

LAMPMAN'S FLEETING VISION

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READING THE POETRY of Archibald Lampman, we are reminded again of the Victorian capacity for dualism: he appears to accept both the Socialist vision of human progress and the Calvinist sense of man's inescapable evil; a professed non-believer, he explores the ways of stoic and hedonist without ever losing his own devotion to a reinstated Pale Galilean; a pacifist of sorts, he shrinks from violence yet writes several fascinated explorations of the psychology of brutality. In Arnoldian frame, Lampman regularly suggests the need to "moderate desire" despite which some of his best poems are celebrations of anarchic passion. An idle dreamer, a self-proclaimed troubled soul, a Utopian, a feminist, and a critic of society . . . The list of epithets gleaned from the poetry are often self-contradictory; yet, most often, Lampman's varied poetic stances are related to his exploration of an abyss which he perceives gaping between the benevolent nature which he would like to affirm and the often unpleasant "reality" of everyday life.

This rift between the real and the ideal world is bridged, although not always successfully, through the metaphor of the "dream". Lampman's first poems are superficially descriptions of the peace, beauty and truth received by the poet as he "dreams" in nature, but the reader is always made aware of the unpleasant "real" which the idyllic vision attempts to subjugate; the "dissonant roar of the city" intrudes into the "easeful dreams" of even such idylls as the early poem "April". The Victorian parable of the high dream struggled into fruition ("The Story of an Affinity") and the Utopian vision ("The Land of Pallas") are all undercut in Lampman's canon by assaults of human viciousness and cruelty ("The Three Pilgrims") or by the perversions of human reason expressed in the nightmare vision of the coming machine world ("The City of the End of

Things"). In fact, a characteristic development of many of Lampman's later poems is that of the dream dissolving into the nightmare as in his sonnet, "Winter Evening":

Tonight the very horses springing by
Toss gold from whitened nostrils. In a dream
The streets that narrow to the westward gleam
Like rows of golden palaces; and high
From all the crowded chimneys tower and die
A thousand aureoles. Down in the west
The brimming plains beneath the sunset rest,
One burning sea of gold. Soon, soon shall fly
The glorious vision, and the hours shall feel
A mightier master; soon from height to height,
With silence and the sharp unpitying stars,
Stern creeping frosts, and winds that touch like steel,
Out of the depth beyond the eastern bars,
Glittering and still shall come the awful night.

In his earlier work, Lampman appears to accept the truth of the visionary experience: dreaming in nature, he can proclaim "dreams are real and life is only sweet". But the primary difficulty with continuing in the dreaming state, as even an Endymion must discover, is that the poet is not always able to keep "reality" at bay. Eventually, he does find it necessary to ask himself whether the visionary experience is indeed a true insight into higher truth or simply the embroidery of a cheating fancy. The question is stated quite explicitly in Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale": "Was it a vision or a waking dream/ Fled is that music: do I wake or sleep?" Lampman's aspiring "Vision of Twilight" concludes with a similar questioning of reality: "Comes my question back again — / Which is real? the fleeting vision?/ Or the fleeting world of men?". Is the true reality the product of our imagination, "the fleeting vision," or is it "the fleeting world of men?" Lampman's use of the same adverb to describe both states (and the fact that both are perceived through a poem which is itself a "vision") points up his transitory sense of both states and may be taken to support the view that he often sees the "visionary" and the so-called "real" world from the essentially passive state of the observer in the dream.

Curiously, Lampman began to write poetry not as a direct response to the dream visions of the major romantics (Keats' *Hyperion*, 1819, or its Victorian descendent, Hengist Horne's *Orion*, 1843), but rather under the influence of a derivative Canadian work in the late Victorian stream, the *Orion* (1880) of

Charles G. D. Roberts. Orion, a latter day Endymion, is "a dreamer of noble dreams"¹ and Lampman, when first reading Roberts' *Orion*, was plunged into a state of "the wildest excitement": "A little after sunrise I got up and went out into the college grounds . . . but everything was transfigured for me beyond description, bathed in the old-world radiance of beauty." Lampman was particularly delighted that "those divine verses . . . with their Tennyson-like richness" had been written "by a Canadian . . . one of ourselves".²

Lampman's first books, *Among the Millet* (1888) and *Lyrics of Earth* (1895), are clearly a response to Roberts' *Orion* and *Songs of the Common Day* (1893). But although Lampman adopts much of Roberts' romantic dream mythology, (the "sleep" of time and winter, the "dream" as a description of human life, and the Pan myth as it relates to nature's "dream" and poetic experience) his stance in nature is somewhat different from that of Roberts. From a comparison of Lampman's early sonnet, "In November", with Roberts' sonnet, "The Winter Fields", we can see that Lampman's "dream" is not only transcendental metaphor but also poetic process. The octave of each sonnet describes the wintry landscape, but in the sestet Roberts then deserts the fields for a dream-wish projection of the future; Lampman, in opposition, brings the reader back to the still figure of the poet:

I alone
Am neither sad, nor shelterless, nor gray,
Wrapped round with thought, content to watch and dream.

