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**Cognitive Implications in Irving Layton's 'Keine Lazarovitch'****Jayasimha Polavarapu****Abstract**

This paper explores Canadian poet Irving Layton's poem "Keine Lazarovitch", an elegy, lamenting his mother's death, through a Cognitive analysis of poetic sensibility and meta-cognition of concepts: 'death' and 'self'. Irving Layton's greatness is embedded in his use of vocabulary and images that do not directly talk about his love for his 'self' and his portrayal of 'self' through his mother's personality. This paper draws the parallels between invisible 'death' and the poet's hatred for such design of universe by the god, of which his mother has been a victim. The cognitive implications that are taken into consideration not only elucidate poet's meta-memory but also make the Canadian poetry reader aware of neuro-linguistic flaws like inappropriate usage of vocabulary due to poetic stress caused by the dissociation of sensibility. This is a special case with Layton's poetry as he never wanted to show his personality through a prism of preoccupations to which the poetry readers are subjected.

**Key words:** Psychological implications, met-memory, mental representation, flux of emotions.

**Introduction:**

There is no poetry without imagination. The depth of imagination makes any piece of poetry to live for a long time. Poetry in modern times has to be democratized in its existence and readership. Today only the elite or refined readers have better access to poetry and its importance in human life is not strictly taken into research through modern approaches. Pre-readings and post-readings of poetry makes difference or change among readers.

A recent approach in research, particularly in Humanities, is studying subjects through Cognitive approaches. Though the

importance of Cognitive science is slowly spreading across Indian subcontinent, it is not yet taken seriously in Poetics.

This article will explore the feasibilities of studying Canadian poetry through Cognitive science. There are certain psychological aspects which can be exploited to study the cognitive implications of Irving Layton's poem "Keine Lazarovitch" in which he addressed his mother's personality and expressed his grief over her death. Irving Layton's poetry is obviously one of the distinct poetry in the entire Canadian poetry that needs to be analyzed from Cognitive perspective.

This article will discuss the distinction between imagination and creativity in poetic language and symbolism through a Cognitive approach. The essential and expected outcome of this paper is to find out the actual existence of aesthetic beauty between creativity and imagination. The so called theories of metaphor may be helpful or relevant in the context.

Irving Layton's "Keine Lazarovitch" is not an ordinary ode written either like Romantic poets or Post-modern poets but it has psychological implication where poet's perceptions and emotions get twined by meta-memory. His writing of "Keine Lazarovitch" was delayed for almost two years and his desire to write this poem had been undergoing poetic ambivalence.

#### **Layton's Mental Representation:**

Most of the theories that are associated with literature and its sub genres shall not be taken seriously in the total evaluation of Canadian poetry or fiction. Literary theory which can't help a cognitive scientist to investigate the existence of a neural process, formulates the symbolical characteristics of the language in which Canadian poetry has been produced.

The so called theories like Formalism, New Historicism, Marxism, Deconstruction, Transcendentalism, imagism, symbolism and Sociolinguistic theories have established their ways of analyzing poetry through political, economical, philosophical, social

and psychological approaches. A new Psycholinguistic approach is necessary to lay down the basic principles of analysis of Canadian works of literature. Of course, there are certain theories which could help the researcher such as Cultural Anthropology, Psycholinguistics and Reception studies to some extent in a cognitive approach to poetic analysis and appreciation.

In Layton's mother, Keine Lazarovitch (1870-1959), steadfast yet moving woman died at the age of 89, is an influential mother who guided as a spirit throughout his life. Though his much delayed writing of the poem, "Keine Lazarovitch" (1961), is projected as the Layton's elegy, it seemingly lacks original emotion from him. This is not to say that Layton did not care or lament for his late mother, however, indeed it is quite the opposite.

"Keine Lazarovitch" is a poem with much psychological implications and emotions that go deep into the poet's meta-memory. Throughout his life, Layton has believed that his mother's presence protects and guides him. His love for her has never diminished but his expression of his affection and her affection to him has been portrayed differently which might drag the reader into a dilemma as to whether Layton really loved her or opposed her! This kind of feeling is quite common for those who read "Keine Lazarovitch".

If we analyze "Keine Lazarovitch" from Cognitive scientific point of view, where we can take the help of Neuropsychological implications and models of assessing his

emotional attachment to his memory of his mother, the significance of Layton's use of words and their connotations can be better understood. "Poets are judged by the frames of mind they induce in us" says Emerson (Joga Rao, 1989). In Layton's poem intuitive experience doesn't exist like a memory in his mind but it tries to come out of his mind as an expression which may not make the reader understand his emotional bondage with his mother.

