

WILFRED CAMPBELL RECONSIDERED

Laurel Boone

THE ART OF WILLIAM WILFRED CAMPBELL cannot be separated from his life.¹ Campbell believed that only social thought was worthwhile and that intellectual and artistic activity could properly take place only within society. Therefore most of his poetry is social or public. His poems about nature often depend on nature's value to man in society; his dramatic poems tell of heroes and heroines who live and die by the highest social ideals; and, after the success of "The Dead Leader" in 1891, he came to see himself as the laureate of Canada, duty-bound to commemorate persons and events and to rouse the nation to achieve its best nature and highest dreams. His poetry would teach what that nature and those dreams should be. Unlike the work of more individualistic artists, Campbell's poetry must be seen in the context of the man's intellectual and spiritual nature and his intellectual, political and social milieu.

In the *Literary History of Canada*, Carl Klinck recognizes Daniel Wilson's *Caliban: The Missing Link* as a source of Campbell's "experiments in imagery of primitive nature and primitive religion."² Wilson influenced Campbell even more profoundly than that. He had been a professor of history at University College, University of Toronto, since 1843, and when Campbell began his studies there in 1881, Wilson was the new president of the College. Campbell probably heard him lecture, and he had the opportunity to know the man himself, a singular blend of poet and scientist. Wilson credited Shakespeare with discerning the proper application of the theory of evolution to man because in *Caliban* he had shown how high man's animal nature, uninformed by the divine, could evolve. Shakespeare's unique poetic intuition enabled him to know and describe what nineteenth-century scientists had just begun to discover. Other thinkers, such as George Paxton Young, professor of ethics and metaphysics at University College, and William Dawson LeSueur, an acquaintance of Campbell's middle age, rejected with Wilson the positivist idea that all knowledge must be derived from sensory perceptions. Young finally became an idealist, and LeSueur regarded knowledge derived from intuition or revelation to be factual along with scientific

knowledge.³ Wilson's idea about Caliban seized Campbell's imagination, but it was the holistic view of knowledge he and his fellows shared that gave Campbell the impetus and courage to regard all knowledge as within his province and to pursue science through spiritual or poetic intuition for the rest of his life.

Campbell left the University of Toronto in 1883 to study at Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Mass., where the intellectual ferment marked him as permanently as did the exposure to American transcendentalism. The School had been founded just sixteen years before Campbell began his studies there. It was independent of Harvard, but its nearness to the university and the freedom of students to take courses at either institution meant that the Theological School had to meet Harvard's high intellectual standards. In *Faith and Freedom*,⁴ a history of the School, the Rev. George Blackman says that faculty members were required to teach "theological science" and had to display "a scientific mind and culture, . . . some acquaintance with the later results of scholarly research in other departments . . . [and] acute knowledge of the relations of modern Science to Revealed Truth." The social sciences and psychology were welcomed, and higher criticism of the Bible was both practised and taught. Faculty and students were on intimate terms, studying, living and worshipping together. Blackman describes some of the men who were Campbell's teachers: Peter Henry Steenstra, his professor of Old Testament, was a man of "monolithic honesty" who was "almost frighteningly frank." Because of his continuous inquiry, his "scholarly opinions changed throughout his life." Alexander Viets Griswold Allen, who taught church history, was "absorbed by the history of ideas embodied in institutions"; "the large and cloudy canvas on the grand scale" was his "favoured medium." A student said of New Testament Professor Henry Sylvester Nash, "His was no Sunday-school course, shielding our faith. We were given the supreme documents of Christianity and we were set to find their meaning and their truth. If they were filled with hard questions which might later unsettle our faith, we were forced to face the issue at once." Campbell's spirit of restless inquiry into any subject and his sense of the unity of knowledge, set in motion at University College, received direction and encouragement at Episcopal Theological School.

By contrast, his life as a rural priest must have been extremely frustrating. A man with such an appetite for speculation and (as Klinck suggests in his biography) such a relish for lively conversation would chafe under parish duties performed in isolation from suitable friends. Campbell also became disenchanted with the church as a model of society. The hypocrisy of churchmen and the pettiness of parish politics disgusted him so much that while he was writing a sermon with one hand he was composing invective against churchmen with the other.⁵ He left the priesthood in 1891. The poetry he wrote near the end of his ministry shows that he felt the despair induced by a vision of a godless universe.

Nevertheless, all his life he remained at least a spasmodic churchgoer. His speculations on man and nature carried him away from trinitarian, sacramental orthodoxy, but if he no longer defined his faith according to the Thirty-nine Articles, he did not deny them either. His view seems to have been, not that the faith of the church was wrong, but that it was insufficient. In verse and prose he flayed both Protestantism and Catholicism, but he praised Christianity itself as one of the main unifying forces in society, a part of the common heritage of the British race. Campbell's faith was tried severely during his six years in the priesthood, but he neither lost it nor ceased to value the institution which embodied it. The harmonizing of religion, science, and social theory which preoccupied his middle age began in these years.

