The Poet-Impressionist: Some Landscapes by Archibald Lampman

by Anne Compton

The development which L.R. Early notes in Archibald Lampman's poetry is from "an almost obsessive interest in landscape to a greater concern [in his last years] with ethical and social questions" (*Archibald Lampman* 45), and these later poems have not received "their proper share of attention" ("Archibald Lampman," *New Canadian Anthology* 22). Ralph Gustafson cautions us, however, against forcing upon Lampman the identification of socialist poet: "Lampman was not cut out to be a socialist poet; he was a nature poet" (5). Misguided or insufficiently informed, our estimate of Lampman's socialism remains suspended. His best work, it is generally agreed, is his poetry of natural description. Lampman himself thought so: "`The contents of my book [*Among the Millet*] are very varied, but those that are devoted to nature description are certainly the best . . . '" (Doyle 39). The superiority of the nature pieces derives from what is unique in Lampman's vision, what is distinguishable from, yet complementary to, the Romantic heritage. Making excursions into the country, Lampman was, W.J. Keith writes, "preparing himself for both thought and dream" (18).

Escape, companionship, recovery of innocence, and spiritual regeneration have all been offered as motives for these excursions. All or any of them might be true, but what exactly, I want to know, was gathered in the tilled or in the fallow field as preparation for "thought and dream." Lampman himself speaks of poetry as the second harvest, following the farmer's, of the rural field ("Poetic Possession"), but one wants to feel, touch, smell the second harvest as one does the former, the farmer's. For A.J.M. Smith, "Sensation, rather than idea, is what Lampman derives from landscape" (182). Sensations, inflected by consciousness, synthesized into an impression, make up the harvest. Impressions---the immediately conscious effect resulting from sensations---are offered to us in his poetry. What we experience of landscape is entirely refracted through the temperament of Archibald Lampman. Impressionism, according to Raymond Cogniat, is "Nature seen through the eyes of the individual" (6). The emphasis here is on the individualism of visual perception. The statement is literal not metaphorical. Claude Monet, for example, paints the effect of landscape as it actually exists before his eyes (Blunden 162). He relies on immediate sensory perception, the experience of the individual. As distinguished from the Romantic, who also places the individual, his attitudes and feelings, at the center of artistic expression, the Impressionist is always attentive to the actual, never transcendent. Truth to the object or scene---to the actual---is fidelity to one's own sense experience. Disclaiming anything beyond the actual, Impressionism also discountenances *a priori* assumptions. Quite apart from their technical innovations, the French Impressionists shocked their public because, in their paintings, they insisted that there was no common normative view of things. "`We must render the image of what we see, forgetting everything that existed before us,'" writes Cezanne (Nochlin 95). Absolutes, either transcendental or normative, are inconsistent with the impressionist view of reality as changeable. Nothing more than momentary truths can be established. "Impressionism is a realistic style of description," argues Rodney O. Rogers, "precisely because reality is ephemeral, evanescent, constantly shifting its meaning and hence continually defying precise definition" (265). Lampman shares with the Impressionists an attention to fleeting effects, and he is similar to them in his emphasis on visual experience. "Visual perception," Early writes, "remains the dominant sense in Lampman's body of poetry" (*Archibald Lampman* 74). Moreover, light, changeful light, is the optical phenomenon which predominates. Lampman is the poet of light, the effects of light, and of the mobility of landscape in light.

Lampman, we are told, is descriptive, "pictorial" (Connor 154), achieves "picturesque realism" (Daniells 398), provides "a picture gallery of the seasons" in *Lyrics of Earth* (Unwin 87), has a "painter's eye" (Keith 20)---but what kind of painter?---and "He made trim little etchings of snowcapes [sic], crows in flight, and hepaticas in season . . . " (Kennedy 123). Identifying poetry as a symbol-making art, Barrie Davies defends Lampman against the charge of being merely descriptive (*Archibald Lampman: Selected Prose* 7-8) and rightly so since as early as 1896 Lampman was castigated for his "vicious habit of description" (Waldron 104), but to be really, rather than "merely" descriptive is to describe what is actually there---light, or to be subjective, the sensations caused by light (Bell 8).

