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## Archibald Lampman's "Nature" Poetry as Reflecting the (Im)possibility of Construing Canadian Identity

### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to show on the example of Archibald Lampman and William Wordsworth how the two literary traditions intersperse and diverge on the ultimate Romantic subject – Nature. Descriptions of nature in the poems of Lampman and Wordsworth are often interior landscapes or "maps of a state of mind" (Atwood) important for defining one's identity. In Wordsworth's poetry man's identity is built and re-built on the basis of his close contact with Nature that soothes him and provides comfort for the years to come. On the other hand, Lampman's poetry speaks about the difficulty of coming to terms with Nature, of taming the unpredictable, cruel and often meaningless landscape. There exists in Lampman's poetry an attempt to reconcile with Mother-Nature and seek guidance from it, a prominent Wordsworthian trait which is juxtaposed to the feeling of being swallowed up by Nature's unconscious cruelty and bareness. The instability of the Canadian concept of «identity» and the inability to define what it really is might be the result of this double-sided view of Nature.

### Résumé

Le but de ce travail est de montrer, à travers l'exemple d'Archibald Lampman et William Wordsworth, comment deux traditions littéraires se croisent et divergent au sujet du plus important concept romantique, la nature. Les descriptions de la nature dans la poésie d'Archibald Lampman et William Wordsworth sont souvent des paysages intérieurs ou des « cartes de l'état de conscience » (Atwood) essentiels à la définition de l'identité de chacun. Dans la poésie de Wordsworth, l'identité de l'homme se construit et se reconstruit sur les bases de son contact intime avec la nature qui l'apaise et lui fournit la consolation pour les années à venir. Quant à la poésie de Lampman, elle parle des difficultés à essayer de comprendre la nature, à dompter le paysage imprévisible, impitoyable et souvent dénué de sens. Il existe chez Lampman une tentative de se réconcilier avec la Mère-Nature et d'être guidé par elle, trait wordsworthien majeur, et parallèlement le sentiment d'engloutissement par l'inconsciente cruauté et le dépouillement de la Nature. L'instabilité du concept de l'« identité canadienne » et l'incapacité de la définir peuvent être le résultat de ce double rapport à la Nature.

Using a number of representative poems of Wordsworth and Lampman this paper will purport to prove that it is in their similarities where these two poets assert their individuality most vigorously. It will show that Lampman adapted and modified romanticism to express his own time and place. A borrowed European concept serves wonderfully to prove that Lampman is not a pale imitation of Wordsworth, but a poet portraying Canada's national distinctiveness.

If there was anything to establish Archibald Lampman as the finest English Canadian poet of his time, it was certainly his first collection of poems *Among the Millet, and Other Poems*, published in 1888. *Among the Millet* demonstrated Lampman's technical mastery as well as his unique way of observing and contemplating nature – the ultimate romantic subject. Now, there exists a discrepancy between the year 1888 and the label "Romantic" that is usually attached to such writers as Charles G. D. Roberts, Bliss Carman, Wilfred Campbell, D. C. Scott and Archibald Lampman, the writers who were mainly active in the 1880s and 1890s. First of all, this is because the Romantic period in Great Britain, as a particular historical epoch, ended by the late 1830s. In fact, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Victorian age had already reached its climax and was facing its decline. In Canada, on the other hand, those poets who are the obvious candidates for the label "Victorian", such as Charles Heavyside, Alexander McLachlan and William Kirby, in fact preceded those labelled "Romantic", who lived in the late nineteenth century, which only complicates the issue further. Secondly, "Romanticism"<sup>1</sup> as a set of cultural and ideological formations that came to prominence during the romantic period, presupposes such concepts as "the age of revolution", "the coming to power of the middle classes", "the untrammelled growth of the individual", "the attempt to reconcile with nature", on the grounds that man and nature have parted – all of them inapplicable to Canadian experience. Even the term "a colonial culture lag" used to explain this time differential does not seem to account for the absurdity of transferring a literary-historical term such as "Romanticism" to describe the poetry of the Canadian poets of the 1880s.

