WATCHFUL DREAMS AND SWEET UNREST: AN ESSAY ON THE VISION OF ARCHIBALD LAMPMAN

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Part I

> Subtly conscious, all awake,
> Let us clear our eyes, and break
> Through the cloudy chrysalis,
> See the wonder as it is.
> (*Poems*, p. 165)[1]

These are the opening lines of "Winter-Store," the long poem with which Archibald Lampman intended to conclude his second volume of verse, *Lyrics of Earth* (1895).[2] In context, it serves as prologue to Lampman's condensed version of Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode," his meditation on the process by which men "forego the power to see/The threads that bind us to the All,/God or the Immensity . . ." and become "blind . . ./[To] the magic pageantry . . . Issuing in perpetual change/From the rainbow gates of Time." The opening lines of "Winter-Store" are quoted at the head of this essay because, like the poem from which they come, they throw into sharp relief some important, and all-too-often ignored features, of Lampman's visionary verse. It is not my aim here to name and to castigate, yet again, the critics who have seen Lampman as a mere dreamer, an escapist, a functionary who sought solace from the city and from himself in an external nature, detailed descriptions of which are his major claim to be that the best of nineteenth-century Canadian poets.[3] Rather, it is my intention to demonstrate that in the visionary poems that must be considered central to Lampman's canon there is present the subtle and alert consciousness, the clarity of vision, the unclouded focus on things as they are, that the Canadian poet sets down in "Winter-Store" as the requisites for a rational, realistic, and comprehensive understanding of man's relation to the world, to the "All," and to "Time." Specifically, the essay will examine such poems as "Heat" and "Among the Timothy" in relation to such pieces as "The Frogs" and "Freedom" as a means of demonstrating that, for Lampman, true insight meant seeing and understanding the world, with all its tensions and oppositions, comprehensively. For him, the only acceptable reason for leaving the world of men was to return to it regenerated, with a reformed and reforming humanitarian vision.

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[1] This and subsequent quotations from Lampman's verse are taken from *The Poems of Archibald Lampman* (Including *At the Long Sault*), ed., and with an Introduction, by Margaret Coulby Whitridge (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974) and are cited as *Poems* in the text.

[2] See the Introduction to *Archibald Lampman: Lyrics of Earth* (1895), ed. D.M.R. Bentley (Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1978), pp. 11-14.

[3] My debts to and departures from previous criticism will be everywhere evident in this essay; the work of Desmond Pacey, F. W. Watt, and Barrie Davies is especially present in the background of the essay, however, as are conversations with several colleagues and friends at the University of Western Ontario.

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Before proceeding to examine individual poems and particular passages in Lampman's *oeuvre* where vision plays a paramount role, account must be taken of the fact that the Canadian poet's best and most central poems obtain much of their energy and detail from a coherent cosmology or "world view." Derived both from Lampman's experience of previous literature (his extensive reading of the classics, of Milton, and of numerous nineteenth-century authors for example) and from his experience of the Canadian environment (his attentive observations of the *flora* and *fauna*, as well as the meteorological and climatic conditions, in the environs of Ottawa) Lampman's cosmology consists of a series of circular and cyclical correspondences radiating outwards from a still centre, a standpoint, which is emphatically his own, of the late nineteenth-century, and of Canada. The cosmology is best envisaged as a series of concentric circles, of temporal cycles, revolving around a point of no movement, a point paradoxically in and out of time from which vision is possible. In their increasing circumferences these temporal cycles embody the diurnal movement of the sun, the annual round of the seasons, the ontogenetic movement of individual man's life, and the phylogenetic "progress" of Western civilization, with the whole anchored geographically in the four cardinal points of the compass as conceived, in their associations, from a standpoint in the Northern hemisphere. The wheels within wheels of Lampman's system served him well, providing a lens to focus the energy of his imagination and furnishing a series of correspondences for each quarter of the day or season of the year which he could either ignore or draw upon for purposes of resonance and metaphor. Lampman did not, of course, invent the associations and correspondences which comprise his system; rather, he seems to have subsumed several quite traditional organic, cyclical, and linear analogies (such as those which link the human lifespan with the cycles of the day and year and the classical Greek conception of the Ages of Man) into an intelligible and hieratic, but not Procrustean, pattern which is rendered tangible and individual by being rooted in his own personal experiences of a Canadian nature that is relatively extreme in its daily and seasonal variations.

The concentric circles of Lampman's cosmology divide readily into quadrants, two of which were of special significance to him and, hence, will be of special importance here. The first, and most important quadrant, is that which radiates outwards from the period surrounding noon, through Summer and youth-manhood, to what, mythologically, is the Golden-Silver age of Man and, geographically, is the South, the region of the most intense light and heat in the Northern hemisphere. This is the quadrant in which Lampman's most celebrated poem "Heat," where the time of day is "noon," the season is clearly summer, and the poet is facing "southward" (*Poems*, pp. 12-13) is emphatically located. It is the quadrant in which positive visionary experiences — epiphanic insights in to man, nature, and human life — are most likely to occur because, to Lampman, sunlight is poetentially and metaphorically the source of both physical and spiritual illumination. For the Canadian poet conceives the "marvellous sun" (in the classical tradition the emblem of Apollo,[4] in the Christian tradition the type of God's radiance) as the source of a creative and spiritual light which at once clarifies, harmonizes, and regenerates the common-day and common-place world, bestowing on the poet lucid and rational insights to the way of that world — making his "Thoughts grow keen and clear" in the fullest senses of each of those words.

