

**Keywords**

R. F. Langley; "To A Nightingale"; Radical Landscape Poetry; Modernism; Stylistics; Existentialism

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R. F. Langley; "To A Nightingale"; Radikal Manzara Şiiri; Modernizm; Biçembilim; Varoluşçuluk

## RADICAL LANDSCAPES OF R. F. LANGLEY'S POETRY: A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF "TO A NIGHTINGALE"

### R. F. LANGLEY ŞİİRLERİNİN RADİKAL MANZARALARI: "BÜLBÜLE" ŞİİRİNİN BİÇEMBİLİMSEL İNCELEMESİ\*

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to examine R. F. Langley's poetry as an example of radical landscape poetry, which is characterized by the interplay between landscape and language in an open field of con/textual relationships, with special focus on his poem "To a Nightingale". Langley's poetry can be regarded as a Modernist compound of tradition and innovation, affirmation and negation, certainty and doubt, and the human and the non-human. Langley's poetic landscape(s) or his artistic canvas is associated with the late-modernist writing of his time. In Langley's poetry, the relationships between landscape/environment and humanity, the human and the non-human are depicted as mutually constructive. Situated between the romantic and the existentialist discourses, Langley's poetry possesses a modernist, depersonalized, scientific, innovative, experimental and speculative approach to reality and language. "To a Nightingale" epitomizes the modernist indeterminacy of reality and language through the vertiginous vacillation of the speaker between alternatives of truth and expression in the checkerboard of existence, as well as through the disordered structure and shape of the poem, alternating between opposite poles, through the use of stylistic devices such as parataxis, juxtaposition, enjambment, parallelism, deviation, foregrounding and discursual relations.

**Öz**

Bu makalenin amacı R. F. Langley'nin şiirlerini, bağlamsal/metinsel ilişkilerin açık sahasında manzara-dil etkileşiminin belirlediği radikal manzara şiirinin bir örneği olarak ve "Bülbül'e" adlı şiiri odağında incelemektir. Langley'nin şiirleri gelenekle yeniliğin, olumluyla olumsuzlamanın, kesinlikle şüphenin ve insanla insan olmayanın modernist bir bileşimidir. Langley'nin şiirsel manzaraları ya da sanat tuvali zamanın geç-modernist yazılarıyla ilişkilendirilir. Langley'nin şiirlerinde manzara/çevre ile insanlık, insanla insan olmayan arasındaki ilişkiler birbirlerini karşılıklı olarak kurar. Romantik söylemle varoluşçu söylemin arasında yer alan Langley şiirleri modernist, kişisel olmayan, bilimsel, yenilikçi, deneysel ve kurgusal bir gerçeklik ve dil yaklaşımına sahiptir. "Bülbül'e" şiiri, gerçeklik ve dilin modernist belirsizliğini, şiirde konuşan kişinin varoluşun dama tahtasında doğruluk ve ifade seçenekleri arasında vertigovari sendelemesi yoluyla ve aynı zamanda şiirin zıt kutuplar arasında değişen, düzensiz yapısı ile şekli ve "yanaşık sıralama" (parataxis), "yanyanalık"(juxtaposition), "artlama" (enjambment), "koşutluk" (parallelism), "sapma" (deviation), "önceleme" (foregrounding) ve söylemsel bağlantılar gibi biçembilimsel yöntemler aracılığıyla örnekler.

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### **Introduction: Langley's Poetic Vision, Modernism and Radical Landscape Poetry**

In his 1994 *Note* to his poems, R. F. Langley quotes Cézanne's famous saying "Every brushstroke changes the picture" (qtd in Langley, 2015, 1). Similarly, in the artist-poet Langley's poetry, every expression changes and defers meaning, opening out onto multiple landscapes or text-scapes. In Langley's vision, poetry is an open "process" and experiment which, he believes, relies on "not things, but seeing things" (Langley, 2015, 2) and "calls for testing all available strategies" (Langley, 2015, 2). Thus, the concepts of perception and experimentation are intrinsic to Langley's poetry. Langley delineates his idea of poetry as a "sequence" that bears a composite of "ideas", "etymology" and "experience":

The poem makes a start and you read what you've written, and from this and from what you half have in mind, the next bit comes. Sequence poems make the process visible. Many of the best poems I've seen over the past thirty years have been sequence poems. Don't talk to the driver. Not until some time afterwards. Crusoe standing thunderstruck, looking at the footprint, toes and heel, facing wide-reaching options. It might have been made by the devil deliberately to tell him something. Or by himself on some previous, now forgotten occasion. Then the word 'toe' is close to 'token', 'sign', 'mark', even 'miracle'. It has connections with teaching, showing, indicating, having dignity and being worthy. Also, when walking through a bright nave, the various shades of a foot come from different sides, all at once, to join under the footfall. Ideas, etymology, experience. (Langley, 2015, 1)