Campbell spent twenty-six years as a civil servant in Ottawa without rising above the rank of clerk. His 1910 diary⁶ is filled with complaints: when he is late he must sign a book; his office is too small and uncomfortable; he is not paid enough. But not one of these complaints concerns the work itself. In 1908 he had been promoted to Archives because of the fine historical work he had done while working in Privy Council (1897-1908),⁷ and his projects continued to be historical. Far from creating intellectual or artistic tension in his life, his work coincided with his interests. He seems to have worked alone much of the time too, so that when he took advantage of the policy which permitted civil servants to take unpaid leave when they wished, he was not constrained to hurry back. In 1897, 1901, 1906 and 1911, he made extended visits to Britain; letters to Mrs. Campbell during the 1906 visit express his intention to write to various people to forestall criticism of his four-month absence. These letters admit, too, that one of the purposes of the trip, as well as the means of financing it, was to sell some poems and *Ian of the Orcades*.⁸ He succeeded in these endeavours, but not in his search for a position in which he could contribute more directly to the Empire. His yearning for work that would serve not only his interests but also his highest ideals, first expressed when he became a priest, persisted until the end of his life. When his age and health prevented his becoming a soldier in the Great War, he threw himself into the war effort in Ottawa, recruiting, drilling Home Guards Corps, lecturing, farming, and writing poems, songs and articles. Finally, Archives loaned him to the Imperial Munitions Board as historiographer.⁹ At the time of his death, he was writing an account of Canada's munitions industry, his daily labour at last the outlet for his spiritual as well as his intellectual energy.

MUCH HAS BEEN MADE OF Campbell's quarrels and his contentious nature, but it is worth noting that the complainers have been other writers. Professional jealousy sharpened Campbell's pen, and it also amplified

the responses to its jabs. Campbell may have parodied Lampman's poetry in "At the Mermaid Inn,"¹⁰ and irritated his fellow travellers to the 1897 meeting of the Royal Society by declaiming blood-curdling passages from his tragedies;¹¹ he may have been too eager to defend his literary territory by ravaging someone else's; but among philosophers and historians, and among politicians and other men of the world, he was more at ease. On May 23, 1894, he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and from 1903 until 1911 he was secretary of Section II, the section for English humanities. His correspondence shows how zestfully he performed his duties and documents the warm relationships he formed with the most interesting men in Canadian letters. In Ottawa, Campbell made lasting friendships with William Lyon MacKenzie King, who was his frequent companion from 1901 until his death; Thomas Gibson, his physician and an amateur pianist of local fame; the Rev. D. W. R. Herridge, Ottawa's leading Presbyterian minister; and W. J. Sykes, an anthologist and the librarian of the Ottawa Public Library. He became close friends with his clan chieftain, the ninth Duke of Argyll, and with Earl Grey when he was Governor General of Canada. He also visited Nicholas Flood Davin, A. R. Dickey, John Peter Featherston, and other politicians who could enjoy a heated discussion with him. He conducted a long and animated correspondence with R. Tait McKenzie about art in general and their own art in particular, and he and Charles Harriss, the composer, enjoyed a fruitful and pleasant collaboration.

Unlike the writers who criticized him, Campbell was a showman. He filled his life with music. His mother, a musician, owned the only piano in Warton,¹² and doubtless taught young Will to play. His daughters played, composed, and sang, and he may have done the same. The Lorne Pierce Collection contains manuscripts of musical settings for poems, one by his daughter Faith and at least one that may be in his own hand, although whether he copied it or actually composed it cannot be known. He and Amy Troubridge, who adapted "England" and set it to music, planned to earn a good deal of money by collaborating on songs, and he and Charles Harriss enjoyed several notable successes. Campbell's poetry has been called unmusical, but many poems that appear to be repetitious and harsh, such as "Chant Cordiale" and "The Sea Queen," could easily be made into rousing songs, and perhaps this was the fate Campbell intended for them.

Whether Campbell himself played or sang for others is not known, although as a priest he could hardly have avoided it. But he did recite. On February 17, 1896, at the Historical Ball given by the Governor General and the Countess of Aberdeen, "Mr. Hayter Reed as Donnacona made a speech in the Indian language to Their Excellencies. Mr. Wilfred Campbell as Tessonot interpreted."¹³ Campbell's photographs show what an elaborate event this was, and how intently he played his part. A year later, on March 2, 1897, he performed in "An Intellectual Treat," in which Dr. Thomas Gibson and others played the piano

and Campbell and Miss M. F. Kenny, an actress, recited Campbell's poetry. Miss Kenny's offerings included "The Vengeance of Saki," "written for her by the author." Her rendering of "Harvest Slumber Song" was accompanied by music she had composed. Either she or Campbell recited "Pan the Fallen," and Campbell's recitation of an excerpt from "Daulac" was "quite the intellectual feature of the evening."¹⁴ There was some enthusiasm, at least in Ottawa, for Campbell's closet drama. Four of his "poetical tragedies" were published in book form and a fifth appeared in a magazine. One typescript play remains in a full script with well-thumbed individual parts and another is in six copies; both were rehearsed, if not performed.¹⁵ In his lectures on life, literature, and the Empire, which he began to give in the early years of the new century, Campbell combined this passion for drama and performing with his sense of mission as a teacher.