Those words, of course, comprise the famous concluding line of "Heat," a poem which, as Desmond Pacey has shown, is "constructed on the principle of balanced opposites" (such as hot/cold and light/dark) that are reconciled in the poem's dominant image of "the turning wheel," the "revolution," the "cyclical movement."[5] Pacey's analysis of "Heat" need not be replicated here; however, there are some features of the poem which Pacey does not mention but which do need briefly to be discussed. The first is that the effort to comprehend the place of "balanced opposites" within a dynamic circle that is significant and revelatory of the organic unity of all nature requires on the part of the poet very considerable mental and perceptual powers. That is why in "Heat" the poet, intent on making intelligent use of his senses, bends his thoughts and his perceptions to such activities as observing the "idly clacking wheels" of a "hay-cart," counting "marguerites one by one," and listening to the "thin revolving tune" of a "thrush" (*Poems,* pp. 12-13). In his search for a comprehensive vision of a unity that includes man (the "wagoner" and the poet himself), Lampman must seek to discover in the particulars of the world evidence of the (cyclical) design of his cosmos, must set his mind and senses to find reflections of the organic cycles that, ideally, govern nature and man. If he is to achieve these ends he must see what *is* through what only *seems* (significantly the words "seems" is used twice only in "Heat," both times in the first two stanzas, where the poet is struggling to clarify his thoughts and perceptions); moreover, the poet must experience a sensation of being a part of external nature while yet remaining apart from it and conscious of his rational, human self. The conditions for achieving such a state of equipoise are that the body be stationary — a still centre — in the natural (as opposed to urban and non-organic) realm and that the mind be active and, hence, able to balance close observation (watchfulness) with coherent reverie (dream). So it is that in the penultimate stanza of "Heat" the poet states (italics added):

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[4] See *Poems*, p. 311 and *Archibald Lampman: Selected Prose*, ed., and with an Introduction, by Barrie Davies (Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1975), p. 125, hereafter cited in the text as *SP*.

In *intervals* of *dream* I *hear*
    The crickets from the droughty ground;
The grasshoppers *spin* into mine ear
    A small innumerable sound.

(*Poems,* p. 13)

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[5] "A Reading of Lampman's 'Heat'," in *Archibald Lampman,* ed., and with an Introduction, by Michael Gnarowski (Toronto: Ryerson, 1970), pp. 181-184. Hereafter this volume will be cited in the text as *AL.*

The very fact that the sound is "innumerable," and, moreover, that "The burning sky-line *blinds* [the poet's] sight" later in the stanza, serves to indicate the formidable proportions of the struggle to retain rational coherence and perceptual clarity in "the pale depth of noon." But the "And yet . . ." with which the final stanza of "Heat" opens shows that the poet has won his struggle, albeit conditionally and with difficulty:

> And yet to me not this or that
> Is always sharp or always sweet;
> In the sloped shadow of my hat
> I lean at rest, and drain the heat;
>
> Nay more, I think some blessed power
> Hath brought me wandering idly here:
> In the full furnace of this hour
> My thoughts grow keen and clear.
> (*Poems*, p. 13)

While the perception of the other ("some blessèd power) is here, so is a consciousness of the self ("to me," "I lean" and so on); and while the senses are represented ("sharp or . . . sweet") so, insistently, is the rational mind ("I think," "My thoughts"). Indeed, the carefully unspecified "thoughts" that "grow" as if organically under the intense light of the sun suggest that the poet has achieved communion with the world of nature, not by allowing his reason to become impaired, but, on the contrary, as a means of having it sharpened and clarified.

Finally it must be said of "Heat" that for the reader the recreation of the steps to illumination that comprises the poem functions as a simulacrum and a rehearsal for what the human mind can gain through a proper — which is to say rational — approach to and understanding of external nature. Very likely, Lampman would have allowed Roberts' description of the animal story as a "potent emancipator" that "frees us for a little from the world of shop-worn utilities and . . . leads us back to the old kinship of earth"[6] to stand as a description of the social-aesthetic function of his own 'nature poetry.' He would have wanted it clearly understood, however, that, in Arnold's words, ". . . man hath all which Nature hath, but more . . ." and "Man must begin . . . where

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[6] "Introductory: The Animal Story," in his *The Kindred of the Wild: A Book of Animal Life* (Boston: L.C. Page, 1902), p. 29.

Nature ends. . . ."[7] The implications of this suggestion that in "Heat" and elsewhere Lampman was concerned, not merely to acquaint his readers with the beneficial aspects of nature, but also to teach them the correct response to her, will be taken up again later, after the remainder of the poet's cosmology has been placed on view.

The intense light and heat of midday are not always beneficent and illuminating, productive of positive visionary experiences, in Lampman's work. In the realm of the city, the assaults of heat and light contribute to the sense of oppression and lassitude which Lampman saw as negative aspects of urban life. For instance, in "The Poet's Song," a poem which probably owes a debt of imagery, including noon imagery, to Rossetti's "The Bride's Prelude,"[8] the unremitting heat has parched the "burning plain" and driven the city's inhabitants "half-mad." It has also rendered the "Dark-browned" poet "mute," "listless," and cantankerous to the extent that he has lost his creative energy, his powers of observation, and his sympathy for his fellow men:

> Sometimes with clank of hoofs and cries
>   The noon through all its trance was stirred:
> The poet sat with half-shut eyes,
>   Nor saw, nor heard.
>
> And once across the heated close
>   Light laughter in a silver shower
> Fell from fair lips: the poet rose
>   And cursed the hour.
>   (*Poems*, pp. 211-212)

The imagery of the opening section of "The Poet's Song," from which these two stanzas are quoted, represents an inversion of the positive associations of heat and light (and, for that matter, silver) in Lampman's work. A far cry this from the light and heat that provoke sharp, clear thought in "Heat" or, indeed, from "the noon" hour at which the Christians set sail South-East from Rome to the ascetic regions of revelation, the "fierce bare places" (*Poems*, p. 62) of the

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[7] "In Harmony with Nature," *Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold*, ed., and with an Introduction, by A. Dwight Culler (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1961), p. 27. Hereafter cited, in the text, as *MA*.

[8] For a discussion of the function of light imagery in this poem see "Rossetti's Bride-Chamber Talk," *Wascana Review*, 11 (Fall, 1976), 83-97.