Langley's poetic vision can also be explained by referring to Derrida's conception of poetry. Both Derrida and Langley consider poetry an ongoing process or open field which involves many encounters, risks and sights, and embrace the wide-ranging alternatives of truth embedded in a poem. For Derrida poetry is like a "hedgehog" (*herisson*) which shields itself through its spines and rolls itself onto a highway, simultaneously closing and opening itself (Derrida, 1991, 233). Poetry opens out onto a cluster of sounds, senses and sights which are not easy to reach, like the hedgehog that is hard to touch due to its sharp spines. Thus, a poem involves contingency and risk. In Derrida's words, a poem is a "contamination", "crossroads", and "accident" (Derrida, 1991, 235):

The unicity of the poem depends on this condition. You must celebrate, you have to commemorate amnesia, savagery, even the stupidity\* of the "by heart": the *herisson*. It blinds itself. Rolled up in a ball, prickly with spines, vulnerable and dangerous, calculating and ill-adapted (because it makes itself into a ball, sensing the danger on the autoroute, it exposes itself to an accident). No poem without accident, no poem that does not open itself like a wound, but no poem that is not also just as wounding. (Derrida, 1991, 233)

A poem, as Derrida conceives of it, is an “event”, rather than a closed being, and digresses from absolute meaning or truth like a hedgehog rolling itself in a ball. In other words, poetry involves a proliferation or loss of the self as well as its forgetfulness and blindness:

The poem can roll itself up in a ball, but it is still in order to tum its pointed signs toward the outside. To be sure, it can reflect language or speak poetry, but it never relates back to itself, it never moves by itself like those machines, bringers of death. Its event always interrupts or derails absolute knowledge, autotelic being in proximity to itself. This “demon of the heart” never gathers itself together, rather it loses itself and gets off the track (delirium or mania), it exposes itself to chance, it would rather let itself be torn to pieces by what bears down upon it. (Derrida, 1991, 235)

Langley’s poems, roll themselves into a myriad visions in the open landscape/road and faces the chances or “nothingness” along the road. His speakers project themselves onto the landscape thereby forgetting themselves and becoming a part of their object, that is, the landscape. The open road and landscape observed by the speaker in Langley’s “To a Nightingale” provide examples of the textual and contextual possibilities and risks poetry poses.

Langley’s poetry is connected with radical landscape poetry. Harriet Tarlo, in *The Ground Aslant* (2011), deals with “radical landscape poetry” and mentions the conception of landscape poetry as “radical”, within the Modernist framework, as it “challenges the divide between experimental or innovative and traditional or mainstream which has haunted British poetry” (Tarlo, 2011, 7). Combining the senses of land and human “scaping” of it, the concept of “landscape” concerns not only the relationship between humanity and land/nature/environment, particularly “interventionist human engagement with land”, but also its representation or “scaping” in art (Tarlo, 2011, 7). “Radical landscape poetry” is distinguished from the pastoral in its negation of a sentimental connection with landscape or nature, which is based on an authentic and fixed idea of landscape, and on the opposition between nature and culture. It cherishes instead an idea of landscape which relies on an open, fluid or dialogic outlook in that it is an innovative, modernist “poetry full of questions, uncertainties, self-doubts and self-correction” (Tarlo, 2011, 12). The interaction or dialogic relationship between language and landscape/environment is central to radical landscape poetry for language plays a pivotal role in the construction of landscape. As Tarlo emphasizes, “Language is a form in which landscape can come alive” (Tarlo, 2011, 10). Radical landscape poetry acknowledges the connections between the spatial design of the poem and the landscape (Tarlo, 2011, 9). It involves linguistic games in that “parataxis” or “juxtaposition” of “different discourses of nature or place, whether it be the use of natural and unnatural terminologies” or “the meeting of scientific and spiritual language” (Tarlo, 2011, 9). Furthermore, it includes the juxtaposition of “differing arrangements of prose blocks, found text

and stanzas of poetry” within the same poem, thereby providing the intertextual relationships across a wide range of texts (Tarlo, 2011, 9).

Modernism refutes the Romantic notion of the Sublime and the authentic and is sceptical of meaning and language. As Tarlo suggests, in radical landscape poetry “the poet replaces the great romantic myth of originality, of the poet as a genius, with a more humble image of the poet as a re-user, a recycler of words, images and ideas” (Tarlo, 2011, 15). So, modernist landscape poetry is built on the ghostly traces of the past on the present in that the past texts of literature, history and culture impact on the present. In this respect, Langley’s poetry is modernist in its dissemination onto a wide stream of meanings and language.

