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

Part II

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What is very possible without a recognition of Lampman's essential humanitarianism is a failure to appreciate the ironies that pervade such key poems as "Among the Millet," "The Frogs," and "Freedom" and, hence, a failure properly to assess the validity of the alignments that are explored in these and other works. On a cursory reading, the five ballad stanzas of "Among the Millet" read like a simple and dew-drenched paean to the clouds perceived from the perspective and in the language of the pastoral poets "in the time of old":

> They called you sheep, the sky your sward,
> A field without a reaper;
> They called the shining sun your lord,
> The shepherd wind your keeper.
> (*Poems*, p. 3)

But the "They" of this engagement with the classical, European tradition are not Archibald Lampman, and neither is he one of them. On the contrary, many poems in the volume—including "April" (which immediately follows "Among the Millet") and "Among the Timothy" (whose original title of "Among the Millet" attests to its importance both for itself and also, perhaps, as an antidote for its namesake)—make abundantly clear the fact that Lampman was an uneasy poet in a new country who, when he looked to the sky did so, not for "soft white clouds" (the fleecy source and symbol in his work, as we know, of blocked illumination), but for a vision from which to write for the amelioration of his fellow, earth-born men. Similarly, when Lampman conceived of fields he thought not of a "shepherd wind" and a lordly sun, but of men—carters ("Heat"),

mowers ("Among the Timothy"), ploughmen ("In November")—going about their daily work, ideally in harmony with the organic rhythms of the earth. Thus the final stanzas of "Among the Millet," which are addressed to the sky, must be read as a recognition of the limitations of the old-time poets and of the sky-oriented perspective. They are addressed to the clouds:

> Your sweetest poets I will deem
> The men of old for moulding
> In simple beauty such a dream
> And I could lie beholding,
>
> Where daisies in the meadow toss
> The wind from morn till even,
> Forever shepherd you across
> The shining field of heaven.
> (*Poems*, p. 3)

Unquestionably the merely sweet and simply beautiful dream of a pastorl realm immune to time had its appeal for Lampman, but he recognized that there was more to life than sweetness and beauty and more to living than passively and perpetually looking at clouds (and at that with borrowed eyes). "*I could lie*," which defines itself against "I will deem" in the stanzas just quoted and through "I am fain" in the first stanza of the poem, is a key phrase; the poet "*could*" succumb, he could "*lie*" (this word, like the earlier "fain," is indicative of the deception involved), but that does not mean that he "will." Lampman was not a member of the fraternity of lying poets. He recognized the attractions of raising his eyes from the here and now, of focusing on the sky and the past rather than on the earth and the present. But he also knew that where there is a will ("I could lie . . ."), the way is open to active meditation in nature and positive action in society.

Lampman's most sustained treatment of the attractions and deficiencies of escapism is "The Frogs," the fourth poem (after "Among the Millet," "April," and "An October Sunset") in the *Among the Millet* volume. The opening sonnet in "The Frogs" sequence characterizes the "Breathers of wisdom . . ." in a qualified manner that should quickly alert the reader to the inadequacy of what they have to offer the poet: their "wisdom" is "won without a quest . . ." (that is: too easily come-by); they are "uncouth dreamers" whose voices are "strange" and "Sweet" (that is: unknowingly and irrational, but attractive, purveyors of unreality); and the lands of which they flute

are cognates of the "land of Cockagne," places where there is neither "change" nor "grief" but only "everlasting rest," "glad days," slow time ("moments are as aeons"), and a "sun" which is past its peak of energy and, indeed, "ever sunken"—in a perpetual stasis which connotes deadly inactivity—"Half-way toward the west" (*Poems*, p. 7). The frogs have been in the past for the poet a source of an attractive illusion, an engrossing fancy, which he now recognizes as delusive: "Often to me who heard you . . . / With close rapt ears," he says, "it *could not but seem*/ That earth, our mother . . . / Made you her soul, and bade you pipe for her" (italics added). The method of the central three sonnets of "The Frogs" sequence is to recreate for the reader the languorous, solipsistic, and—since the poem takes as two of its points of departure Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" and Tennyson's "The Lotos-Eaters"—even narcotic state induced by the constant and circumambient murmurings of the frogs. From morning (and spring, characterized by anticipation and ignorance: "hope was strong, we knew not why or how . . ."), through noon (characterized by neither "grief" nor "loneliness" nor "delight"), the frogs have seduced the poet into an unwise passiveness, a voluptuous unconcern for post-lapsarian reality. Here in its entirety is the third of "The Frogs" sonnets:

> All the day long, wherever pools might be
> Among the golden meadows, where the air
> Stood in a dream, as it were moorèd there
> For ever in a noon-tide reverie,
> Or where the birds made riot of their glee
> In the still woods, and the hot sun shone down,
> Crossed with warm lucent shadows on the brown
> Leaf-paved pools, that bubbled dreamily,
>
> Or far away in whispering river meads
> And watery marshes where the brooding noon,
> Full with the wonder of its own sweet boon,
> Nestled and slept among the noiseless reeds,
> Ye sat and murmured, motionless as they,
> With eyes that dreamed beyond the night and day.
> (*Poems*, p. 8)

A far cry is this from the "thoughts grow[n] keen and clear," the mind made sharp and lucid, in the noon light of "Heat" or from the "thought" made passionate and "rapt" by "the spirit of humanity" "In the City" (*Poems*, p. 259). Appropriately, the sonnet lacks a volta, allows the listener no pause between octave and sestet to

gather his thoughts against the drowsy numbness and stupefying stasis induced by the frogs.