Holy Land, in "The Three Pilgrims." There are times when Lampman, having retired from the city to commune with nature in the Ottawa valley, discovers that the light and heat (and humidity) emanating from the sun, together with the dizzying optical effects that they produce, threaten to engulf the mind in a drowsy, almost narcotic, numbness that can subvert reason's rule and prevent active meditation. It is against such an impaired, unfocused, and torpid state that the poet struggles towards clarity in "Heat"; here now is the first stanza of that poem, with italics added to indicate the weakened powers of observation and thought with which the poet begins his meditation:

From plains that *reel* to southward, dim,
  The road runs by me white and bare;
Up the steep hill it *seems* to *swim*
  Beyond, and *melt* into the *glare*.
Upward half-way, or it may be
  Nearer the summit, slowly steals
A hay-cart, moving dustily
  With idly clacking wheels.
    (*Poems*, p. 12)

Pacey is right in seeing an "implicit suggestion of the ancient cosmogony . . . whereby all creation is the result of the intercourse of the male Sun with the female Earth" (*AL*, p. 182) in "Heat." It is precisely because this is so that in Lampman's work communion with nature under the imminent, consummating light of the sun can either result, positively, in (re)generation or lead, negatively, to a torpor which it is tempting to describe as post-coital or, worse, anti-coital. For Lampman, the period surrounding noon is a time of great visionary potential but also of potential drowsiness, a fact which adds considerable dramatic and meditative tension to such poems as "Heat" and "Among the Timothy."

The second most important of the quadrants in Lampman's scheme is the one which radiates outwards from midnight, through Winter and death, to what, mythologically, is the Iron Age of man and, geographically, is the North, the region, needless to say, of least light and most cold in Canada. This is the quadrant in which the foundations of "The City of the End of Things," Lampman's nightmare vision of the dreadful spiritual consequences of the urgan-industrial age of materialism (of 'things'), are squarely sunk: the horrifyingly sublime city, it will be recalled, is glimpsed at "midnight," constructed of "iron," inhabited by robot-like creatures of "iron," and presided over by a "grim Idiot" who looks "toward the lightless north . . ." (*Poems,* pp. 179-182). In "The City of the End of Things," Lampman casts himself in the role of the physician of the iron age, diagnosing for the purposes of healing the disease of his times in appropriately repetitive, circumscribing, and cross-rhymed octo-syllabic lines:[9]

> With measured roar and iron ring,
> The inhuman music lifts and falls.
> Where no thing rests and no man is,
> And only fire and night hold sway;
> The beat, the thunder and the hiss
> Cease not and change not, night nor day.
> And moving at unheard commands,
> The abysses and vast fires between,
> Flit figures that with clanking hands
> Obey a hideous routine . . .
> (*Poems*, p. 180)

As this passage shows, life in "The City of the End of Things" is characterized by its mechanical, and, therefore, inorganic, unnatural, and inhuman rhythms. The same is true of life in "The City," where the "curses of gold" perceived as demonic and soul-entrapping, have transformed the city into a factory-town that is obedient to the rhythms, not of nature, but of night (indeed, graveyard) shifts and perpetually-moving machines:

> Through doors that darken never
> I hear the engines beat.
>
> Through days and nights that follow
> The hidden mill-wheel strains;
> In the midnight's windy hollow
> I hear the roar of trains.
> (*Poems*, p. 216)

Lampman's moralized cityscapes have parallels in the natural order in the cold river and bitter wind of "April Night" and "Winter Evening" which are "*like* steel" (*Poems,* pp. 185 and 243) — i.e., reminiscent of the metallic but still obedient to natural rhythms. In the main too little attention has been paid by Lampman criticism to the ordering of the poems within his three published volumes, to why the poet might have printed one poem before or after another. But it is worth noticing that the "iron," yet transmutable "year" of "The Song Sparrow" — the poem which, not fortuitously, follows "The City of the End of Things" in *Alcyone* (1899) — the "doomed and broken" end of winter yields, as it must in the organic and seasonal cycle of regeneration, to the "silvery song and golden news" (*Poems*, p. 182) of bird song, to a rebirth that is hardly possible in the mechanical (and stoney) environment of the city.

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[9] A more detailed discussion of the form of "The City of the End of Things" can be found in "A New Dimension: Notes on the Ecology of Canadian Poetry," *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews*, 7 (Fall/Winter, 1980), 1-20.

