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**THE MAKESHIFT TRUCE: LAMPMAN AND THE  
POSITION OF THE WRITER IN NINETEENTH-  
CENTURY CANADA**

My purpose in this essay is not to discuss those poems of Lampman which directly attack what he most feared and hated in his society and time. Rather I want to examine that area of his work in which he is concerned with art, the artist, and his place in society. Such themes are related, but external expressions of a further concern, the apprehension that contemporary life threatens with disintegration the core of being, retards and stifles the very self. To put it briefly, art affirms identity and is the means to self-hood, wholeness, and unity; society and the times demand self-deception, compromise, and eventual dehumanization.

These preoccupations become clear once we have grasped the meaning of his nature poetry, for they are implicit there just as fully as those impulses which would give rise to the denunciation of economic exploitation or a vision of the death of the spirit in a mechanized universe. Lampman's nature poetry is the affirmation of his values. His social poetry is the expression of the negation of these values. Somewhere between these two areas is a dark and uncertain labyrinth in which values must be painfully sought, in which integrity is menaced by hostility, or lulled into compromise. Above all, it is an area of isolation which offers the extremes of fulfillment or despair.

Lampman's Platonic and transcendental vision of the universe should be recalled. The poet is configurative man and, armed with creative imagina-

tion, is capable of penetrating fact and attaining a higher reality. These are the moments of greatest self-realization, paradoxically when the distinction between subject and object dissolves and the finite self is enlarged to contain the infinite whilst becoming increasingly conscious of itself as a part of the whole. This means that the poet feels himself to be part of a universal order and alien to the blind and degenerate society of man. Society offers a threat to the poet's perception of unity, and in its dependence upon the analytic powers of reason and its worship of material ends, it menaces the poet with self-division, loss of self, or an inability to experience the self most keenly through transcendence. Ultimately, society provokes self-imprisonment, isolation, and fragmentation.

Lampman was aware that the poet's position and status in society had changed. In "To Chaucer" (p. 271) he characterises the Middle Ages as a time when the poet was valued, was able to meet a social role without being corrupted. By contrast the present had driven the poet into complete isolation, and this is all he could express with certainty.

Formerly poets had been teachers and leaders of men, accredited spokesmen of their societies. Lampman points to Aeschylus, Dante, and Milton as "men of affairs before they were poets". Able to participate in the general life, they gained a universality which is a strong factor in producing their "dignity and majesty of tone".<sup>1</sup> Lampman wrote to E. W. Thomson: "I think the people about me here regard me merely as a kind of soft-headed fool".<sup>2</sup> In his own society, Lampman protests against calling the poet a "singer", a word which indicates his function as a mere entertainer and shocks the poet "with a sudden sense of the absurdity of his position".<sup>3</sup> It appears to him that many people, especially those of his own country, "have the idea that a poet, or, indeed, any kind of literary artist, must be a sort of monstrosity".<sup>4</sup>

In an early essay on Shelley, "The Revolt of Islam", Lampman maintained that the progress of society denied the mode of experience which the poet upheld, and was even positively antagonistic to his vision and values. A year later, in 1881, he wrote on a similar theme in an essay called "Friendship". Essentially what Lampman says is that success in social terms can only be obtained at a terrible cost to the personality, making a man "selfish and immovable as the rest". Such a life of "enterprise", "ambition" and "pleasure" is to be rejected, but then a man must be prepared to endure "contempt" and "neglect".<sup>5</sup> Desmond Pacey speculates that in this essay, "prefaced by a quotation from Carlyle, it is surely not personal experience but his reading of Carlyle

that leads him to speak despairingly of modern man".<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, there may be a good deal of truth in Carl Y. Connor's remark that:

He was positive, courageous, even aggressive in manner with people of his own sort, but his college days were intermittently haunted with the thought of the commercial struggle that was to come.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps his reading has reinforced his experience. The fact is, that we encounter these, and similar images of a Darwinian social struggle, throughout his work.

The foregoing observations are a necessary clearing ground for an examination of a whole area of Lampman's work. His writing abounds in lonely, deracinated, questing figures, often poets, who dramatise their creator's rootlessness in his age. There are also poets who pursue their vision in face of the hostility around them, and others who have been broken by the struggle.

"The Poet's Song" (pp. 210-214), through technique and imagery, provides a subtle evocation and criticism of a society's debilitating effects upon the artist. The first four stanzas carefully build up an atmosphere and an environment charged with meaning, especially if the animated landscapes of Lampman in which contraries move towards synthesis are kept in mind. The lack of change within this land is stressed. Thus the verse movement is made deliberately monotonous, with its heavy repetitions and balance. This is the first of the two major techniques that control the poem. The comparison of the passing of the days to "Ghosts that cannot touch or speak" anticipates the other organising principle. Standing for complete isolation and fragmentation, the ghosts mirror the meaningless and unrelated events that follow. The fifth stanza concentrates on the poet, and his situation is literally conveyed by the actual placing of him, within the court, sitting in "one red corner of the wall". There he is enclosed and made impotent. But beyond the wall lies the sterility of the "burning plain". Images of monotony, fragmentation, and unbearable heat associated with death now dominate the poem and define the symbol of the broken lute. The poet cannot create because he can give no form to an inchoate situation which in turn has reduced him to insensitivity and vacuity.