The label "Confederation Poets" proves to be equally spurious. As explained by Les McLeod "the term implies no aesthetic method or credo, and certainly no relationship between the poetry and international artistic or intellectual currents," and thus "it represents the form, not the substance of an attempt to see Canadian poetry in its own context" (McLeod, 1984, 1-37). In other words, the term fails in both literary-historical and literary-theoretical sense. Regardless of the dubious validity of both terms, my belief is that the term "Romantic" should and must be applied to the late nineteenth-century poets and Archibald Lampman in particular, because the quintessential experience in his poetry is that of a solitary man faced with awesome nature that destabilizes the poet's notion of the self.

In Lampman's poetry we are dealing with Wordsworthian Romanticism that locates the essential poetic experience in the relationship between man and nature. Wordsworth as a counterpart to Lampman seems to impose himself spontaneously. Not only because he is the greatest British Romantic and Lampman was acquainted with his writing<sup>2</sup>, but also because his nature poetry, just like Lampman's, is never just about nature. The lines containing mere descriptions of landscape are often interior landscapes or "maps of a state of mind" (Atwood, 2004, 59) important for defining one's identity. For Wordsworth, man's identity is built and

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- 1) For a detailed discussion on such concepts as "the Romantic period" and "Romanticism", see Jerome McGann: "Re-thinking Romanticism", 735-754.
  - 2) Though Lampman wrote a series of essays on Wordsworth, he admired Keats more than any other English romantic poet. In fact he claimed that Wordsworth was the most spontaneous and, in the loftiness of his nature, the greatest of all English romantic poets. Still, Keats was the most perfect one. Lampman considered himself to be "Canadian Keats", believing that Keats found a sort of reincarnation in him. For Lampman's detailed account on the difference between the two poets see his essay "Poetic Interpretation."



re-built on the basis of his close contact with nature that soothes him and brings comfort for the years to come. On the other hand, most of Lampman's poetry speaks about the difficulty of coming to terms with nature, of taming the unpredictable, cruel and often meaningless landscape. Yet, there exists in Lampman's poetry an attempt to reconcile with nature and to seek guidance from it as a kind of Mother-Nurse – a prominent Wordsworthian trait which is juxtaposed to the feeling of being swallowed up by nature's unconscious cruelty and bareness. Lampman's insistence on emotions rather than reason as the vehicle of poetic communication echoes Wordsworth's feeling that "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings."

Just like Wordsworth, Lampman is constantly drawn to solitary figures, the people reduced to an almost animal state, believing that they assert their humanity through what they feel and how we feel about them. Wordsworth's "creative doctrine or myth" (Bloom, 1971, 159) of "spots of time" brings together the actual place the poet had visited a long time ago and the memory of it which reshapes the past experience. Lampman's poetry testifies to the centrality of the concept of memory as being both a place and a process in Romantic poetry.

Lampman's best nature pieces are often descriptions of nature's extremes reflecting the actual climatic conditions in Ontario. In "Heat" Lampman records his experience of a landscape in noontime heat as a series of sensations stamped upon the poet's mind. As noted by Anne Compton, the emphasis here is on the individualism of visual perception (Compton, 1994, 33-56). At first, we feel the poet's aloofness as the passive observer of the plains, the road, the slowly-moving hay-cart, the wagoner, the flowers and the lying cattle, all of them numbed by the insufferable heat. The poet becomes involved in this static scene where the wagon is "the sole thing that seems to move/ In all the heat-held land," the moment he confesses his immediate sensory perception:

In intervals of dreams I hear  
 The cricket from the droughty ground;  
 The grasshoppers spin into mine ear  
 A small innumerable sound.  
 I lift mine eyes sometimes to gaze:  
 The burning sky-line blinds my sight:  
 The woods far off are blue with haze:  
 The hills are drenched in light.  
 ("Heat", 33-40)