As the very title "Winter-Store" suggests, the final seasons of the year and of life are also times for recollecting in the tranquility of diminished sensual stimulation the "images" and "thoughts" that have been gathered earlier. To Lampman, the "winter reveries" of a "sheltered mind" that is able to "feed" in comfort on a store-house of "unhurt remembrances" are potentially the source of deep and lasting happiness (see *SP*, p. 109). It is to be expected that Lampman's winter store of memories will contain "remembrances" gleaned through the observation of both nature and man: "grasshoppers" and "haymakers," "purple grass" and "crowded mills" (*Poems*, pp. 166-171). The winter-store also includes the bad with the good: remembrances of moments when "through this common air" the poet achieves perceptions that bring him closer to being "One with earth . . . one with man" and "One . . . / . . . with the planets and the stars . . ." (*Poems*, p. 166) together with memories of times when his tendency to "stray" takes him "by many a stream" where drowsy, "half-shut lilies gleam" and "the bull-frog lolls at rest . . ." (*Poems*, p. 168). The "unwinnowed" contents of the winter-store must, therefore, be winnowed; they must be examined and sifted to separate the grain which sustains imaginative lift from the chaff which surrounds it. Although this process is anticipated in "Winter-Store" it is not undertaken. At the conclusion of the poem (and hence of the *Lyrics of Earth* volume, which "Winter-Store" concludes and chastens) the Lampman for whom, finally, the proper study of man is men, permits the potentially solipsistic contemplation of the mind's contents to be eclipsed by a vision akin to that of the poet figure in Arnold's "Resignation" of "the labouring world down there . . ." in the populous city. Lampman's sympathy for the agonies and strife, the pleasures and dreams of post-lapsarian man in all his "many conditions of . . . happiness and pain" (*SP*, p. 95), forces him at the dark and wintry conclusion of "Winter-Store" to admit, reluctantly and wistfully, the deficiencies of the Romantic conservatism that has prompted him to contemplate gathering memories for future, solitary enjoyment and the insufficiency of the pastoral idealism that has allowed him to envisage a happy and "ruddy race of men . . . All immortal, all divine" dancing "through a wood" (*Poems*, p. 173). What remains for Lampman to keep from the dark vision of "Winter-Store" is "A nameless hunger of the soul" — probably the futuristic desire of the socialist to refashion and transform society — which, though viewed ambivalently as so powerful as to be beyond control, nevertheless marks the poet as one of those for whom, in the words of Keats's Moneta, "the miseries of the world/Are misery and will not let them rest."[10] This is as it must be for the poet who never sanctioned a fugitive and cloistered retreat from humanity but, on the contrary, harshly censured those other poets whom he saw as failing to pay sufficient attention to the human condition (see *SP*, p. 101) and who, in his own poems, attempted both to confront ("The City of the End of Things") and to ameliorate ("Heat") the problems of men living in the brazen prison of modern, urban society.

It must not be thought that winter and midnight were productive only of nightmarish visions for Lampman. On the contrary in the long poem "Winter" in *Among the Millet* (1888) he fancifully envisages winter as a grotesque figure of supernatural dimensions who torments and mocks man from his home "beyond the northmost woods . . ." (*Poems*, p. 24) and in "With the Night" in *Lyrics of Earth* he optimistically suggests that the "doubts, dull passions, and base fears/That harassed and oppressed the day . . ." are incompatible with "the earth, the nights, [and] the stars . . ." (*Poems*, pp. 139-140). Night, for Lampman, can knit up the ravelled sleeve of care (see "Midsummer Night," *Poems*, pp. 118-119) and, of more significance for the present discussion, can assist the poet in his efforts to pierce through the veil of quotidian reality and delusive dream, to achieve a sense of human dignity within a natural universe. In the sonnet entitled "Night" the poet, after glancing backwards to the "shallow day" when he was "A dreamer among dreamers" who "strove and fretted at life's feverish play,/And dreamed until the dream *seemed* infinite" (italics added), jubilantly asserts: "But now the gateway of the All unbars . . ." and "On the great threshold of the night I stand,/ Once more a soul self-cognizant and still,/Among the wheeling multitude of stars" (*Poems*, p. 263). In "Night," as in "Heat," regeneration comes to the poet as an affirmation of human self-awareness within a cosmic-design.

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[10] "The Fall of Hyperion," 11. 148-149 in Keats *Poetical Works*, ed., and with an Introduction, by H.W. Garrod (Oxford: O.U.P., 1956), p. 406. Hereafter cited in the text as *JK*.

Perhaps it is the sheer length of winter nights and of winter itself in the Ottawa region that prompted Lampman to explore the relatively harmless but nevertheless escapist activity of dreaming beyond the present season. In "Indian Summer," he envisages that brief respite from the onset of winter as a senile and deluded dreamer who, in his "golden dream of . . . /A second childhood . . . ," fails to perceive the advance of the "polar armies" of winter (*Poems*, p. 225). And in "Winter-Break," the insufficiently and, perhaps, ironically optimistic sonnet that concludes the *Alcyone* volume, a mid-winter thaw produces illusions of Summer and Spring and prompts suspect dreams of "April woods," "silver-piping" swallows, "gurgling brooks," and "sprouting solitudes" where the poet, destructively and bathetically, fancies himself 'stooping,' 'laughing,' and 'plucking' "hapaticas" (*Poems*, p. 252). It appears that for Lampman any attempt to escape the cycles of time, to transcend the present through pretense, was suspect: only in time and with intelligence can visionary insight, in Lampman's work, be validly achieved. In the poem to which we shall now turn, "Winter Hues Recalled," Lampman remembers back to a moment of vision on an evening in February, a moment whose validity the reader must assess from its qualities and contexts.

Since "Winter Hues Recalled" is insistently Wordsworthian in both form and content — its meditative blank verse is reminiscent of *The Prelude* and its focal point is a spot of time recollected in tranquility — there is good reason to suspect that Lampman intended the poem to be seen and judged as an exercise in Wordsworth's manner. Now it will be remembered that in *The Prelude* Wordsworth accords greatest value to those "spots of time" which "give/Profoundest knowledge to what point, and how,/The mind is lord and master — outward sense/The obedient servant of her will" (XII, 11. 208-223).[11] With this in mind, it becomes clear that the opening lines of "Winter Hues Recalled" — "Life is not all for effort; there are hours/When fancy breaks from the exacting will,/And rebel thought takes schoolboy's holiday,/Rejoicing in its idle strength" (*Poems,* p. 27) — do not augur well, in their suggestions of irrationality, immaturity, and irresponsibility, for the recollection of a moment whose vision will be firmly based in imaginative reason and clear perception. The reader should have further misgivings when the "Impetuous" moment that surfaces unbidden from the memory turns out to be one "when with feet/*Arrested* and *spell-bound,* and *captured eyes*/Made wide" in "joy and wonder" the poet beheld the "wintry land" both "Swept with the fires of the sunset . . ." and transformed into "A miracle of colour and of beauty" (*Poems,* p. 28, italics added). There is even ambiguity in the word "wide," which suggests a vision that is both expanded and (childishly) credulous, and in the fact that the landscape is at once ravaged and enhanced by the fiery sunset. Throughout the introductory verse paragraphs of "Winter Hues Recalled" the reader is pointed by ambiguities of diction and imagery towards the equivocal nature of the experience that the poet has retrieved from the "garner-house of memory" while passively "loitering in [his] dreams . . ." (*Poems,* pp. 27-28). Simply put, the question that the poem ask the reader to answer is whether the spot of time tranquilly recollected in it belongs with the wheat or the chaff.