The rest of the poem is only comprehensible if we are in total possession of all the facts concerning the poet's position which Lampman has been careful to furnish. He is part of a rigid, hierarchical structure, a court poet, the king's poet, and therefore a servant like any other. Essentially he is a public poet. The king acknowledges the function of the poet in these terms by command-

ing him to rid his mind of the implications of the situation. But the poet refuses, and his refusal is in effect a disavowal of his public role. He will no longer cater to the whims and tastes of a specialised audience or provide entertainment in a critical situation. His emphatic stand is an assertion that a crisis does exist. So in the second part of the poem there follows "a sense of change upon the land". This dissent, of course, is not enough to provide a personal vision, but it is a beginning. His decisiveness and acquired self-reliance is compared with the aimlessness around him. He leaves the court and the city. Then the storm breaks but brings no relief to the king and the citizens. The poet can no longer be commanded. He is the storm or in other words that critical minority so damaging to complacency. Moreover, in his newly-found state he is not unheard or ignored but finds an incidental audience, isolated and dedicated like himself, "shepherds in their watches". As for his song, it has become "a cleaving chant", a flash of lightning, the sound of which reverberates throughout the mountains and the land.

Another group of poems takes the form of a quest either by river or sea. Such voyages by water, though not exclusive to the Canadian experience, are very much a part of the country's consciousness. The quest means individual self-realization and, as such, implies the severing of social responsibilities and ties.

"Between the Rapids" (pp. 36-38) is a dramatic poem which begins in *medias res* and gains its complexity from the contrast between the levels of meaning assigned to the rapids and the placid stretch of water. Many of the organizing details are set out with economy in the first four lines. Here we have played off against one another the familiar tensions so characteristic of Lampman's poetry. The first half-line suggests the inevitability, while the latter half makes clear that night is approaching and that there is need for decisive action and speed. These suggestions are allowed to lapse temporarily into the background, for the shadow and twilight make the present scene indistinct and prepare the way for recollection of time past. The "wheeling stream" emphasises the process of time, of becoming, reminding us that time can never be static. Though the shore is "receding", it is also "soft", that is, gentle and familiar. Then everything is dominated by the violence and noise of the rapids. This is the original impulse that controls and pervades the poet's consciousness. At this moment, and there is a good deal of psychological realism here, the protagonist attempts to postpone a decision already made. For the rest of the first stanza, and the greater part of the second, the quest and the rapids appear to have been forgotten, and softly pastoral memories are

foremost. But the last two lines re-assert the significance of the present situation. Even while the past is remembered and vicariously re-lived, the protagonist and his companions are being carried by an ever-quickening river into the future. In the next two stanzas, the memories become more personal and dear; and when in the final two lines the protagonist attempts to persuade his companions to linger, he is deliberately deceiving himself, for though he may not help his destiny by 'paddling', he is being inexorably carried towards the rapids. The protagonist in the fifth stanza, as if to measure what he had against what he seeks, attempts to describe the quest:

Whither I go I know not, and the light  
Is faint before, and rest is hard to win.

He not only admits that the goal is uncertain but also that value lies in the quest itself. The search for the unrecorded experience is necessary self-fulfillment. As the moment to enter the rapids approaches, his mind fluctuates wildly between the familiar and the unknown. Then suddenly he realises with intensity what he has always known, that he must accept and also promote what is his destiny. To find himself, the protagonist knows that he must first lose himself. Thus the journey into darkness begins but is rewarded now and then by a gleam from heaven in an age when the light is receding.

"Aspiration" (p. 113) uses the sea as an image for the area in which the self may be discovered. The poem turns on a contrast between those who venture into this sea and those who remain on land. The speaker begins his address to his fellow poets with a rhetorical question, which makes clear "here" or within his society, "now", which is to say his age, or in the future, there can be no end to their quest. The poets are likened to isolated navigators. "Steer" refers to the creative imagination, and "barks" are the vessels of poetry. The uncertainty of the poetic life is there in the paradox, "misty bournes across that coastless sea", and also in the fleeting poetic inspiration suggested by the winds "that ever gust and flee". Despite the uncertainty, however, and the fact that the pursuit of art exacts its own penalties on "flesh and mind", this life is more rewarding than the almost primordial existence of those who never explore the possibilities of the self.

Two poems with similar titles, "A Dawn on the Lievre" (pp. 290-291) and "Morning on the Lievre" (pp. 19-21), illustrate the theme of a journey towards a vision of transcendental truth. These poems are not so slight as they appear if we are alert to the quiet insistence on details of time and place.

In "A Dawn on the Lievre", the questing idea is deliberate and the poem could be a continuation of the journey of "Between the Rapids". The

occupants of the boat are strenuously paddling against the current up the dark valley of the river. There is a sense of physical and emotional energy expressed as they struggle out of the dark valley of the night. The epithets that describe the river, "shrouded" and "night-charged", carry overtones of death. As they reach the bend, the dawn breaks and an avalanche of sunlight puts the mists and shadows to rout, suddenly revealing "the mount", which has been close but invisible to them. The mountain in Lampman's poetry is often the symbol of the spirit, and in a later discussion of "Ode to the Hills" it becomes clear that the hills symbolise inspiration and poetic integrity. Within the poem the glory of the vision is conveyed through a delayed climax. Between "And lo!" and "The Mount", placed prominently at the beginning of the line, we have an unfolding of the verse, a growing sense of height and aspiration. The morning sits on the mountain, "like a glowing conqueror", a simile which continues the theme of struggle and battle implicit throughout.

In "The Loons" (p. 119), Glooscap, the beneficent spirit of nature, is an alienated figure. The loons, lonely and strange creatures that seem to have the power of metamorphosis, symbolise the compulsive quest, a yearning for what Glooscap represents.