Langley’s conception of landscape and radical landscape poetry can also be explained by referring to Heidegger. Langley’s journal entries reveal the connection, as he cites Heidegger’s *The Thing* as an influence on his poems (in Noel-Tod, 2015, 15-18). Heidegger does not conceive the natural/non-human world as a passive product/object of humans, nor does he view the human world as separate from or unconnected with the non-human. He regards the human and non-human world as mutually constructive. The world, as he perceives it, relies on the relational or dialogic coexistence or unity of things, which he identifies as the reciprocal production of “earth and sky, divinities and mortals”:

“Earth and sky, divinities and mortals-being at one with one another of their own accord-belong together by way of the simpleness of the united fourfold. Each of the four mirrors in its own way the presence of the others.” (Heidegger, 1971, 177)

For Heidegger, the thing or each object “mirrors”, “responds” to and “recalls” the other. In other words, Heidegger opposes the idea of things as representations. His relational thinking can also be considered ecological as he views the coexistence of human and non-human worlds not in a hierarchical order but as relational:

“When and in what way do things appear as things? They do not appear by *means* of human making. But neither do they appear without the vigilance of mortals. The first step toward such vigilance is the step back from the thinking that merely represents - that is, explains - to the thinking that responds and recalls.” (Heidegger, 1971, 179)

Langley’s view of the landscape and the relationship between human and non-human worlds tallies with Heidegger’s views in that it is relational and assumes the non-hierarchical, ecological view of existence. The natural and the cultural/industrial are merged as the reflection of each other in Langley’s poetry. The interplay among the varying discourses of etymology, entomology, ornithology, natural history, linguistics, existentialism, modernism and romanticism manifests the reciprocal production of the human and the non-human worlds in Langley’s poetry.

In “To a Nightingale”, for instance, the things in the landscape are defined or constructed through their relationships with each other. The natural world of flowers, insects and birds is constructed not as an essence but in its relationship with the human/cultural world of the humans, industry and language. The landscape, in this poem, is conceived as the mirroring of each element in existence. Landscape is not only nothingness, emptiness, meaninglessness and absence but also existence, presence, significance, possibilities, and fullness, as the speaker vacillates between varying visions of the things in the landscape as well as between absence and presence amidst the dissemination of meaning/reality. Nature resonates with culture, while language and culture exist as reflections of nature. Accordingly, the human and the non-human fuse into each other as the speaker echoes the landscape. The scepticism of the speaker about the identification or expression of the things s/he beholds in the landscape, wavering between the scientific names, etymologies and popular names of elements of nature, as well as the linguistic and cultural associations of them demonstrates the eddy of reality and language.

Langley’s poetry foregrounds the concept of “seeing” or vision. In his “Preface” to his *Journals*, accounting for the connections between his journals and his poems, Langley places great emphasis on “what Ruskin advocated as the prime necessity, that of *seeing*” (Langley, 2006, 7). The act of seeing, listening to or observing reality for Langley means “emptying”, which requires a certain state of quiet, transcendence and attention to reality which is a linguistic act, demanding a certain conception of language as well. Language, thus, plays an important role in the attainment of “scape” or vision in Langley’s poetry. The condition of stillness or “emptying” which necessarily accompanies the act of “seeing” or truth/ meaning is not a suspension or obliteration of language but, as David Herd puts it, “a careful listening to the language we ordinarily use” (Herd, 2019). “The purpose of a Langley poem”, in other words, is not the achievement of the poet, but the achieving of a language by which intensified perception becomes possible” (Herd, 2019).

The “torque between propositional knowledge and direct perception” which is a key issue in Modernism is at the core of Langley’s poetry (Byers, 2017, 333). This epistemological crisis or doubt which recurs in Langley’s poems, Byers suggests, is an aspect Langley shares with the early and high modernists rather than late Modernist poets (Byers, 2017, 333), as the latter deals “less with epistemological than with semiotic and linguistic problems” (Byers, 2017, 334).

Langley’s concern with the act of reflection or the gaze can also be explained by referring to “biosemiosis” which Peter Larkin thinks sharpens “the writer’s itch to be seen alongside, a seeing to be seen towards” (Larkin, 2008). “Biosemiotics” as Wendy Wheeler conceives of it, “renaturalises human cultures, seeing them not only as emergent from, but to some extent shared by, the non-human, a condition of our being able to recognize any natural existence at all” (in Larkin, 2008). Langley’s intertwinement of the human and the non-human can be seen

as a dialogic communication. Furthermore, the connections between landscape/environment and the linguistic and structural levels of the poem can also be explained through the concept of biosemiotics. To illustrate, the mutual production of environment and language, of landscape and the text/poem, demonstrates the dialogic relations not only between the human and the nonhuman, but also environment/landscape and human-made or literary texts. For, in “To a Nightingale”, the speaker’s recording of each movement in the landscape actively constructs the textual or linguistic spaces of the poem and is influenced or shaped by that landscape.

Langley’s poetry accentuates the biologic semiotics or dialogic relationships among landscape/environment, humanity, reality and language/text. The permeability of the borders between them, demonstrates their interdependence and interconnectedness as well as the challenges, games and failure of meaning and of language. In Langley’s poem “My Moth: My Song”, “Metaphors/are only other mice”, “a symbol is a face held out to you”, words are “white as water”, words “hover close to” thoughts, thoughts “almost were words”, and a moth is a song (Langley, 2015, 1-3).