The final sonnet in "The Frogs" sequence is explicit in its condemnation of the "stillness of enchanted reveries," the thought-entrapping and world-excluding bower of bliss, into which the frogs have in the past misled their listeners. With eyes "half-closed" in a torpor which makes clear-sightedness impossible, with "brain and spirit" "Bound" by "some sweet wonder dream," the poet has been led "astray," seduced into ignoring the "sorrow," "dismay," and "discord" of the world, deluded into perceiving "The voices of mankind, the outer roar," as "strange and murmurous, faint and far away" (*Poems*, p. 9). The fact that the words "strange" and "murmurous", which had earlier been applied to the airy voices of the frogs, are here applied to the sounds of humanity is in itself an indication of the perverse effects of the "uncouth dreamers" on the credulous listener. The sonnet sequence closes with a final recognition of the limited consciousness and false security that are attendant upon accession to the dreams engendered by the voices of the frogs:

> Rapt 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 is only sweet.
> (*Poems*, pp. 10-11)

A condition in which "dreams are real" and "life is *only* sweet" (as opposed to the "not . . . / . . . always sharp or always sweet . . ." of "Heat") is attractive but insufficient for Lampman. Not fortuitously "The Frogs" sequence is immediately followed and qualified in *Among the Millet* by "An Impression," a laconic and chastening recognition of the realities of linear time and mortal life, of the agonies of human hearts:

> I felt the march, the silent press
> Of time, and held my breath;
> I saw the haggard dreadfulness
> Of dim old age and death.
> (*Poems*, p. 10)

And this is followed in *Among the Millet* by "Spring on the River," a prayer to the sun to shine long and hot on the "face of the river" whose sounds include, not just those of "myriad streams," the "gray

sparrow," and a droning cataract, but also those of river "boats," the "hewing and hammering [of] nails," and a moaning "saw-mill" (*Poems*, pp. 10-11). Like the Keats of the "Ode to a Nightingale," the Lampman of "Frogs" awakens from drowsy numbness to address himself to the sights and sounds, the pains and strife, of the real world of men.

It is impossible to discuss "The Frogs" without thinking of Lampman's youthful fairy tale, "Hans Fingerhut's Frog Lesson," which was written and published (twice) well before the appearance of *Among the Millet* in 1888. Like D.G. Rosetti's "Hand and Soul" (1850) and D.C. Scott's "The Piper of Arll" (1905), two pieces with which it has clear affinities,[17] "Hans Fingherhut's Frog Lesson" is a displaced examination of the relation between an artist, his art, and his audience. But Lampman's "Fairy Tale" is a *kunstmärchen* and, as such, has affinities with such tales as Ruskin's *The King of the Golden River* (1851), where the naive form of the folktale is used as the vehicle for a sophisticated moral and social theme. At the beginning of Lampman's *kunstmärchen*, the poet, thwarted in his desire for "unlimited good living, sympathy, and above all . . . praise" ceases writing "fresh and joyous" treatments of "wonderful and beautiful things . . ." (*SP*, p. 21). He turns instead, in his "anger," first to an art of "wrath and bitterness" and then, after breaking his harp and becoming a tailor, to "scrawling satires" on the gates of the city and to singing "chants so dreadful and ferocious" that little children "are afraid of him." Resolving to abandon his work and the town, to sever forever his relation to society, he ventures forth into the countryside, into nature, where, far from gaining relief from the hateful siege of disappointments within himself, he becomes "fiercer," cursing the "happy and beautiful" things around him and doing violence to a "little stream" whose cheerfulness and contentment drive him to angry distraction and, finally, to exhausted sleep. He is awakened from his sleep by a traditional, gnomic figure, an elf, who castigates him for his violence to the "beautiful stream" and for his failure to understand its "wonderful lesson" (*SP*, p. 23). In order that he might remedy his shortcomings by finding out "the meaning of the stream-song," Hans is turned by the elf into "a great frog, with webbed feet, wide ugly mouth, and staring eyes"—a description which in itself is reve-

[17]See "Rossetti's 'Hand and Soul'," *English Studies in Canada*, 3 (Winter, 1977) 445-457 for an examination of the tripartite structure of the central portions of that prose-poem.

latory of Lampman's attitude to frogs. As a frog, Hans quickly assimilates himself to the (Darwinian) laws of primal nature, eating insects, avoiding frog-eating cranes, and seeking the company of "thousands of other frogs" whose "discordant bellowings"—true to his form in the human world—he outdoes in "depth and harshness . . ." (*SP*, p. 23). Such activities, needless to say, are inimical to an understanding of the stream-song. Hence Hans makes three wrong guesses as to the meaning of the song; he suggests: (1) that the song is simply a joyful celebration of the gladness everywhere evident in nature ("good," says the elf, but not correct); (2) that it is a brave attempt on the part of an unhappy stream to keep its own spirits up ("farther away" says the elf); and (3) that it is, in fact, a sad, long-suffering, and hopeless song emanating from the stream's recognition of the wretchedness of all things, including man and especially itself, which is only misinterpreted as a joyous song by listeners who "themselves for a time are joyous" ("farther from the stream song than ever," says the elf). It is obvious that what the poet is being asked to discover is the proper reading of the Book of Nature, a book in which, in Hans's translation of the stream's song ("millers dam me . . . and men are wretched"), man figures prominently. It is also obvious that the poet is unlikely to discover the secret of the stream's song while listening to and competing with the discordant and circumambient "bellowings" either of frogs or—since Lampman stresses that the two realms are similar (though *not* identical)—of people.

