His poetry exhibits terse evidence that he is a philosophical poet with an oeuvre to treat such philosophical themes as hermeneutic by its focus on introspection of the meaning of life. In this context, Nietzsche "concludes a grand philosophical approach that revolves around several metaphysical and rational issues, and, on the other hand, stands for the dichotomy and simultaneously the beginning of a new era of thought" (Malik, 2019, p. 612). This conclusion helps to explicate Smith's philosophical views on the themes treated in this paper because as Dahir and Al- uhammadawi (2021) remark, Nietzsche replaces traditional values with creative values in which they are superior to the status of the human self.

Smith's adherence to the phenomenological investigation of man's experience occupies fundamental philosophical portents. He intends to attract the reader's attention, through functioning associative images, to coexist attentively with his environment, and to be aware of every detail of his daily experience. As Brown (1969) states: "Mr. Smith is a difficult poet he would not himself deny [...] but perfect keeping between substance and form" (p. 98). Smith concentrates on human experience and the impact of the objective world on its moral and social construction. That is why Smith's contribution to the art of Canadian poetry moves beyond poetic creativity. According to Pacey (1958), "Smith is the master craftsman, the guardian of high standards, the sensitive arbiter. Almost single-handed, Smith in thirty years has affected a revolution in Canadian poetic theory and practice" (p.195). His craftsmanship intermingles elements such as symbolism and imagism to create his aesthetic realm and view, giving it philosophical depth and multi-layered levels of reading and interpretation. Like Whitman, poetry for Smith "is not a distinguished form of art. Everything is poetry and everything is himself" (Ahmed, 2013, p. 47).

Smith sees beauty as an entity that can serve as a track to truth, enabling one to glimpse the underlying realities of human existence. It is not a tangible entity but an elusive quality discernible and enigmatic through the aesthetic perception of beauty. A matter which made Smith's concern with philosophy and poetry quite stirring amid the late thirties. As a metaphysical poet, his poetry explores sophisticated philosophical and metaphysical themes like the nature of reality, the meaning of existence, time, and death. Such themes are closely connected to social issues such as ideal nationality, sense of belonging, and the concept of identity to establish the relationship between the physical and spiritual domains in man's consciousness.

Smith's Metaphysical Aesthetics

Smith's thematic engagements coincide with these primary concerns exploring abstractions about existence itself together with deep levels of human consciousness and experience. Although not studied sufficiently, his poems have pursued metaphysics through mingling poetical language as well as thoughtfulness. His rejection of traditional aesthetics reveals his belief in the exigency for poetry that goes beyond mere descriptions of physical realities to probe into the metaphysical realms when

fus[ing] thought and feeling. Such a fusion is characteristic of the kind of poetry usually called metaphysical. Good metaphysical verse is not, it must be understood, concerned with the communication of ideas. It is far removed from didactic poetry. What it is concerned with is the emotional effect of ideas that have entered so deeply into the blood as never to be questioned. (Smith, 2006, p. 147)

Smith's metaphysical aesthetics involves a departure from didacticism and embracing a more intellectual approach to poetry. He seeks to convey ideas and concepts concisely and precisely, using sharp language that evokes intellectual stimulation rather than emotional sentiment. Through this rendering, Smith intends to transcend the physical world's limits and delve into the complex questions of existence as he considers "allusiveness of imagery and directness of language are characteristic features of metaphysical poetry (Smith, 1957, p. 31). He challenges traditional notions of aesthetics and beauty in poetry and advocates for a more abstract and philosophical approach employing poets to engage with sophisticated ideas to explicate how they reflect the disintegrated modern life and open new avenues for poetic expression and interpretation.

Smith incorporates unprecedented imagery and draws eccentric parallels to tackle abstract concepts and phenomena. His poetry demonstrates a predilection for wit and linguistic adroitness by employing linguistic devices such as puns, paradoxes, and intricate wordplay to engage readers with an intellectual atmosphere. His poetry includes paradox, which is another characteristic of metaphysical poetry since the "[c]ontradictory elements of his career may in this way become evidence of his complex inheritance of various conventions and schools of poetry" (Trehearne, 1989, p. 231). In his PhD thesis entitled: *Studies in the Metaphysical Poets of the Anglican Church in the Seventeenth Century*, Smith states that the metaphysical poet:

is one who prefers a life of thought to a life of sensation The metaphysical poet uses abstract concepts as the romantic uses poetic figures of speech: to recognize likenesses, to emphasize differences, to discriminate, and to heighten an effect. Thus, concepts might be called poetic "figures of thought" (p. 5).

By emphasizing the poet's inclination towards introspection and intellectual exploration, Smith focuses on philosophical and abstract concepts. It is a pivotal point to consider how this preference influences the subject matter within his poetics. The comparison of abstract concepts to poetic figures of speech is intrinsic. Rashley (1969) regards the new Canadian poetry as metaphysical since it is dedicated to man and his affairs. Wit, irony, ingenuity, and satire are some of the qualities that make Smith a metaphysical poet with complex.