CAMPBELL TRIED CONTINUOUSLY to discover the nature of man, his place in the physical and social universe, and his relationship with God. From his earliest exposure to the idea of evolution at University College, he was obsessed by the puzzle of man's origin. From about 1902 until at least 1910, he worked on a treatise called "The Tragedy of Man,"¹⁶ which begins with an idea akin to Daniel Wilson's: man's animal nature evolved according to the pattern suggested by Darwin, but his spiritual nature came more directly from God. Campbell then postulates a superior race, one not evolved from the rest of physical nature, which mated with the evolved race to produce human nature as we know it; this mating, he says, was the Fall. On this scheme depend twenty-two chapters of speculation about mythology, ethnology, the Bible, literature and art, religion, ancient and modern history, monarchy and man's social relations, and man and the universe. Campbell builds the entire corpus of his religious, literary, and political thought upon his theory of man's origin.

Campbell does not subscribe to the dualism inherent in Wilson's suggestion: man for Campbell has one nature, not two, although his nature was formed by two influences. Man's spirit, he believes, is dominant, infusing and controlling his whole being. Klinck says that Campbell's thought is "Emersonian idealism returning through reliance upon spirit, if not through spiritual self-reliance, to something very near orthodoxy." He adds, "The only -ism in [Campbell's] approved list was idealism." Actually Campbell's idealism is not Emersonian. It is related only collaterally to that New England school of thought.

Klinck's statement contains the key to the difference. Emersonian idealism is individualistic; "reliance upon spirit" is very different from "spiritual self-reliance." A. B. McKillop, in *A Disciplined Intelligence*,¹⁷ outlines the idealistic philosophy of John Watson and George Paxton Young in terms that come very

close to describing Campbell's. Watson, a Scot from Glasgow University, taught logic, metaphysics and ethics at Queen's University from 1872 until 1924. He published frequently in magazines as accessible as *The Canadian Monthly* and *Queen's Quarterly* as well as in scholarly journals. A charter member of the Royal Society, he was in Section II when Campbell was secretary. George Paxton Young was older than Watson, but he became an idealist late enough in life to be considered Watson's follower. He taught ethics and metaphysics at University College when Campbell was there. These men were disciples, not of the American school, but of Kant and Hegel by way of Edward Caird, Watson's professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow. For them, "the universe [is] an organic whole," and the single principle behind history is a spiritual one. Physical nature is "transmuted by the action of thought into exemplifications of necessary laws, and thus half-subjective generalizations are raised to objective truths." Man is literally made in God's image, because reason "connects him with the Divine"; Nature is "the visible garment of God"; and Duty is "the voice of God speaking in the innermost depths of our moral nature." This appeared to Watson to be "the essential principle of Christianity, the union or identity of the human and divine." Christianity, not the personal expression of private religious sentiments, followed from the idealism propounded by Caird and interpreted and taught by his followers in Canada. Watson reconciled the contradiction between the need for freedom and the belief in necessity by calling a free act one which "is regulated by the highest laws of our nature," that is, by the internal sense of duty which comes from God. One who acts freely in this way "is not subject to any external necessity, but only to the inner necessity of his own nature, in obeying which he strengthens his will." By "working out one's freedom through seeming necessity," one [is] brought to a universal point of view." "Watson . . . taught that the Christian message was best understood and acted upon, not by depending on traditional creeds or doctrines . . . but by the application of idealist social thought to life in the secular world. In so doing, the secular world would be spiritualized and the Kingdom of Heaven would arrive."

The Canadian idealists extended to society their notion of duty as freedom. Their view, like Hegel's and Caird's, was that because society is an organic whole, social freedom is found in subordinating personal to social good. This means that personal life ought to be assessed from a social perspective, and that it will have meaning only insofar as it contributes to the common good. Watson says that the man who has freed himself from "undue accentuation of his own individual desires" moves from being merely a citizen of his family and then of his own country to being a citizen of the whole community of man. His duty is to serve larger and larger social organizations: the family, the church, the state, and the whole race of man.

“[E]ach individual must conceive of himself as a member in a social organism,” Watson said. Because the parts of an organism are bound to their various orders of duties, an organic view of society encourages monarchism and Toryism. And if the organic metaphor be extended over time, society is seen as evolving, just like other organisms. Natural selection suggests that if one organism flourishes more vigorously than others, it has a natural superiority; when evolutionary theory is reconciled with Protestant Christianity, that organism’s superiority becomes an expression of God’s purpose. For idealistic imperialists like George Parkin, George Grant, and Wilfred Campbell, the supremacy of the British race was clearly a sign of its superiority, and the expansion of the Empire was “‘as natural and organic as the force which compels the bursting of a bud.’”¹⁸ They translated Watson’s ideas on personal duty to the human race into an imperative to serve the British race and his idea of the world into their vision of the British Empire. Campbell thought that the higher, godlike portion of his nature inspired in him a sense of brotherhood, not with all people, but with those who, like himself, had evolved into the supreme race on earth. Serving this race was Campbell’s mission in life. As a poet, he sang impassioned songs to inspire his feelings in others, for his imperialism expressed not simply his political stance but his deepest spiritual beliefs.