So it is that the movement towards understanding begins for Hans when he decides to abandon the society of the frogs and return "up the stream to the place," the point of intersection between human and primal nature, "where he first became a frog," there "to see if he could not make something of [the stream-song] in the coolness and stillness of the forest" (*SP*, p. 25). When he finds the spot he is able to ponder, with mind and senses relatively free from simplistic and erroneous preconceptions, the beauty and significance of external nature, discovering in its complex sounds, in "the murmur of the water mingled with the sigh of the midges" (the category of creatures on which, significantly, he had earlier fed) what "seem[s] to him the loveliest song he [has] ever heard; neither merry nor sad, but happy and peaceful" (*SP*, p. 25). This is still, of course, a limited response (the qualifying word 'seems' indicates the gap that exists between primal and human nature), but it is followed by an act, weeping,

which establishes that the poet, being human (earlier in the tale it is stated that "no other frogs could weep . . ." *SP*, p. 24), is apart from external nature but capable of responding sympathetically towards it. Significantly, each of Hans's human tears becomes a "little fairy no larger than a gnat, and . . . they formed a ring on the stream, shining in the moonlight, and . . . the ring grew wider and wider as the drops ran down" (*SP*, p. 26). The significance of this important occurrence is that it shows the outcome of sympathetic and imaginative human activity—the creation of tears/fairies, of super natural creatures which coexist in the same dimension as "gnats" but are nevertheless not of the lower natural orders—to be an expanding circle, an image of perfection and, to borrow D.C. Scott's phrase, a circle of affection which emanates from the poet and, at the same time, links him with all of nature, as well as with eternity (see *MI*, p. 37). Finally, "two specially large tears" join together at the "middle of the ring" to form a female fairy who is not only "larger and . . . more beautiful than the rest" but who also acts as their spokesman, offering in a "sweet small voice" (a cognate surely of the "still small voice" of conscience) to sing the "song of the stream in [Hans's] mortal tongue." Since this female creature of natural supernaturalism who offers the poet the words of the song (which appear, incidentally, as "Song of the Stream-Drops" in *Among the Millet*) surely has her ancestry in the traditional Muse figure, her creation and characteristics may be taken as imagining a process by which poetic inspiration originates in human sympathy, becomes manifest through synthesis, and finally, speaks with the inner voice of a sweetened and active human conscience. That the beautiful fairy turns, after the singing of the song, into the gnomic elf is no surprise. That the elf explains to Hans the social implications of the song, however, serves to indicate, once again, the social-aesthetic concerns at the heart of Lampman's thinking.

Before discussing the song's social implications, however, the point needs to be made that, when the "fairy *ring*" begins to sing what is now called "the song of the water-drops" (the shift in title suggests that they sing as one yet as individuals) while going "*round*" in a circle, Hans is placed in a similar position and experiences similar potential and danger as the poet in "Heat" and "The Frogs": he "would have been entranced and stupefied with wonder and delight *had his mind not been set with all its faculties* to catch the fairy song" (*SP*, p. 26, italics added). The song which the weary yet alert poets hear, though somewhat reminiscent initially of Tennyson's "The

Brook," is a joyous statement of the tendency of all life towards reabsorption in the "sea," conceived as maternal and "sheltering." "We labor and sing sweet songs, but we never moan," declare the water-drops; "Gladly we sing for our mother . . ./Songs of beauty and peace, freedom and infinite rest . . . For we dream and dream of our mother . . ." (*SP*, pp. 26-27). Needless to say, the perspective of "The Song of the Stream-Drops" is innocent; in *Among the Millet* it is preceded, probably for the purpose of contrast, by the ". . . crying in the dark" of "Midnight" and the bitter-sweet vision of "Between the Rapids;" and even in "Hans Fingerhut's Frog Lesson" it is described as having a special appeal to "all the good children in the town . . ." and likened to the songs that Hans sang in his own "youth" (*SP*, pp. 26-27). Yet, for Lampman, it was imperative for the poet to retain a degree of "innocence," to retain the "sense of wonder" that would enable him to discern the higher (divine) tendencies operating in both external and human nature, and, hence, to write poetry that helps "mankind in the gradual and eternal movement toward order and divine beauty and peace." Like Blake, Lampman valued the state of experience, but not to the exclusion of innocence, and *vice versa*; when the Canadian poet states that "true art must be naive" (*SP*, p. 103), he means that it must issue from a mind which, in a manner somewhat akin to Blake's state of organized innocence, comprehends both innocence and experience and, moreover, understands life teleologically—as a purposive movement towards what is, spiritually, "the All,/God or the Immensity . . ." and, socially, "The Land of Pallas," the earthly paradise based on human wisdom. It is the realization that "everything in the world has something great and noble to strive towards," the elf tells Hans, that brings happiness and peace to the water-drops. And he concludes: "You, too, . . . have your sea to seek without ceasing—a wondrous and absorbing sea of strength and beauty and peace. You can never come to it, but you can approach ever nearer and nearer. If you understand this rightly, the troubles and vexations of life, all its trials and difficulties will no longer fret you but only arm you with the wide knowledge and power" (*SP*, p. 27). Once the teleological tendency of life has been grasped, peace of mind and purposeful activity follow, and the cognizant are able, not to ignore the unpleasant aspects of life, but calmly to acknowledge them and, in so doing, to equip themselves ("arm," of course, has militaristic connotations) with wisdom and potency. Now it is possible that the author of this homily is

a deceiving elf, a figure akin to the frogs whose wisdom must be rejected as insufficient. Against this possibility, however, must be placed the fact that the elf's gnomic speech to Hans has the tone of a significant pronouncement on life, society, and, by extension, on the social-aesthetic problems which the poet has been confronting. Nevertheless, it should be noticed that, although the final words of the elf's speech—". . . but only arm you with the wide knowledge and power"—contain a definite article that points towards intelligent and effective activity ('*the* knowledge and power *to* . . .'), he offers his listener no plan for poetic activity in the human world. It should also be noticed that the final sentence of the elf's speech is conditional; the listener must "understand . . . rightly" the import of the lesson which, it should be stressed, turns insistently on the necessity "to strive . . . to seek without ceasing . . ."