Roger Francis Langley (1938-2011) was born in the West- Midlands, where he also worked as a secondary school-teacher. His poems and other writings were much influenced by the country, mainly the county of Suffolk where he moved later. Having studied English at Cambridge, he was also associated with his contemporary Cambridge-School poets (Hamilton & Noel-Tod, 2013, 334-335). Langley’s school curriculum included writers ranging from Shakespeare to the avant-garde writers such as Ezra Pound, Charles Olson, Samuel Beckett, William Carlos Williams, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Melanie Klein (Noel Tod, 2015, 3-5). Langley wrote reflective prose published as his *Journals* and began publishing poetry in 1978. Some of his journal entries and poems were published in the poetry magazine *PN Review*. His last poem, “To a Nightingale” was published in 2010. English Romantic poetry, as well as the ode form, were among the major influences on Langley’s poetry (Noel-Tod, 2015, 7-8). Art, art history and architecture also had an impact on Langley’s writing and painting, including the influences of Adrian Stokes, the Pre-Raphaelite painters and Vorticist portraits (Noel-Tod, 2015, 2-5).

Langley’s verse is associated with British modernist poetry of the late twentieth century or late Modernism. British modernism since the 1960s has been mainly shaped by the established critical approaches at English studies at Cambridge University, which valued such figures as Eliot and Pound (Noel-Tod, 2013, 126). The idea of a “modernist tradition” has been replaced in the last two decades with the term “linguistically innovative poetry”, as it is considered “monolithic” (Noel-Tod, 2013, 126). British poetry of the post-war period, through the New York School and then the American Language poets are thought to have “brought new lyric voices to Cambridge and beyond” (Noel-Tod, 2013, 126) with the “effect” to “re-write literary tradition again, so that the experimentalism of Gertrude Stein has begun to emerge as equally influential as

Eliot, Williams, or Pound” (Noel-Tod, 2013, 126). Noel-Tod further emphasizes “modernism’s depersonalized analyses and verbal excesses” (Noel-Tod, 2013, 117) and the “modernist dialectic between the private and the public voice.” (Noel-Tod, 2013, 121)

The term “Projective verse, coined by Charles Olson, is a major influence on Langley as his poetry is concerned with the process of perception which can also be considered projective verse. Olson’s manifesto “Projective verse” (1950) refers to the new conception of poetry in the 1950s in the vein of the poetry of Pound and Williams as distinct from the conventional “closed verse” in British poetry. Using an agricultural metaphor, Olson also names projective verse “composition by field” (Olson, 1997, 239), which recalls the openness of a field. The poet, in projective verse, transfers the energy of the poem to the reader without any subjective and descriptive interference: “A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader.” (Olson, 1997, 240).

“Objectism” is the quality Olson expects from the poet, which is based on the relationship between nature and humanity, or nature and the poet:

Objectism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the “subject” and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature (with certain instructions to carry out) and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. For a man is himself an object, whatever he may take to be his advantages, the more likely to recognize himself as such the greater his advantages, particularly at that moment that he achieves an humilitas sufficient to make him of use. (Olson, 1997, 247)

The relationship between the poet and the landscape or his object, as well as between the human and the non-human in Langley’s poetry can be explained through Olson’s idea of Objectism as the speaker in a Langley poem sheds his/her personality, adopts the view of his/her object or landscape, and thereby merges with the landscape. Langley’s emphasis on syllables and lines as well as his use of enjambment are also in line with Olson’s projective verse in that syllables and lines ride over metre and rhyme.

Langley’s view of poetry owes much to Pound’s conception of poetry and the idea of Imagism. Langley shares the Imagists’s concern for the “particular”. In the “Preface” to *Some Imagist Poets* (1915), it is maintained that “poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous” to “produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite” (in Kolocotroni, 2007, 269). The Vorticist notion of an image as a “vortex” is a chief influence on the poetry of Langley. As Pound puts it in his essay “Vorticism”:

THE IMAGE IS NOT an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perform, call a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing. In decency one can only call it a VORTEX. And from this necessity came the name "vorticism." (Pound, 1916, 106)

Langley's depersonalized poetry, can also be traced back to Eliot's theory of "impersonal" poetry, in which the poet articulates "a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways" (Eliot, 1993, 2174). As Eliot puts it, "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" (Eliot, 1993, 2175).

It can be argued that Langley envisions poetry as a "catalyst" of tradition and innovation like his early modernist predecessors. "To a Nightingale" demonstrates not only a new, modernist, innovative, scientific and depersonalized conception and style to express reality, but also pays homage to history and literary tradition, mainly to figures such as Shakespeare, the Romantics and the early modernists. Langley uses the traditional as well as Romantic ode form in "To a Nightingale". However, his treatment of the form is innovative and Modernist, distinguished from the Romantic odes. Furthermore, the speaker in Langley's poem is not the emotional, subjective speaker of Romantic poetry but the impersonal poet of Eliot, who escapes from emotion and of Olson, as s/he becomes objectified in the landscape.