When examining his poem entitled *The Fountain* from a metaphysical perspective, it seems that Smith tackles the themes of the passage of time and the interaction between nature

and human perception. The poem is appreciated as “an equally interesting example of Smith's poetic art. ... [it] represents an image that transcends seasonal circularity, developing a symbol of transcendence over time” (Ferns, 1979, p. 52). The poem's depiction of the fountain's change brings to mind the theme of recurrence, where the universe repeats itself endlessly:

This fountain sheds her flowery spray
Like some enchanted tree of May
Immortalized in feathery frost
With nothing but its fragrance lost.
Yet nothing has been done amiss
In this white metamorphosis,
For fragrance here has grown to form,
And Time is fooled, although he storms.

(Smith, 1962, p.40)

The continuous cycle of transformation portrayed in the “metamorphosis” (Smith, 1962, p. 40) of the fountain reflects Nietzsche's belief in time and the infinite repetition of events when “All truth is crooked, time itself is a circle.” (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 125). Pletsch defines eternal recurrence as “encompasses not only historical events but everything that ever can happen” (p. 35). The notion of temporality is also evident in how the poem explores time as a constantly changing thing. The poem reflects on how the fountain changes, allegorically symbolizing the idea of recurrence, implying that the universe repeats itself. The theme is evident in the relationship between the ephemeral and the persistent by the changing states of the fountains. The fountain is now a perennial, recrystallized in the softest frosty veil after becoming an ephemeral flower storm spray. Here is the combination of liquid and solid, which suggests that everything is coexistent in perennial recurrence, with the dynamic flux of life matched by the circular repetition of existence. The fountain is eternally parted and joined, denoting life: transient yet permanent.

This white metamorphosis conveys with every breadth the process of transformation of eternal recurrence. Not only does metamorphosis signify change, but it also becomes an inevitable process inherent in the fabric of existence itself. The necessity and harmony of such transformation are accentuated in the poem, reflecting the philosophical view that all events the good, the bad and those deemed chaotic must form part of an integral whole. Having Challenged the reader, this universality embraces a perspective of interconnectivity among things. The metamorphosis of the fountain is that of humanity going through time; loss and change meet renewal in an endless stance. Furthermore, the fountain's ability to deceive time suggests a disruption in its flow, where past and present merge aligning with Heidegger's concept of being within time. The transfigured state of the fountain challenges the recognition of time and perception prompting the reader to contemplate how existence flows and how beauty possesses a timeless quality. Yates (1976) mentions that:

Time, in most instances, is a destroyer, but the fountain's feathery frost paradoxically and through a process akin to metamorphosis, is immortalized. While all nature evolves and changes, this aspect in its delicate precision and perfection remains the same. So too does the poem. (p. 52)

The poem questions traditional ideas of truth as absolute and straightforward. The image of the fountain represents an evident transformation from linear time. In Nietzsche's philosophy, truth is relative. It is an enactment of perspectivism with each individual's interpretation of the truth being influenced by his/her perception. Time, like the fountain, is shown as cyclical instead of linear. Repeatedly, events and experiences occur endlessly resulting in a metamorphosis. The circularity of time brings forth an idea of continuity and recurrence, where life seems to loop over itself in a halting cycle. Having tackled the transformation of a fountain reflection, it could also nurture liveliness in the environments of words for poetic images, reality, and time as in Smith's major poem "The Lonely Land." Considering this philosophical framework surveys psychological and existential influences which the Canadian landscape may have realistic reflections within themes of solitude and self-contemplation. This poem is a quiet treatment of the ideal Canadian national character as it "suggests a Canadian inspiration" (Magee, p.153). It reflects the Canadian landscape as well as the psychological impact of the environment on an individual. Smith presents a wilderness that is emblematic of loneliness, self-reflection, and meditation. The poem talks about broad and desolate landscapes of Canada, which define the isolation and harsh beauty of nature:

Cedar and jagged fir
uplift sharp barbs
against the grey
and cloud-piled sky;
and in the bay
blown spume and windrift
and thin, bitter spray
snap
at the whirling sky;
and the pine trees
lean one way.