In "Thamyris" (pp. 274-275) and "Xenophanes" (pp. 266-267), Lampman's imagination seized upon two idealists uprooted or stricken by circumstances. This kind of figure appealed also to Charles G. D. Roberts in his poem "Marsyas". Thamyris, like Marsyas, was punished for his arrogance. He boasted he could rival the Muses and was deprived by them of sight, voice, and the capacity to play the lute. In Lampman's poem, the artist is warned to respect his gift as divine and to use it not for enhancing his own personal greatness but for selfless ends.

Unlike Emerson, who wrote a poem of the same title, Lampman in "Xenophanes" is not so much interested in that poet's philosophy as in his situation. Xenophanes asserted the doctrine of a divinity who is the One and the All, the underlying reality behind appearance. In the Lampman poem Xenophanes is seen towards the end of his life, a wandering, melancholy figure, still seeking after his elusive vision. What is significant for Lampman is that the "hunger" of the long dead poet is the same one that possesses him, and is the source of his hope and despair.

In an unpublished essay "The Poetry of Byron",<sup>8</sup> Lampman re-stated and extended the problems so far examined:

To a certain extent it seems to be true that the life of a poet is a dual one—the life of the bodily (worldly) man and the life of the poetic soul—and the two do not seem to be always reconcilable with one another.

In his work, Lampman has a great deal to say about the implications of this dual life, and an understanding of his meaning is essential to this essay.

By the poetic soul, Lampman meant the creative self, that part of the self related to something enduring beyond the limits of time and space. The majority of men, so Lampman believed, had lost this creative capacity. He posits a time when all men possessed the creative capacity and when no conflict existed between the spiritual and the mundane. In "A Vision of Twilight" (pp. 195-198), for example, he envisages a race of divine men who existed:

Ere the world was cooled by Time  
When the spirit flowed unbroken  
Through the flesh, and the Sublime  
Made the eyes of men far-seeing.

In "Inter Vias" (pp. 183-184), with its significant title, he points out that the poet as well as the seer and the child are remnants of this superior race. But the poet exists in the fallen world of time, and the worldly part of the self desires, like other men, material gratification. "The Poets" (pp. 113-114) expresses the duality in medieval terms; they are "half-god, half-brute". Misunderstood and disliked by the majority, they are, because of their nature, best able to express the complexities of life. They are also most liable to be hurt by its dangers, contradictions, and snares.

In the life of the poet, the duality of the self may exist in three ways, or a combination of all three: complete antagonism, destructive compromise, and creative tension. It is the first two states with which we are mainly concerned here, for the third produces Lampman's affirmative nature poetry. Inasmuch as the worldly self is also the social self, we have returned to the problem of the creative self in relation to its place and time.

It becomes increasingly clear from a study of Lampman's work that he believed alienation from society to be necessary, if distressing. What he most feared was that his artistic vision would be inhibited and crippled if the creative initiative of the artist succumbed to tendencies prevalent in his society and time. Many critics have spoken of Lampman's "escape" from society. In so doing they are confusing escape with voluntary, and deliberate, self-exile. Exile means a process of exorcism, a coming to terms with the environment. It is a bid for freedom and at the same time an acceptance of a respons-

ibility compounded of integrity and detachment. Lampman would have understood very well the inner meaning of the fact of Thoreau's hut at Walden Pond or Joyce's determination to fly the nets cast at the soul. He created his own symbols to express similar perceptions.

Lampman's position and response may now be summarised. The domination of material ends and self interest is a blight to sensitivity and unworldliness. Thus the artist accepts as a blessing his alienation from a society that needs regeneration. "Song" is a simple expression of the ambivalent gift of poetry. The opposite state occurs when the poet feels himself to be at fault because he has betrayed the values of the creative self by desiring to gratify the needs of the worldly self. Here alienation from society is replaced by alienation from the creative self, or self distortion. At such times poetry is a curse because it becomes what Matthew Arnold meant when he called it a "criticism of life". It is that which reveals the shortcomings of the lives of men and is especially painful to the poet who is failing to live up to what he knows is his responsibility. That is why Joyce called art "conscience", and Lampman knew that his "hypocondria" was in fact an anguish that emerged whenever he felt that he was not living according to the values of art or allowing anything to become more important than the artistic life. The matter is complex because it means an exploration of an outer awareness that is the poet's relation to his age, his time and to the demands of his audience, and an inner awareness, Arnold's dialogue of the mind with itself, or Lampman's quiet understatement that the dual life is not always reconcilable. The examination of these states of being will occupy the rest of the essay.

I have already stated that Lampman's essay "Friendship" is the earliest expression of the dilemma of the artist within society. Throughout his work this insight receives re-statement, extension, and clarification. The artist who dedicates himself to the life of the imagination and the original expression of his personal vision must be prepared to endure contempt and neglect. Here the danger is not that he is exiled but that he may become embittered. The alternative is just as harmful. The poet can achieve popularity if he is prepared to give expression to conventional attitudes but must live with self-contempt or the eventual loss of artistic integrity. Lampman repudiated the concept of the role of the artist that his society and age demanded.