Lampman's impressionism has been remarked upon most fully by Louis K. MacKendrick, but also by others, including Early who speaks of the "impressionistic method that generally shapes Lampman's nature poetry" (*Archibald Lampman* 76), but it is usually the case in Lampman criticism that attention to the impressionistic method quickly gives way to an exploration of symbols and emblems, visions and dreams. Just as A.J.M. Smith has been dubbed a metaphysical poet, so Lampman has been described as an impressionist but without much investigation of the term and without showing what exactly makes his work impressionist.

In the 18 June 1892 Mermaid Inn column, Lampman writes, "You do not need to go to the Rocky Mountains or the Yosemite Valley in order to find the beautiful; it is in the next field; it is at your feet" (94). Man need only, Lampman adds, "accustom himself to the intelligent use of his senses." Like the Impressionists, Lampman lauds the adequacy of the ordinary and the sufficiency of sensation. Clive Bell describes the common aim of the French Impressionists: "No need for the artist in search of subjects to go to history or mythology or literature; no need to ransack the gorgeous East or the mysterious North . . . let the artist walk into the street or railway station . . . there he will find beauty galore" (7). Their techniques enabled them to record their visual sensations so that the spectator sees not the normative but the sensational truth of things. Between 1874 and 1886 there were eight French Impressionist exhibitions. The label derives from a journalist's derisive reference to Monet's *Impression: Sunrise*, 1872, which appeared in the first exhibition. The first word in Monet's title draws attention to an essential factor---the beholder's fidelity to the unique moment. Around the same time as the Impressionists were distinguishing sensation in this way, Walter Pater, in the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873), was similarly anatomizing objects and exalting sensation. The experience of an object, according to Pater, dissipates the solidity of the object in a "swarm" of intense moments: "each object is loosed into a group of impressions" and "those impressions of the individual mind to which, for each one of us, experience dwindles down, are in perpetual flight . . . " (248). Pater was theorizing what the Impressionists were practising. For the visual artists, light is responsible for the "perpetual flight" of the impression. The Impressionists aimed to represent the appearance of the world out of doors as it is affected by light, the reflection of light, and by atmosphere (Murray 8), all of which had to be conveyed with the freshness of the initial sensation. As a result, their work had the vigorous and spontaneous appearance of a sketch and an incomplete, unfinished look (Cogniat 47). The techniques which they developed---the restriction to pure colours and the application of colour in thick flecks and short, small brush strokes---put into practice what they believed: colour is not in objects but in the light (Kronegger 42).

Although Lampman tried outdoor sketching only a little, "many of his poems," Carl Connor observes, "were like pictures . . . and he was much interested in the pictures and the progress of art in the Dominion" (154). In the Mermaid Inn column (24 June 1893), Lampman urged the Dominion government to increase and to improve the "so-called national gallery" (337). Reviewing an Academy exhibition (16 April 1892), Lampman and D.C. Scott deem the landscapes most successful, and of the landscapists, Homer Watson is especially praised: "He has so thoroughly mastered a certain kind of landscape under definite conditions of atmosphere. . . . [H]e reproduces the landscape under the presence of those cool, half-stormy days when the fields are darkened by great shadows and swept by splendid gleams and he conveys a delightful impression of the reality" (54-55). Watson is commended not for reproducing reality but for conveying his impression of reality. The finished presentation, they concede, can deliver no more than the impression as experienced by the painter.

When Lampman speaks about poetics in "Poetic Interpretation," there is a similar emphasis on the individuality of the impression. Distinguishing the great poet from the perfect poet (whom he prefers), Lampman says that the great poet because of his style---his settled method and tone---has "failed to render the pure and absolute impression produced by the phenomena of material nature, and the movement and emotion of human life." Without this impeding style, the perfect poet will "arrive unerringly at the perfect rendering of everything" (*Selected Prose* 88-89).