For Lampman, as for any Romantic poet, eyes and ears become the poet's major gates of perception, active participants in the constant dialogue between the poet's self and nature. In line with Lockean concept of *tabula rasa*, visual images, as replicas of the objects of sight, become vital mental units that imprint themselves upon a passive mind. This is why the first generation of English romantic poets, firmly influenced by empiricist philosophy, believed that they were most effective when they visualized and evoked the scene they were describing. Thus, if Wordsworth's poetry suffers from "despotism of the eye," as Coleridge would put

it, this is because sight is his most powerful means to imprint the objects of external world on his sensitive mind. One remembers Wordsworth saying in *The Prelude*, Book IV, how he solaced himself “with such discoveries as his eye can make beneath him in the bottom of the deeps,” seeing “many beauteous sights – weeds, fishes, flowers, grots, pebbles, roots of trees” and fancying more, unable “to part the shadow from the substance” (250 – 255). The heat in Lampman’s poem has a blurring effect: the road melts into the glare, the wagoner is half-hidden in the blur of white dust and the woods are blue with haze.

Wordsworth, on the other hand cannot distinguish the shadow from the substance of landscape. One is immediately aware that these are the sensations of Impressionist artists; Turner comes to mind in connection to Wordsworth and Watson<sup>3</sup> in connection to Lampman. If we take Impressionism to be all about “art’s transition from trying to portray what all men know to trying to portray what the individual actually sees” (Watt, 1979, 169-180) then it is not difficult to connect it with Romanticist poetics – the belief that the individual sensations are the main avenue to truth and value. We are not to expect a clear view of the artist’s depicted object but a transformed version of it where the conditions under which the viewing is done are an essential part of what the poet sees and tries to convey. Yet, individual sensations are changeable and nothing more than momentary truths can be established. It is the momentary personal experience that matters for Lampman. He finds his momentary sensuous delights in his close contact with the local Ontario landscape and builds up an impressionist “painting” entirely his own. The heat permeates the poet’s entire being and his state is in between dream<sup>4</sup> and reality. Only in the intervals of dream does he see the surroundings and hears the sounds of nature until by the end of the poem the scene affects his thoughts and the romantic mind-nature correspondence has finally been established:

Nay more, I think some blessed power  
Hath brought me wandering idly here:  
In the full furnace of this hour  
My thoughts grow keen and clear.  
("Heat", 45-48)

As noted by Roy Daniels, Lampman says nothing about the subject of his dreams in his best poems, even if they seem to be the centre of his poetic experience. Dreams “seem to partake of sensations, of an expansive feeling of peace and the resolution of all difficulties” (Daniels, 1965, 389-405). Neither do we know about the subject of his thoughts, but we can feel that the moment in which the mind responds to nature, growing “keen and clear” is the moment in which the nature’s opposites will be conciliated: the tension has been established between movement and stillness, coolness and warmth, sound and silence, darkness and light and the

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- 3) Homer Ransford Watson (1855-1936) was in Lampman’s opinion the most successful of Canadian landscapists. Reviewing an Academy exhibition in 1892, Lampman and D. C. Scott praised him not for reproducing reality but for conveying his impression of reality, reproducing the landscape under the presence of half-stormy days when the fields are darkened by great shadows.
  - 4) Some of the best Lampman’s poems such as “April”, “The Frogs”, “Among the Timothy”, “Winter Hues Recalled” etc. speak about dreaming.



poet's mind is there to bring the resolution. The poem establishes a sort of "psycho-natural parallelism" (Abrams, 1960, 52) according to which the essences within nature have a kind of duplicate subsistence as ideas in the mind. In his famous 1800 "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" Wordsworth tells us that poetry is the image of man and nature because the Poet considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature. According to M. H. Abrams, the interaction of mind and nature, subject and object, and the hope of synthesizing the two terms of the dialectic lie at the heart of romanticism. We sense through the poem's imagery that Lampman did not strive to evoke any philosophic or theological concepts but a simple belief in the goodness of life and the beauty of nature that pervades everything. Moreover, nature is made into a symbol of interior processes of the self in motion. The poetic "I" that at the beginning of the poem counts the marguerites one by one, hears the cricket and gazes into the sky by the end of the poem turns into a thinking subject. In other words, we realize that nature induces in the poet the trance of insight into the life of things. Such positive portrayals of nature are a rather rare occurrence in Lampman's work and his most powerful poems are those depicting nature's cruelty and bareness.