It is apparently with a right understanding of his lesson that Hans Fingerhut returns, after a night of 'thinking *and* listening' (*SP*, p. 27) by the stream, "homeward" (*SP*, p. 28). At least he is correct in using an enlarging and enlightening experience, away from the city, not as the basis for a *contemptus mundi*, but rather, as the context for a return to the human world. But, although Hans has had hints of the proper way to proceed and is moving in the right direction, he soon evinces signs of an unrealistic and limited response to rural and urban society. The pastoral sounds of "birds," "grasshoppers," and "labourers" only 'seem' (the word "seemed" is used twice) to him to be cognates of the stream's song. And, as he makes his way back from the fields to the town, he fails to distinguish between rural life, whose ways run parallel to nature's, and urban life, whose ways do not. Thus:

> . . . the noise and stir of the streets were to become quite pleasant to him. He no longer walked with his usual defiant stride, downcast face and scowling brow. The portly figures and round faces of the busy burghers, and the well-filled purses at their girdles no longer made him fierce and envious, but he greeted them all with a quiet and pleasant "good morning."
>
> (*SP*, p. 28)

It may be said positively of Hans's response in this passage that it shows him ignoring neither the city nor its inhabitants; but, because

of his own settled peace of mind and freedom from envy, he is able to observe and countenance even the unpleasant aspects of greed with conciliatory manners and genial speech. But is this sufficient? Is Hans truly 'armed' with "wide knowledge and power?" Has he 'understood rightly' the elf's lesson? Or has he allowed himself to be morally disarmed where he should have been moved to consider humanitarian action?

To answer these questions it is necessary to differentiate between Hans's posture *vis-à-vis* the urban, capitalist world and that of Lampman. F.W. Watt has done a valuable service by pointing out the relevance of D.C. Scott's description of the "downcast glance, with . . . eyes fixed upon the ground . . ."[1] that Lampman "habitually" adopted while walking in the city to the conclusion of "Hans Fingerhut's Frog Lesson." It must also be recalled that Lampman himself was fierce in his lacerations of *cupiditas* in such poems as "To a Millionaire" and "Epitaph on a Rich Man," that his canon contains many uncompromising and authentic comments on urban life, and, moreover, that he was convinced of the necessity in his own day for satirical as well as visionary poetry.[2] From these facts it follows that Lampman would be unlikely to give his full endorsement to Hans's quiescent countenancing of urban and capitalist evil. The limited nature of Hans's response to society is indicated in the "Fairy Tale" itself in several ways: by the judgemental terms in which the anti-capitalist narrator describes the "burghers;" by the facile contentment with which Hans addresses his songs (themselves described as "never . . . bitter and complaining" but "all sweet and beautiful and wise"), not to the adult, working members of his society, but only to "little children" and to "the great;" and by the fact that, contrary to the elf's statement that he must "seek without ceasing" in life, he becomes a non-questing, static singer of songs which he comes to believe—perhaps with a suggestion of delusion—have been given to him by "the Great Father" (*SP*, pp. 28-29). In marked contrast to Hans in this last respect is the artist-protagonist of Lampman's other fairy tale, "The Fairy Fountain," who learns of the impossibility of serving art and Mammon, dedicates his life to hard work, family life, and charitable acts as well as to his "singing," and feels the necessity to return "once every week" to his fairy world—a "hidden land" in which man toils in harmony with nature—to reexperience "the beautiful

[1]See "The Masks of Archibald Lampman," in *AL*, pp. 203-206.
[2]See *MI*.

things that [are] told in his songs" (*SP*, p. 49). Significantly, Anders Christensen's canon encompasses various subjects and modes; his songs are "sometimes of labour and patience . . . of anger or courage or fear, of mirth or sadness, of weeping or revelry . . . [of] towns . . . toil . . . and all the changes and sad and lovely things of life" (*SP*, p. 37). By comparison with this the social-aesthetic alignment that is examined in the "Frog Lesson" is at once less specific and more teleological, a fact that does nothing to excuse Hans's unrealistic and limited notions of his subject-matter, audience, and aims. It is now possible to recognize that even the droll title of "Hans Fingerhut's Frog Lesson"—the German word "Fingerhut" meaning, literally, finger-hat (thimble), a merely self-protective and utilitarian tool of the protagonist's trade as a tailor but, perhaps, also a hint in the direction of his ultimate poetic function as merely a social anodyne—is intended to alert the reader to the insufficiencies of Hans's poetic posture. Lampman, after all, was not writing for children. Surely when he published "Hans Fingerhut's Frog Lesson" first in Edward Playter's *Man* in 1884 and then in Trinity College's *Rouge et Noir* in 1886, he did so, not to elicit a simple-minded or, indeed, a childish response to his *kunstmärchen* but to provoke his (adult) readers, albeit by touching the child in each of them, into serious thought about what constitutes a partial and what a full response on the part of the poetic and thinking man to external nature and to human society.

As shown by the well-known variant ending to "The Land of Pallas," which has the visionary poet "madly" seeking re-entry to his utopian dream land (see *AL*, p. 214), Lampman was sometimes tempted to depict the lot of the man who commits himself to socio-aesthetic activity as an unhappy and hopeless one. Yet the entire concluding section of "The Land of Pallas" as it appears in the *Alcyone* volume, is what Lampman wished to be read and remembered; and it provides the most complete statement in his canon of the social function of the visionary poet. Like Hans (or, indeed, like the poet in "April"), the speaker of "The Land of Pallas" returns from vision to reality; however, unlike Hans, he truly confronts the evils of the city (" . . . the proud and fortunate . . . faring/In fatness and fine robes, the poor oppressed and slow . . ." *Poems*, p. 209) and responds with a sympathy, a "deep solicitude and wondering pity . . . ," that prompts him to address "the crowd . . . in a mighty city . . . ." The substance of his message to that crowd is *both* the attractions of an alternative society based on "brotherly Communion"

and the horrors of their present condition of "disunion/ . . . self-worship, and the waste of life." The equivalent in poetry of such a double-pronged encounter would, of course, be a canon containing, like Lampman's own, both idealistic and forensic poems whose aim is to effect the meliorization of the human condition. For his humanitarian efforts in spreading the news from nowhere, the speaker of "The Land of Pallas" is labelled an "anarch" by the "powerful" and dismissed as "mad" by "they that served them . . . ." In the final stanza of the poem he defiantly asserts:

> And still I preached, and wrought, and still I bore my message,
> For well I knew that on and upward without cease
> The spirit works forever, and by Faith and Presage
> That somehow yet the end of human life is Peace.
> (*Poems*, p. 210)

While the conditional words "somehow" and "yet" indicate some uncertainty about the ways, means, and time-scheme through which the teleological design is fulfilling itself, the visionary and humanitarian poet remains committed to activity in the social realm because, with a certainty derived from faith and foreknowledge, he believes that a melioristic tendency is operating in human life. For Lampman, then, a belief in the "beauty at the goal of life" (*Poems*, p. 301) provides the foundation for the poet's necessary, educative activities in society and for his equally necessary, revitalizing excursions to nature.

With confirmation, once again, that Lampman conceived of the poet's vocation as an idealistic and purposeful movement to and from, from and to nature and society, it is possible to arrive at a full reading of "Freedom," the often misunderstood poem that follows "Heat" and "Among the Timothy" in *Among the Millet*. Since "Freedom" strongly recalls Swinburne both in its reliance on rushing anapests and in its depiction of the earth as "Our broad strong mother . . ./Mother of all things beautiful, blameless . . ." (*Poems*, p. 17), it is worth noticing that in his essay on "The Modern School of Poetry in England" Lampman takes the author of *Songs Before Sunrise* to task for writing "mere vague communistic chants, mad glorifications of liberty, defining nothing and teaching nothing" (*SP*, p. 101). Behind Swinburne's "lovely mastery of expression," says Lampman, there is no "thought," "truth," "reason," or "order," no sympathy for "the homely things of life" but, rather, a licentious and destructive failure to differentiate human nature from "original," or

"animal nature" (*SP*, pp. 99-103). Now is it not possible that the Swinburnian form and content of Lampman's "Freedom," particularly the poem's coercive and anti-rational anapests and its insistent and complete endorsement of "nature" over "men," are intended, like the mellifluous sounds of "The Frogs," to entrap the unwary reader, to replicate the attractions and to reveal the insufficiencies of a freedom that is false because divorced from social responsibility and predicated upon an erroneous understanding of "Mother" nature?

The narrative movement of the poem takes the speaker quickly away from the city, which is perceived in wholly negative terms as a realm of usury, discord, darkness and harsh light where "pity is dying" and "beauty is lying" (a phrase that may comment on the deceptiveness of the poem itself), towards the "arms of our mother," "the innocent earth" where, he asserts, "the voices of grief and of battle are dumb,/And the whole world laughs with the light of her mirth" (*Poems*, p. 17). In fact, nature turns out to be a place which, though technically innocent, contains many suggestions of the post-fallen condition, and which speaks eloquently of unhappiness, conflict and death: by the "swelling breast of the dimpled river" a "kingfisher" watches for its prey; under the "withering fires" of noon "rough bees trample the creamy bosoms" of flowers; in the "crannied gloom of . . . stones and . . . briers" the "gray snakes hide;" and within the "dim woods" are the "tombs/Of the dead trees soft in their sepulchres . . . ." (*Poems,* pp. 18-19). All these things, together with others suggestive of nature's cycle of birth, copulation, and death in both its joyful and melancholy aspects, the poet passes over *en route* to the hills where he is able to gain the distance that lends enchantment to the worlds of men and nature by seeing them in panoramic prospect:

> Up to the hills, where the winds restore us,
> Clearing our eyes to the beauty before us,
> Earth with the glory of life on her breast
> Earth with the gleam of her cities and streams.
> (*Poems*, p. 19)

At this point the speaker may have achieved either a clear and comprehensive vision of reality which includes the variousness of human labours or, given the fact that he must ignore the darkness to see the glory, a baseless and delusive dream of an innocent world. In either case, it is crucial to notice that the final stanza of "Freedom"

effectively deconstructs the poem's title and the speaker's credibility, showing that what has been achieved is not freedom at all, but an exclusive, misanthropic, and entrapping state of childish dependence on 'mother nature':

> Here we shall commune with her and *no other*;
> Care and the battle of life shall cease;
> Men, her degenerate children, behind us,
> *Only* the might of her beauty shall *bind* us,
> Full of rest, as we gaze on the face of our mother,
> Earth in the health and the strength of her peace.
> (*Poems*, p. 19)

The words chosen for emphasis—"no other," "Only," and "bind"—in this stanza, together with its speaker's obliviousness to the rest of mankind, are reminiscent of "The Frogs," a fact which alone should counsel the reader to reject the speaker's self-satisfied characterization of all his fellow men as "degenerate children" and to decline his exclusive invitation to enter into a condition of infantile and static bondage with mother nature. Nature is a friend to man when she serves to relieve his fretfulness and to aid his meditations. But for Lampman, as for Arnold, "Nature and man can never be fast friends" (*MA*, p. 27) because they must not be inseparable; the "Fool" who does not realize this, will "rest her slave."[3] Like "The Frogs," "Freedom" turns out to be the exploration of an escape route, a strategy of avoidance, which is shown to be superficially attractive but ultimately imprisoning—a dead end which, in this case, offers no egress to the path that leads from the regenerated individual to the meliorization of society unless the poem's "we," its speaker and reader, do an about-face and turn homeward.