In his *Globe* column he distinguishes between public poets and the more enduring private ones. Certain brilliant or arresting qualities in the lives of some poets bring them an exaggerated reputation within their age. Thus Dryden during his time tended to overshadow Milton and in the nineteenth



century Byron "overclouded all the reputations of his age".<sup>9</sup> Public taste is fickle and not to be taken as an indication of true greatness. Lampman deplored both the drift of the times, which would make the artist public property, and those writers as well who gratified public demands. In part he is protesting, like many nineteenth-century writers, against the levelling tendencies of his age, against a growing middle class who preferred the average to the exceptional. He fears that originality must contend with a growing mediocrity. In the passage which follows, the imagery of the disintegrating self is uppermost:

It is as if the writer's personality were dispersed among the multitude, and only by feverish and violent effort is he able to gather his forces together for an important undertaking.<sup>10</sup>

In the same column, (not included in Bourinot's edition) Lampman praises the poet E. T. Fletcher and at the same time characterises his age:

Let us do honour to such a poet who has maintained a reserve so fine and so unusual, who has run so far counter to the clamorous custom of his age as to live out a long life in the tranquil love of books, wisdom and poetry, without caring whether the public buy his photograph or the reviewers blow all their penny whistles in his praise.<sup>11</sup>

He recorded his well-known, youthful reaction to the poetry of Charles G. D. Roberts in a public lecture in 1891. In the same lecture he qualified his reaction and began quietly criticising and detaching himself from popular nationalism:

At this time when our country's destiny, its very independent existence perhaps, is a matter of doubt and anxiety, it behooves us to be silent and do no boasting, but look seriously about us for the wisest thing to be said and done at each crisis.<sup>12</sup>

By 1892 in his *Globe* column he had become critical of Roberts who, though a talented poet, had in his opinion compromised himself by seeking popularity among enthusiastic nationalists.

Writing to Mrs. May McKeggie as early as 1884, he tells how he has composed "a voluminous fairy tale".<sup>13</sup> This is probably not "Hans Fingerhut's Frog Lesson", published in the first edition of *Man* in 1885 and later in *Rouge et Noir*, which is quite a short piece. It might well refer to another fairy tale called "The Fairy Fountain", which exists in manuscript and runs

to thirty-one foolscap pages. In 1885, also to May McKeggie, there is the revealing comment:

I wrote another fairy-tale the other day and much to my mother's disgust, who is unlimited in her complaints of the impractical and outlandish character of my writings, which indeed fetch no money, or even respect.<sup>14</sup>

This is significant because it crystallises Lampman's predicament and enables us to explore in a concentrated way his own concerns. The fairy tales are highly personal allegories of his own situation in particular, and the artist's in general, in relation to society. His mother's reaction I believe to be typical of the kind of social response he could expect. His writings do not conform to the expected or desired, and his mother believes that they have no "practical" point, for they bring him neither renown nor money. It is ironic that while Lampman is struggling to give imaginative expression to his perceptions, he receives objective, factual confirmation of them.

In "The Fairy Fountain"<sup>15</sup> the protagonist is a typical Lampman creation. He is young, an orphan, living in a northern city outside of which he has hardly ventured. He is also a cobbler. Once we are familiar with Lampman's terms we realise that the protagonist symbolises the self in an unformed, rootless, isolated and enclosed state, defined only by an inherited social role with little status. In his loneliness, the young man turns to books to provide him with inspiration. He decides to take a holiday and leaves the city. In other words, he feels a need to cast off momentarily his role and pursue an obscure desire to enlarge the area of his perception. Some way from the city he is confronted by a smooth wall. This is the self-created barrier the majority of people erect between themselves and the life of the imagination. But on the wall there is the figure of a carved fairy blowing a horn from which water runs. The young man drinks from the fountain and discovers there a key which unlocks a gate set in the wall. He has loved books, and this, together with a nature as yet uncorrupted by society, provides a way through and beyond the purely material view of life.

He now experiences what Keats called the life of the "chameleon" poet or "negative capability". Beyond the wall he has insights into the lives of all kinds and classes of people in many ages. The time comes when he feels the need to leave the life beyond the wall and give his perceptions an external and objective validity—in other words, to write poetry. As he passes back through the gate, he is warned by the fairy that "he that is of the world shall drink of me in vain", that is pursuit of material success will cut off the poet

from his creative self, which will be imprisoned. His pattern of life is established. After a day's "cobbling", he fashions his insights into poetry. The parallel with Lampman's own life is obvious. Clearly at this time Lampman believed, or at least hoped, that his post office work and his writing were not mutually exclusive. Later in his life he had no doubt that the office was detrimental to his poetry. The young protagonist now wins fame as a poet, but it is suggested that the kind of poetry for which he is appreciated is of the same kind as that in "The Minstrel", descriptive and public. He meets and falls in love with the daughter of a wealthy scholar and is plunged into discontent because, by contrast, the poverty of his situation makes him believe that this rich girl would never be his wife. In order to possess the daughter, he feels he must possess wealth, and thereby he reduces love to material standards. As he grows richer, poetry seems to him more and more a waste of time, and his imagination can only return to him images of decay and death. He becomes wealthy, but the scholar's daughter refuses to marry him because he has become "like all other men". After a period of penance and suffering in which he embraces poverty, the desire to create poems returns, but this time his poetry is much graver and maturer.

"Hans Fingerhut's Frog Lesson", probably written later, is a more complex treatment of a similar theme. Hans Fingerhut is in the pattern of Lampman's protagonists. He is an itinerant, unknown in origin. He is well received as a poet and enabled to lead a simple life. In this tale Lampman indicates that Fingerhut's dilemma is both personal and social. He is not content with being a poet but has worldly desires for praise and good living. At the same time, he is exposed to "many a rebuff and many an ill-deed". Angered by his failure to receive what he believes are his deserts and because his bitterness leaves him without an audience, he resumes the trade of tailor that he has pursued in his youth. He becomes a satirist, but his satire is born of resentment and envy. The gradual disintegration of the self is emphasised; "the restless melody of his soul" no longer answers to any objective reality. Because of the disunity within himself, he can feel no correspondence with the universe. Nature appears then to mock him. He can no longer affirm universal harmony and so attempts to deny it and curses "the heavens and the earth and all happy and beautiful things in them".