"When I saw my mother's head on the cold  
pillow,  
Her white waterfalling hair in the cheeks'  
hollows,"

In the beginning lines, Layton goes into his memory where he recollects his mother's condition before her death and tries to express his experience intertwined with his memory. He describes her mind as a mind that was feeling the cruelty of the world that she lived for eighty nine years as "head on the cold pillow". The poem opens and closes with metaphors and images of water; her "waterfalling hair" (line 2) and her veins, or "rivers" emptying into the "sea" (line 20). He describes her physical appearance pitying her full of uncertainties and indistinctness.

Layton's emotional tranquility at its peak stage causes him to lose his expression and he could not find apt words to express his feelings towards his mother as he already incurred stress due to dissociation of his sensibility. Layton's memory has already taken his words out of his poetic consciousness and made him lament at her corpse.

"She loved God but cursed extravagantly his  
creatures"

Layton's anti-Puritanism is seen in the above line (third line) as he attributed his hate for Puritanism and his mother's love for god gave her nothing but to curse him finally. He compares god with a black hole for which his mother has paid her life.

"A small black hole, a black rent in the  
universe"

Layton's ideals are blended with his understanding of his life's existential qualities that would vanish one day through death and it is inescapable for anybody else: "Inescapable lousiness of growing old" (line eight). To describe what his mother is in his memory, he uses words like "comfortless", "vituperative", "ignorant" and "glad". It shows that Layton's poetic sensibility and stress out of his memory made him incapable of choosing appropriate words that best describe his mother's attitude.

"I record she was comfortless, vituperative,  
Ignorant, glad, and much else besides"

It is clearly evident that he used words such as: plagiarizing, dignity, stubborn, radiant, spoil, limited, fierce, unaccommodating and proud which generally make any reader to assume that Layton has no special love for his mother. But the cognitive functions of his emotions that pass through his lament have been under the stress of his memory where his sensibilities have reached a stage of tranquility.

Stress is caused due to two factors: The first stress is due to loss of expression caused by the result of emotional tranquility. Therefore Layton fails to associate some of his feelings

with an apt word and suffers stress. Secondly, the stress caused by Layton's sub-conscious thought of loss of experience in expression. This is again a linguistic inability caused by emotional overlapping. The sub-conscious psychic stress due to linguistic inability is not a direct result of an existing factor or an external factor but a dissociation of sensibility. This kind of mental representation is mainly observed in Metaphysical poets. When a belief persists strongly about a thing in imagination, its impact on the poet's cognition makes him - oblivious to the stress caused by his sub-conscious linguistic inability.

When a poet fails to express his experience or fails to choose apt words to form rhyme and rhythm aided lines, he suffers from stress which could lead to distraction sometimes from his memory or imagination. Then the poet suffers diminishing of his experience due to lack of appropriate words to assert his experience. "As for free verse which was born partly, it would seem, of a desire to express one's thought without deforming it" (Leforgue, 1890). Layton has indirectly expressed his voice and 'self' through his mother's personality and succeeded to some extent to perceive death and growing old too as inevitable evils or limitations to him. In this process of finding suitable words Layton could not succeed in his hunt for such expression due to an unknown stress caused by the memory of his mother's death. The pain caused immediately after death of his mother cannot be expected now while writing the poem as an elegy as Layton's sorrow psychologically diminishes. This is the pain caused by his mother who is invisible and already affixed

in his 'self'. Hence he brought out his emotional detachment from his life and the world as an emotional defense against his more powerful feelings from his mother. In fact, physically he was born to her and mentally grown from her perception of the world that had never lent her happiness.

The neural networks have very complex relations and connections. Still the Neuroscientists have to explore the complexity of using inappropriate use of words or negative words that express affection or love. Layton's use of certain words that describe his mother's appearance at the time she died do not convey his actual feelings due to lack of their emotional uniqueness. His feelings could not stick to the words he chose. It might be due to the flux caused by overlapping of emotions carried throughout his memories.

Layton uses certain words that describe the physical aspects of his mother such as: Cheeks, black eyebrows, amber beads, breast, gold earrings, youngest sings and red veins. His memory has reached to his childhood days when he saw his mother looking young, beautiful and passionate about her physical beauty. He remembers her interests and her admiration of herself' as a limited mind enjoying the little world, for the outsiders it may be madness, beyond the common imagination.

### **Conclusion:**

Layton has bestowed his love of words, sounds, and indeed his love of life itself upon audiences and readers throughout his life. The cognitive analysis of Layton's "Keine Lazarovitch" can make the general readers of Canadian poetry aware of the



complexity of Neuro-linguistic implications upon the poet's meta-cognition and meta-memory. The poetry which readers understand after many readings of "Keine Lazarovitch" and the meaning made of it is different from Layton's use of negative words under the stress of loss of sensibility and its consequence of using words that

exactly do not convey his sensibility. Without extricating the aesthetic qualities of the poem "Keine Lazarovitch", the mental representation of Layton, emotional characteristics of his 'self' and projection of his mother's 'self' between the physical and mental worlds has been dealt through cognitive inferences.

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