Campbell’s passion for history springs from these same sources. If present society is an organism, and if it has evolved like an organism, then a man who aspires to guide it into a nobler future must know its history. With his fellow idealists, Campbell believed that the direction in which the race would evolve was neither predetermined nor decided by such externals as geography or the encroachment of other cultures. In his “Life and Letters” essays,¹⁹ Campbell insisted that analysis of the race’s history disclosed the special strengths of the national character and therefore that it could enable statesmen to pursue strenuously and effectively the highest national goals. Widespread study of history, he said, would rekindle in all members of the social organism the racial pride that would make each one a devoted contributor to the progress and welfare of all.

WATSON IDEALISTICALLY VIEWED Nature as “‘the visible garment of God.’” Because of Campbell’s intimacy with nature, his philosophy became more complex than Watson’s. Campbell found the natural world, like the social world, to be informed by spirit, and nature’s physical beauties communicated this spirit to him. Poems such as “The Mystery” (CP 104, PW 187) and “The Earth Spirit” (CP 142, PW 102) articulate this attitude fully and beautifully. In “Nature the Benign” (CP 274, PW 233), Campbell says that the reality is not the randomness and violence seen by the materialistic observer; instead,

“She is a spirit, and her joy is life.” His poems involving gods, goddesses, nymphs, satyrs, or dryads express his sense of that continuous, timeless spirit which gives value to nature’s physical reality. In “An August Reverie,” he confesses that

I may not know each plant as some men know them,
 As children gather beasts and birds to tame;
 But I went ’mid them as the winds that blow them,
 From childhood’s hour, and loved without a name.
 (CP 117, PW 61; ll. 43-46)

He concentrates emotionally on that spirit in nature which informs her physical manifestations. In his earliest poems, the haunting of woods, lakes and rivers by the souls of ancient Indians marks the beginning of this concentration. In his mature work, exhausted man, attracted by the beauties of nature, draws his only solace from nature’s spirit.

Campbell’s feeling of oneness with nature, expressed in “An August Reverie” and also in “March Morning in Canada” (PW 325), comes from two sources. First, as a physical being, man is a creature of earth, and is kin to other earthly creatures. But he is not to be identified with them. Man is not part of the economy of nature because his spiritual component separates him from the natural world. Yet the spirit of man can find its counterpart in the spirit of nature, and so on the spiritual plane, as well as on the physical one, man is united with nature.

This sense of spiritual unity and continuity means that the effects of nature can be felt even when the physical reality is absent, and for Campbell, recollection is as important as experience. Not only is he able to recreate at will the pleasures of nature as he writes about them, but he is also able to draw from his spiritual communion with nature the strength that enables him to maintain his equilibrium in his daily life. Nature alone is rarely the subject of his poems about nature. Man is almost always present to be acted upon by nature or to reflect on her lessons. In the later poems, the persona finds a refuge in nature from the stresses of life. He turns away from other men to refresh his spirit in the spirit of nature, and then he is able to continue his worldly life. Although Campbell conceives of society as an organism in which each member ought to find his own good in seeking the good of the whole, men succumb often enough to their individualistic animal natures to make actual life intensely materialistic, even for an idealist like himself. Communion with the spirit of nature mitigates the damage inflicted by other men.

One of Campbell’s favourite words is “dream,” and he uses it to describe the state in which his spirit is united with nature’s. In this state, he receives the messages of nature, spiritual truths apprehended by his spirit. He knows the source of these truths, too: God. Visible nature may be the garment of God, but

the spirit of nature, which alone has power and value for him, is the voice of God. This distinction between the voice of God and God Himself, and between the spirit of nature and physical nature itself eliminates the need for Terry Whalen's division of Campbell's poetry into "romantic" and "transcendental" categories.²⁰ For Campbell, nature is neither the stepping-stone to a transcendental God nor the physical manifestation of God. The "face behind earth's face" and the "mystic word our wisdom fails to spell" is the spirit of nature through which man's spirit is in speechless communion with God ("Nature's Truth," CP 277, PW 235). In "The Mystery," Campbell articulates this relationship clearly. The mysterious "glory" or "greatness" which "nature makes us feel" *guides* men to God; the "glory" is not God Himself, nor does nature's physical reality alone lead directly to God.²¹ "Stella Flammarum" (PW 285) gives concrete expression to the idea that God communicates through the spirit of nature with the spirit of man. Although man cannot understand the actual errand of Halley's comet, his certainty that it has a duty imposed by God is in itself an important message. In his diary entry for April 13, 1910, Campbell says, "I believe that the comet has its appointed place and task in the universe. . . . No one can fathom the vast unplumbed depths of the mystery of the vast universe. Our mind is finite; but the soul is wider in its dim consciousness of things outside of its whole comprehension." Man's nature is in part godlike; his spirit, which has come from God, responds to the spiritual quality in nature and is thus united with God. From this union Campbell derives the energy to try to practise idealism in the world and his comfort when his efforts seem futile.