The stream is the symbol of such harmony, and Fingerhut's futile attempts to destroy it are neatly dramatised. It seems that here too Lampman is pointing out that minor disharmony only serves to emphasise the total unity, that negative impulses become positive. Fingerhut throws stones into

the stream, but the stones "made the water ripple and dance and sing the merrier, and the bigger the stones the louder the song". Enraged he kicks and lashes the stream, but it "still rippled around his legs in perfect contentment".

Fingerhut is described by the stream as "an outcast", but it should be noticed that Lampman is not stressing that he is a social outcast. Clearly this is not so important. The stream as a symbol of universal harmony, as a continuous principle he cannot disrupt, reveals the universal alienation of Fingerhut. He falls asleep and is awakened by an elf, harmoniously attired in natural objects, so as to leave no doubt that the creature is a projection of the principle of nature itself. There is an element of humour here—Fingerhut prodded awake by a foot-high creature brandishing a thistle—but the underlying purpose is serious, suggesting as it does the power that informs the humblest of natural objects. The elf explains that Fingerhut, through his own fault, has lost a harmony of which previously he was becoming more aware. There are overtones here of the Fall from Heaven and Paradise, and Fingerhut does enter now in his "blind and degraded" state a kind of Hell or fallen world. Lampman employs here what could be termed a characteristic "device", if it were not so much a part of his philosophic and aesthetic belief: transmogrification. Fingerhut is changed into a large, ugly frog. There are two points to be noticed here. The ugliness is the external reality of what he already was. This is the second kind of alienation, which is distortion of the essential self. At the same time, according to Lampman's belief, change is eventually desirable, and we realise that Fingerhut is in a transitional state. For the moment, of course, everything seems much worse.

Likewise the landscape changes because it is seen through the eyes of a frog that is not a frog. It is dark, close, and rank. The theme is expressed concisely. Hell is a place of poetic justice. Fingerhut must live appearing to be a frog and knowing that he is not. Hypocrisy for Lampman was evil, and to be forced to appear as one was not was a tragic situation. Ideally, appearance should be reality, and disparity meant a violation of universal harmony. Fingerhut makes a very poor frog, almost starving to death because he is inept at catching insects. He inhabits a hostile universe seemingly bent upon his discomfort and destruction: "The thick grass teased and impeded him, flies were hard to catch, and the long-billed cranes hunted him perpetually". In other words, disunity with the self produces an inability to perceive the harmony that lies behind apparent disorder. Several poems recording this state, the opposite of that in "Heat", I shall discuss later.

Fingerhut is given the task of interpreting the song of the stream. This, of course, is asking him to discover the meaning of his essential self. His situation appears to grow worse. He is misunderstood and rejected by the other frogs because, though he resembles them outwardly, he is not like them. Lampman is saying that Fingerhut cannot be a successful frog as poets cannot be "successful" men. To attempt to emulate such men or pretend to be like them results in torment because it condemns the creative self. Hans offers three interpretations of the song, which are rejected: first, a kind of universal hedonism; secondly, a steady optimism in the face of disaster; thirdly, a desperate stoicism. He now comes close to despair but decides as a last measure to "go back up the stream to the place where he first became a frog". That is, he begins a voyage of self-discovery. The familiar pattern, discussed earlier, re-appears. A long, arduous journey is made against the stream. He reaches the scene of his envy and rage and, suddenly overcome by the beauty around him, he weeps tears of penance, a symbolic gesture rather like that of the Ancient Mariner. His tears become fairies and one of them interprets the song of the stream for him. The answer, then, is born of himself. The meaning of the stream is its own nature. It begins high in the hills, but despite the immediate environment or the present circumstances it is in constant movement towards an ideal vision, the sea. For Hans Fingerhut this means that he, too, has a "sea to seek without ceasing". It is unattainable but can be sought for with growing understanding. Life is a journey of self-discovery and self-realisation, eventually completed in the presence of the ideal. Individual life should be linked like the stream to its sea, the part to the whole, which are eventually one.

Hans returns to his own shape and symbolically bathes his hands and face in the stream. He passes through the forest to the town and now sounds of nature "seemed to him so many different versions of the stream song". Hans is no longer envious of the rich, but in Lampman's description of them there is an implicit and comic criticism, as if in the face of Hans' newly-won wisdom they are no longer formidable.

In this particular tale, he is charging the poet with the responsibility of pursuing his own private vision. Yet he was a socially involved poet. There is no contradiction, however, for he believed that attacks upon social evils must be objective and free from any personal malice or envy; otherwise the satire can only be an expression of the poet's self-deception.

The question of the poet's relation to his audience became especially acute in the dismayed comments of Lampman's mother upon tales which I

believe to be precise expressions of an artistic crisis. I am not sure that to say, as does Desmond Pacey, that "Lampman was not unduly neglected by his contemporaries"<sup>16</sup> places the right emphasis. It is true that he received favourable and enthusiastic reviews, but this might conceal a more complex situation. It is possible that Lampman felt he was praised for all the wrong reasons; that the reviews tell us more about the tastes of his society; that they smoothed over in bland appraisal all evidences of struggle and commitment. In other words, society took from Lampman's poems whatever comforted and flattered their preservative instincts and simply refused to see in them anything more abrasive. There is enough evidence later that Lampman felt that, despite his intention, his real meaning had gone astray, that at best society would accept him as a "singer", and that at worse it regarded him as "a soft-headed fool".