(Smith, 1954, p.27)

These lines reveal that the whole poem "represents a triumph of subtly controlled vocabulary and carefully modulated rhythm" (Keith, 1985, p. 61). According to Smith, the ideal national feeling can only be found in the profound experience that one has with land and nature but not this common patriotism. The ideal nationality concept also involves the portrayal of an individual's relationship to wild untamed nature. Through emphasizing rugged terrains, Smith seems to assert how the current Canadian landscape has a transformative power on the human mind which results in such sense of belongingness and interconnectedness related to the soul. As such, one sees ideal nationality as passion or love for the natural environment beyond the real or traditional sense. As Pinder (2009) points out, Smith endeavours to find the logical solidarity itself up to the writer in the manner it does to Wordsworth, all things considered, he is passed on to separate significance from a scene in which the hierarchical strain does not achieve anymore. In a fervid spirit, Smith intends to reveal that he is not a mere Wordsworthian so far as the adherence to nature as a source of inspiration is concerned. He strives for the same kind of underlying philosophical consistency and unity in this poem, what resonates with Nietzsche's concept of *Will to*

Power realized as the inner driving force behind man. Smith's quest for deep philosophy resonance within his poem mirrors Will to Power in terms of self-assertion, and realization of creative capacities.

Smith's inward-looking imagery deal with the ideal nationality by shifting attention to the inner self of a person within the vastness of Canada's majestic wildernesses. The depiction of the sky evokes an existential and cosmic belonging, thereby encouraging an outlook on national identity in a transcendent poetic voice. It portrays ideal nationality as the metaphysical concept that is linked to man's existential relationship with nature. Language and imagery are wielded to convey distance as well as isolation. The land is imaged as bare and "LONELY" (Smith, 1954, p.27), while the sky as "whirling" (Smith, 1954, p.27). These images associate a harsh nature where life is hard, and survival is a constant struggle to be maintained. Nonetheless, Smith indicates that it is this harshness which makes Canada unique; only facing such challenges truly helps Canadians determine their meaningful as well as authentic existence in the modern world.

The poem can be explicated from an ontological perspective. It casts a penetrating reading of the poem's reflective engagement with the meaning of existence, the oracular view of Canada's natural environment and the existential questioning that persist within poem's imagery and symbols. It explores being, human presence and intimate contact between ontology and Canadianization of land in relation to its value in shaping Canadian identity. The poem's imagery associates a deep meditation about the inherent loneliness, everlasting relation between mankind and nature as well as perpetual echoes of being across the vastness of the Canadian landscape. It helps to recognize how the Canadians are attached to nature by reflecting on such crucial issues as authenticity of existence, oracular depths of human presence in Canada and the everlasting call for Being as inherent in Smith's poetic voice. It is worth observing that the poem demonstrates the ontological function of the poetic language as intentionally adopted when

Heidegger thus grants language an ontological function. Moreover, it is poetic language that most embodies this primordial function of the linguistic, a function from which the notion of language as representation is derivative and falling off. In particular, poetry affects an ontico-ontological difference in that it is through language that things stand revealed in their being. (Clark, 1986, p. 10)

Smith shows his talent to express the relationship between the ideal Canadian identity through nature imagery in regards to his poetic voice in a Heideggerean ontological view through the poem's language. Here, truth is "self-contained, and is not the realization of an external element ... Heidegger believes that language bid things come to the world and vice versa ... even when a word is missing and silence prevails, the essence of language endures and can undoubtedly be realized" (Elaiwi, 2007, p.p, 104-6). The poem represents one of the most intrinsic aspects of this interconnection, which is the ontological role of poetic language. Being true to oneself for Canadians means that they are attached to their environment despite its harshness and obstacles. The idea of oracular depths betrays a profound understanding of human experience within the natural landscape of Canada. For Smith, it reflects an eternal call to be voiced as part of Canadian essence of existence.

Moving from the eternal verities of the environment into the harshness of the social critique, Smith's "The Common Man" reveals the alienation and misery of people in this contemporary world. It is one of the memorable poems in which Smith "lists many of the conditions that contribute to the failure to recognize the individual, and identifies that as the chief malady of the modern generation" (Yates, 1976, p. 42). It is often observed that Smith

satirizes and redefines the image of the modern Canadian man as being victimized and dehumanized by the modern materialistic philosophy of living. The poem is a social critique that suggests a satiric overview of the common man's struggle in present-day Canadian society. The deadly image in line "Beside a corpse the death ray only charred," (Smith, 1962, p. 78) is strikingly tragic showing a dead person next to what still remains from a damaged food card. It demonstrates more about hopelessness and destruction thus depicting how difficult it may become to survive for one day as

He was the only man in the world
Not registered. He was a node, a furled
Forgotten flag, a still point still unwhirled.
His function was to stand outside.
At first, he thought this helped him when he tried
To tell who told the truth, who plainly lied.

(Smith, 1962, p. 78)

Implying various poetic devices that intertwine philosophical themes and create a feeling of existential meditation, they contribute to a narrative full of rich emotions which focus on individuality, being and selfhood. The lines have metaphors that add layers of meaning to the imagery. The description of the persona as *node* or *forgotten flag* emphasizes disconnection and insignificance, making the person seem solitary and neglectful within the wider world. These metaphors enrich the picture of someone's existential state. The repetition of the word "still" in "a still point still unwhirled" contributes to contemplative mood; it emphasizes stasis and unfulfilled potential as well. This reiteration helps to accentuate immobility or rather sometimes an individual who has stopped as far as his existence is concerned till he gets his "unwhirling" or awakening.