Sometimes Campbell is unable to achieve this "dream" state; nature seems utterly dead and symbolic of human death. Then, in "The Winter Lakes" (CP 346) and "Into My Heart the Wind Moans" (PW 333), his images are all of winter. Even in "September in the Laurentian Hills" (CP 151, PW 95) and "An October Evening" (CP 146, PW 69), autumn signifies only the approach of death-dealing cold. Yet in some of his most frigid poems, such as "To the Ottawa" (CP 120, PW 119) and "Cape Eternity" (CP 103), he is awed by sublimity rather than numbed by emptiness and fear. In many poems, too, death is seen as the final mystery, an awesome passage to some unknown state of being. It is only in poems combining winter imagery with ideas of death that the spirit is absent. Campbell experiences his version of religious despair when the spirit of nature holds no communion with his own, for he is separated from God.

Actually, for Campbell, winter is usually a time of peaceful sleep and hidden growth; nature rests in preparation for spring, and the snow is gentle and kind. Even a storm can be exhilarating when nature's spirit is present, in the poet as well as in the woods and streams. John Ower is surely mistaken in his suggestion that "How One Winter Came in the Lake Region" (CP 344, PW 74) ends with the "equation of spiritual inspiration with annihilation" and the "celebration of

an apocalypse of obliteration."²² Lines 1-20 indeed show nature devoid of spirit, and, by extension, they also describe the poet's desiccation. However, the reddening of the sky and the landscape in lines 21-25 communicates not "incipient horror" but the mystery of some burgeoning life force. The tone of the stanza is positive: red is usually a colour of life for Campbell, and all of the content words in line 22, "Flooding the heavens in a ruddy hue," have positive connotations throughout his poetry. When the sun in line 21 sets "like blood," it does so in favourable contrast to its "blear" and "aghost" appearance in lines 6 and 18. The lake in lines 9 and 10 is deadly still, and in lines 3 and 4 the fields are dead, but in line 23 the red light begins to revive them. The marshes and creeks become red, too, and no longer seem "shrunk and dry." Life has not yet returned — "never a wind-breath blew" — but the landscape, the poet and the reader are poised on the brink of true apocalypse. In the last stanza, new life arrives violently. The "north's wild vibrant strains" finally bury the deadness of the world in snow so that nature can begin her yearly movement toward rebirth. The winter in the poet's veins and the "joyous tremor of the icy glow" signify nature's spirit rushing into the poet, awakening his creativity, just as the snow comes to prepare the earth for its new life. When the spirit of nature is absent, poet and landscape are dead, but however violently that spirit returns, it brings back the essence of life. The last stanza of "How One Winter Came in the Lake Region" communicates the joy and peace of this return. "Thunderstorm at Night" (PW 323), on the other hand, ends with terror. The spirit of nature is absent and "ancient Dread" overwhelms those primitive men whose "modern cults" give them no security against nature's outward rage. The sonnet "Nature the Benign" (CP 274, PW 233) sums up Campbell's solution of the problem: when the spirit of man is at one with nature's spirit, even her violence is life-giving.²³

Poetry was Campbell's vocation, and in "The Night Watcher" he tells of receiving his calling.²⁴ The speaker, on a hilltop in the stillness of a winter night, refers to his shadow, the evidence of his material self, as "doggedly" following him, a "grotesque giant on the snow." The "I" experiencing the event is his spiritual self. The great intelligences of the past come to him through nature and enrapture him so that for a while he knows immortality and the infinite directly. As he returns to the material world, each intelligence kisses him, baptizes him into their fellowship, and bestows on him the fiery gift of tongues. Receiving the holy spirit of poetry, he hears the music of the spheres and is set apart from other men. Campbell sent "The Night Watcher" to the *Atlantic Monthly* on January 23, 1891, but it was not published there or anywhere else until Sykes included it in the Posthumous section of his *Poetical Works*.

The reason for this may be that the poem speaks of a private, personal inspiration that Campbell soon came to regard as only a part of his calling. His elegies on the deaths of poets show the beginnings of this change. "To Mighty Death

Concerning Robert Browning," probably written shortly after Browning's death in December 1889, is a meditation on death and poetry, whereas "The Dead Poet," composed in August 1891, and "Tennyson," published in October 1892, reflect on the services Lowell and Tennyson gave to humanity and the public grief upon their deaths.²⁵ In mid-1891, Campbell distributed his first occasional poem, "The Dead Leader" (CP 183, PW 77), written on the day of Sir John A. Macdonald's funeral. The 1892 notebook contains several poems prompted by social rather than personal feeling; by the fall of 1894 Campbell had written "The Lazarus of Empire," and in 1896 he published "Ode to Canada." By 1900, he could write "[Canadians in this great Canadian Land]," his statement of intention to direct all of his poetry to the public good.²⁶ Social thoughts and current events inspired about half of his poetry in the decade following the Boer War, and during his last years the horror of the Great War compelled him to write public poetry almost exclusively.