One of Lampman's finest poems, and the one chosen to end the present discussion, has not received the critical attention demanded by the fact that its original title of "Among the Millet" would have given it a central position in the *Among the Millet* volume.[4]

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[3]Cf. "On the Companionship with Nature" (*Poems*, pp. 258-259) where Lampman enjoins his readers to "be much with Nature," as "children of one common birth,/Discerning in each natural fruit of earth/Kinship and bond with this diviner clay" so that their "bodies" and "thoughts" may be regenerated. The difference between the poem and "Freedom" is the difference between a "bond" that is visible to the discerning eye and a bondage that result when mature thought and discernment are abandoned.

[4]See Kathy Mezei, "Lampman Among the Timothy," *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews*, 5 (Fall/Winter, 1979), 61.

Placed between "Heat" and "Freedom" in *Among the Millet*—which is to say, amid the cluster of poems that deal with the proper approach to nature—"Among the Timothy" also locates itself in the noon-summer quadrant of Lampman's cosmology, drawing heavily on both the creative energy of the midday sunlight and, like "Heat," on the circular imagery of the turning world. Indeed, "Among the Timothy," besides being an important and successful poem in its own right, is a more complex and more satisfying treatment than "Heat" of the central patterns and concerns of Lampman's visionary poetry.

Like "Heat," "Among the Timothy" begins with two human presences in the landscape: the poet himself, the perceiving I/eye of the poem, and a "mower," a figure who is not seen but imagined going about his work "Long hours ago, while yet the morn was blithe . . . ." (*Poems*, p. 13). With his "gleaming scythe" the mower who, in the poet's imagination, slowly sheared a "circle clean and grey" among the "clover" and "daisies," is both a literal mower, a man doing a day's labour in the Ottawa Valley, and an allegorical figure, a representation of Time itself, whose workings are not to be ignored but, rather, contemplated and understood. So it is that the poet has taken his place on or near a "stump," the still but dead centre of the mower's circle, amongst the "dead daisies" and "scented swathes" of clover whose colour, "gray," is, significantly, that of the "blind gray streets" of the cacophanous and stultifying city from which he has come. The significance of the reappearance of gray in the city and in the circle, and, moreover, of the presence in the circle of a "stump" and "dead daisies," is that the very poet who, in the third stanza, will compare the moods which led him, while in the city, into dreams of "sweeter," "enchanted" realms, to a "flower," "leaves" and trees that are now "lifeless" (*Poems*, p. 14), has sought out in nature a locale whose attributes are those of his own dead and uncreative condition. Death and the city—the forces hostile to life and creativity—far from being denied are comprehended and assimilated within a circle which both includes the linear movement of time and evokes the cycles of organic, universal nature. But initiation into this fact, though sought by the poet, will not come immediately. When in the city, he had "strayed" into escapist dreams. Now, in the country, in an as yet unregenerated psychological state, he will initially experience unregenerated desires and dreams, turning his vision upwards, away from the earth and from thought and, proclaiming: ". . . it is sweet to lie/And watch the grass and the few-clouded

sky,/Nor think but only dream" (*Poems*, p. 14). While the negative aspects of this resolution (the rejection of thought, the emphasis on mere sweetness, the implications of "lie") are clear enough, it also contains positive features: the sky is relatively cloud-free (hence, penetrated by the illuminating and regenerative light of the sun) and the poet is watching (thus, actively observing) not just the clouds but also the grass—he is, potentially at least, not "blind" to the life around him.

The middle stanzas of "Among the Timothy" (i.e., from stanza three onwards) discover the poet purging his mind of that in him which is fretful, blind, dead and, hence, hostile to imaginative thought, clear observation, and creative regeneration. At first, however, he resolves to free his "overtasked brain" from the mindless and uncreative "search and toil" of the work-a-day world by simply and passively letting "it go, as one that hath no skill,/To take what shape it will . . ." (*Poems*, pp. 14-15). The possible shapes that the poet fancies his mind assuming—an ant "slow-burrowing in the earthly gloom,/A spider bathing in the dew at morn,/Or a brown bee in wayward fancy borne . . ."—indicate that this strategy, while at least earth-oriented, is itself a "*wayward fancy*,"—delusive (spiders, as Lampman well knew, do not "bathe" in dew) and unlikely to be productive of illumination (light does not come to the subterranean ant). That the strategy, in its negation of thought and its renunciation of humanity, is also potentially irresponsible, because careless as opposed to carefree, is made very clear in the following stanza, where the poet's attention is given to "little breezes," essentially trivial forces, which are characterized as purposeless, unobservant, annoying ('teasing' may also carry the sense of destructive), sensual, and rambling. They are, in a word, childish rather than child-like:

> Hither and thither o'er the rocking grass
> The little breezes, blithe as they are blind,
> Teasing the slender blossoms pass and pass,
> Soft-footed children of the gipsy wind,
> To taste of every purple-fringed head
> Before the bloom is dead;
> And scarcely heed the daisies that, endowed
> With stems so short they cannot see, up-bear
> Their innocent sweet eyes distressed, and stare
> Like children in a crowd.
>
> (*Poems*, p. 15)

This stanza reveals the poet, unlike the capricious breezes, imaginatively observing external nature in a sympathetic manner which discovers resemblances with the human world, which heeds the less-gifted but dignified "daisies" and sees in them a reflection of the world of the city. External nature, when properly seen and correctly interpreted, does not take the poet away from human considerations but back to them.