In the poetic soul there exists an "answering harmony" to a received impression; each separate impression will register its "musical value" on the poetic soul, and the perfect poet will reproduce not only a "vivid picture" and "accurate description" but also through the "subtle arrangement of word and phrase," a "marshalling of verbal sound," he will communicate the "stir in the soul" wrought by the impression (87). What is remarkable about this essay is the pre-eminence which Lampman gives to the impression. Not only is the distinctiveness of every phenomenon---May day sunrise or October sunset---to be exactly rendered but it is to be rendered as it registers on the "answering harmony" of the poet's temperament. Working out his aesthetic, Lampman presciently proposes a theory of literary impressionism. Successive critics---as early as Arthur Symons in "The Decadent Movement in Literature" (1893) and as recently as Peter Stowell in *Literary Impressionism, James and Chekhov* (1980)---have continued to explore the fruitful hybridization of literature and painting in literary impressionism. Although each medium has its own techniques, the impressionist writer and painter share a view of the nature of reality. Commenting on the novel, James Nagel writes, "As a total aesthetic, the themes and techniques of Impressionistic fiction derive their coherence from the assumption that human life consists of the interaction of an individual intelligence with a world apprehensible only in terms of sensory experience" (21). And for Elizabeth Kronegger, "the interplay of the individual's consciousness and the surrounding world," what Lampman is describing above, constitutes the impression (13).

The fundamental characteristic of the "surrounding world" for the painters---and the one which led to their particular techniques---was the instability of atmosphere and light in nature. Recognition of that instability required, in the observer, a continual adaptability---a flexible responsiveness to light and atmosphere wed to scrupulous observation. Fleeting change, in impressionist painting, had to be incorporated into the representation of nature. Lampman, in his essay "Poetic Interpretation," prescribes for the poet the same flexibility in response to the "phenomena of material nature" and recognizes that "pictures" so produced will be deeply inscribed with the "stir of the soul" which the perceived phenomena produces. Impressionism, therefore, combines the changeability of natural phenomena and the "answering harmony" of the individual temperament. Like the French Impressionists, Lampman extols the ordinary, recognizes the sufficiency of sensation, and prescribes a flexibility which would answer to nature's changeability.

It is my contention that Lampman arrived independently at an impressionist presentation of landscape. His poetry, and his remarks in prose on poetics and painting, reveals premises and procedures analogous to those of the French painters. Whereas in Europe and England, the painters exerted an influence on the French Symbolists, the Aesthetes and Decadents, the stream-of-consciousness novel, and eventually on the Imagists, Lampman is not in that line of inheritance. He arrives at impressionism not by way of these literary developments but out of his own close relationship to landscape, a relationship shaped to a large degree by his interest in painting. As an impressionist, Lampman is closer to the painters---Monet, Manet, Renoir, Sisley, and Pissarro---than he is to Impressionist poets such as Arthur Symons and Lionel Johnson. Particular landscapes, notes Early, suggest "the art of Monet or Renoir" (*Archibald Lampman* 51). Lampman's landscapes correspond to early Impressionist landscapes by Manet, Monet, and Renoir rather than to their later figural work, and to Sisley, in particular, he bears resemblance. Both poet and painter were interested in the effects of light on snow.

It is likely that there were no impressionist canvases in the Academy Exhibition of 1892 which Scott and Lampman reviewed. Their remarks do suggest, however, their sensitivity to the painters' handling of light. In Canada in the 1890s Canadian artists adopted impressionist methods; Lucius O'Brien's *Towing Barges on the Hudson River* 1895 is usually identified as the first Canadian Impressionist painting. Lampman was well acquainted with O'Brien's work; Lampman and Scott speak of the excellence of O'Brien's exhibits in the 1892 Academy Exhibition, commenting particularly upon *The Mill Pond at Blair*, a painting of a "misty cataract with the light upon it [which] is a delicious surprise" (*At the Mermaid Inn* 57). They are appreciative of the sudden shock---the "delicious surprise"---with which light so rendered invests its object. What the report on the Academy exhibition tells us is that Lampman approached painting, as he did landscape, attentive to the values of light, to the way in which light creates landscape. Impressionism arrived in the U.S.---in Boston---a decade earlier, in 1883. The chief proponent of Impressionism in America was Lampman's friend Hamlin Garland, the novelist and essayist: "the literary articulation of the movement in painting came largely through the efforts of Hamlin Garland, who . . . lectured on Impressionism and wrote about it in *Crumbling Idols* [1894]. . . . [H]is ideas were an important influence throughout the 1890s" (Nagel 14-15). Garland knew Lampman for ten years; their correspondence was established in 1889, and they met in 1892 when Garland visited Ottawa. Enthusiastic about "Heat" (shown to him by an editor at the Boston *Transcript*) (Doyle 38), Garland initiated the correspondence with a "fan letter" to Lampman. Two key letters from Garland to Lampman---one in response to "Heat," one critical of *Among the Millet*---have not survived (Doyle 38-39). It is likely, however, that Garland's comments on Lampman's work were governed by his zeal for Impressionism. Although lacking the benefit of direct contact---viewing impressionist canvases---Lampman may have become acquainted, through this correspondence, with impressionist theory. Other occasions of contact are possible.