HIS "LIFE AND LETTERS" ESSAYS OF 1903-05 spell out his convictions about the poet's mission. He has not given up his sense of the poet as seer: "the poet, who interprets [nature], is also a prophet of God . . . listening to the oracle and uttering it in tongues of fire, on human pages. . . . [T]he truest prophet, the truest revealer of Deity, is he who has the largest nature, who can find Deity not only in the Bible and the church, but also in history, life, genius and nature" (December 26, 1903). Poets must continue to sing, whatever obstacles be placed in their way (March 26, 1904); they will remember "the sacred office to which they were born, and its relationship to mankind" (January 30, 1904). The measure of a poet's work is the benefit the world derives from it (September 12, 1903). Indeed, "the religion or philosophy of any writer greater or less should be that of the whole community in which he lives. . . . No true genius is eccentric. He cannot stand alone. . . . [H]e represents [the people's] ideals" (September 17, 1904). Poems about society need not be directly nationalistic: "A nation's greatest poets are not always those who have written its most striking patriotic verses, yet the body of their work is generally imbued with many sentiments of a patriotic nature." "The poems of a true poet crystalize from the finest emotions and ideals of his life," which necessarily include his patriotic feelings, and a great national poem "must represent the highest crystalization of a truly national sentiment" (November 14, 1903). "Literature is the voice of a people's ideals" (January 23, 1904), and the poet is the conduit of this voice. Campbell's persona, therefore, is usually the Poet Laureate, the anointed one. He does not hesitate to be openly didactic, for that is how he must perform his duty to God and his people. Philosophy, politics and religion are suitable subjects as well as themes for poetry

because the public poet, in "crystalizing" the highest ideals of his audience, inspires them to nobler lives.

The poet should remain committed to art as well as to society, but humanity must be at the core of artistic expression. The "truest realism" is unrelated to the accumulation of facts about daily life on the material plane, but instead it "is the creation of a mind great enough to see human life as it is in all ages — which can grasp universality" (February 27, 1904). "Art for art's sake" is worthless, and so is art for nature's sake. Scorning merely descriptive poetry, he says, "Humanity is everything, because it is soul; and nature is only its environment or mirror. . . . Nature on the large scale, in its various moods . . . has a wonderful effect on our humanity; but we must have the humanity first on which the nature can act" (September 3, 1904). The peculiar quality which makes the works of the greatest artists immortal is "a wonderful touch of the purely natural" taken from "the book of nature and of life" (May 21, 1904). "[T]here will ever be a wide gulf . . . between art and nature. . . . To discern this is needed a divine instinct of the truly natural." The artist must go "to life and nature first and to letters afterwards" (September 12, 1903).

Naturalness forbids "fine writing" and artificial style, first because of the purity and beauty of the thought behind the poem, and then because the truly great artist will write only in his own unique way. "That which is simplest because most human and natural . . . is the great literature. . . . [T]he words themselves are lost, like elements in the limpid water . . . in the greatness and beauty of the thought which they help to clothe" (September 26, 1903). "I would lay it down as an axiom that in literature and art the style . . . if it is natural, is but a product of the message. . . . [W]hat is language save the magic expression of thought and ideal." This magic expression should be unpedantic, free of "artificial conceits," and universally comprehensible. "What the great mass of sincere men and women can understand and appreciate . . . is without doubt the best and the nearest to nature. The universal judgement is after all the final one." To be simple and understandable, literature must not "strain to a pretence of, or an arrogation of intellectual meanings and spiritual insight which cannot be expressed in ordinary language . . . so as to be intelligible to the average sincere mind." Great literature cannot come from the "cult in which small cliques of men and women claimed to see and feel beauty and idea in language and art, for the most part unmeaning to the rest of the world" and therefore "divorce[d] . . . from humanity" (July 9, 1904). Truth to nature demands simplicity of style, and the touchstone of simplicity is the accessibility of the ideas to the sincere reader.

Campbell's poetry shows that he did not push this ideal of naturalness and simplicity to the logical conclusion of refusing to revise lest he strain after "fine writing" or "artificial conceits." On the few occasions when he changed a poem

after he had decided on its final form, his alterations coincide with his ideal of simplicity, consisting mainly of cutting out repetitious material and substituting specific terms for general ones. The drafts show how he wrestled with his material to find the forms, words and expressions he wanted, and his letters record that he invited criticism and willingly made changes his friends suggested. He also accepted editorial criticism. Instead of holding his original expression sacred because it was "natural," he attempted an artistic rendering of the natural. As he developed his theory of simplicity, his use of grammatical inversion declined. His continuous use of archaic verb forms is not natural, in the sense that it does not imitate speech, but it seemed to Campbell to be the natural language for a poetry which he intended to be universal, linking his audience with their poetic heritage as well as with one another in the present. Believing that contrast is as necessary in natural poetry as it is in nature itself, he praised the unevenness of finish such contrast requires and did not take pains to distill his thoughts or express them economically. He believed that true simplicity and directness demand not mere compression, but greatness of thought expressed according to the writer's natural genius. The greatest poets, he said, have always "been considered uneven in the character of their work," and "the uneven poem may be as necessary to the line or stanza of beauty therein as the wood or heaven to the flower or star."²⁷