Smith renders a problem and its solution. The problem is represented by the absence of community in mass society tending to devalue the worth of the common man. The impact on personal identity and collective cohesion due to modern social structures is spotlighted. The poem provokes a philosophical question – how commoner should become strong enough or an overman in Nietzsche's thought? Even if the strong will is an admirable character trait, this ending seems over-simplistic in explaining complex aspects inherent in social change, unity and shifts in human nature during modernity. Despite all the ordeals and obstacles from which the common man suffers as rendered in the poem in terms of a problem, Smith renders a solution in the last part of the poem:

To speak and be himself and have a name,
And shake abstraction's disembodied shame,
And play, not overlook, the murderous game. . . .

(Smith, 1962, p.78)

Nietzsche (2006) tackles such philosophical concepts as self-confidence and the significance of personal aim in life especially in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* when he states "Wherever I found the living, there I found the will to power; and even in the will of the serving I found the will to be master" (p. 89). Similarly, Smith portrays an ordinary man who could be described as an example of quiet courage and determination in human existence. Meaningful existence, according to Nietzsche, is hitherto essentially motivated by

the will to power: an intrinsic impulse towards all living things especially humans to prove their strength, actualize themselves and transcend their fate. The will to power, then, involves personal and collective empowerment; asserting one's own distinctiveness in terms of creative potential as well as going beyond social boundaries, obstacles and restrictions.

Although many of Smith's contemporaneous poets may have disagreed with his works, they still owe a debt of gratitude to his earlier years of literary contributions. By presenting his poems as exquisitely finished objects, Smith encourages other poets to strive for a similar level of craftsmanship and attention to detail to transcend Canadian poetry from native to cosmopolitan, maintaining the national traditions alongside the cosmopolitan line. This creates an atmosphere where a poet feels compelled to refine his work and elevate it to a higher artistic standard and "seeks by study, practice, imitation, and discipleship, to master it, and later, if he is successful, to develop it, to extend its limits, and push forward to new discoveries" (Smith, *Poetic Process*, p. 354). Smith embraces the techniques of international literary isms, such as imagism, free verse, and symbolism, and integrates them into his own poetic style to maintain and authenticate the Canadian ideal nationality.

In 'Political Intelligence', Smith seems to render the theme of the Canadian identity through a series of images interestingly interwoven with surrealism and absurdity, making the reader think about how an individual's perception relates to cultural constructs. The poem presents a world where everything happening looks absurd and does not make sense at all, juxtaposing itself significantly to harsh regular realities. The series of surrealistic images undermines what it means to be an individual or part of a group through incomprehensible poetic voice. The unexpected prosperity of the sardine and soldiers using crutches oddly indicates that the poem moves away from conventional storytelling, encouraging to question the security of identity and ideal nationality in light of the surrealistic imagery:

Nobody said Apples for nearly a minute —
I thought I should die.
Finally, though, the second sardine,

from the end, on the left,
converted a try.
(It brought down the house.
The noise was terrific.
I dropped my glass eye.)

(Smith, 2006, p. 94)

The poem's imagery functions in a manner that transcends conventionality. The sardine represented as scoring a try and the resulting chaos like brought down the house portray a situation of unrest as well as unanticipated incidents that Smith intends to convey as a call for political independence to attain the Canadian ideal native identity in a time of wars. The surrealist touches within the poem support the read-as-dreamlike nature, which shows an illogical sequence of events. This enforces the reader to move beyond established narrative lines since such images are not unprecedented in order to reflect the chaos of the war time intentionally. The view of the poem as a surrealistic oeuvre resonates with Nietzsche's account of surrealism. The Apollonian or consciousness is just a layer of illusion that is imposed on the substrata of nature. Creativity for Nietzsche is a continuous resurrection of the Dionysian through, ecstasy, frenzy or rapture that always reconfigure the forms of Apollonian thought.

Freud's ideas are central to Surrealism as being associated with Nietzsche's thought on the unconscious and the supraindividual. Nietzsche does not reject Apollonian thinking but seeks to confirm again Dionysian's necessity. He emphasizes on the destructive and constructive nature of the relationship between Dionysian and Apollo. This implies that Apollonian thinking should never be turned into truths, logic systems or rational structures. It thus becomes natural for him to stand against all cultural organizations upholding codification of Apollonian illusions such as science and political dogma. In addition, Nietzsche claims that there are multiple levels of reality that reason cannot assimilate through any system of thoughts or using rational auguries (Rensburg, 1989). The view through which this poem can be explicated aligns with Nietzsche's view on Surrealism in which the differentiation between Apollonian and Dionysian can be realized in how the poem treats reality through surrealistic imagery.