It can be argued that Langley's poetry is mainly about linguistic crisis as it portrays a kaleidoscopic landscape of reality. The "modern crisis of language" which follows existential crisis, related to the loss or failure of the connections among reality, thought and language, is a key concern of Modernist poetry. As ordinary language is regarded as "de-potentiated" or emptied, "its syntax and vocabulary are rejected as unserviceable for poetry" (Sheppard, 1976, 328-329). Modernist poetry, thus, aims to recover the multiple strands of meaning lost in conventional language. As Sheppard puts it, the Modernist poet "attempts to liberate the repressed expressive energies of language; ceases to be the celebrant of a human order and becomes the experimenter who searches for a barely possible 'redeemed and redeeming image' amid a protean universe in apparently chaotic process" (Sheppard, 1976, 329). Modernist experimentation with or innovation through language also brought about new discourses. As Güzel Köşker states, "Modernist poets, who also pioneered Imagism in poetry, created a new discourse by experimenting with language to reach new styles of expression" (Güzel Köşker, 2016, 6).

Modernist experimentation with language can also pose a difficulty for the reader: "As such, the artist's relationship with the audience becomes problematic in the modern era"



(Şenlen Güvenç, 2019, 126). Ezra Pound's poetry illustrates the difficulties modernist poetry involves for the reader. As Şenlen Güvenç suggests, the "elitist style or voice employed by Pound –who believed that poetry should be challenging rather than easily consumed-excludes the common reader who might not have a command over the Classical texts, foreign language, Latin etc." (Şenlen Güvenç, 2019, 127). In the same manner, Langley's poetry posits difficulties and challenges for the reader, as it is experimental and innovative.

Daniel Eltringham points out the underlying sense of ambivalence in Langley's verse, in the fluctuation between certainty and uncertainty, the naturalist and the experimentalist:

Roger Langley's writing lies between two worlds: the certainty desired by the amateur naturalist and its implications for artistic and taxonomic records, poised against the uncertain, plural, deferred, evasive character of an experimental artist. But poised without explicit tension: he is not a tense writer, more curious and exploratory, content to allow contradictions to remain contrary. (Eltringham, 2013, 50)

Eltringham also notes the contradictory use of images in the endings of Langley's poems, which simultaneously affirm and negate a certain sense of meaning or truth: "It's typical of Langley to end his poems with such searching ambiguities, confirming and frustrating in a single image, or rather statement about an image, the numerical 'closing down' of the world" (Eltringham, 2013, 51).

Langley uses stylistic devices as foregrounding, deviation, parallelism, parataxis and enjambment<sup>1</sup>. As Richard Bradford puts it, modernist poetry is characterized by such stylistic elements as the "foregrounding" of the right or the left-hand columns in a "radical" manner and/or constant upsetting of any neat relationship between the two columns (Bradford, 1997, 153-4), parataxis or "language organized at the moment of experience or perception without too much attention given to formal syntax" "enjambéd syntax" and "free-verse" (Bradford, 1997, 155).

### **A Stylistic Analysis of Langley's "To a Nightingale"**

Langley's poem "To a Nightingale" enacts the ongoing interaction and even battle between nature and culture, past and present, emotion and reason, presence and absence, affirmation and negation, certainty and doubt, and significance and futility. It can be argued that the text adopts a modernist stance towards reality, as it acknowledges the new and the modern while feeling nostalgia for the idyllic, rural past, or between the romantic and modernist outlooks. The poem dramatizes the communication and relations between human and non-human worlds

<sup>1</sup> Short introduces the notions of "foregrounding", "deviation" and "parallelism", which are central to stylistic analysis (Short, 1996, 1-79). See Short, M. (1996). *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose*. London & New York: Longman.

through the contrast between the ecological outlook and the human gaze, mainly through the juxtaposition of the human and the non-human, including birds, insects, flowers, trees, the weather, the earth, the bridge and the sky.

“To a Nightingale” is a poem written in the form of an ode even though its title does not contain the word “ode”. It is addressed to the nightingale in the tradition of Romantic odes. The ode is an elastic and open poetic form in both structure and content, as Richard Bradford suggests, not only bearing “the most flexible and variable stanzaic form” but also as a tool for “personal reflection” (Bradford, 1997, 20). “The open, flexible structure of the ode”, Bradford states, is functional as it “eschews logic and systematic argument in favour of an apparently random sequence of questions, hypotheses and comparisons” (Bradford, 1997, 20).

The title foregrounds the sense of deferral which is central to the poem. That is, there is no mention of a nightingale in the rest of the poem. The word nightingale functions as a signifier endlessly deferred and an intertextual element linked with the representations of the nightingale in various disciplines, discourses and texts. Thus, the idea of the nightingale may be a sum of the multiple ideas concerning the nightingale. The arrival of the nightingale is deferred throughout the poem, and anticipated by the end. The poem is built on the presumption of absence which precedes presence in that the very presence of the nightingale is built on its absence or anticipation. For, the poem ends with the speaker waiting for the song of the nightingale which he expects to record. As Carol Rumens says, “the poet having reminded us that emptiness is the precondition for hearing”, “the poem doesn’t need to tell the nightingale” (Rumens, 2016).