Naturalness and simplicity led Campbell to use conventional stanza forms. Seeing himself as a member of the timeless community of poets, too, he felt that innovation would be a rejection of his calling. In his earliest Indian poetry, he plainly imitated Longfellow, although he soon outgrew this attachment. His enthusiasm for Poe helped him to shape his melodramatic impulses into marketable verse in the 1890's. Of the English Romantics, he loved Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley, but he found Wordsworth too far removed from humanity and Keats too deliberately artistic. Campbell's poetry was obviously influenced in a lasting way by Tennyson's, although his critical appraisal of Tennyson was ambivalent. As an artist, he said, Tennyson was a "writer of polished verses," a "mere maker of rhymes and phrases." Poems such as "The Lotos Eaters," "Ulysses," and "Enone" exemplified his "drivel about mated vowels." But "he was not the most finished artist when he produced his best and most characteristic verse" such as "Locksley Hall," "The Charge of the Light Brigade," and "The Death of Wellington." These represent "genuine bursts of inspiration," written in "his truest and least self-conscious moods." He credited Tennyson with "a strong individuality . . . which chafed . . . against that very smugness and artificial conventionalism, of which Tennyson the artist afterwards became the chief and leading apostle" (May 7, 1904). The key to Campbell's mistrust of Tennyson the artist lies in his term "self-conscious": the true artist is conscious of his mission, not of himself. Consequently, he writes narratives or meditations with clear messages for his audience, not self-indulgent tone poems. Campbell did not like Kipling either,

and for the same reason: his work was self-indulgently boisterous and vulgar, and his narratives contained little to mirror and encourage the highest ideals of the race (October 17, 1903). Campbell admired Lowell without reserve, praising "the noble spirit of his verse which voiced a high ideal of human effort and ultimate destiny." Lowell "felt and put into his song the responsibility of the national life and saw the ill resultant from the failure of the people to realize that only unselfish citizenship and the putting into practice of the golden rule could ultimately save the Republic," a lesson Campbell found appropriate for Canadians, too. He especially loved Lowell's patriotic "Commemoration Ode," on which he modelled his own (June 18, 1904). Campbell regarded Shakespeare with awe as both a dramatist and a poet. That the British race had produced Shakespeare was one of its highest achievements. Campbell worshipped him; he did not criticize him. Among his contemporaries, his friend William Henry Drummond was his favourite. But Campbell loved Burns above all other poets. Whenever he wrote about others, Burns was his touchstone. Burns wrote naturally; he "went to life and nature first"; he recognized and was inspired by "Nature in the abstract, the great purifying, elevating, consoling influence" (September 3, 1904); and he was the quintessential poet of humanity. None of the poets Campbell admired was an experimenter with form. All were conservative, making the poetic conventions new by their special use of them rather than leading other poets into new ways. As a poet of humanity writing for "the great mass of sincere men and women," Campbell found his only suitable vehicle to be the familiar verse forms.

Although Campbell did not invent new forms, he was not enslaved by the old ones. In "Sebastian Cabot" (CP 172, PW 107) and "The Tragedy of Man" (PW 280), for instance, Campbell shaped the feelings he wanted to evoke with varied line lengths and irregularities of metre. These irregularities suggest the organic nature of the emotion as it arises little by little from the thought, as well as conveying the emotion itself. With his use of the six-beat line in such early poems as "The Winter Lakes" (CP 346) and "To the Ottawa" (CP 120, PW 119), he augments his descriptive and evocative powers with a subtle yet intense onomatopoeic rhythm. Such manipulation of form cannot be considered innovative, but it shows more sensitivity than Campbell is often credited with having. In general, his meditative poetry is less regular than his narratives, exhortations, or songs, and the poetry from the middle of his career, from the 1890's until about 1910, is a little more adventurous in rhythm and less regular in rhyme than his earlier, more imitative work or his later, more didactic work. Campbell wrote to draw a certain response from a certain audience, not to express his private feelings or to create detached works of art. His poetry is "self-expression" only in the sense that he expressed feelings and ideas that he believed to be worthy of public attention and general application. His attitude toward the formal qualities of

poetry, like his attitude toward its subject and the emotions it should convey, was governed by his vision of the use of poetry in the world and his mission as a poet.

In the fragment "[Canadians in this great Canadian Land]," Campbell articulates the unity of his poetic impulses: the aim of his poetry is to improve all Canadians by showing them the essence of their land and their own collective nature. He asks for the poet's crown because, knowing these essential truths, he can communicate them at the one appropriate level, the poetic. He would be the laureate who would teach his countrymen to nurture their own best selves so that they could contribute whatever was good in themselves to the nation and the race. Most of his poems about man and nature and all his poems about events have this pragmatic aim, and this is the context in which we must read them. Then we can see how interesting his poetry is, and how valuable it is in our literary history.