Lampman's friend and correspondent Edward William Thomson left Toronto for Boston in 1891 to become editor of the *Youth's Companion*. Lampman visited Thomson in Boston in August 1891 and again in April 1893 (Bourinot 9, 18). Perhaps there, or perhaps at home, Lampman encountered this revolution in the visual arts, and even if he didn't, he anticipated it. Lampman is remarkable not because he applied to his poetry an emerging theory and practice but because out of an extraordinary relationship to landscape, he came to it on his own.

In his Mermaid Inn column, 18 February 1893, Lampman speaks of the "wonderful painting to be done" by the Canadian painter who takes as his subject the midwinter landscape. Perceiving this potential, Lampman predicates the transformation in Canadian painting, in the late 1890s,[1] from Academicism to Impressionism.

> On some of these splendid February mornings it cannot but occur to one that there is some wonderful painting to be done, which has perhaps not yet been even attempted. In the winter dawn, with every gradation of red and gold and blue; even in the early forenoon, when the towers of our northern capital stand westward, pale luminous, touched with rose, against a pale, greenish-blue sky, when every roof fronting the sun is a sheet of dazzling cream . . . and every shadow a patch of the clearest crystalline violet; in the coming of the winter night, with its gorgeous changes of colour, subtle and indescribable, what an infinite variety of choice there is for the hand of the painter. . . .
>
> (260)

Everywhere Lampman looks, he sees colour in light. His imagined canvases celebrate light's range, "its infinite variety"---luminous, dazzling, crystalline---in Canadian midwinter landscapes. If midwinter provided "indescribable" changes in light, high summer heat translated the visual into visceral terms so that the poet reporting on heat's effects is himself charged with those effects ("Heat").

In "Heat"[2] Lampman records his experience of a landscape in noontime heat as a series of intense moments. The poem registers the successive impressions wrought on the speaker's temperament moment by moment as the objects on the hill, of the field, and in the shade of the trees flash upon the eye and the sounds "spin" into the ear. His intense engagement with the scene is presented not as a narrative but as a record of impressions which are passed on to the reader and from those impressions, the reader construes the scene, much as the spectator of an impressionist painting, led on, as it were, from one local area of colour activity to another, fuses the blobs of colour in the painting into a unified field. "Heat" invites a similar participation to link what Desmond Pacey calls the "sequence of emotional impressions" (179). The sensory experience is directly rendered; no expository comment punctuates the consecutive sensations. Visual, auditory, and tactile, the poem is predominantly visual. The eye travels "From plains that reel to southward dim," follows the road "up the steep hill" where the road seems to "melt into the glare." In other words, objective data are combined with subjective apprehension to yield an impression of just that place in a specific moment of time, what is for the perceiver the "one and unique occasion" (Nagel 28). Glare and blur modify sight; gloom---"The cool gloom of the bridge"---and the shadows of the elm-tree, in the foreground, further affect sight, giving the impression of "Dark patches in the burning grass." The scene is interpreted in colour and form, light and shadow: "The woods far off are blue with haze: / The hills are drenched with light." The sensory effect of the scene, not the scene itself, is Lampman's project here. Perhaps this is what Early means when he says, "If Lampman escaped anywhere, it was into nature poetry, not nature" ("Archibald Lampman," Canadian Writers 146). Roy Daniells compares Lampman to Cezanne (398)---"he has his own little sensation in the face of nature"---and it was Cezanne who said, "`Art should not imitate nature, but should express the sensations aroused by nature'" (Nochlin 95). What especially determines the sensory effect here is the heat. James Nagel, in Stephen Crane and Literary Impressionism, writes:

> *Of particular interest is the obscuring of vision in Impressionistic painting, a systematic limitation of the sensory reception of the essentials of scene. Such obscuring is generally the result of natural phenomena (trees, fog, snow, darkness, distance) or, less often, problems arising from human civilization (smoke, flags, buildings, crowds). (12)*

Heat, and its effects, is the obscuring medium in Lampman's scene. A disturbance-free stillness pervades the scene. The moment is "windless." The stillness enables an acuity of perception; the marguerites are numbered "one by one," yet the heat, because of its "glare," seems to melt object and scene. Heat casts a haze over the wood, colouring the line of wood blue. Sunlight saturates flora and drenches the hills in light. Heat, like an obscuring film, suffuses the scene. Not only does heat create the visual swimming effect---the impression that the plains "reel"---but also the natural result of intense heat, the dust, further obscures vision. Movement stirs dust, and the wagoner is "Half-hidden in the windless blur / Of white dust puffing to his knees." The "puffing" dust augments the impression that in the heat the scene swims. Lampman establishes the impressions which the scene and its objects make upon him as seen through, and in, heat. Acuity of perception is qualified by the intervening heat, the heat that falls between the eye and the object, affecting the eye. None the less the poet---it is a visual exertion---discriminates exactly, "Upward half-way, or it may be / Nearer the summit," the position of the wagoner. He does not offer a normative common vision of the scene; "Heat" is how this landscape is seen by precisely this temperament in a single passing moment. Had Lampman been interested in anything other than the impression which the scene had upon him, he would have elaborated on the thoughts promoted by this visual moment, but even of these thoughts he speaks sensually. "In the full furnace of this hour / My thoughts grow keen and clear" remains at the level of sensation. The inward sensation---the invigoration---differs not at all from the beneficence of sensory effects provoked by the scene.

Heat textures ("melts," "soaks") the scene and deepens the space. The appropriate reflection of the scene's depth is sound; the thrush's "revolving tune" (stanza four) slides, it would seem, "leisurely" towards the poet from an indefinite "somewhere on the slope" although the slope is "near by." The heat, which obscures visually, contributes a depth to the landscape so that sound reaches the poet slowly, as across a great extent. The perceptions, inventory-like, of the active eye are suspended in the "sense-transference" (Ower 27), the shift to the auditory in stanza four. The thrush's "revolving tune" encourages the intervals of dreams during which other sounds "spin into mine ear," but the grasshopper's crackling, like the thrush's tune from "somewhere," is "A small innumerable," and therefore indefinite, sound, a spinning only. Either the poet could drift and dream in those mesmeric sounds or he could recharge in the blinding field of light: "I lift mine eyes. . . . " The colon-punctuated lines of description---simple, subtle and luminous---marshall the impressions received in the restored visual focus.

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.
(PAL 13)

The recharging enables the poet to reflect on his modes of perception and his pleasure in them: "And yet to me not this or that / Is always sharp or always sweet," and although the sensations, auditory and visual, do not always so distinctly precede dream and thought respectively, in this situation, there can be little doubt that the pre-eminently visual (veering to tactile) experience of the landscape has made a refining furnace of the brain. Merging impressionistically with the "surrounding world," the individual con-sciousness, the brain, takes on the furnace features of the landscape.

There is something appallingly lonely in the individual testament---whether in poem or painting---of the single passing moment. The impression is always a lonely affair. "I so utterly alone," concludes the speaker in "Winter Solitude" (ALS 21). Lampman's use of "the isolate `I' (eye)" (Steele 48) in the nature poems emphasizes the singular---the sole beholder in the unprecedented moment. No landscape is so congenial to the impressionist's lonely moment as the Canadian landscape in winter. For one who wanders into that landscape, there is always the sense of the single unique moment, a moment never to be experienced by another and never to be experienced again. The impressionist-poet is the only witness, and there is only one moment of witness. In poem after poem---"January Morning," "Winter Evening," "Winter Uplands"---Lampman records such moments. Often the singularity of the moment is heightened by the impending fall of darkness: "A little while / And night shall darken down" (PAL 117), or "Glittering and still shall come the awful night" (PAL 243). In "Evening" (PAL 199), "the great night comes on," and all "Shall be gathered into the night" (PAL 143). In these landscape sonnets, more than anywhere, Lampman establishes what "Soon, soon shall fly" ("Winter Evening"), the evanescent moment. Like Alfred Sisley, who was also fascinated by the evening sky, Lampman records "the charm of things which are going away" (Blunden 162). On the space framed by the sonnet form, he deftly and quickly strokes in the sense-data. In longer, more discursive poems such as "The Frogs," he is less of an impressionist. The sonnet and the short lyric were well suited to the paradox of impressionism---the arrest of the fleeting moment.