This conclusion reinforces our awareness that the poem itself has come about because the poet, as observer, has stood and "dreamed". In that sense, his conclusion is a low modulated affirmation of the impartial "truth" of the experience just described.

As John Sutherland and Roy Daniells both have noted, it is the figure of the poet as apparent idler and dreamer which appears throughout Lampman's poems, especially in such poems as "Among the Timothy" or "At the Ferry" where the narrator states, "I look far out and dream of life."³ In this "dream" or "reverie" he gives himself up to the "beauty" of sense impressions from nature. These impressions are analogous with high truth because Lampman prefers, as did the early Keats, the easy equation of beauty and truth. Furthermore, the truth of nature is a truth spontaneously given:

. . . I will set no more mine overtaskèd brain
To barren search and toil that beareth nought,
Forever following with sore-footed pain

The crossing pathways of unbournèd thought;
 But let it go, as one that hath no skill,
 To take what shape it will,
 An ant slow-burrowing in the earthy gloom,
 A spider bathing in the dew at morn,
 Or a brown bee in wayward fancy borne
 From hidden bloom to bloom.

Similarly, the poems "Ambition" and "The Choice" declare that for "poet" and "dreamer" it is all sufficient to "Sit me in the windy grass and grow/ As wise as age, as joyous as a child".

The romantic inheritance from which Lampman derives this wise passiveness is almost surely Wordsworth's "Expostulation and Reply". Wordsworth's conclusion, "Think you . . . That nothing of itself will come,/ But we must still be seeking?" would seem to underlie Lampman's assertion that he will "let it go . . . / To take what shape it will". No longer will he attempt to impose his willed structure on the world outside and so shape the poetic happening (as do, for example, Heavyside, Crawford, and Roberts) but he will rather sit passively and so allow the powers of nature to impress themselves upon poet and his art as do the minutiae of "ant", "spider" and "bee" from "Among the Timothy".

This formulation would seem to be a fairly accurate description of Lampman's nature poetry; if in Roberts' work there is most often an active straining for apotheosis, Lampman's poems, such as his sonnet, "Solitude", are most often a series of associations tied together by natural sequence and by the fact that they are the related perceptions of the recording poet:

How still it is here in the woods. The trees
 Stand motionless, as if they did not dare
 To stir, lest it should break the spell. The air
 Hangs quiet as spaces in a marble frieze.
 Even this little brook, that runs as ease,
 Whispering and gurgling in its knotted bed,
 Seems but to deepen, with its curling thread
 Of sound, the shadowy sun-pierced silences.
 Sometimes a hawk screams or a woodpecker
 Startles the stillness from its fixed mood
 With his loud careless tap. Sometimes I hear
 The dreamy white-throat from some far off tree
 Pipe slowly on the listening solitude
 His five pure notes succeeding pensively.

But the point should be made that this is not only passive sense impression. Lampman's characteristic stance is one in which, Meredith-like, he insists upon cultivating the faculties of seeing and hearing: "Let us clear our eyes, and break/ Through the cloudy chrysalis". No longer "blind", man is enabled to see "The threads that bind us to the All,/ God or the Immensity" (Winter-Store). In the sonnet "Knowledge", Lampman describes the life which he would like to live as one "of leisure and broad hours,/ To think and dream" while "An Athenian Reverie" states explicitly that the function of these "broad hours" is to inquire into the deeper meaning beyond the surface phenomena of life. This whole association of "dream" and "knowledge" is given an Arnoldian context in the earlier poem "Outlook" where it is asserted that the true life is "Not to be conquered by these headlong days" but to allow the mind to brood "on life's deep meaning": "What man, what life, what love, what beauty is,/ This is to live, and win the final praise."

Despite the easy conventionality of these lines, Lampman's work does suggest a genuine preoccupation with the nature of the buried life, the hidden stream, the authentic self which Arnold in "Resignation" describes as lying unregarded beneath life's phenomena, a hidden self which must be tapped if man is to find peace and a moral guide for his existence. The protagonists of Lampman's major narrative poems — the dreamer of "An Athenian Reverie", Perpetua, David and Abigail as well as Richard and Elizabeth of "The Story of an Affinity" — all ask variations on the general question "What is this life?" More often than not, their moral struggles with themselves lead to an affirmation based on the fleeting "vision", a glimpse of that higher reality which they understand to underlie surface phenomena.