The central section of "Winter Hues Recalled" discovers the poet "Marching at ease" (an ambiguous, yet predominantly militaristic phrase) on snowshoes to "southward," which to say towards the region where even the winter sun would shed most light. The "air" is "bright," the "day" is "radiant," and the "snow-packed fields" are "gleaming" (*Poems,* p. 28). But against the possibility of the poet achieving illumination in and through external nature at this point in the poem there stand several facts. There is his militaristic and rough-shod "stride." There is his concomitant perception of a "great struggle," a "wavering contest," between "sun and frost" in the natural world ("passive minds" says Wordsworth in *The Prelude,* II, 11. 382-386, cannot observe

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[11] *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth.* ed. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966). This and subsequent quotations from Wordsworth's poetry are taken from this five-volume edition and are designated in the text.

"affinities"). There is his likening of some distant clouds to "streaks of ash" and of the land's stillness to "sleep," two similes that reflect his own denatured and unawakened consciousness. And, finally, there is the fact that he is virtually oblivious to time ("An hour has passed above me," he says) and that his senses are severely impaired: his ears, "covered" against the cold, cannot hear and his eyes, though "clear," are "unobservant, noting not/ That all the plain beneath [him] and the hills . . ." are taking on "a change of colour splendid, gradual,/ Leaving no spot the same; nor that the sun/ Now like a fiery torrent" is flaming over the western horizon (*Poems*, pp. 28-29). But just as he is about to turn "homeward," the poet, being, as he says, "heated" and "weary" from snowshoeing, seats himself on the "topmost log" of a "buried fence." Having thus assumed a position that is, potentially, the still point in the turning circle of time and nature, and, moreover, being alerted by the sun and wind to himself and the world, the poet seems ideally situated and prepared for a moment of illumination.

What happens, however, is that he fails to achieve the delicate balance between perception and intellection that was remarked in "Heat." Instead, he allows his mind and sight to be overwhelmed by the aesthetic spectacle of the sunset; dangerously losing his "memory of the frost," he becomes "Transfixed with wonder, overborne with joy," and contents himself with observing and describing the mere optical effects in a "flame" and "rose" tinted prospect which nevertheless includes a city:

> In the valley far before me,
> Low sunk in sapphire shadows, from its hills,
> Softer and lovelier than an opening flower,
> Uprose a city with its sun-touched towers,
> A bunch of amethysts.
> (*Poems*, p. 30)

This is the distance that lends enchantment, the dream that transmutes reality. Only in the poet's momentary illusions is the city either an (organic) flower or an (exquisite) jewel. That is why the phrase "A bunch of amethysts" does not ring true. More importantly, it is why the poet goes on to admit that, "Like one spell-bound," he has been "Caught" in an attractive and dream-like delusion, encircled and entrapped by a circumambient spectacle, which has rendered him dangerously and irresponsibly oblivious to the real world, to the "keen wind and the deadly air . . ." In Lampman's work enchanting spells must be broken and insufficient dreams shattered; so it is that at the conclusion of "Winter Hues Recalled" the poet is awakened, indeed humanized, by the "warning chill" of actuality and that the poem is followed in the *Among the Millet* volume by "Storm," a piece which remembers, not Wordsworth, but Shelley, as it explores the "Mad moods" when "We dream outselves divine . . ." (*Poems*, p. 32).

It should now be evident that in Lampman's work the times of the day and the year when the sun's energy is waning (albeit spectacularly) or the immediate outlook is darkling are frequently the settings and components of delusive and inauthentic visionary experiences. Before the discussion proceeds, as it must in a moment, to the afternoon/Fall quadrant the summary point needs to be made that the midnight/Winter quadrant tends to associate itself in Lampman's poetry with diagnostic, futuristic and apocalyptic visions that confront the world with its condition of entrapment and, by implication, suggest that illusions are untenable and changes desirable. Needless to say, the very existence of such vision is predicated on the poet's retention, even as he looks into the metallic darkness of the iron age, of his sense that all life, whether animate or inanimate should properly be synchronized with the rhythms of the nature whose organic design not only provided Lampman with the basis for his cosmology but also offers to the excursive mind, the mind that seeks, possesses, creates, and communicates design, intimations of the cosmic rhythms, harmonies, and tendencies of "the All,/God or the Immensity . . ." Although the midnight/Winter quadrant of Lampman's schema most often associates itself with visions that provide an ironic, realistic, or prophetic commentary on an entrapped, ritualized, and denatured world, it can also, as the nadir of light and life, remember forward to what in the natural cycle is the new light of dawn and the new life of Spring but in the Christian tradition (in which Lampman was, of course, raised) is the resurrection and ascension of the faithful; indeed, the dramatic situation of "Easter Eve" turns on the fact that the "aging" speaker of the monologue was once told by Christ that "when bells at midnight sound . . ." (*Poems*, pp. 69-70) he must "rise" and go with Him to eternal life.