The last line that "It was all very British" (Smith, 2006, p. 94) enhances a unique philosophical depth in the whole poem. It recasts a contrast of the absurdity of the events with an attempt to be native Canadian but not British. It also enables one to think beyond the common social norms as well as their reactions, hence enriching the poems multi-layered nature so as to handle the theme of the quest for independence through a series of surrealistic imagery. It is a whimsical and unpredictable poem that leads readers into a sphere that moves beyond reason. It intertwines with unconventional and graphic imagery, thus leading through a trip inside this surrealist world of thoughts to rationalize the hardship of being native in an age of war and chaos.

Smith's Poetics of Truth

In a career that contributes to shaping the philosophical identity of contemporary Canadian poetry to the level that he is regarded as the T.S. Eliot of Canada, Smith actively urges to create genuine techniques to tackle such themes as conceived by the contemporary reader. His poems, early and later, "demonstrate his sharp and finely controlled style" (Ousby, p. 867). His notion of art and aesthetics of cosmopolitan, urban, modern and capitalist contexts, art, commerce, and technology are connected to determine the nature of reality of human experience. As Iseminger (2004) remarks concerning the relation between art and aesthetics, he says: "Art is essentially the bearer of a distinctively aesthetic kind of value, of which beauty is a prime example, that is revealed by or realized in a characteristically aesthetic state of mind" (p. 3). Smith's philosophical aesthetics deals with the notion of beauty/truth, which he wields to reveal the enervated inner thought of the modern man and how this perplexed state shapes his vision of life. His contribution to Canadian modernism, in terms of these ardent philosophical notions that helped to establish the cosmopolitan Canadian poetic tradition, can be recognized through his poetry. Smith pursues a promising endeavor to vacate the traditional Victorian forms and themes of Canadian poetry.

Among Smith's notable poems is *Like an Old Proud King* in a Parable which reflects a desire for austerity and bareness and an attempt to make the organic look rigid and durable. There is a tendency to abstraction which reflects the idea of disharmony or separation between man and nature (Collin, 1975). The lines hint at the divide between man and nature, which is a profound theme that resonates with the persona shown in the poem and his emotional landscape.

Smith's poetic journey is one that consciously moves from personal introspection to eclectic modes of presenting and investigating different metaphysical and aesthetic standpoints. It is in terms of melody that binds together the successes and obstacles defining a bitter ruler where the poet centers his work. The fluidity and gracefulness of the lines create an impression of being timeless by combining sounds in such a way that they evoke ancient parables as well as mournful cries of proud Monarchs, Smith masterfully creates an all-surrounding experience for readers through their senses as in these lines:

A bitter king in anger to be gone
From fawning courtier and doting queen
Flung hollow sceptre and gilt crown away,
And breaking bound of all his counties green
He made a meadow in the northern stone
And breathed a palace of inviolable air
To cage a heart that carolled like a swan,
And slept alone, immaculate and gay,
With only his pride for a paramour.

(Smith, 2006, p. 33)

This type of poetry implies a conscious detachment from self and subjectivity in favor of different perspectives and experiences of human life. Smith's poetry becomes a platform for examining the human condition from various standpoints. The diegetic shift demonstrates intellectual and philosophical evolution in his poetic style. The poem resembles a desire for austerity and bareness. This abandonment of grandeur matches well with an underlying motif of rejection and insistence on authenticity in its most slimmed-down form. The desire expressed for simplicity and organic rigidity represents a profound yearning for harmony as well as unity with nature amidst human disharmony or separation from his environment. The bitter king's lonely journeying as well as his singing to the desolate rocks are consistent with this hidden theme, echoing the widespread lack of connection that exists throughout life.

By establishing a new aesthetic framework, which reshapes and reconfigures its thematic concern; the poem cultivates an intricate visual and emotional resonance. Such intervention marks the initiation of aesthetic domain that leads to an immersive exploration of how strict pride, human yearning, and the world of emotions relate to one another. Through its rich touches of aesthetics, Smith's *Like an Old Proud King in a Parable* is a well-written lyric that persuades one to delve into its depths. The language cascades with an air of royal dissolution, capturing the luxury and fragility of the human soul that endeavors to seek truth. According to Sandra Edel, in this poem, the poet denies his worldly kingly self, yet he cannot escape his poetry. Smith's choice of this ambivalence suggests the complicated compromise in his psyche, his inner, and his endeavor to attain order out of passion (p. 206). Through deeply ambivalent and associative imagery and symbols, it draws an image of inner heightened emotions and contemplative desires. In the dark solitude of the king's grieving Monarch's innermost thoughts, each line hums with a symphony of visuals and feelings.