In "The Woodcutter's Hut", one of Lampman's most original poems, he speaks about a solitary man who goes up the hills during winter months to chop woods. All he hears is "the echoing shout of his axe" and the stirring of some mountain birds. This solitary figure seems to be entirely isolated and inarticulate, reduced to an almost animal state:

He lies through the leaguering hours in his bunk  
Like a winter-hidden beast  
Or sits on the hard-packed earth, and smokes by his  
Draught-blown guttering fire,  
Without thought or remembrance, hardly awake,  
And waits for the storm to tire.  
(*"The Woodcutter's Hut"*, 47-52)

The woodcutter might be Lampman's alter ego, as suggested by Roy Daniels, "the man to whom total dreaming commitment in natural surroundings is a supreme good, without an articulate philosophy of life but with a vigorous full realization of life" (Daniels, 1965, 397) and this is the reason why, according to Daniels, this solitary man awakens the poet's admiration. Yet, if we recognize the Wordsworthian notion of a poet as "a man speaking to men", then a poet's curious attraction to solitary outcasts might come from the need to express their belonging to general humanity. When Wordsworth sings about "The Old Cumberland Beggar" who "sate and ate his food in solitude" (15) with a palsied hand, or about the blind beggar (*The Prelude*, Book VII) upon whom he stared "as if admonish'd from another world" (623), his message is not that the beggars are prompters of charity and as such, pointless moral entities. A human identity is not defined by what we possess; it derives from the sympathy we feel for another person, when one experiences the being of someone else as merely human (Cf. Bromwich, 2000, 30). Wordsworth is very much of the Rousseauist party in his belief that our feelings connect us and that it is through them that we belong to humanity. Lampman's "animal

man", although pictured as an emblem of man's difficulty to come to terms with nature, should not be deemed useless because he can feel as intensely as anyone. Although "without thought or remembrance", this *noble savage* is "sound and hard and complete" because he courageously faces the unpredictable and cruel landscape. When the summer comes he would leave into the valley to work in the fields and his hut in the hills would remain as the symbol of his loneliness and hard work. Therefore Lampman uses the motif of a lonely and silent spikenard to replace the woodcutter and to arouse in a random traveler "a sweet and beautiful sense" "of a struggling life in the waste, and the mark of a soul's command/ The going and coming of vanished feet, the touch of a human hand" (95-100).

The Romantic attraction to solitary outcasts thus becomes linked to a typically Canadian environment where a man dares not ask "Who am I?" The poem's first line "Far up in the wild and wintry hills in the heart of the/ cliff-broken woods" points to the fact that the woodcutter lives "somewhere out there" but also that his place could be anywhere. The "here" thus becomes irrelevant and the ontological speculations must succumb under the pressure of illimitable space. Thus man's isolation in nature becomes both, spacial and psychological isolation. Wordsworth can afford to ask himself "Who am I?" in a country where the environment, the "here", is already well-defined. But in the Canadian context Fry's essential question "Where is here?" imposes itself before "Who am I?" Thus for Lampman, or a lonely woodcutter as his possible *alter ego*, isolation and solitude that delete man's thoughts and memories are the only reality. He is not given a choice and has to accept life as it is. This is where Lampman is different from Wordsworth. Wordsworth's creative act arises from his *wish* to be alone. Poetry, in his words, must be born out of "emotion recollected in tranquility." For Wordsworth the solitary act of writing is a natural state. In *The Prelude*, for instance, the boy Wordsworth deliberately detaches himself from his companions at the climax of every "spot" (e.g. the skating memory, the nest-plundering memory, the Windander boy spot etc.) because he believes that there is something divine in solitude.