Just as the French Impressionists painted the same subject from the same perspective---Monet's *Rouen Cathedral, West Facade, Sunlight, 1894* and *Rouen Cathedral, Sunset, 1894* (Blunden 206)---but at different times and under differing conditions of light, so also Lampman repeatedly presents the same view---the horizon of the city as seen from a distant rural position---but seen in different climatic, atmospheric, and light conditions. Monet's presentation of the same subject, Rouen Cathedral, in different light conditions confirms that reality is a matter of perception (Nagel 13). In Lampman's "Winter Uplands" (PAL 299), the cityscape seen in evening is "The far-off city towered and roofed in blue / A tender line upon the western red," but in "A January Morning" (PAL 286) the "city towers up-borne / Glimmer faint rose against the pallid blue." There is a perceptual shift in colour due to the effect of light (evening light, morning light) although the mass is constant and the subject remains the same. The distant city, the massing of the towers the same, is yet again different in "Winter Solitude": "I saw the city's towers on a luminous pale-grey sky; / Beyond them a hill of the softest mistiest green . . . " (ALS 21). Gazing upon the same scene, Lampman records how the sensory effect of the same varies; the scene is always different. Lampman illustrates that no two moments of perception are the same; for the poet-impressionist the reality of the city is in the perceiver's eye. Lampman is no more interested in the massiveness, the structural fixity of the city towers, than he is in the business going on in these towers. He is visually teased by the variable line. Facing the city, what he saw was an undulating and ever-changing line not a fixed and permanently contoured shape.

Since the variable line is a matter of perception, it occurs as a sensory perception whether one gazes upon a natural, a constructed, or a human subject. In the landscape sonnets, there is frequently, for instance, a line of carters, woodmen's sleighs "team by team," a line of wagoners. Sometimes it is a flight of swallows ("A Thunderstorm") or a file of animals ("Evening"). More often it is the human line: "The woodmen's carts go by me homeward-wheeled, / Past the thin fading stubbles, half concealed . . . " (PAL 117). The figures in a Lampman landscape, always on the verge of leaving, are not anecdotal. As in Monet's *Cart on the Road Near Honfleur* or Sisley's *Snowscape with Huntsman*, the figures are integrated into a natural, and changing, landscape. Closer to home, in Maurice Cullen's landscapes---*The Ice Harvest* or *The Last Loads*---one sees a similar flowing line of figures in a snowscene. The undulating line is Lampman's refusal to see a scene as fixed. Because the scene is ever-changing, nothing more than a momentary impression can be rendered. The momentary impression is, for Lampman, the truth of things.

Lampman never delivers the fixed scene; there is always a slow shift in landscape due to snow or mist or dusk or tide. "Les Eboulements" is one of those silent scenes of slow shift. Even the title "A Sunset at Les Eboulements" (PAL 273-74), not "The Sunset . . . ," suggests the tentativeness of the scene and consequently the provisional quality of what is glimpsed there. The sonnet's emphasis on silence proposes that at any moment sound or shift will shatter the scene. The delicacy of the perceived moment is inherent in the image of the benign hay-carts, which homeward moving, disrupt and disturb the shallow coastal water: "Splashing the pale salt shallows." Silence and shadow, the auditory and the visual, invest the scene: the speaker perceives the objects---fragments of the scene---as situated in these conditions. The "dun rocks" are seen against the "Fawn-coloured wastes of mud," both wastes and rocks are undergoing change as the in-coming tide slips over and around them. Here, too, in the in-coming tide, the fishing apparatus is apprehended not as function but as pattern---"wattled fisheries"---its flexible withes interwoven. The slipping tide momentarily heightens, to the perceiving eye, the pattern of lines. Lampman is an impressionist not only because he renders pattern provisional, but also because the scene is presented as the impressions register on the observing eye as it moves from object to object. Interpretation, anecdote, meaning are suspended in the perceptual report on ephemeral phenomena. Fragments of the scene are focused as the eye sweeps from mountain side to hay carts on the beach (which have descended from the scythed mountain fields) to shoreline objects in change in the in-coming tide. The eye follows the crows, rising from the pooling tide, lifting into the sky where "Soon will the first star shine," but not yet because the surveying eye sees in the "pale-green distances," the "sun's last shaft" drenching the Kamouraska villages "golden." Scrupulously attentive to change in light and tide, "Les Eboulements" renders, in what Pater calls "the passage and dissolution of impressions" (249), the evanescent moment when shadowy dusk is streaked with light. It does so through an uncontaminated report from the visual sense.