While the quadrants radiating outwards from midday and midnight have a certain paramountcy in Lampman's cosmology, the quadrant emanating from the late afternoon (twilight, Fall, mature-old age, the West, the Bronze Age) also has an important and intelligible place in his poetry. In view of the importance of sunlight for Lampman's visionary poems, it is to be expected that in Fall, when rain and clouds obscure the sun, illumination will be achieved with more difficulty and less frequency. (Confirmation of the fact that clouds and rain militate against illumination for Lampman may be readily obtained from such poems as "After Rain" and "Cloud-Break" in the *Lyrics of Earth* volume). Since Fall in the Ottawa valley is also a season in which the showy spectacle of decay and death, with its attendant moods of melancholy and morbidity, will tend to make the poet introspective rather than excursive, it is also to be expected that the poems of the afternoon-Fall quadrant will be relatively lean on visionary insights into the human condition. So it is that the "In November" of the *Lyrics of Earth* volume finds the poet, under a "low . . . sky" and after experiencing an empathetic sense of being at one with a stand of "long . . . dead," "hermit-like" mullein-stalks, being granted a fleeting moment of illumination: "And as I stood, quite suddenly,/Down from a furrow in the sky/ The sun shone out a little space . . . And lit the leaves that lay,/Level and deep within the wood . . ." (*Poems,* pp. 158-160). This unexpected cloud-break provides the poet, as he stands "shuddering betwixt cold and heat," with "A moment's golden reverie" whose effect, however, is ambiguous: it awakens his rational "thoughts," but in a self-protective manner (he draws them round him "like a cloak") and it produces "something in [his] blood" which is "nameless," "unnatural," "secret," and "austere" — a response which is limited in value because it militates against communication, true creativity, and even the forces of life itself. The poem which follows "In November" in *Lyrics of Earth,* "By an Autumn Stream," also sees a "cloudrift" open to provide the poet with a moment of insight which, in this case, is deceptive and spellbinding:

> All things that be
> Seem plunged into silence, distraught,
> By some stern, necessitous thought:
> It wraps and enthralls
> Marsh, meadow, and forest; and falls
> Also on me.
>
> (*Poems*, p. 161)

Entrapment is the state of the poem who allows the seeming melancholia of Fall to obscure the fact that, in the organic cycle of natural things, when Winter comes Spring cannot be far behind. In "By an Autumn Stream" and "In November," as in "A Vision of Twilight," where the poet achieves one of his rare glimpses of a good city, a celestial city whose "glamour" is "soft" with a pristine "gold" but concludes by asking "Which is real? The fleeting vision?/ Or the fleeting world of men?" (*Poems,* pp. 195-198), the short-lived light of evening and Fall produces limited, confusing, and relatively unilluminating apprehensions.

It is a matter of some significance that to the poet of "In November" the mullein-stalks "seem" to be, not merely "hermit folk," but "hermit folk" who have been struck dead in the midst of "their compline prayer," for surely to Lampman, the anti-sacerdotalist who detested the sorrowful and depressing rituals of the Church,[12] little of value could come from a deluded participation in a dubious activity. Some credence is lent to this view by "In October," the poem in which the Wordsworthian cathedral of nature is depicted, not merely as a wasteland of sorrowful catholic ritual, but as a barrier ("bar") standing between the poet and the sky, itself the seat of the sun and stars, the emblem of infinity, and the focus of prescient and transcendant vision for Lampman. The first two stanzas of "In October" find the poet, as we would expect, facing the almost lightless "west" where "The pines/ Like tall slim *priests* . . . stand up and *bar*/ The low long strip of *dolorous* red that lines/ The under west . . ." (italics added) (*Poems,* p. 21). (The blocking quality of the priest-like pines in the context is made all the more ironical by Lampman's more orthodox description, in his *At the Mermaid Inn* column, of the pine as "the priest of the forest, leading heavenward the thoughts of men and the flights of birds."[13]) The "windheaped *traceries*" of the leaves in

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[12] See *SP,* p. 124 and *Poems,* p. 138. "Life and Nature," it may be noted incidentally, is a poem which presents two simple-minded and deluded notions of "Life" — the first, achieved in "the midst of the city," that Life is merely "sad" and the second, achieved "on the earth's quiet breast," that Life is merely "sweet" (*Poems,* p. 139).

[13] *At the Mermaid Inn: Wilfred Campbell, Archibald Lampman, Duncan Campbell Scott* in The Globe, 1892-1893, ed., and with an Introduction, by Barrie Davies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), p. 37. Hereafter cited as *MI.*

"In October" are part of a dead landscape devoid both of life ("The cornfields all are brown . . .") and of life-sustaining elements (there is "no bloom for bees"), but not of the sounds of misery: the "sad trees" and dying leaves "murmur incoherently" from "pain-crazed lips . . . low soft *masses* for the . . . / . . . leaves that live no more." The second, and last, two stanzas of "In October" find the poet locating himself within the landscape on a "naked stone" — an image suggestive both of a Catholic altar divested of its trappings and of a sacrificial, Pre-Christian religion — the "conquered creed" whose unintelligible (and sibylline) "markings [and] . . . runes" he can sense in the "dry dead leaves . . ." of Fall. Once seated on the "naked stone" — which is probably to suggest, not only that he had become the still point in the landscape, but also that he is rejecting the sacerdotal, and, perhaps, affirming the Pre-Christian — he characteristically draws his "coat closer" about him with "numbed hands" against the cold. Through a willed act of empathy with the dead landscape — "I will," he says "send my heart out to the ashen lands" — he first realizes the limitations of the seductive but irrational "visions" of "golden madness" that had endeared themselves to him "last month" and then achieves a release from the "pain of . . . lurid hue" that had coloured his perception of the landscape earlier in the poem. "In October" ends with the poet, "still and very gray and dreary" like the "Sweet sombre lands," having achieved a bitter-sweet harmony with the autumnal landscape but having learned little, if anything, from his melancholy experience in the ritualized and unilluminated landscape of Fall.