For Lampman, on the other hand, solitude is rarely a matter of choice, it is far more often a matter of fact. This is why solitude is unavoidable and all-pervasive and nature seems to be as alienated as the man who depends upon it. In one of his minor poems, conveniently entitled "Solitude", Lampman personifies nature to show that man and his surroundings share one common destiny. The air that "hangs quiet as spaces in a marble frieze" becomes a metaphor for nature's muteness out of its unwillingness to communicate with man. The loneliness of both man and nature and nature's unresponsiveness to man's desire to communicate is nowhere more obvious than in "Winter Uplands":

The frost that stings like fire upon my cheek  
 The loneliness of this forsaken ground  
 The long, white drift upon whose powdered peak  
 I sit in the great silence as one bound;  
 ("Winter Uplands", 1-4)

The reading of this poem as "an intensely personal expression of self, superimposed upon the natural scene" (Whitridge, 1974, 7-28) seems to be neglecting another aspect typical of Lamp-



man's poetry. Although the poet's mood and attitude are a legitimate element in the tendered impression, the poem speaks above all about his desire to communicate with nature and his thwarted expectation. Both Wordsworth and Lampman want to communicate with nature but most of Lampman's poetry testifies to the fact that communication cannot be established.

For Wordsworth the dialogue between mind and nature starts at the very beginning of our life and it is crucial for the growth of the poet's mind. Wordsworthian child holds "unconscious intercourse/ With the eternal beauty, drinking in / A pure organic mist, or from the level plain/ Of waters coloured by the steady clouds" (*The Prelude*, Book II, 589-593) and his mind is connected to the universe first through his Mother and then through nature which takes up his mother's place. Later on in man's life there are epiphanic moments when the landscape becomes "the perfect image of a mighty Mind". One such moment occurs in Wordsworth's climbing of Mount Snowdon:

The universal spectacle throughout  
Was shaped for admiration and delight,  
Grand in itself alone, but in that breach  
Through which the homeless voice of waters rose  
That dark, deep thoroughfare, had Nature lodged  
The soul, the imagination of the whole.  
(*Prelude*, Book XIII, 59-65)

Yet, where some critics would speak about the happy union of mind and nature<sup>5</sup>, some others would suggest that in Wordsworth's poetry man's absorption into nature is never final. Thus Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman believe that *The Prelude* is all about the difficulties of the poet's return to nature. In fact, Hartman claims, the import of the Snowdon vision is that there exists an imagination in nature analogous to that in man. The episode returns him to the faith that "the forms/ Of nature have a passion in themselves." In Hartman's words: "Nature is not a universe of death that lives only from or within our life. It has a greatness commensurate to that in man: this greatness, this imagination, is revealed on Snowdon" (Hartman, 1964, 184). Thus, Lampman and Wordsworth believe that there is an indissoluble relation between mind and nature. Yet, nature for both is the Other, having a life of its own.

Lampman turns to nature as a mother in his poem "Freedom". His Mother-Nature is strong, innocent, beautiful and blameless – a refuge for the entire generation of men "whose hearts in the furnace of care have forgotten/ For ever the scent and hue of her lands" (6-7). He believes in the regenerating power of nature but that power is to be confirmed in the years to come. Nature, or at least reminiscence of nature, is not there for Lampman all along, as it is for Wordsworth in his Cambridge or London years: ("In deep devotion, Nature, did I feel / In that great city what I owed to thee;/ High thoughts of God and man, and love of man,/ Triumphant over all those loathsome sights/ Of wretchedness and vice", *The Prelude*, Book VIII, l. 62-5). I believe it to be a sign of Lampman's skepticism towards nature as healer. The fact that the consolation nature offers is a matter of future is suggested by the "shall" in the final stanza:

5) See M. H. Abrams: *The Mirror and the Lamp* and *Natural Supernaturalism*.