A crucial reading of the poem is through examining the merging of the poet's quest for truth with the aesthetic elements wielded in the poem. This is shown by the embittered

king's rejection of his empty symbols and the shackles of his kingdom in search of a simple truth that is not prominent or rich. Here, the aesthetic element yearns for a simple reality beyond the luxurious trappings of kingship. The vocal point alludes to the human obsession with discovering truth beneath mere appearances. It echoes Heidegger's view of authenticity which is attached to possibility as "Higher than actuality stands possibility. We can understand phenomenology only by seizing upon it as a possibility" (Heidegger, 2001, p.63). Smith seeks authenticity as a possible truth through aesthetic perception. The bitter king, disillusioned with his own artifice as a monarch, seeks an authentic existence undistorted by courtly pretensions. His heightened surroundings and his seclusion are so heavily contrasted as to evoke a philosophical question about whether what man can perceive is real or illusory. This suggests an examination of how truth can be undermined and how far truth can be pursued. But within the poem's warp lays a parabolic musing on truth and lives experienced aesthetically. As an allegory, the typical aged proud king brings out philosophy in asking about truth while one falls prey to alluring aesthetics. In this parable, Smith accentuates the margins between knowledge and sensory lures for embellishing aesthetics; making the reader participate substantially in philosophical tensions underlying his being.

The interrelation of death and art is a major theme in Smith's poetry. He addresses the intricate relationship between mortality and artistic expression, poeticizing philosophical poems in which he engages the human enervate condition. His tackling of death and art reflects his sense of existential speculation. He reveals the transient nature of life and the enduring power of artistic creativity. His poems about these notions are appreciated as vehicles that convey the complexities of human existence in modern and urban society. In the exploration of death and art in Smith's poetry, this section explicates some of his most notable poems, dissecting the intricate tapestry of themes, emotions, and philosophical questions that he raises through them about whether the existential topic of death imposes limits on the accomplishment of poetry or not. Or whether the truth of death is generated by art. Through his poetic journey, Smith gets a deeper understanding of the human experience, capturing the essence of life's transient beauty and the timeless resonance of art.

The inquiry into death and art as intertwined facets of human existence is thus itself a complex negotiation between existential questions and artistic expression. It raises questions about that which lies outside the purview of mortality and what art can do: the probable interrogative it poses regarding the relationship between permanence and impermanence. The dimension between corporeal and spiritual is thus introduced as a theme that recurs, but whose richness lies in opening a field for reflections on how people sense and respond to death and dying. Moving from these broad existential and artistic concerns, Smith's poem, "To Henry Vaughan" turns attention to the metaphysical side of death and enters into direct engagement with Vaughan's spiritual perspective as it becomes juxtaposed with modernity's secular preoccupations. It is this thematic interaction that sharpens our focus on how Smith's poetic voice mirrors, adapts, or criticizes Vaughan's metaphysical framework while being balanced by contemporary dilemmas. It tackles the metaphysics of death and the secular concerns of the modern man through the contrast with Vaughan who is concerned with spiritual values. As Yates remarks, the poem is an undisguised imitation of Henry Vaughan's verse and answers the specific issues brought up in Vaughan's poem entitled *The Retreat* in which Vaughan revels in cheerful considerations of a pre-earth existence. There is no delight in his ongoing life, and he yearns to be liberated from the obligations of mortality. For each step towards maturity takes him further from the envisioned honesty and virtue of his previous life. Smith at long last understands that while he has been worried about physical things, Vaughan has been worried about spiritual things. The poem shows that Smith

accepted the belief of another man. The formal diction and metrical pattern are similar to Vaughan's and resonate with his sound and rhythms. Smith (1976) also recreates a similar harmony between the structure and theme of the poem. The poem reflects Smith's use of metaphysical ideas and philosophical questioning as the background of his poem by referring to Vaughan to whom the whole poem is devoted. The poem draws the boundary between the physical and the spiritual realms by using vivid imagery and lyrical style to create an atmosphere of speculating on the relation between the corporeal and transcendental facets of human life:

Of happy larks that climb the air
Like a broad golden winding Stair
To Heaven, singing as they climb,
Lifting the rapt soul out of Time
Into a long Eternity

(Smith, 1962, p. 85)

Smith's intrinsic themes are death, the transience of human life, and the everlastingness of the divine. The contemplation of mortality gives an impulse to the metaphysical query of the nature of the human soul. The aesthetic aspect of the poem is based on the evocative imagery and lyrical style of the poet that attempts to incorporate a meditative nuance that is absorbed into the nexus of human physicality, and spirituality. The image of the larks protesting their way up slowly but surely with black-golden stripes winding through the air toward heaven leaves a very powerful picture of rising and spiritual join. Along with that, the poet wields such distinctive imagery pictures of larks flying upward and singing in that way, and thereby not only answers the questions of this being a visualization of the soul flying up but also affirms that it is a pursuit of the higher realm of existence. The lark's skyward soaring exemplifies the human soul's eternal search for freedom while conquering the obstacles and pressures of worldly life. The form of the poem provides a lyric aspect as well as musicality like the melodious performance of larks that represents the harmony of the chirping winged- creatures. The rhyming scheme and alliteration in the lines such as "wide hanging winding stairs" give the poem a musical impact which makes its elegance and tone more impressive. Through the careful interplay of the corporeal and transcendent elements of a person's life with striking visuals and rhyming words, the poem drags its readers on a reflective quest to unravel the topic of the soul's immortality and possible pathway to spiritual transcendence and light. Aesthetically, this poem reflects the feelings of this transcendent moment where the truth is unveiled- one grabs at the ideal and contemplates, while the physical and spiritual boundaries disappear and reveal the grandeur of the sky.