Lampman did not take kindly to magazines and reviewers in Canada. He was only lukewarm about *The Week*, though he knew it was better than anything else. He deplored reviewers for "the same ridiculous praises decked out in the same fulsome and meaningless phraseology". What was needed was "a really good literary magazine, including a department of criticism conducted in a spirit of serious appreciation and uncompromising candour". Instead, all one met was "inert neglect" or "spasmodic and senseless eulogy".<sup>17</sup> Writers would be stimulated and encouraged by "an ever more searching process of criticism".<sup>18</sup> In the circumstances, however, the poet has little respect for the public, reviewers, or publishers, and must be content with the judgements of trusted friends and the hope that his poetry "will be read some day and by those who know".<sup>19</sup>

Certainly, if we look at some contemporary reviews, we see that they did not approach the kind and quality Lampman required. They seem calculated to depress any original or radical insight, and constantly dilute or miss the complexity of his best poems. In *The Week* for March, 1889, "Fidelis" comments:

In such poems as "Among the Timothy", "Winter Hues Recalled", while there is true and delicate description we miss something more, something which would have given the description a greater value.

Some years later in the same magazine, Lilly E. F. Barry, in an article called "Prominent Canadians",<sup>20</sup> notes that Lampman's mother "was eminently qualified to understand the bent of her son's mind, and to assist him in developing the spiritual forces latent within him". She observes that the "simplest

theme tempts his facile pen as well as the noblest. He skilfully assimilates the most trivial seeming details of a landscape into his finest descriptions, transforming them by his treatment into valuable bits of local colour". She illustrates this point by quoting from "Heat". In his poetry there is none of "the tone of complaint and revolt common to young writers".

What is most evident here is the kind of poetry which the society found acceptable. It is equally evident that Lampman's poetry only appeared to conform to these standards. A number of his more outspoken poems simply were not published during his lifetime and remained in manuscript until 1943 when "At the Long Sault" appeared. Others such as "Life", "Despondency", and a revolutionary poem which begins "Do you hear the cry of the people?" remain in manuscript. Through a process of careful selection an image has been established and this is difficult to disturb. This process has continued. A. S. Bourinot, for example, though he quotes part of a letter dated February 10, 1893, will leave out a vigorous and colloquial expression of Lampman's disgust with politicians in the capital:

no sooner has the weather moderated than we have that other worse disaster, the assembly of the great national dunghill, or Dominion cess-pool, everything connected with which gives me sensations of unutterable loathing and horror.

On another occasion, Lampman dramatised social disapproval by creating a persona. In his *Globe* column for June 4, 1892, he invents a defiant sonneteer who delights in violating social decorum. The sonneteer reads his first effort. Surely Lampman is reproducing, in the remarks which follow, the tone of criticism that he had no doubt been forced to endure himself:

"Well", I said, "that doesn't seem to be bad—in a certain sense, from a certain point of view—rather true to life, quite picturesque in fact—but could you not have arranged your impressions in some more suitable form a little less ridiculously inapplicable to the smallness and homeliness of your subject?"

The sonneteer, now irritated, reads, "The following utterly atrocious and impudent production". This poem "Reality", Lampman left in his manuscript book, and only recently has it appeared. It offends every canon of literary taste at the time, as "Lampman" makes clear. Would not Lampman have liked to emulate the sonneteer's behaviour or did he not take vicarious pleasure from it?

My friend, instead of answering me, broke out into a roar of coarse and offensive laughter. He crushed up his papers into a couple of pellets and, filliping them into my face, strode rudely out of the room. The poor fellow had talent, if only he would apply it in a serious and sensible way.

Another way in which Lampman avoided conformity was by writing poems which often seemed to fulfil accepted literary taste and could, as contemporary reviews show, be read on that level. On another level, these poems expressed private and original perceptions, often at odds with the temper of his society and times. We may reinforce this assertion by looking at some more poems which at first glance appear almost impossible as examples of the double awareness described.

"The Story of an Affinity" (pp. 411-473) seems to have all the ingredients of a poem which would appeal to Victorian tastes. It can be read as a rather melodramatic tale of love, in which the earnest, worthy hero finally wins his beloved and the rueful blessing of his former rival. At the same time, many of Lampman's characteristic perceptions and, one would hazard, personal experiences, have been incorporated into its rambling length. Thus it is a record of the buried self-awakening into self-fulfilment in the case of Richard, and the stultification of the self as regards Margaret. These portions of the tale are much more realistic and vivid than the vague, sentimental framework, probably because Lampman was writing of something which really engaged his interest and which was an observable fact in Canadian society. While Richard struggles towards "his neglected heritage", Margaret, who had been educated and was his original inspiration, ironically is being reduced by circumstances. Her "motive—core of Life" is "deep-hidden" and "far within". She is troubled by a "sense of lost desire" and "cramped and fettered capability". Though she is stoical and maintains a sturdy happiness, her repose is disturbed at times of "sharpened consciousness", when she sees

underneath its cloak of ash  
That dim and secret smouldering at her heart.

With these images of imprisonment, growing obscurity, and loss of definition before us, it is appropriate to turn to those poems which are intimate expressions of the creative self, and the consequences which follow when it is marred or betrayed.