For Lampman the flood-tide at Les Eboulements occasions a flood of everchanging sense impressions. For Charles G.D. Roberts, with whom Lampman is often linked as a painterly poet, "the tides vexing the Westmoreland shores" ("Tantramar Revisited"), occasions memory. Whereas Lampman's landscapes are drenched in light, Roberts' are drenched in time. This is particularly so in *Songs of the Common Day* (1893) where Roberts moves between "The Salt Flats," echoing with "the keels of centuries ago," and the "well-loved," long-established "Fields of Tantramar" ("The Pea-Fields"), spaces where lives---domestic and labouring---were spent. Roberts' "Sower," significant in his eternal provision for mankind, is a figure larger than the landscape he occupies. The figures in Roberts' landscapes, whether it is the single figure of the mower or the group, the "harvest-folk" ("The Potato Harvest"), are fully modelled, contoured, and realized. In Lampman's sonnets figures occur only in an undulating line. But what especially differentiates these poets as to their painterly qualities is the handling of light. In Lampman, light---radiant, qualified, or reflective---falls in an impartial manner over all. Even in a poem such as "Winter Hues Recalled," with its complex structuring of time (Early, *Archibald Lampman* 56), what is recalled is light. Remembering a February, southward journey by snowshoe, Lampman describes field, forest, and hill, a snow-bound waste, colour-created by sunlight.

I saw them in their silence and their beauty,
Swept by the sunset's rapid hand of fire,
Sudden, mysterious, every moment deepening
To some new majesty of rose or flame.
The whole broad west was like a molten sea
Of crimson. In the north the light-lined hills
Were veiled far off as with a mist of rose
Wondrous and soft. Along the darkening east
The gold of all the forests slowly changed
To purple. In the valley far before me,
Low sunk in sapphire shadows, from its hills,
Softer and lovelier than an opening flower,
Uprose a city with its sun-touched towers,
A bunch of amethysts.
(PAL 29-30)

The light which transforms the landscape---"Leaving no spot the same"---furnishes the memory, the "well-stored picture house," with moments "laid away," which will emerge later through "luminous doors." Memory is a place of pictures; the retrieval of pictures is "luminous." In Lampman's "Winter Hues Recalled," the Wordsworthian "spot of time" is generated by light. The recovered experience is similarly luminescent. "Winter Hues" indicates how Lampman, in the light of a Canadian landscape, adapted and refined a Romantic concept. Whereas Roberts, as he says in the prologue poem to *Songs of the Common Day*, aimed to make "familiar things divine" (45), Lampman celebrated the fleeting, and thus unfamiliar face, of familiar things.

The silence which pervades Lampman's landscape sonnets is connected with the solitariness of the impressionist moment. The low-toned "Solitude" (PAL 120), which anticipates the Imagists' clarification of the image and perfecting of diction, recreates the spell of a silent space through the visual suggestiveness of sound, about which Lampman speaks in "Poetic Interpretation," his essay on poetics. Silence and sound, octave and sestet, relate as background and foreground.