THE INSISTENCE that the poet should put himself in touch with nature's underlying truth seems to have been a part of Lampman's early thought. F. W. Watt (writing in *The University of Toronto Quarterly* in 1956) describes Lampman's early fable "Hans Fingerhut's Frog Lesson" which was first published in the periodical *Man* (1885). Clearly an allegory of the artist in society, it describes a young poet failing to receive popular recognition who then reviles man and nature. For this *hubris*, he is metamorphosed into a frog until he learns to interpret nature's cosmic plan, described by Watt as "cosmic optimism based on a stoical acceptance of one's lot and faith in Nature's maternal

purposes".⁴ Initiated through suffering, Hans Fingerhut undergoes a moral transformation: "From that day the great songs that he made were nothing like his former ones. There was never anything bitter or complaining in them. They were all sweet and beautiful and wise."⁵ This easy parable of the poet's reconciliation with himself and with society might be compared with Lampman's own pronouncements on the nature of unhappiness:

All our troubles in reality proceed from nothing but vanity if we track them to their source. We form an ideal of ourselves and claim what seems to be due to that ideal. The ideal of myself is entitled to love and approbation from my fellow creatures: but the love and approbation does not appear, and I fret and abuse the constitution of things. To the ideal of myself money and power and practical success are no doubt due, but they do not come, and again I abuse the constitution of things. (1896)⁶

Lampman's early complaints that his poetry was not properly appreciated, his continued penury, his unhappiness with the tedium of the Ottawa Post Office, grief over the death of a young child, suggestions of an unrequited love, and, above all, his fatal illness and early death are all legendary and have contributed to the view of Lampman as a Canadian John Keats. Despite the evidence of D. C. Scott's letter to Ralph Gustafson (17th July, 1945) which argues "the cast of Lampman's nature was not towards melancholy",⁷ much discussion of Lampman has interpreted the poetry to infer that Lampman did consider himself heir to "The woe and sickness of an age of fear made known". The truth of Lampman's situation may have been somewhat less onerous; writing for the *Globe* in 1892, he proclaims: "No man is more serious than the poet; yet no man is more given to expressing under different circumstances the most opposite statements."

Implied in Scott's letter to Gustafson and in his Introduction to *Lyrics of Earth: Sonnets and Ballads*, 1925, is the suggestion that some of the "ills" which plague Lampman's poetic world may have been an imaginative recreation of Socialist thought rather than Lampman's actual experiences in Ottawa, circa 1890. Certainly, we do notice there are very few poems referring to Ottawa life which are grounded in the realistic mode. Even when presented in a poem specifically titled "Ottawa", the city is not recognizable as any place having a Canadian habitation and a name but is instead the city of misty romantic towers or the city of industrial greed and social oppression. It is also true that other than for the sensitive nature poetry of the first two books, Lampman's later work does become a repository for the Victorian stock concerns of religious bigotry ("To an Ultra Protestant"), social injustice ("Epitaph on a Rich Man"), evolutionary

progress ("The Clearer Self"), the machine age and utopias ("A Vision of Twilight").

However stereotyped the invocation, there is a note of genuine melancholia running throughout Lampman's poetry. The early sonnet "Despondency" bleakly views the future: "Slow figures in some live remorseless frieze/ The approaching days escapeless and unconquered". He concludes that life itself is "Vain and phantasmal as a sick man's dream". A poem such as "Sapphics" which urges man to follow the stoical fortitude of nature also presents a personal application: "Me too changes, bitter and full of evil,/ Dream after dream have plundered and left me naked,/ Grey with sorrow". "Loneliness", like Margaret Avison's "The Mirrored Man", starkly reveals an inner self:

So it is with us all, we have our friends
Who keep the outer chambers, and guard well
Our common path;
For far within us lies an iron cell
Soundless and secret, where we laugh or moan
Beyond all succour, terribly alone.