The emergence of the metaphysical implications in the poem can be observed from the images taken from Vaughan's spiritual biography like the regeneration, and the night. Vaughan's characteristic longing for eternity is expressed within an audaciously homely conceit of homesickness. The poem develops through a series of analogies that show that nature, because infused by God, is Heaven on earth; and Smith's poetry is fully worthy of the metaphysics it expresses (Djwa, 1978). The idea of cheerful larks climbing up the air steps to reach heaven as if they are gold-colored ladders is very elating, elevating, and transcending. Birds soaring on the stairway of the sky, like the divine staircase, applied the metaphor of a lark climbing to indicate the spiritual journey of the soul in the heavenly realm. The poem depicts the larks as the symbols of ascension and the note-making entities whose

range surpasses the earthly limitations and through that, it reflects on how life is ephemeral and there is always something higher that is eternal and timeless.

Smith materializes the inevitability of death and, indeed, the tentativeness of life. He agrees with the vulnerability of human existence, as well as the lack of knowledge about the afterlife. In the net of death, with its darkness and uncertainty, there is also a place of acceptance and even beauty in the cycle of birth and death. Smith finds it hard to accept the apparent fact that death is a part of human existence as it should be faced up and not dodged. He furthers that death is not the end, but rather a transition to a different realm in which nothing is perceived:

To be one perfect Member, die;
And anxious to exchange in death
Thy foul, for thy Lord's precious, breath,
Thou art content to beg a pall,
Glad to be Nothing, to be All.

(Smith, 1962, p. 85)

The quoted lines express the poet's aspiration to get extricated from his realm to join a lasting union, referring to the spiritual union with a divine force or an essence of supreme power. To have a decision to get detached from the secular and get attached to goodness in death means that a transition to an eternal state of purity and piety is being realized. Smith offers proof for his metaphysical view by contemplating about one's ideal death.

Whereas, one can become "Nothing" making him realize that he could become "All"-the rebirth of the spirit. As Djwa (1978) Writes:

To be dead, to be nothing, is to be gathered into the "All" of God — as such to be a part of all, of everything. Behind Vaughan's joyful anticipation to be "Nothing" is the seventeenth-century universe of correspondences; behind the "All" stands the certainty of the Bridegroom Christ and the wedding feast of the Resurrection. (p. 22)

Smith's yearning to transcend his existence and merge with a higher spiritual essence is vividly embodied. This longing for a lasting union with a divine power signifies a desire to move beyond the limitations of the physical realm and achieve a profound connection with goodness and purity in death. The decision to detach oneself from worldly concerns and embrace virtue symbolizes a transition toward an eternal state of spiritual wholeness and sanctity. The notion of being dead holds profound symbolic significance and associates a profound merging of the individual self with the cosmic essence of God or universal consciousness. As one becomes part of the "All," (1962, p. 85), it signifies a reintegration into the cosmic fabric, a spiritual union with the entirety of existence. The reference to Vaughan's anticipatory joy in being "to be Nothing" (1962, p. 85) harks back to an era of interconnectedness and spiritual correspondence, where the concept of being All embodies a sense of unity with the divine, symbolized by the Bridegroom Christ and the promise of spiritual resurrection and eternal bliss, as espoused in seventeenth-century beliefs.

In *My Death*, the experience of death has been appreciated introspectively. This poem exalts the personal, existential and metaphysical connotations of transience when the poem "offers a simpler and more genuine fusion of thought and emotion Desiring death is an affirmative gesture, not a submission, because it is seen as a pitting of strength against

strength” (Darling, p. 35). Smith regards death, as one of the realities of his life, a component of human experience, a physical fact with which he cannot escape in his existence:

‘I carry my death within me.’

Who was it said that? — St-Denys-Garneau?

It’s true. Everyone— free

.....