Writing to E. W. Thomson in 1894 Lampman reveals that he experienced "dark stretches" when he was "sitting long in sackcloth and ashes".<sup>21</sup> In the same letter, the imagery of penance is continued by his reference to the poem, "Peccavi Domine" (pp. 219-221), described as an "act of self relief". The nature of his guilt is made clear by the poem. Lampman evokes a God who is a creative centre, a "poet-heart" and "Maker", of a vast, centripetal



universe containing within its "glowing rings" the "small miracle of earth". God is an all-pervading whole of which everything contains a part and is thus "protean". God is part of the poet and is recognised as a vision of the "ought to be" and "the might have been". God is the creative self of the poet in perpetual correspondence with itself throughout the universe. In its ideal state, the creative self experiences unity with the universe. But the poet feels that he has "fallen astray", and the fourth stanza evokes a landscape of darkness and confinement in which movement has ceased. The creative state of the self is most difficult to maintain and is disrupted either by external pressures or by the betrayal of the bodily self. Several poems record the loss of the creative self and are always accompanied by darkness, confinement, and disintegration, as I make clear in the examination of poems of this kind later in the essay.

In "An Ode to the Hills" (pp. 221-225), the hills symbolise the poet, or are an example in the natural world of the integrity of the creative self. The hills, in stanzas one and two, are an enduring principle in the midst of chaos and ruin. In stanzas three, four, and five they stoically accept their "harsh", "wild" and "bitter" destiny in a hostile and destructive environment. But if they attract hostility, they also gather the world's beauty. In stanzas six and seven the hills mean isolation, aloofness, and freedom. The poet wishes to live in the hills, that is to take on the qualities which they stand for, and this desire makes the creative self,

hard and true,  
wide-seeing, passionless, immutably glad,  
And strong.

From 1894 on, as his letters reveal, the struggle to "slip the yoke" and seek the "upward way" was intensified to the point of tragedy. E. W. Thomson, writing to D. C. Scott in 1895, expresses the fear that his criticisms of Lampman's poems might have contributed a little to unbalancing "a mind so delicately poised".<sup>22</sup> The opposite of Lampman's "peaceful serenity of thought and vision" was morbidity, "dreadful moods", "hypochondria", and "insomnia".<sup>23</sup> At times the responsibilities of the poetic self became intolerable and the poet feels himself to be cursed as "a miserably imaginative creature—always after the unattainable".<sup>24</sup> Though "difficulties and afflictions . . . have encompassed" his spirit, he realises his dilemma and knows that he can eventually come to terms with it:

The man is useless who does not possess his own soul and that is what is the matter with me. I shall recover some day but for the present I can see no clear path to walk on.<sup>25</sup>

It should be clear by now what Lampman meant.

A poem which has for its theme the repossession of the soul after the disintegrating forces of life is "Night" (p. 283). The centrifugal pattern, which is replaced by a centripetal one, is of course more than just a structural principle. It is the expression of a profound belief. As the last three lines of the poem indicate, the creative self has become the still centre of recognition in the vast movement of the universe.

What Lampman feared, as we have seen, was that pressures within society and within himself were pushing him towards a sterile compromise. This fear is vigorously present in a poem called "The True Life", dating from 1894 but not published in his life time. It is the same syndrome as that expressed in "Hans Fingerhut's Lesson". What emerges in the poetry we are concerned with here is the strong need to resist dispossession, as Lampman might have called it, to avoid being fixed and defined by anything outside the creative self. In moments when Lampman could declare "Poetry has seized me and enveloped the whole field. To speak vernacularly I do not care a damn for anything in the world but poetry",<sup>26</sup> there was no conflict or trouble. In other moments, he was horrified at being pushed into a kind of limbo where he would be forced to exist apart from his essential self. Something like this motivates "The True Life".

He is quite explicit about the quality of life at such moments. It is a "depressing compromise". He moves next to that specious gap between the possible and the conventional, undemanding and comfortable reality as defined by his "careful neighbours". This is the area of the "Makeshift truce", an expedient willingness to ignore the insights of critical intelligence and delicacy of feeling, and the moral courage required to act upon them. The initial act of compliance means that the personality is activated by a role hostile to the identity and that the resulting conflict is inevitable. Eventually, all that remains are hollow men, whose lives are all on the surface and moving towards the total dehumanization of those creatures of Lampman's despairing vision in "The City of the End of Things", a poem of the same period. The "soul", then, is nothing more than the "mask" it wears. It is that which "lolls behind a fence of courteous lies". If the inhabitants of "The City of the End of Things" may be compared to the horrible malformation of those

in Swift's third book of *Gulliver's Travels*, the ones in the present poem are as distressing as they are Lilliputian. They have the same sort of preposterous envy for a stature that exceeds their own, a similar need to "depress" everything to their own height, a vindictive malice, and an inordinate pride in their own petty concerns. In the last three lines of the poem Lampman is undoubtedly striving to express the quality of this "world of little men". He is defining characteristics in his society and age that inhibit the moral and spiritual conditions most favourable to the creative self. Another kind of life was possible.

Elsewhere Lampman was to write: "I begin to feel as if I were being forcibly held down and smothered—an uncomfortable sensation even in a spiritual sense."<sup>27</sup> These remarks compel our attention as the obviously sincere expressions of a man engaged in a fluctuating struggle for his artistic and personal integrity.

A number of other poems complement and expand the critical apprehension of "The True Life". Complicity in "the makeshift truce" is followed by a growing insensitivity and uncritical acceptance of mediocrity and by alienation from the universal reality behind phenomena.