Other than for a large cluster of images which makes reference to the "dream" or "vision" in relation to the "beauty" of nature, Lampman's poetic vocabulary is often concerned with the negative emotions of "pain", "misery", "fear", "loneliness", "loss" and "emptiness". The particular association of the "dream" with "grief" and "death" which begins to dominate about 1894 particularly in relation to poems such as "Chione" and "Vivia Perpetua", suggests Lampman's grief at the death of his infant son. Similarly, the long narratives, "David and Abigail" and "The Story of an Affinity", parables of impossible love brought to fruition, may be given a new rationale if they are viewed in the light of the autobiographical "A Portrait in Six Sonnets" and Lampman's stifled affection for Katherine Waddell.⁸ It is perhaps because of this growing burden of unhappiness, coupled with the beginning of his own fatal illness, that Lampman writes in 1895:

I am getting well weary of things. I was so far gone in hypochondria on Saturday last that I had not the spirit to go to my office at all. I went straggling up the Gatineau Road, and spent the whole day and most of the next under the blue sky and the eager sun; and then I began to perceive that there were actually trees and grass and beautifully loitering clouds in the tender fields of heaven; I got to see at last that it was really June; and that perhaps I was alive after all.⁹

For the early Lampman, as for his alter-ego Hans Fingerhut, the cure for

melancholy was to return to nature. And, as in the early poetry of Keats ("I Stood Tip-Toe Upon a Little Hill" or "Sleep and Poetry") the realm of "Flora and old Pan: sleep in the grass" is invariably associated with the poet's "dream". In addition, Lampman endows nature with the instinctive apprehension of eternal truths. Throughout Lampman's verse, there runs a conscious-unconscious antithesis in which the creatures of nature are associated with the instinctive knowledge or "dream" which underlies creation, while man is made miserable by his own nagging consciousness. Consequently, in poems such as "An Old Lesson From the Fields", and "Comfort of the Fields" the lesson given to man is the injunction to experience the true "power" and "beauty" of life by putting away conscious knowledge. At one with the other creatures of the field, he can drain "the comfort of wide fields unto tired eyes".

This emphasis on a wide passiveness would seem to be related to the idea that the poet, standing a little apart from both nature and himself, is not only in a position to be impressed upon by the moving "frieze" of nature, but is also enabled to see into the fixed plan or "dream", which he hypothesizes as underlying the active surface motion of nature and the universe. In Lampman's work, as in the early verse of Roberts, the frogs have a special function as emissaries of the poet's "dream". In the poem "The Frogs", they are specifically associated with a lack of conscious thought: "Breathers of Wisdom won without a quest,/ Quaint uncouth dreamers". For Lampman, the frogs become a way of communicating with the eternal first principle:

Often to me who heard you in your day,
 With close wrapt ears, it could not choose but seem
 That earth, our mother, searching in what way,
 Men's hearts might know her spirit's inmost dream;
 Ever at rest beneath life's change and stir,
 Made you her soul, and bade you pipe for her.

As he listens, "The stillness of enchanted reveries/ Bound brain and spirit and half-closed eyes,/ In some divine sweet wonder-dream astray", so that the "outer roar" of mankind grows "strange and murmurous, faint and far away":

Morning and noon and midnight exquisitely,
 Wrapt with your voices, this alone we knew,
 Cities might change and fall, and men might die,
 Secure were we, content to dream with you,
 That change and pain are shadows faint and fleet,
 And dreams are real, and life in only sweet.

In effect, the peace and comfort of the eternal dream, unconsciously experienced by the frogs, is passed on to the poet who lays himself open to this experience. In another poem "Favourites of Pan", Lampman adapts Roberts' earlier poem "The Pipes of Pan" to suggest that the poetic voice of Pan (the "dream") is carried by the frogs.

In the first two books, the "dream" is the direct result of sense impressions from nature; in the long narrative poems, "The Story of an Affinity" and "David and Abigail", re-worked during the early 1890's, the "dream" carries the implications of religious or social "vision". In the first of these (title given as "My Story of an Affinity" by Bourinot¹⁰) we find in Margaret, a woman of sensitivity and independence, an embodiment of the topical feminism of Lampman's essay for *The Globe*:

Give [women] perfect independence, place them upon an exactly even footing with men in all the activities and responsibilities of life and a result for good will be attained which is almost beyond the power of the imagination to picture
(1892-93)¹¹

Both Margaret and Abigail are women of charm and dignity whose actions have overtones of the philosopher-queen of "The Land of Pallas". Lampman's stress on the "Beauty" and "Peace" of this utopian land and the detail in which "the wise fair women" are described as bringing out baskets of food to their men in the fields, all suggest William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), as does this conventional passage of Socialist economics:

And all the earth was common, and no base contriving
Of money of coined gold was needed there or known,
But all men wrought together without greed or striving,
And all the store of all to each man was his own.

The insertion into this utopia of a "ruin" describing "The woe and sickness of an age of fear made known" is equally suggestive of the museum of machines and the attack on codified religion from Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872):

And lo, in that gray storehouse, fallen to dust and rotten,
Lay piled the traps and engines of forgotten greed,
The tomes of codes and canons, long disused, forgotten,
The robes and sacred books of many a vanished creed.