There is a sense in which both "In November" and "In October" are not merely poems of the Fall but also, consistent with the quadrant in which they locate themselves, poems of the late-nineteenth century, of the twilight of civilization, the "transit age, the age of brass . . ." as Lampman calls his own times in "The Modern Politician" (*Poems,* p. 277). In a well-known letter to his friend E.W. Thomson the poet permits us a valuable insight to his conception of the place of Christianity in the history of Western thought: "In the old days when men were children," he writes, "they were worshippers of light and joy. Apollo and Aphrodite and Dionysus were enough for them but the world is grown old now . . . It is sad and moody and full of despair, and it cleaves to Christ, its natural refuge." Cardinal Newman's "Lead kindly light/ Amid the encircling gloom," he writes in the same letter, has "hit it exactly."[14] As poems such as "The Three Pilgrims," "Easter Eve," and "The Martyrs" (*Poems,* p. 115) make abundantly clear, Lampman had moments of almost Hardean longing for the faith of the Early Christians. He could even write wistfully in "To Chaucer" (and notice his use of a seasonal analogue to describe the High Middle Ages): "Twas high midspring, when thou wert here on earth,/ . . . and the new world was just begun . . . We believe/Neither in God, humanity, nor self . . ." (*Poems,* p. 271). There can be little doubt that the contrast between past and present, between the comprehensive faith of the Early Christians and the gloomy religion of the darkling plain, gave strength to Lampman's fear that his own age was a twilight zone on the edge of night, a "transit," brazen age which would soon give way to the dehumanized, iron world of "The City of The End of Things." In brighter moments, however, Lampman believed that "the main current of the human spirit, through many changes and many falls, is setting eternally towards a condition of order, and divine beauty and peace" (*SP,* p. 93); and he believed, too, that it was the task of the poet to assist that forward tendency, that movement towards a new Golden Age. But from his letter to Thompson, as well as from "In October" and, perhaps also, from "In November," it is clear that Lampman found the depressing Christianity of the nineteenth-century Church a hindrance rather than a help in his own efforts to achieve illumination, to write with a clear and happy intelligence, and, hence, to assist in the meliorization of mankind.

Just as the midnight-Winter quadrant of Lampman's cosmology could inform poems in which a clarity of observation, a keenness of thought, and a sympathy for mankind are paramount, so the afternoon-Fall quadrant can occasionally spawn comprehensive visions of life. One such vision is to be found in the sonnet entitled "In November" near the end of the *Among the Millet* volume. There the poet is able calmly to accept the movement towards darkness and death in the diurnal and seasonal cycles because with eyesight informed by sympathetic reason, with learned and imaginative eyes, he achieves a vision that is cogniscent of men working happily in and with nature to assure survival through the winter and regeneration in the spring:

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[14] See *SP*, pp. 124-125.

> In shouting file
> The woodsmen's carts go by me homeward-wheeled,
> Past the thin fading stubbles, half-concealed,
> Now golden-gray, sowed softly through with snow,
> Where the last ploughman follows still his row,
> Turning black furrows through the whitening field.
> Far off the village lamps begin to gleam. . . .
> (*Poems,* p. 117)

The "golden-gray" is present in this *grisaille* to remember forward from the gray of death to the gold of the growth made possible by the labour of the ploughman and by the grace of the nature which, even now, has "sowed" the stubble "through with snow," with a source of fertilizing water. By the end of "In November" the poet, though solitary, is not an unaccommodated man; by seeing and understanding the organic cycles of nature and man's involvement in them, he has achieved a comprehensive or 'rounded' perspective on life, a contented equipoise in which watching and dreaming are in harmony:

> Fast drives the snow, and no man comes this way;
> The hills grow wintry white, and bleak winds moan
> About the naked uplands. I alone
> Am neither sad, nor shelterless, nor gray,
> Wrapped round with thought, content to watch and dream.
> (*Poems,* p. 117)[15]

Such lines show that in the twilight-Fall quadrant (though admittedly "In November" partakes generously of the Winter-Spring movement of the seasonal cycle) Lampman was able to achieve an ideal state of being "shelterless" but "content" because contained within an all-, and therefore self-, inclusive circle of tranquil thought.

At first it might seem strange that Spring, traditionally the season of "young lovers" (*Poems,* p. 137), birth, and rejuvenation, is the least important of the four seasons in Lampman's poetry. When it is remembered, however, that Spring in the Ottawa valley is not the extended process of regeneration that it is in, say,

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[15] It is possible that Lampman's "I alone . . ." refers wittily to Arnold's "Resignation": "From some high station [the poet] looks down,/ At sunset, on a populous town;/Surveys each happy group, which fleets,/ Toil ended, through the shining streets,/Each with some errand of its own — / And does not say: *I am alone" (MA,* pp. 40-41).

England or Victoria, B.C., but, rather, a brief phenomenon that comes late after a long Winter and yields quickly to full Summer, it becomes easier to understand why in Lampman's work the dawn-Spring-youth-East-Golden Age quadrant lies relatively fallow, why 'Spring' poems are considerably less in evidence than 'Winter' and 'Summer' poems, and why the associations of the Golden Age tend to accrue to noon-Summer in his cosmology. (Two further factors, one merely practical and the other more humanistic, could have discouraged Lampman in his use of the morning-Spring quadrant: as an employee of the Post Office he would, presumably, have had to concentrate his energies on getting to work early in the morning, and, probably more important, in rating the stages of human life he assigned "the season of youth" a position decidedly inferior to "early middle age" [*SP,* p. 109]). For Lampman, the experiences of Spring, the sowing of wild oats to be harvested as memories, and the hatching of poetic plans which do not always come to maturity (see "The Meadow," *Poems,* pp. 134-137), are a preparation for the more settled and less agitated period of full maturity. Nevertheless they could in themselves yield a mindless and merely sensual happiness akin to that of "young lovers" who "Deem that they have their utmost worship's worth,/ If love be near them, *just* to hear and see" (*Poems,* p. 137, italics added). And, as "April in the Hills" from the morning-Spring section of *Lyrics of Earth* indicates, Lampman could take advantage of the "lucid air" and fairly clear "noon" skies of April to "break the spirit's cloudy bands . . ., bathe [his] spirit in blue skies,/ . . . taste the springs of life," and, by participating in the rejuvenation of spring, achieve a state of transcendental unity with all nature:

> I feel the tumult of new birth;
> I waken with the wakening earth;
> I match the bluebird in her mirth;
>   And wild with wind and sun,
> A treasurer of unmortal days,
> I roam the glorious world with praise,
> The hillsides and the woodland ways,
>   Till earth and I are one.
>   (*Poems,* p. 128)

The ecstatic happiness of this, the final stanza of "April in the Hills," is chastened by the ensuing poem, "Forest Moods" with its concluding image of "the pale wood-daffodil . . . /Agloom with the doom of a sorrowful race" (*Poems*, p. 129); Lampman can allow himself to participate in the childlike innocence of a Spring in which even the wind is perceived as "romping" (*Poems*, p. 128), but, for him, consciousness of the dark, portentous side of life will not, cannot, be far behind if that life is to be seen steadily and whole.