"The Child's Music Lesson" (pp. 88-90) takes for its theme the fall from a state of awareness and is built around the archetypal symbol of the garden. Sitting in his garden, the poet hears the stumbling efforts of a child to play the piano. The child, or rather the poet who was a child, provides the two points of view. The actual and the present struggle with, and are complicated by, the dimly remembered past. Thus in the second stanza the actual garden is firmly presented in a concrete and sensual manner. It is a place of beauty, but it is contaminated because it must co-exist with the disagreeable material world. The third stanza, deliberately using sunlight and shadow to break up and soften the present, leads to an ideal garden located deep within the poetic self.

My heart, a garden in a hidden place,  
Is full of folded buds of memories.

Instead of the assertion and joy we might expect, there follows a sense of loss and deprivation. The poet may be conscious of the ideal, but consciousness is painful. Like Adam his life is darkened with memories of Eden, and like Moses he may see the Promised Land but not enter it.

He is condemned to stand at "the wicket" tormented by the actuality of his vision. The final mood is, however, modified and is very close to that

at the end of "In November". It is not of the extremes of "joy" or "aching pain" but rather of a simultaneous experience of contraries which brings "a dim delight".

Like Henry-Frederic Amiel, whose *Journal Intime* he had read before 1890, and who must be counted as a major influence in forming and reinforcing his beliefs, Lampman felt that a landscape, whilst conforming to objective reality, was essentially created by inner experience and transformed into a symbol of that experience. He made this explicit in an unpublished poem which he called "Despondency".<sup>28</sup> The title suggests a state of mind and emotion, but the poem itself is a landscape created to externalise the inner experience. The point of the foregoing is that a number of Lampman's poems must be regarded as landscapes of despair brought about by the severing of the poetic self from the universal harmony which illuminates the phenomenal surface of the natural world.

In "Despondency", the poetic self is in the distressing state of unresolved contradiction. As a consequence, the poet looks "with burdened eyes" upon a landscape that is a projection of this state. It is devoid of light and colour, unintegrated, and, so to speak, unfulfilled. The time is evening and the land is "sombre" and "shadowed". The "black branches" are shaken by restless "wailing winds" and the entire landscape is dominated by "jagged dark" and the ominous glow of a vanished sun.

Much the same thing may be said of "Midnight Landscape" (pp. 270-271) and "The Autumn Waste" (pp. 228-229), to take two of several possible examples. In the first, the world appears to be a "waste", penetrated by "infinite darkness", in which "old heroes" continue to wander "on some dolorous quest". In the second poem the poet evokes once more "melancholy lands" and "charnel solitudes" which seem to have been never capable of sustaining aspiration and beauty, but only death and decay.

Lampman in "The Frost Elves" characterises exceptional men as possessed of "a body of flax" and "a spirit of flame". Their complex personality means that they will live "at the uttermost tension of life". In a society and age hostile to poetic values, the poet's foremost task and need is to guard against tendencies within himself that in any way reflect, or derive from, external tendencies inimical to the integrity of the poetic self. As Lampman puts it in a poem of the same title, the poet is responsible for the knowledge and cultivation of "the clearer self".

In "Salvation" (p. 263) the means whereby the poet saves himself is by dedication to the "primal energy" and by devotion to the task of revealing

the "one clear meaning of the deathless I". "To the Prophetic Soul" (pp. 200-201) states the contrast between the constitution and values of the creative self and those of society and the mass of men. The imagery of the poem, "clinging bubbles", "vain foam" and so on, suggests the superficial and the ephemeral. The poet resolves to embrace his dowry from God, "an alien mind" and the burden of isolation, but also the possibilities he might encounter on "the glorious road".

An unpublished poem called "Life"<sup>20</sup> is an allegory of the creative self and its relationship to society. In its inclusiveness it forms a fitting conclusion to this essay. The spirits of men occupy "earthen palaces", which are themselves surrounded by a difficult and uncongenial environment where the possibility of failure is high. Life for some is constant frustration, for others the loss of their highest instincts, and for still others, the confusion of an "alternating mind". But the perilous consequences of life may be countered by knowledge of the "central tower" which endures in the midst of flux and change. At the base of the tower is a narrow opening, difficult to find. The "central tower" is the creative self, rising above the crowd and strong in its constant illumination of reality. The poem is subtitled "individual Duty" and the poet's responsibility is to inhabit, and accommodate himself to, the "central tower" within which he is free and beyond the enervating limitations of "the makeshift truce".

## NOTES

1. Archibald Lampman, "At The Mermaid Inn", the *Toronto Globe*, Saturday, July 2, 1892.
2. Letters from Lampman to Thomson, MS Group 29940, Vol. I, November 11, 1813, Public Archives, Ottawa.
3. Archibald Lampman, "At The Mermaid Inn", the *Toronto Globe*, Saturday, November 19, 1892.
4. *Ibid.*, Saturday, April 2, 1892.
5. Archibald Lampman, "Friendship", *Rouge et Noir*, December, 1881.
6. Desmond Pacey, *Ten Canadian Poets*, (The Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1958), p. 125.
7. Carl Y. Connor, *Archibald Lampman*, (New York, 1929), p. 46.
8. Archibald Lampman, "The Poetry of Byron", MS Group 29940, Vol. I, Public Archives, Ottawa.
9. Archibald Lampman, "At The Mermaid Inn", the *Toronto Globe*, Saturday, June 25, 1892.
10. *Ibid.*, Saturday, July 23, 1892.
11. *Ibid.*, Saturday, January 14, 1893.
12. Archibald Lampman, "Two Canadian Poets", Pref. note by E. K. Brown, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 13, (July 1944), p. 407.