Most interesting is the concept of Pallas, "the all-wise mother" which seems to blend the earth goddess of the first nature poetry with "the wise fair woman", a development, perhaps, of the Pre-Raphaelite Burne-Jones ideal by way of Mor-

ris's Ellen and Katherine Waddell. The noble women of Lampman's major narratives are all characteristically "grey-eyed", conforming in stature and in dignity to that ideal figure of "A Portrait in Six Sonnets":

Grey-eyed, for grey is wisdom — yet with eyes,
 Mobile and deep, and quick for thought or flame
 A voice of many notes that breaks and changes
 And fits each meaning with its vital chord,
 A speech, true to the heart, that lightly ranges
 From jocund laughter to the serious word,
 And over all a bearing proud and free,
 A noble grace, a conscious dignity.

In "David and Abigail," the spiritual vision is associated with its feminine exemplar in the manner of Keats' *Hyperion*; Abigail's "high dreams" are related to the desire to emulate "those great women praised of old," a Miriam or Deborah whose courage and wisdom supported the tribe. To the lovestruck David who is plunged into "dreams" at the first sight of Abigail, she is, as the maidservant Miriam astutely remarks, "the vision of the wise fair woman." Similarly, in the long narrative poem, "The Story of an Affinity," the "vision" of Margaret is the catalyst which "burst[s] the bolted prison of [Richard's] soul" and transforms an aimlessly violent existence into the nobler "dream" of a formal education and the development of the self which will enable him to claim Margaret's love. Margaret's own dreams are for a life of which William Morris might have approved: "full of noble aims,/ A dream of onward and heroic toil/ Of growth in mind, enlargement for herself/ And generous labour for the common good." For Richard, the "dream" of Margaret proves a passport to the authentic self which guides him through ten years in the city and undergirds the shared "dream" of their future together.

This insistence on the "dream" or "vision" as the mainspring of human experience is sometimes likely to strike the modern reader as a somewhat naive wish-fulfillment device: Nabal, Abigail's gross, wine-bibbing husband is indirectly but conveniently dispatched from a love triangle by the after effects of a great, black "dream". Yet, even while amused at the facility of this structure, we are somewhat sobered by Lampman's earnest attempts to re-define the primary experience of his poetry, the "dream", in terms of a moral guide for man's behaviour in society. Like faith, the dream has the great advantage of being undeniable as it is at once its own genesis and justification.

Among the Millet and *Lyrics of Earth* demonstrate that the dream enabled

Lampman to write some of his most striking poems; the charm of the unusual narrative "In November" is the evocation of the tranced state in the mind of the observer-poet. Loitering in the November woods, he finds himself motionless amidst a group of mullein plants, and feels as if he has become "One of their sombre company/ A body without wish or will." A sudden ray of thin light, (associated with the glimpse "of some former dream") induces a moment of "golden reverie" to man and plant. The attraction of this poem lies in the nicely understated kinship between man and nature and also in the narrator's shock of emotional discovery, a discovery which we as readers share:

And I, too, standing idly there,
 With muffled hands in the chill air,
 Felt the warm glow about my feet,
 And shuddering betwixt cold and heat,
 Drew my thoughts closer, like a cloak,
 While something in my blood awoke,
 A nameless and unnatural cheer,
 A pleasure secret and austere.

In this poem, as in the earlier poems, "Among the Timothy" and "At the Ferry", the dream is linked with Lampman's passive apprehension of nature and as such it does not interfere with his observations. In fact, it adds an effective (because unexplained) suggestion of the supra-natural. But serious problems do arise in later poems when Lampman attempts to invoke the dream in connection with vague abstractions and unrealized experience; the dream then becomes a substitute for reality rather than an agent for perceiving it.

A rationale for the early "dream" experience together with some of Lampman's most characteristic uses of the word itself is to be found in the long narrative poem "An Athenian Reverie". A Greek watching "before the quiet thalamos" falls into a "reverie" compounded of the memories and associations of his past and present life. He views the land itself as if it were "breathing heavily in dreams" and speculates on the "dim dreams" of the wedding guests. Moving to a larger generalization, he concludes that love itself is "one all pampering dream" but this he rejects with the alternative of Tennyson's "Ulysses": "to me is ever present/ The outer world with its untravelled paths,/ The wanderer's dream." In this same Tennysonian vein, he describes as "greedy and blind" the multitude of people for whom life is a "dull dream" to which they never awaken. In contrast is the rich life of the man "who sees":

to whom each hour

Brings some fresh wonder to be brooded on,
 Adds some new group or studied history
 To that wrought sculpture, that our watchful dreams
 Cast up upon the broad expanse of time,
 As in a never-finished frieze.