Julie Larios, in “R. F. Langley: Between Two Worlds”, notes Langley’s use of “indirection” in “To a Nightingale”, which she thinks, distinguishes his odes from its Romantic predecessors. The opening line of the poem, which emphasizes nothingness turns out to be affirmative only to end in negation, and the curvilinear structure, she states, is an instance of Langley’s “poetic trick” of “indirection” (Larios, 2015, 4-5).

The coexistence and alternation of affirmation and negation, hope and despair, closure and indeterminacy dominate the poem. As in Langley’s poem, “The Upshot”, whose first and last stanzas begin with the expression “We leave unachieved in the /summer dusk” (Langley, 2015, 1-3), and which ends with the line “there is more here. More. Here.” (Langley, 2015, 3), the sense of unfulfillment and deferral alternate with a sense of affirmation. Feelings of existential contingency and discontent prevail as “Things stand further off” (Langley, 2015, 3).

Noel-Tod maintains that the sense of uncertainty and the speaker’s aim to arrive at exactness or accuracy end, in the Keatsian sense, in a discharge or freedom from anxiety about certainty. The poem, he suggests, concludes with a sense of relief and fulfilment through the nightingale’s awaited song:

The poem searches for precisions around the edges, [...] But it aims further along the road, beyond “the nick-nack of names”, at Keats’ condition for poetry, in which “the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration”. Finally, it is the sound of a nightingale that brings release from wondering about “caterpillars which / curl up as question marks. (Noel-Tod, 2011, 71)

The poem not only deals with the observations and speculations of the speaker on nature, but it moves toward existential concerns. It portrays the modernist battle of the mind over anxieties rather than offering the resolution of questions, a sense of affirmation and relief as a final point. Noel-Tod believes Langley’s primary interest in this poem is not surrealism but contemplation on natural history: “The question, therefore, was not surrealism, but a speculation in natural history, and as much “earned from observation [...]” (Noel-Tod, 2011, 72) However, the poem is also concerned with existential questions and the ensuing linguistic anxiety.

The poem foregrounds a sense of nothingness, of silence, of stillness and of emptiness in the existentialist vein. It registers the condition of being in limbo. The road seems to be a dead-end. The speaker is in abeyance, as he waits for the nightingale’s song to shoot. His/her condition is a state of suspension, oblivion and incompleteness. The “fraught pause” mentioned by the speaker which refers to the period of waiting for the nightingale’s song is the dominant emotional mood of the poem, as it is built on fraught silences, emptiness, nothingness and pauses.

The concept of coping is highlighted in the poem as it connects different layers of the text. For one thing, the metaphor of coping explains the speaker’s struggle with absence and presence, nothingness and meaning, movement and stillness, certainty and doubt. The speaker tries to cope with modernist anguish through the metaphor of “the coping of a bridge”, trying to bridge the gap between meaning/truth and language. His/her aim to make sense of his/her environment and reality continually fails as feelings of hesitancy, ambivalence and nothingness prevail. The speaker’s continuous desire to reach “the particular” amidst the chaos and unfinalizability of reality and language, coping with the reality or particulars concerning insects, flowers, moths, and birds is the focal point of the poem. As Langley concludes his poem “Experiment with a Hand Lens”, “Nothing is less than / particular” (Langley, 2015, 2). At the structural and graphological levels of the text, “coping” may reflect the disordered structure of the poem. The structure and spatial arrangement of the text duplicates the act of coping via the abrupt shift of the ending words of each line, having a zig-zag turn, foregrounding one column in a radical manner mainly through enjambed lines.

The poem consists of forty-five lines, each of which has seven syllables. It is formed of enjambed lines, in that the lines are broken and continue in the next line. Graphologically, linguistically and structurally the poem paints not only the vertiginous vacillation or the flutter

of birds and insects, but also of the giddiness of the speaker's walking and wavering between certainty and doubt, affirmation and negation, the human and the non-human. The ragged, uneven shape of the poem reflects both the vertigo-like uncertainties in existence and the interactions between the human and the non-human. The use of enjambment and parataxis, for instance, helps to imitate the movement including the tensions of the landscape as well as the speaker's stream of consciousness. The flow and fluctuation of the lines echo the tide of the speaker's mind as well as the energy of the landscape.

The speaker refers to various kinds of discourse including entomology, etymology, ornithology and natural history. S/he examines nature like a natural historian but s/he also explores concepts like a linguist. S/he speculates like a scientist or philosopher on the things s/he observes. S/he imparts both his/her impressions and his/her knowledge or scientific information concerning the reality s/he beholds. As Rumsey puts it, "Beyond the drama of the encounter between poet and natural world, it is the effects of that encounter on the use of language that make 'To a Nightingale' remarkable" (Rumsey, 2016). Langley's use of scientific name of the genus, generic names, to refer to the objects in the landscape, for instance, can be regarded as Modernist. The speaker in this poem not only mentions the common or local names of species but their Latin equivalents as well. The speaker refers to mosses for instance as *Grimmia*. S/he identifies a moth as *Scotopteryx* and another as *Camptogramma*. S/he also speculates the flies s/he observes are *Helina Phaonia*. The technical, industrial term "coping" is another example of the scientific and innovative use of language as a modernist aspect.