NOTES

¹ For a biography of Wilfred Campbell, see Carl F. Klinck, *Wilfred Campbell: A Study in Late Provincial Victorianism* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1942; rpt. Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1977). References will be to the reprint; the title will be abbreviated *WC*.

Page references will be made in parentheses in the text to the two collections of Campbell's poetry most likely to be found in libraries: *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Campbell* (Toronto: Briggs; Toronto: Ryerson; New York and London: Revell, 1905) (*CP*); and *The Poetical Works of Wilfred Campbell*, ed. W. J. Sykes (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923) (*PW*). For poems found in neither of these books, I will refer to Laurel Boone, "The Collected Poems of William Wilfred Campbell" (Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of New Brunswick, 1981) (*B*). See also Carl F. Klinck, intro., *Wilfred Campbell: Selected Poems* (Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1976), and Raymond Souster, ed., *Vapour and Blue: Souster Selects Campbell* (Sutton West: Paget, 1978).

The Lorne Pierce Collection at Douglas Library, Queen's University, holds most of Campbell's papers. The initials *LP* and the letters, numerals and titles following will indicate material in the Lorne Pierce Collection.

² Carl F. Klinck, *Literary History of Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), Vol. 1, p. 175. Daniel Wilson, *Caliban: The Missing Link* (London: Macmillan, 1873).

³ A. B. McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1979), p. 168.

⁴ George L. Blackman, *Faith and Freedom: A Study of Theological Education and The Episcopal Theological School* (New York: Seabury, 1967).

⁵ Ms. notebook *LP 13/V Poems. Collected (5)* (ca. 1885-1887). See also *At the Mermaid Inn*, ed. Barrie Davies (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1979), December 24, 1892, p. 216. This essay is anonymous but Campbell is certainly its author.

⁶ *LP 11/III Diary. 1910-1916.*

- ⁷ Klinck, *WC*, p. 12.
- ⁸ LP 9/II Letters. Draft letters to Mrs. Campbell, not bound.
- ⁹ Klinck, *WC*, pp. 239, 241-42.
- ¹⁰ Davies, viii; July 1, 1893, p. 341.
- ¹¹ Arthur S. Bourinot, ed., *Archibald Lampman's Letters to Edward William Thomson (1890-1898)* (Ottawa: privately printed, 1956), 39.
- ¹² Klinck, *WC*, p. 23.
- ¹³ *The Lounger* (July 1986), p. 16.
- ¹⁴ Clipping in LP 13/V Poems. Collected (1) [1895-1897]. See also *Montreal Gazette* (March 13, 1897).
- ¹⁵ *Mordred and Hildebrand* (Ottawa: Durie, 1895); *Poetical Tragedies* (Toronto: Briggs, 1908); "The Brockenfiend," *The Lounger* (December 1896), p. 285; LP 12/IV Drama 8. "The Fatal Throw"; LP 12/IV Drama 4. "The Heir of Linne."
- ¹⁶ LP 20/VI Prose 76. "The Tragedy of Man."
- ¹⁷ See note 3.
- ¹⁸ Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 226.
- ¹⁹ "Life and Letters" appeared weekly in the *Ottawa Evening Journal* between August 29, 1903, and June 24, 1905. Barrie Davies is preparing an edition of the series and has kindly permitted me to use his typescripts.
- ²⁰ Terry Whalen, "Wilfred Campbell: The Poetry of Celebration and Harmony," *Journal of Canadian Poetry* (Autumn 1978), 27.
- ²¹ (CP 104, PW 233). Klinck found what he believes to be an authoritative correction in one of the copies of CP which came to the National Library from William Lyon MacKenzie King's collection. On this basis, Klinck emends the last line of the poem to read "Linking life to God" (*WC*, pp. 219, 278). This emendation does not alter the point made here.
- ²² John Ower, "Portraits of the Landscape as Poet," *Journal of Canadian Studies* (February 1971), 27.
- ²³ For another criticism of Ower's analysis, see Whalen, pp. 33-35.
- ²⁴ (PW 316). "The Night Watcher" is Campbell's ms. title for the complete poem. Sykes' title for his slightly abbreviated and changed version is "The Sky Watcher" (B 466).
- ²⁵ "To Mighty Death Concerning Robert Browning," *The Dread Voyage* (Toronto: Briggs, 1893), p. 181; B 509. "The Dead Poet" (CP 162, PW 210). "Tennyson," *The Week* (October 28, 1892), p. 758; B 537.
- ²⁶ "The Lazarus of Empire" (CP 303, PW 113). "Ode to Canada," *Massey's Magazine* (July 1896), p. 55; B 673. "[Canadians in this great Canadian Land]," LP 13/V Poems Collected (10) [1900]; B 919.
- ²⁷ Davies, November 12, 1892, p. 189; "Life and Letters" (January 28, 1905).