The process described here is actually the process of the poem itself, the dream or reverie which moves over the surface of the dreamer's life casting up memories and associations upon the mind. The Keatsian romantic rationale for the experience, reminiscent of *Endymion*, is also quite explicit:

Happy is he
 Who, as a watcher, stands apart from life,
 From all life and his own, and thus from all
 Each thought, each deed, and each hour's brief event,
 Draws the full beauty, sucks its meaning dry
 For him this life shall be a tranquil joy.
 He shall be quiet and free. To him shall come
 No gnawing hunger for the coarser touch,
 No made ambition with its fateful grasp;
 Sorrow itself shall sway him like a dream.

The dream which is also the poetic process becomes at once a means of apprehending life and an antidote to it; detached from the surface flux of life man acquires both the god-like vision and the god-like immunity to pain.

The importance of this whole cluster of associations in Lampman's poetry is perhaps the imaginative conversion which he is enabled to make; in effect, he is able to reverse the categories of "dreams" and "reality". Because the "true life" of existence is available only to the detached observer in the dreaming state, reality itself can be dismissed as a harmless dream; the inspired dreamer will find "sorrow itself shall sway him like a dream". The great advantage of this structure is that the dream, coupled with the stoic stance, becomes a way of circumventing the pain of every-day reality.

THE PROBLEM inherent in this way of looking at the world is that it is not always possible to maintain the dream and so keep reality at bay. This difficulty is particularly apparent in poems such as the revised "Winter-Store" from *Lyrics of Earth* (1895). In the earliest poems, the high "dream" is sufficient

to hold unpleasant reality in check; the "dissonant roar" of the city intrudes into the poetic dream but it does not take over. But, in the second version of the poem "Winter-Store", there is a schism between the two thirds of the poem which deals with the poet's "dream" in nature and his tranquil winter recollections, and the last third of the poem which is a sudden intrusion of the Socialist vision of the unhappy city. Lampman is no longer able to rest in a Meredith-like beneficent nature, at "one with earth and one with man". Instead the poem develops into a sudden and forceful "vision sad and high/ Of the laboring world down there":

... through the night,
 Comes a passion and a cry,
 With a blind sorrow and a might,
 I know not whence, I know not why,
 A something I cannot control
 A nameless hunger of the soul.

If the voices of the frogs can bring assurance of nature's cosmic plan, the "dream" which underlies the flux of existence, there are other voices which remind Lampman of the fear and sorrow which are also a part of human life. The voice which comes out of the depth, "the crying in the night" of Lampman's much anthologized "Midnight" would seem to be part of a larger sequence of poems dealing with the fearful aspects of existence. In this sense, the comforting noon-tide "dream" has its complement in the midnight sleeplessness which will not allow "dream", ("New Year's Eve") or, as in Roberts' work, in the nightmare which grows out of the dream itself.

In the poem "Winter", strange voices rave among the pines, "Sometimes in wails, and then/ In whistled laughter, till affrighted men/ Draw close". The protagonist, Winter, becomes a fearful artist prototype:

... Far away the Winter dreams alone.
 Rustling among his snow-drifts, and resigns,
 Cold fondling ears to hear the cedars moan
 ¶ In dusky-skirted lines
 Strange answers of an ancient runic call;
 Or somewhere watches with his antique eyes,
 Gray-chill with frosty-lidded reveries,
 ¶ The silvery moonshine fall
 In misty wedges through his girth of pines.

The voice of Winter's "ancient runic call" becomes associated with cruelty and

death: "The shining majesty of him that smites/ And slays you with a smile". In "Storm", the "blind thought" which impels the wind's cry is associated with repression. "All earth's moving things inherit/ The same chained might and madness of the spirit":

You in your cave of snows, we in our narrow girth
 Of need and sense, for ever chafe and pine;
 Only in moods of some demonic birth
 Our souls take fire, our flashing wings uptwine;
 Even like you, mad Wind, above our broken prison,
 With streaming hair and maddened eyes uprisen,
 We dream ourselves divine.

In "Midnight", the landscape is again desolate and associated with cold and snow; the narrator, alone and sleepless at midnight, hears some unidentified "wild thing" crying out of the dark. Because of his implied spiritual isolation, we tend to speculate that the voice which the poet hears is a projection of his own grief. Yet, significantly, Lampman does not admit the personal reference which indicates a consciousness of interaction between man and his surroundings as does say, Coleridge, in "Frost at Midnight", but prefers to assign the voice of fear to some undefinable part of the external world.