The idea of the contingency of life is central to the poem which is further connected with the arbitrariness of language. Facing the maze of the alternatives of meaning/reality, the speaker suffers from the *nausea* of existence as he feels due to the sickening "[H]eat off the/road" the sickness of the labyrinth of language/meaning, "the nick-nack of names" (Langley, 2015, 1). Existential nothingness and dissemination of choices and meanings accounts for the speaker's condition as s/he declares "I am/empty, stopped at nothing, as/I wait for this song to shoot" (Langley, 2015, 2). Feelings of anxiety and nausea accompanying the contingency of reality concerning the landscape recall Sartre in that "Everything is gratuitous" and "When you realize that, it turns your stomach over and everything starts floating about" (Sartre, 2000, 188). The speaker's reference to scientific /generic names to identify and reveal the truth about the things in the landscape is ironic as it helps to underpin the arbitrary and random aspect of reality and of language.

The poem begins with the sense of negation and nothingness through the foregrounding of the indefinite pronoun "nothing" but moves towards the possibilities of both human and non-human sights in the landscape and the relationships between them. The speaker's survey

of the landscape along the road begins and ends in a provisional tone rather than certainty. The speaker's alternation between certainty and possibility or likelihood, between affirmation and negation is graphologically reproduced in the shape and structure of the poem, that is, the zigzag course of the last word of each line, veering alternately to right and left. The preliminary negation of the speaker in the first stanza suddenly shifts to possibility at the end of the same line, through the use of "but", signalling the change in direction or meaning and the adverb "maybe" which expresses likelihood as well as uncertainty, used in the following line. Thus, the presence of flowers' petals is one of the alternatives of reality in the landscape. The mood of uncertainty is transformed into certainty in the third line through the use of the phrase "nothing but" which means "only" or "nothing other than". The existence of the coping of a bridge is expressed with certainty through this phrase. The speaker moves from the space of the natural world to the human plane, through the shift of focus from flowers to the bridge. The linguistic play involved in the same lines imitates the abrupt alternation and unfinalizability of meaning/truth, particularly through the change in syntactic arrangement and punctuation which further changes through their interactions with the words in the next line:

Nothing along the road. But  
petals, maybe. Pink behind  
and white inside. Nothing but  
the coping of a bridge. Mutes (Langley, 2015, 1)

The phrase "stop at nothing" is foregrounded in both form and content of the poem. It recurs at graphological, linguistic and semantic levels of the poem. "To stop at nothing" mainly suggests the unfinalizability of reality and the possibilities of connections, meanings and language. As Byers states, "Stop / at nothing. To stop here at / nothing", in this poem, "offers a warning to the speaker to avoid the Adamic inclination to fix things by their names" (Byers, 2017, 347). Along with the indeterminacy and unattainability of meaning, the phrase, also accentuates humanity's endless search for truth like Camus' Sisyphus. Thus, the borders between absence and presence, nothing and anything, are blurred, which is reiterated in the correspondence between human and non-human planes, including contextual and textual ones. Moreover, the line division stops at nothing in that it flows uninterrupted, without a break or stop. Since the poem is not divided into stanzas and enjambment is used, the lines flow into each other without a break and continue incessantly. The open structure of the poem, "stopping at nothing", parallels the speaker's unending walk, contemplation and speculation on the open road. The movement or alternation of the lines on the butterfly and the lines on the page exhibit parallelism. The movement, namely, the "flutter" of the butterfly, *Scotopteryx* or *Darkwing*, also accompanies the movement on the page, that is, the page margins. The continuous song of the chaffinch also parallels the endless flow of the lines of the poem. The sense of the unfinalizability

or contingency of reality/meaning at textual and contextual levels is also expressed through the images of “waver”ing lines, “the nick-nack of names”, “doubl”ing and “blur”ring of the “margin”:

shaded Broad-bars. Lines waver.  
*Camptogramma*. Heat off the  
road and the nick-nack of names.  
*Scotopteryx*. Darkwing. The  
flutter. Doubles and blurs the  
margin. Fuscous and white. Stop  
at nothing. To stop here at  
nothing, as a chaffinch sings  
interminably, all day. (Langley, 2015,1-2)

The use of stylistic devices such as foregrounding, deviation and parallelism in the text/poem reveals the radical landscapes of meaning and language. Deviation is seen at the discursive level. As the intended addressee is a nightingale, the discourse situation, that is, the conversation, fails. Furthermore, although the persona intends his/her message to the nightingale, the absent addressee and the sense of deferral reinforces deviation in discourse.