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.  
 ("Freedom", 71-76)

The return of man to nature will happen someday, but what if it does not. What if nature responds with cruelty or does not respond at all to man's call. In moving away from the city, away from the group, the individual faces the utmost terror when he feels himself becoming an individual in the face of an unresponsive nature. In Frye's opinion the terror that a Canadian poet expresses with regard to nature is not a terror of the dangers or mysteries of nature, but a terror of the soul at something that these things manifest:

The human mind has nothing but human and moral values to cling to if it is to preserve its integrity or even its sanity, yet the vast unconsciousness of nature in front of it seems an unanswerable denial of those values. (Frye, 1965, 830)

D. M. R. Bentley affirms that Lampman's nature contains many suggestions of the post-fallen condition and believes that the final stanza of "Freedom" effectively deconstructs the poem's title and the speaker's credibility. It shows, in fact, that what has been achieved is not freedom at all, but an exclusive, misanthropic, and entrapping state of childish dependence on "mother nature" (Bentley, 1982, 5-26). Lampman's skepticism becomes the consequence of knowing that nature is only seemingly innocent, hiding in itself the places of unhappiness and conflict. Thus, "mother of all things beautiful, blameless" gradually becomes as frightening as the city itself. "The innocent earth" from the beginning of the poem turns into a place where a kingfisher watches for its prey and where "dim woods" are the "tombs/Of the dead trees soft in their sepulchers" (59-60).

Lampman appropriated another important Wordsworthian term to achieve locality in his poems, that of "spots of time". The term itself is symbolic of both, the literal place the poet had visited and the symbolic place in his own psyche where memory plays the vital role. It points to the importance of the dimension of time in Wordsworth's poetry: it is the personal, subjective time that matters above the historic, factual time. This is where Wordsworth's notion of the "spots of time" foresees Bergson's conception of time: his concept of *durée réelle* (inner duration) contends that our subjective time is in fact a process of reinterpretation between different phases in our inner lives, i. e. between our past and our present (Gillies, 2003, 95 – 115). The romantic poet's "self" is thus defined as a compilation of different older "selves". Lampman's spot (*omphalos*) syndrome also goes beyond a mere physical description or local colour to project both a physical place, and a psychic one. Thus, in "Between the Rapids" Lampman focuses on the image of a traveler in a canoe who visits the familiar spots in Quebec, remembering dear people that once lived there. The trip itself turns into a longing for an unretrievable past, a metaphor of a spiritual journey, reminiscent



of Wordsworth's "Five years have past; five summers with the length/ Of five long winters!" (1-2) of "Tintern Abbey":

Ah, yet the same, or have they changed their face,  
 The fair green fields, and can it still be seen.  
 The white log cottage near the mountain's base,  
 So bright and quiet, so home-like and serene?  
 Ah, well I question, for as five years ago,  
 How many blessings fall, and how much woe.  
 ("Between the Rapids", 5-10)

As the voyageur paddles his canoe down the river, people and places are named and sweet memories are aroused. The process of moving along the river becomes a frame for a personal narrative, and the evocation of names and places of French origin serves to develop the sense of locality: black-eyed Jeanne, old wrinkled Picaud, Pierre and pale Lisette are, we are led to believe, either the voyageur's long lost friends or his abandoned family. The traveler is not only physically separated from the familiar river shores, his separation is also psychic – the memory of the dear ones is all he can cling to. His present "self" becomes enriched by a series of remembrances and thus his personal history, his memories and feelings, are deeply linked with the sense of place (Cf. Mezei, 1979, 57-72). The feeling for place is more important because it checks and balances the feeling for time (Ross, 1986, 89). Lampman could have chosen not to dwell on the details of flora and fauna around him, not to mention familiar landmarks and local words and names in his poetry. In that sense he would have been a worldly poet, closer to the English masters that he wanted to emulate so much. But he chose instead to create a language of place in order to give his poetry a more local flavour. "Timothy"<sup>6</sup> instead of "millet" becomes a symbol of his insistence on the Canadian experience, a mix of wilderness, cultivation and the Old World (Cf. Mezei, 1979, 57-72).