This poem seems to indicate some of the disadvantages of a theory of poetry which postulates that the mind must wander freely the better to apprehend nature's infinite dream. When weary and despairing, the poet's mind might well find quite opposite principles in nature to that of Hans Fingerhut's "cosmic optimism" yet even intimations of demonic forces must be equally accepted as truth because the mind has given up his own autonomy. We can speculate that as Lampman became more depressed — the burden of death, ill-health, a stifled affection and apparent public indifference to his work detailed in the letters to Edward Thomson; — the press of this reality becomes too strong for the protective dream structure and its opposite, the nightmare, takes over. Such a development is implicit in the metaphor and, we might infer, in Lampman's own personality. This tendency is prefigured even in the first book where the poetic voices of frog and cicada are replaced by the fearful cry of "Midnight".

In Lampman's work we see mirrored the dilemma of the later Victorian romantics; he accepted a romantic mythology — the Wordsworthian belief that it is possible to be "laid asleep in body" and so "see into the life of things" — at the very moment when changing social structures, the Darwinistic imperative, and above all, the loss of a settled faith, made it impossible to assert man's

spiritual transcendence in nature. For most of his poetic career, Lampman seems to have willed himself into a denial of these facts: "Pan is gone — ah yet, the infinite dream/ Still lives for them that heed" until that time came when he was no longer psychologically able to participate in the comfort of nature's dream. It is then that there is a great press of new realities — assertions of man's continued cruelty to man, bitter indictments of social injustice, and horrible visions of religious persecution.

Perhaps, as Lampman's own "high dreams" for the future are shaken, he turns to the example of the protagonist of Tennyson's *Maud* and engages himself in the pursuit of the social good. The aspiring "dream" of social progress begins to replace nature's "dream", and this new direction in Lampman's thought is pointedly indicated by the title of his last book, *Alcyone* (1899). The name of this star is meant to suggest man's "wider vision" and this perspective, a Socialist evolutionary vision of cosmic design, is perhaps meant to be contrasted with the narrow and destructive insularity of the man of no vision, the "Idiot" (Greek, *idios*) from the poem "The City of the End of Things". This poem, a nightmare vision of the logical end of man's selfishness and greed, is a descriptive *tour de force* of the death-bringing city of machines.

At this time, Lampman was a member of an Ottawa group which met regularly to discuss Socialism and Science. Animations of Socialist thought, particularly the attack on wealth and social injustice ("To a Millionaire", "Avarice") and Socialist utopias ("A Vision of Twilight", "The Land of Pallas") now begin to fill the vacuum left by the "dream" in nature. Lampman has sometimes been described as a Fabian but his insistence on the social function of "Beauty" and "Art" would seem to suggest that he had been influenced by the aesthetic of William Morris. Certainly, the conclusion of "A Vision of Twilight" is particularly suggestive of the social "dream — vision" structure of Morris's conclusion to *News From Nowhere*. Yet, despite the framework of cosmic optimism provided for *Alcyone*, Lampman's Socialist heavens do not carry with them the beneficent assurance of nature's "infinite dream"; the poet-wanderer returns from his vision of the ideal city, as the first version of "The Land of Pallas" makes explicit, no longer able to find his way back to the social vision, and unable to make the inhabitants of the real city listen to his dream of a better world. In poems such as "The Land of Pallas" and "A Vision of Twilight", Lampman raises the same questions which had hovered on the fringes of his earlier verse — an inquiry into the meaning of life, especially the problem of evil. Such a rationale is provided by the inhabitants of vision city, "They declare the ends of

being/ And the sacred need of pain"; but unfortunately, the narrator can no longer accept this truth and unquestioningly agree that "dreams are real, and life is only sweet". Instead, "A Vision of Twilight" concludes with an admission of a loss of faith: "But in veiling indecision/ Comes my question back again — / Which is real? the fleeting vision?/ Or the fleeting world of men?"

Yet, if we are to accept the pattern of rebellion and reconciliation implicit in Hans Fingerhut's experience, or to note the continually remade "dreams" of an Abigail or a Margaret which reassert themselves in lowlier forms in the face of adversity (Lampman was re-writing "David and Abigail" at the time of his "spiritual revolution") and to note that he was actively attempting to move out of the restrictions of his old nature poetry, we might conclude that Lampman was developing beyond the youthful Keatsian realm of "Flora, and old Pan" into a concern with "a nobler life . . . the agonies, the strife of human hearts". Lampman's later poetry, in particular, "A Portrait in Six Sonnets" dated by Scott 1895-99, is a direct inquiry into human personality in a manner that far exceeds the lovesick "dreams" of "The Growth of Love". This sequence also implies that the higher vision is now to be associated with Katherine Waddell: "Touched by her,/ A World of finer vision I have found".