The subjectivism of Romanticism and the Romantic idea of the poet/speaker’s projection of his/her personality and feelings onto nature are replaced in this poem with the Modernist depersonalized perspective of the speaker. There is a shift from the author to the text, as the poet/speaker becomes an object in the landscape. The speaker refuses emotion and individuality, by emphasizing that his expressions are objective observations, common views rather than his own personal thoughts and feelings. For instance, s/he refers to the sounds of the birds and two turtle doves in an unsentimental tone, using for instance the word “tenderness” simultaneously claiming that he is not concerned with “love” and emphasizing that it is an objective observation rather than his personal interest: “I /say none of this for love. It/is anyone’s giff-gaff. It/is anyone’s quelque chose. /No business of mine” (Langley, 2015). The repetition of the phrase “It is anyone’s” and the negative expressions “no” and “none” underscores the depersonalized outlook. The jarring contrast between the romance-related and emotionally charged word “love” and the unromantic, detached and materialistic concept of “business”, contributes to the unemotional attitude in the poem.

The convergence of the natural and cultural worlds is further sustained through linguistic parallels. The “mutes” or bird-droppings on the bricks, for instance, are depicted in industrial and cultural terms, through the analogy of “metal” and the linguistic and existential overtones of muteness. The word “mute” signifies not only the natural and industrial element but also the sense of inarticulacy or linguistic as well as existential silence or barriers. The “coping” of a bridge

is an act of coping regarding both human and non-human worlds, and the relations between them, combining the social, moral, and linguistic aspects. Mites “ramble” and caterpillars “curl up as question marks”, which imitates the interactions between the human and non-human in a modernist sense. The movement of the mites is likened to the stroll of the speaker and the “rambling” stream of his/her mind is reflected onto the landscape. A further analogy is drawn between the movements of caterpillars and humans as the curling of the caterpillar reflects the speaker’s doubts or questions regarding reality and their expression in language and linguistic terms. In other words, as the beholder perceives the landscape, s/he both produces or writes the landscape and is affected and constructed by it. Waiting for the nightingale’s song, the speaker says “I am / empty, stopped at nothing, as / I wait for this song to shoot”. The expressions of emptiness and nothingness reinforce the idea of a dialogic connection between landscape and humanity, as the speaker is “empty” or absent before the arrival of the nightingale. The presence and identity of the nightingale is also constructed through its relationship with the speaker and when s/he records its song.

Enclosure is another central issue in Langley’s poetry as well as in “To a Nightingale”. In his poem “Mathew Glover”, Langley deals with the enclosure of the commons, giving a historical account of Parliamentary Enclosure and its effects on the English landscape. The poem emphasizes not only the impact of the Enclosures but also emphasizes the confusion in the face of it, as “All is lost” through this change and Matthew Glover “would not speak for or against it” (Langley, 2015, 6):

Enclosures in this parish cut up  
The Open Fields round its centre  
Before 1758 and took the Commons  
30yrs later, fast, from the  
Declaration on the church door  
To the Commissioners’ meeting. (Langley, 2015, 5)

In “To a Nightingale”, the hedge may be the emblem of the Enclosures and its effects. The coping of the bridge may also signify coping with this change and the tensions following it.

The poem concludes with the image of biosemiosis of the human and non-human in the landscape, where the speaker’s self is projected onto the road, the apple-tree and the bridge. The speaker almost forgets himself/herself facing the possibilities including the apple-like risks or truths on the road to reality, and ends his/her observations with the approaching bridge.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, Langley’s poetry demonstrates a poetic vision which is a modernist “vortex”, reflecting the contingency, ambivalence, suspension, dissemination and even loss of meaning

through its choice of “getting –off” the “track” of language and meaning, thereby facing the possibilities and risks encountered in sketching the landscapes and linguistic scapes of reality. In “To a Nightingale”, the relationship between the speaker and the landscape, or between humanity and environment, assumes the nature of biosemiosis as the speaker projects his/her self onto the landscape and takes up the stance of the landscape, thereby becoming an object. Langley’s view of the landscape involves a dialogic interaction between nature and culture, the rural and the urban or industrial, the human and the nonhuman in that the language denoting each element replaces one another. The language about the human and the non-human world are intermingled so much so that it is hard to distinguish between them. The proximity of the human and non-human discourses, mirroring one another, in Langley’s modernist poetics is a far cry from the romantic, pastoral and pre-modernist ones. Stylistic devices such as enjambment and parataxis reinforce the slipperiness of truth and of language, which lies at the heart of the poem. Landscape becomes a text, a linguistic and fictional construct while the text stages the landscape. The speaker’s desire to arrive at certainty, closure and the particular in the face of the flux, indeterminacy, and disorder of reality and of language reflects the modernist “coping” with meaning and language, striving to “bridge” the gaps in existence and language. It is observed that landscape and language are metaphors for each other in Langley’s poetry. “To a Nightingale” demonstrates the vertiginous vacillation and proliferation of language and reality and the nausea of nothingness.

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