The poem "Winter Hues Recalled" immediately makes one think about Wordsworth's *The Prelude* – first in its form, the meditative blank verse and then in its content – a spot of time becomes the crucial experience for the poet. The "quiet garner-house of memory" (13) becomes for Lampman "a sacred dwelling-place of things unfeared" (22). Memory is there for the poet to join two separate selves: the feelings that were once felt by the poet now have to be rethought and felt again, thus bringing together the past and the present. Since the past does not have any objective existence beyond what is retained in the present, memory becomes the link among many interpenetrating and constantly mobile selves. The function of such spots of time is "to enshrine the spirit of the past for future restoration" (Bloom, 1971, 161). The "unfeared things" from man's past come unexpectedly and "they are sweetest when unsought." The experience of traveling through one's past and trying to find the most significant moment resembles, as the poet tells us, that of "reading upon an outstretched map" (29). Time and place become woven closely together and the memory of

6) This type of grass was found as a wild plant in woodlands in some late-settled parts of Ontario. It had obviously run ahead of settlement spreading out from the points where it had been introduced from the Old World.

a moment is as significant as the memory of a place. This remembrance was not a dream but "a thing most keenly real":

The memory of a moment, when with feet  
 Arrested and spell-bound, and *captured eyes*,  
*Made wide with joy and wonder*, I beheld  
 The spaces of a white and wintry land  
 Swept with the fire of sunset, all its width,  
 Vale, forest, town and misty eminence,  
 A miracle of colour and of beauty.  
 ("Winter Hues Recalled", 33-39)

February is a month of great contradictions in Canada and the tension in the poem is achieved through the contrasting images of winter and the upcoming spring. The snow-packed fields, the stinging ice and frost are coloured by the rays of sun. Yet, the sun in itself has an ambiguous role: at first the wintry land is "Swept with the fire of sunset" and later on it is transformed into "A miracle of colour and of beauty." The landscape is at once ravaged and enhanced by the fiery sunset. The white and silver are transformed into rose, crimson and purple. D. M. R. Bentley was right in saying that the word "wide" in the lines above, suggests the poet's vision that is both expanded and childishly credulous (Bentley, 1981, 188-210).

There is something profoundly sincere, innocent and childish in Lampman's nature poems that is different from Wordsworth's experience. The first lines of "Winter Hues Recalled" – "Life is not all for effort; there are hours/ When fancy breaks from the exacting will,/ And rebel thought takes schoolboy's holiday,/ Rejoicing in its idle strength" – suggest irrationality, immaturity and irresponsibility, which do not parallel Wordsworth's view of "spots of time" when the soul "retains an obscure sense of possible sublimity" (*Prelude, Book XII*). In such special moments, Wordsworth's mind acquires a sense of individual greatness, with outward sense merely the mind's servant. Lampman's mind acquires rather a sense of nature's greatness. The tensions visible in Canada's landscape and the overwhelming sense of silence and stillness induce in the poet the feelings of numbness and stupefaction and in the end he has to awake "as if from a dream." In fact, the poem indicates how Lampman, in the light of a Canadian landscape, adapted and refined a romantic concept.

I hope that this paper has proved that there exist many similarities between Lampman and Wordsworth. For both writers nature becomes something that disturbs the mind and sets it into motion. If we take Lampman's nature poetry to be all about sight and hearing (that would immediately entitle him to be an Impressionist poet), solitary men living in contact with nature, the relationship between Mind and Nature where time and place become equally important and the attempt at seeking recovery in nature – we do not need to look further to think of him as a Romantic poet. However, in his attempt to be a universal, worldly poet, he remains distinctively Canadian – his nature is recognizably Canadian and its tensions and contradictions are also reflected in his mind. His feelings for nature are a mixture of both love and terror, a belief in the healing powers of nature and a denial of



nature's beneficent effect. The result is a markedly double-minded attitude towards Canada – faith in the Divine Mother and a feeling of hopeless imprisonment (Atwood, 2004, 62). It is this constant tension between reality and expectation that defines Lampman's nature poetry as well as Canadian identity.

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