Knows death, at least as a metaphor

(Smith, 1962, p.99)

These lines impressively initiate a speculative atmosphere to materialize the journey between life and death. The human experience of death is cosmic and can be conceived by every human, regardless of his origins, beliefs or identity. This recognition drives home the point that death, although individual in its manifestation, is universal in that it addresses the similar human condition of facing it inevitably. The poem breaks new ground by transforming death from its standard representation as a metaphorical or abstract concept to a palpable, material presence within the self—a mysterious, solid, and sensuous entity akin to *Original Sin* (1962, p. 99), implanted indelibly in man’s being. This personification of death into a seed, a dormant but persistent obsession for the poet, has an influence of asserting mortality as an inescapable and dynamic feature of human existence. The poem views death not only as a lurking imminence, but also as a transformative force, which is in shaping and rebuilding existence. Death has been portrayed as gradually bringing itself closer into being, casting light on aspects of life and self-consciousness that were once diminished or not perceived. The poet contemplates over the paradoxical features of death, since it is both a dark factor as well as an aspect that is enlightening. In “The Wisdom of Old Jelly Roll”, Smith views death in a different but more philosophical way:

How all men wrongly death to dignify

Conspire. I tell. Parson, poetaster, pimp,

Each acts or acquiesces. They prettify,

Dress up, deodorize, embellish, primp,

And make a show of Nothing. Ah, but met-

aphysics laughs: she touches, tastes, and smells

(Smith, 1962, p. 96)

By adhering to an ardently philosophical poetic voice, Smith renders an avalanche of themes through asserting the interdependency of life and death as “[d]eath gives life its meaning in defining its limits ... thing and nothing, sound and silence, the net and its holes, have meaning only in relation to each other” (Darling, p. 35). Both have been betrayed as instinctual components of the cycle of existence. Without the other, nothing can be perceived properly. Life’s journey is rather a narration of which death is just a part and not an end.

How all men wrongly death to dignify

Conspire. I tell. Parson, poetaster, pimp,

Each acts or acquiesces. They prettify,

Dress up, deodorize, embellish, primp,

And make a show of Nothing. Ah, but met-
aphysics laughs: she touches, tastes, and smells

.....

‘Nothing’ depends on ‘Thing’, which is or was:
So, death makes life or makes life’s worth ...

(Smith, 1962, p. 96)

Death, then, grants an opportunity for new awakenings and rebirth. In nature, the decay and supplementation of death give wellbeing for the new life to grow. It’s a constant process that includes transformation and renewal. The human perception of impending death makes people take pleasure in the instant, take love and give love, and seek a purpose and meaning in life. Facing mortality is a major transition trigger that often acts as a catalyst for personal development and self-exploration. Life and death are not two unrelated things but two parts of a wider parallel. Loss, grief, and mourning make richer the realities of life’s fragility and beauty. Here, Smith’s philosophy about death gives life a purpose and significance. Man’s perception of the inevitability of death, whether imminent or distant, keeps a man more sensitive to the shortness of life and more intentional about how to conduct it.

In a poem entitled *Good Friday*, Smith renders the theme of death and its impact in a thoroughly different mode. Anne Compton remarks that Smith’s poem is set on Donne’s “Good Friday, 1613”; as both of the poems materialize the impact of the scene on those who witness it (126). The poem addresses the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the profound effect this event has had on the world, particularly about artistic expression. Smith employs vivid imagery and impressive diction to convey the significance of this occasion. The poem opens with the lines:

This day upon this tree
Died one who had he willed
Could have dried up the wide sea
And the wind stilled,

(Smith, 1962, p. 89)

They suddenly set the somber tone and highlight the brutal nature of Christ’s *crucifixion*. The theme of death is enhanced throughout the poem, as the speaker reflects on the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus. This depiction of death helps concentrate on the weight and importance of the event and its effect on humanity. The poem “is an expression of Christian devotion, but it is simpler and moves towards the aesthetic of *The Lonely Land* (Richards, 2005, p.120).

Conclusion

As a precursor of the philosophical poetic voice in Canada, Smith not only writes to tackle the issues of the contemporary age, but also his poetry explores a complex field of metaphysical aesthetics and an unwearying search for truth in spiritual and physical realities.

Perhaps, due to the little critical attention directed at these themes and implications, Smith's experience in treating the real themes and beauty that underscores human experience is a living example of his uniqueness as a poet-philosopher. This coexistence of philosophy and poetics makes the exploration of philosophical topics penetrate through an enlarging of the leading stylistic and emotional aspects of the philosophical explication to the readers. His poetry is imbued not only with aesthetics of self-expression to become a medium for the metaphysical perceptions of human nature and its interrelatedness with the cosmic powers. Through his use of unique aesthetic elements, Smith reveals cosmic metaphysical dimensions and forces readers to feel and think about what these dimensions hold such as the play of mind with world essence and the transformative power of intellectual enlightenment that leads the human mind to insightful truths. His poetic output articulates the incarnation of the intricacies of human experience and beckons the readers to join the train of the philosophers of truth within philosophical art. In his oeuvres, he blends metaphysical inquiries with aesthetic expressions to create a beautiful mosaic that is imbued with significant quests for the meaning of existence. It is a method to embrace the aesthetic value of philosophy.

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