The realization in the central stanza of "Among the Timothy" (the one just quoted) that, when read with imaginative reason, the Book of Nature has lessons for the world of Man, brings about a movement from death to life in the latter part of the poem. The stump in the centre of the gray circle is replaced in the poet's attention by a "pale poplar" in the "central heat," by a living presence whose shadow provides protection for the "clover" in the intense light and whose leaves "beat/Together," the humanizing poet observes, "like innumerable small hands" "when the wind comes . . ." (*Poems*, p. 15). Since the poplar is perceived as child-like by the poet who is himself becoming child-like in the only manner possible, which is, to say, through imaginative and thoughtful sympathy, it demands to be seen in a manner akin to Coleridge's Aeolian harp as emblematic of a poetic imagination activated by the energies, in this instance the "heat" and the "wind," of external nature. This being the case, it is imperative to note that, while the leaves of the poplar are described as protective, "glimmering," and child-like when *activated* (the operative word) by the forces of nature, those same leaves, when passively hanging in a state of entropy, are seen negatively: "with the calm, as in *vague* dreams *astray*" (my italics) they

> Hang wan and silver-*gray*;
> Like *sleepy* maenads, who in *pale* surprise,
> *Half-wakened* by a prowling beast, have *crept*
> Out of the hidden covert, where they slept,
> At noon with *languid* eyes.
> (*Poems*, p. 15)

When static the leaves are like "maenads," like the sensual, female servants of Bacchus who, exhausted, perhaps, by a night of stupefying frenzy, are brutally roused into semi-awareness in the noon light. Lampman is here rejecting "dreams" that are "vague," as well as sickly, pallid, and relatively colourless, because they are not focussed and energized in a mind made fully conscious and active of its own

volition. He is also, just as surely, indicating the power of nature to awaken fully the faculties of even the most "sleepy" and "languid," the strayed revellers, among us.

In the triumphant, concluding stanzas of "Among the Timothy" the poet achieves a rounded and harmonious vision of the world. It is a vision which discovers correspondences, discerns answering harmonies, between the natural and the human by comprehending both: in the "noonday glow" the "creak" of the "crickets" echoes, but cannot, must not, be thought of as exactly the same as, the "jerk" of man-made "wheels" which "ever and anon" steal into the intently listening ears of the poet, making him aware of human "toil that moves alway . . ."; in the "hot mid-year" the "dry cicada" is a "crazy fiddler" plying his "wiry bow" but the encircling orchestral sounds emanate partly from man and, moreover, include the "din" of "small grasshoppers" which becomes "soft and silvery thin" (*Poems*, pp. 15-16) by grace of the poet's imaginative comprehension of its place in a larger harmony. It is precisely because he is able to include natural and human, pleasant and unpleasant, noises within a reconciling harmony that the poet is able now, in the penultimate stanza, to hear only "peaceful sound" (in the singular), to apprehend a comprehensive harmony that brings the peace which rests on understanding. Laid bare, like the poplar tree, to the energizing forces of "wind and sun," he is now able to "lie and feel the soft hours wane" because to so "lie," with mind and senses alert to and accepting of the passage of time, is to engage in an act, not of deception, but of wise passiveness. Now mental anguish disappears, albeit temporarily ("discomfort of the brain" is only "unseen" and "shadowy-footed care" is but asleep), and the poet is able for a time to "forget" the fretful and counter-creative vexations of his own life without abdicating control over his own thoughts and perceptions:

> And gliding on, quite fashioned to forget,
> From dream to dream I bid my spirit pass
> Out into the pale green ever-swaying grass
> To brood, but no more fret.
> (*Poems*, p. 16)

The verb "bid" is critical to these lines, suggesting as it does an act of conscious violition which recalls and corrects the poet's earlier decision merely to "let [his thoughts] go" and, moreover, indicating that he now has the ability either to move "From dream to dream"

without being trapped by any one of them or, better, to move outwards from dream to external nature, a realm of growth ("green") and motion ("swaying") where the poet may "brood" in all the senses of that resonant word[5]—may think deeply, creatively, and actively on the world around him. That is precisely what occurs in the magnificient, concluding stanza of "Among the Timothy" where the poet, never for a moment forgetting either his position in linear time or his status as a sentient observer, attains a golden vision in which infinite circles of perfection are perceived as vital and imminent in the natural temporal world and in which the poet, with his senses and mind vitally active, achieves a bitter-sweet state of equipoise that partakes of both sight and insight:

> And hour by hour among all shapes that grow
> Of purple mints and daisies gemmed with gold
> In sweet unrest my visions come and go;
> I feel and hear and with quiet eyes behold;
>
> And hour by hour, the ever-journeying sun,
> In gold and shadow spun,
> Into mine eyes and blood, and through the dim
> Green glimmering forest of the grass shines down,
> Till flower and blade, and every cranny brown,
> And I are soaked with him.
>
> (*Poems* p. 16)

While this golden and bejewelled vision clearly comprehends, not only light and eternity, but also shadow and time, it may superficially seem to exclude man, except in the form of the poet himself, from consideration. If the reader has read the poem with care, however, he will realize that the stanza incorporates through allusion the poet's direct and indirect musings on the world of men earlier in the poem: the "daisies" will thus recall the "dead daisies" of the opening stanza and the "daisies" that are likened to distressed "children in a crowd" in the central stanza; similarly, the "purple mints" remember the "purple-fringed head[s]" of the flowers which were earlier 'tasted' by the blind breezes, and the word "glimmering" recalls the leaves of the poplar tree beating together "like innumerable small hands." Moreover, the sounds heard by the poet in the final stanza must include those of human "toil that moves alway . . . . " Neither should it be forgotten that the potent and fertilizing sun gives illumination to the poet where he had stationed himself in the opening stanza: in

[5]See, for instance, *Paradise Lost*, I, 21.

the midst of a circle cut by time and man's hands, a circle whose associations through death and the colour grey, were with the city. Nor, finally, should it go unobserved that the phrase "sweet unrest" remembers Keats's "Bright Star" sonnet where it occurs in the context of human love and refers to a poet who is "Awake forever in a sweet unrest . . . ." (*JK*, p. 372). It is a measure of the regeneration achieved by the poet, and of the renovation that such regeneration makes possible, that in the final stanza of "Among the Timothy" a "green glimmering *forest*" of grass stands where only a stump, hay, and "dead daisies" had been seen before and that, through the living grass so perceived, the sun shines down to soak with life-giving light both the living and the dead, both the poet and the nature of which he is a part and yet from which he is, as his unalienated isolation in the poem's final line confirms, necessarily and properly apart.