For Lampman, then, the morning-Spring quadrant is a brief period of growth suspended in time before the inevitable movement towards the bright noon and dark night of mature life with their attendant potentialities and dangers. Like nature itself, Spring is to be enjoyed as a rejuvenating and regenerative period of happiness and tranquility, but not as an avenue of escape, a bower of bliss or a "land of Cockagne" (*SP*, p. 106), which divests the poet of purpose by rendering him oblivious to or unconcerned with the problems of mankind. The vacuum left by Christianity in Lampman's life was filled by Socialism, a fact which ensures that, for him, ecstatic experience in nature provides not an escape from but a context for activity in the world of men. To someone of Lampman's political persuasions, all past and all present experiences, be they in nature or not, are prologue to action in the social sphere, action which, if he is a poet, means writing verses that will "keep mankind in the gradual and eternal movement toward order and divine beauty and peace" (*SP*, p. 104). These are the reason why in the Keatsian "April," the second, and a key, poem in the *Among the Millet* volume, the poet rejoices in an almost epithalamic communion with the "unvexed . . . Maid month" of Spring, a communion which is purgative and restorative in that it allows him utterly to forget the shallowness and unnaturalness of a work-a-day world that is hostile to communication (and hence to community) and to idealism, but then turns "homeward" to the "dissonant roar" and the "hot heart" of the city. What the poet has achieved through his communion with April is a renewal of "calm hope" and a freedom from "desire or fret" which will enable him to pour out a balm upon the world. This psychological state of hopeful equinamity enables him to transcend through acceptance the darker and less attractive aspects of life (as he makes his way towards the city he cleaves through "cedar shadows" and perceives a "Mist of gnats that cloud the river shore . . ." as "Sweet" and "Soft") and, hence, to offer the times and his readers "Gifts of meek song . . . So that" — in the concluding lines of "April" — "we toil, brothers, without distress,/ In calm-eyed peace and godlike blamelessness" (*Poems,* p. 6), which is to say work as part of a fraternal community whose members, through the efforts of one of their number, the poet, have achieved a measure of tranquility and freedom from guilt within a fallen world. The fact that in the penultimate stanza of "April" the poet is "untroubled *yet*" (italics mine) by the city, and that, in *Among the Millet,* "April" is followed by "An October Sunset" with its closing image of ". . . the gray border of the night begun" (*Poems,* p. 7), indicates that, for Lampman, the humanitarian task of refashioning the world necessitates continual — though not continuous — contacts with the liberating and sustaining forces of nature, and, no less, continual returns to the work-a-day world of the city.

There is one more poem from the morning-Spring quadrant, "The Favorites of Pan" from *Lyrics of Earth,* which must detain the discussion for a few moments before it proceeds to examine in detail more of the major visionary poems in the *Among the Millet* volume. "The Favorites of Pan," as has been discussed elsewhere,[16] recounts a tale of how the "goat-foot Pan," identified by Lampman with the "sweet sound" of nature which, when heard especially "In April," "At noon and in the quiet of the night . . ." releases the tired "listener" from the cares of the world into a pristine vision of the unfallen world, bequeathed the power of his song, his "note divinely large," to the frogs of all lands. Listeners who are predisposed by their innocent and untroubled "love [of] life" are able, the poem concludes, to enter "again into the eternal mood/ Wherein the world was made" through the agency of the "Strange flute-like voices . . ." of frogs (*Poems,* pp. 131-133). There will be more to say about frogs and their power when the discussion turns to the sonnet-sequence which bears their name. The point that must be made here is that the goat-god Pan, whose gift, whether direct or indirect, is to permit his listeners to participate in a Golden Age dream, a joyous and pristine vision that nevertheless enables them to "see, wide on the eternal way,/ The services of earth, the life of man . . ." (*Poems,* p. 132), represents for Lampman a type both of the poet and of the human nature from which and to which he speaks. "Human nature," he writes in "The Modern School of

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[16] See "Pan and the Confederation Poets," *Canadian Literature,* 81 (Summer, 1979), 59-71.

Poetry in England," "may be represented by the ancient Pan — half human and half beast — but the human is the mightier part, and the whole is ever striving to be divine" (*SP*, p. 93). And in "The Poets," the sonnet located near the end of *Among the Millet,* Lampman characterizes poets as the "Children of Pan" who are

> Half brutish, half divine, but all of earth,
>   Half-way 'twixt hell and heaven, near to man,
> Full of this human torture and this mirth:
>   Life with its hope and error, toil and bliss,
>   Earth-born, earth-reared, ye know it as it is.
>   (*Poems*, p. 114)

Here, again, is the vision of human life which comprehends all its dualities, its polarities, its dreams (heaven) and its fears (hell), and which affirms, uncompromisingly, the poet's alignment with "earth" and "man," with the world "as it is." Lampman criticism has not always paid sufficient attention to the fact that his vision, even when focused on nature, is "near to man" — humanitarian, and so vitally concerned with bettering the human condition. Without that realization, a full understanding of Lampman's major poems and of their place in his canon is impossible.

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To be continued.