Further, his stoic observation of 1895, "It is necessary for every man when he reaches maturity of understanding to take himself carefully to pieces and ascertain with pitiless scientific accuracy just what he is, then he must adjust his life accordingly", is a far cry from that boyish romanticism which had earlier led him to identify with Keats, and suggests that Lampman was undertaking that mental stock-taking which leads to a new vision of the self and of the world. In particular, his interest in Socialism would appear to be an attempt to move out of the restrictions of nature poetry into what he saw as the real world of men. Writing for *The Globe* in 1893, he argues that "the greatest poets . . . have been men of affairs before they were poets, . . . those men who have been poets only have belonged, however illustrious, to the second class." In April 1894, writing of an early poem derivative of Keats, he asserts, "I am only just now getting quite clear of the spell of that marvellous person."¹¹ In this context, we may see Morris's Socialist "vision" as Lampman's vehicle of escape. Such a movement from the romantic "dream" to a new sense of social reality would be consistent with the experience of Lampman's good friend and fellow poet, Duncan Campbell Scott. Like Lampman, Scott began to write under the influence of Keats and Charles G. D. Roberts but soon began to move away from the infantile reaches

of dream (*The Magic House*, 1893) when he encountered the realities of Indian life (*New World Lyrics and Ballads*, 1905).

The poem which Lampman was working on four months before his death in 1899, "At the Long Sault: May, 1660" does reconcile man, nature and the social vision. It also suggests a new view of nature which is neither the entirely beneficent nature of the dream nor the entirely fearful nature of the nightmare: instead both beauty and fear co-exist within nature and are reconciled. If the poem begins in the old ideal mode, "The innocent flowers in the limitless woods are springing", Lampman for the first time, admits that even a beneficent nature might have its serpent, the soaring "grey hawk" of the first stanza. Again for the first time, he does not try to escape this evil by assigning responsibility for it to the intrusion of the "toiling city", his own antithesis to a comforting nature. As a result, "At the Long Sault" becomes a moving acceptance of all "the savage heart of the wild" as Daulac's men, one by one, fall before the Iroquois:

Each for a moment faces them all and stands
 In his little desperate ring; like a tired bull moose
 Whom scores of sleepless wolves, a ravening pack,
 Have chased all night, all day
 Through the snow-laden woods, like famine let loose;
 And he turns at last in his track
 Against a wall of rock and stands at bay;
 Round him with terrible sinews and teeth of steel
 They charge and recharge; but with many a furious plunge and
 wheel
 Hither and thither over the trampled snow,
 He tosses them bleeding and torn;
 Till, driven, and ever to and fro
 Harried, wounded, and weary grown,
 His mighty strength gives way
 And all together they fasten upon him and drag him down.

The dream, no longer a passive gratification of the senses, is now the high ideal of heroic action for the good of society, the "sleepless dream" which impels Daulac and his men "To beat back the gathering horror/ Deal death while they may/ And then die". The town, safe and unknowing, does not "dream" that "ruin was near/ And the heroes who met it and stemmed it are dead." In the last stanza, reconciliation is achieved as violence modulates into pastoral: the metre of the poem changes to the lyric elegaic as the flowers of French chivalry are gathered back into the natural world:

The numberless stars out of heaven
 Look down with a pitiful glance;
 And the lilies asleep in the forest
 Are closed like the lilies of France.

NOTES

- ¹ Richard Hengist Horne, *Orion*. 10th ed. (London, 1874), v.
- ² Archibald Lampman, *Lyrics of Earth: Poems and Ballads*, edited and with an Introduction by Duncan Campbell Scott (Toronto, 1925), 8.
- ³ John Sutherland, "Edgar Allan Poe in Canada", *Archibald Lampman*, ed. Michael Gnarowski (Toronto, 1970), 159-178; Roy Daniells, "Lampman and Roberts", *Literary History of Canada*, gen. ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto, 1965), 389-98.
- ⁴ F. W. Watt, "The Masks of Archibald Lampman", *Lampman*, 205-206.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 206.
- ⁶ Arthur S. Bourinot, ed., *Archibald Lampman's Letters to Edward William Thomson, 1890-96* (Ottawa, 1956), 33.
- ⁷ "Copy of a Letter to Ralph Gustafson", *Lampman*, 154-58.
- ⁸ Scott, *Lyrics of Earth*, 38; Gnarowski, *Lampman*, xxiv; Bruce Nesbitt, "A Gift of Love", *Canadian Literature*, No. 50 (Autumn, 1971), 35-40.
- ⁹ *Lyrics of Earth*, 23.
- ¹⁰ Bourinot, *Letters*, 18.
- ¹¹ *Lyrics of Earth*, 31-32.

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