The present discussion has been described as "An Essay" on Lampman's vision to indicate that it is in the nature of a probing attempt, an endeavour, in the direction of an understanding of the world view and major works of Canada's most important nineteenth-century poet. An essay on Lampman is, perhaps, all that can safely be written on the poet until the definitive edition of his verse that has been projected for some years is completed, until a responsibly edited collection of his published and unpublished prose is available, and until a competent biography that places him in his intellectual context has been undertaken. Yet surely the time has arrived for Lampman students to raise the question of parting company with those critics and poets of the Modernist period (Arthur Stringer, Raymond Knister, Leo Kennedy, Ralph Gustafson, John Sutherland, Louis Dudek, and others) who, to a noticeable degree, have shaped the critical response to Lampman and who, unfortunately, have been all too eager to read him superficially, to ignore his ironies, to denigrate his skills, and to deny him the qualities of discrimination that he clearly possessed and still demands of his readers. The views of Canadian modernists on Lampman will always be of historical interest, and they contain a great many valuable insights, but they can be as misleading, and for many of the same reasons, as Wordsworth's pronouncements on neoclassical verse or, indeed, as T.S. Eliot's pronouncements on the poets of the nineteenth century. In endeavouring to show that Lampman was neither the escapist dreamer nor the facile imitator that the

moderns wanted to see, this essay has attempted to depict him as possessing the "intellectual motive" that Dudek denies him (*AL*, p. 105), as rejecting the "cult of nature for nature's sake" in which Knister enrolls him (*AL*, p. 105). It has tried to show that he deserves to be remembered not just as a prophetic city poet and not just as a descriptive nature poet but as a man with a coherent vision whose work, because it participates in that vision, is cogent and unified. This is a large claim, but Lampman is capable of honouring it.

"On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life"—the opening line of the "Prospectus" to the 1814 edition of *The Excursion*—could stand as an epigraph to Lampman's *Complete Works*. It would serve there to point up two aspects of Lampman's work that have been central to the concerns of this essay: his relation to the Romantic-Victorian tradition that includes Wordsworth and Arnold, Keats and Tennyson, the Pre-Raphaelites and, though not specifically mentioned here, Browning and Emerson; and,concomitantly, his excursive and humanitarian approach to the world around him in Ontario's Ottawa Valley. For Lampman, as for Wordsworth and Shakespeare (whom he greatly admired), flowers, and trees, and frogs are ultimately fascinating only insofar as they permit the rational mind to attain a renovated and renovating vision of the organic world of which they, like man, are a part. This vision is difficult to achieve, and the pitfalls surrounding it are many, but the poet must not cease from the mental effort required both to obtain it in external nature and to return, restored, to the world of men. Lampman quite clearly understood the benefits and insights to be gained from excursions into nature and into dream, but he indicates repeatedly, as this essay has tried to show, that there are correct and there are incorrect attitudes to nature and to dream, that neither the one nor the other must permanently absent man from human concern. He never sanctions, though he sometimes succumbs to the abandonment either of rational and conscious activity or of social and human concerns. Although, ideally, the poet should seek to restore his vision by comprehending with a full consciousness all the facts of life in the natural and human realms, he may sometimes achieve visionary experiences of value by excluding or distancing aspects of reality, in which case the vision must be chastened by an acknowledgement of what has been ignored. In 1945 D.C. Scott, at pains to correct erroneous notions of his friend, told Gustafson: "Actually [Lampman] took a keen interest in human psychology and conduct . . . I know the real strength of his spirit and

mind, his veneration for great poetry and his resolute contemplation of 'life' as it developed in his time" (*AL*, pp. 156-158). Lampman's stance *vis-à-vis* the "great poetry" of the Romantic-Victorian tradition was, as this essay has also tried to show, active and selective rather than passive and merely accepting. He argued with his precursor-models and he used their styles for his individual purposes. He thus qualifies, not as a practitioner of debased Romanticism, but as a legitimate and Canadian participant in the tradition that leads from the great Romantics to the great Moderns. His perspective, for the very reason that it does rest on a "resolute contemplation" of his time and place, is distinctly his own. It is a perspective that includes "Man . . . Nature, and . . . Human Life" because it is the perspective of a man with a wide but coherent range of concerns, of an imaginative observer of external nature who was committed to a gradualist, evolutionary socialism, of a thoughtful humanitarian who sought both to confront his society with authentic visions of its own mechanistic inhumanity and to comfort his readers, not only by asserting the possibility of a change for the better, but also by affirming the kinship of all organic life. "Under different circumstances," Lampman somewhat playfully wrote in his *At the Mermaid Inn* column, the poet may express "the most opposite sentiments . . . it is that which brings him into the most tender and intimate relation with the general soul of humanity" (*MI*, p. 180). It has not, of course, been possible here to examine Lampman's canon in all its variety and complexity, but only to indicate the relation of some poems to their author's humane concerns. Yet if the essay has been at all successful it can now, finally, allow Lampman's words, again in the *At the Mermaid Inn* column, to speak for themselves:

> The poet attaches himself to no dream. He endeavours to see life simply as it is, and to estimate everything at its true value in relation to the universal and the infinite. But the man of affairs still calls the poet a dreamer.
>
> (*MI*, p. 45)

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