How still it is here in the woods. The trees
Stand motionless, as if they did not dare
To stir, lest it should break the spell.The air
Hangs quiet as spaces in a marble frieze.
Even this little brook, that runs at ease,
Whispering and gurgling in its knotted bed,
Seems but to deepen, with its curling thread
Of sound, the shadowy sun-pierced silences.
Sometimes a hawk screams or a woodpecker
Startles the stillness from its fix鑔 mood
With his loud careless tap. Sometimes I hear
The dreamy white-throat from some far off tree
Pipe slowly on the listening solitude,
His five pure notes succeeding pensively
(PAL 120)

The quietness is spatial ("quiet as spaces") and as in "Heat," sound is the index of depth; here the "curling thread / Of sound," from the brook, deepens the woods' "motionless" silence. Not so in the foreground. Just as sun shafts pierce the shadowy stillness, so sound "Sometimes" and "Sometimes" pierce ("screams," "startles") the solitude. Lampman's carefully chosen words as well as the natural sounds themselves contribute to the visual suggestiveness; the woodpecker's tap, appears sudden and "careless," like movement, in this motionless space. After that rupture, the lazier note of the white-throat---"five pure notes"---appropriately slows the poem to silence again.

The loneliness of the unique moment is nowhere more obvious than in "Winter Uplands" (PAL 299), a sonnet written, D.C. Scott says, fourteen days before Lampman's death. What tempers loneliness is the vivacity with which impressions are received. "Winter Uplands" is a composition of rapid notations ("The frost," "The long white drift," "The rippled sheet of snow," "The far-off city," and so forth, begin the lines: strokes of a scene sketched in). Lampman's tendency to move rapidly from point to point parallels the quick, fluent strokes in Impressionist painting. Fluency, in poem or painting, is a response to changeability. However different their media, poet and painter similarly devise techniques appropriate to their common conception of reality as shifting. The first quatrain positions the speaker in the snowscape---

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---

anticipating the coming walk home, "And then the golden moon to light me home---. . . . " Sitting "as one bound," the poet is perfectly, passively receptive to his situation: the "answering harmony" of the poet's consciousness will, however, synthesize and modulate the sensations. As Kronegger points out

> Just as light has come [in Impressionism] to invade matter, so the mood of the subject has come to invade and to transform the object. . . . Imperceptible transitions and dissolutions of subject and object reduce them to homogeneity, to a state of immersion. (72)

A comment on "Winter Uplands" by Margaret Coulby Whitridge enables me to clarify this point: "This poem, ostensibly a description of a winter night in Ottawa, actually contains an intensely personal expression of self, superimposed upon the natural scene" (xxviii). Whereas the poet's temperament---specifically, his present mood and attitude---is a legitimate element in the tendered impression, to suggest that the scene is like a blank upon which the self is "superimposed," ignores what is most important to Lampman---the sensation-provoking possibilities of landscape and the need, in response, for "the intelligent use" of the senses. Lampman acknowledges, often in a poem's conclusion, the dissolution of subject and object: "I roam the glorious world with praise / . . . / Till earth and I are one" (PAL 127-28). What has often been taken as a Romantic declaration---his contiguity to nature---results, in fact, from his impressionist aesthetic. Not surprisingly, snow and frost, soft or sharp, are the predominant atmospheric elements in a Lampman winter scene. Fallen or falling snow is responsible for the merging of object into object, so that one sees not distinct contours but undulation: even land and sky appear merged, and sometimes, as in "Winter Uplands," the snowscape appears aquatic: "The *rippled* sheet of snow where the wind blew / Across the open fields for miles ahead" (emphasis mine). In an Impressionist painting although contours are indistinct, and haze, fog, smoke, or whatever, blurs landscape, loci of colour occur. Similarly, in "Winter Uplands," in spite of the "long white drift" and the drift of landscape into sky, localities of colour occur; in fact, colour predominates over objects. The city is perceived as "A tender line [a blue line] upon the western red," and further skyward, stars are "jets of silver from the violet dome. . . . " The vivacity of "Winter Uplands" results from the discernment of colour, the "beauty everywhere," cast by the setting sun. For Lampman, as for other impressionists, colour is not in objects but in the light and light is what makes a scene transitory.

These are poems of the purest sensory perceptions. Impressions of this and that in heat, dusk, sunrise, are communicated with an exact fidelity not to the object but to the sensory experience. How different is a poem such as "In November" (PAL 158) where the sensations are subordinated to narrative or to myth. "In November" narrates the speaker's discovery of "scores of mulleins long since dead," which he instantly identifies as "some spare company / Of hermit folk," but what happens when narration eclipses sensation, when natural objects are humanized, is the attribution of character to light, a reversal of what in other poems is a sustained attempt to document poetically the effect of light on the perceiver. The light which "In November" is invested with "melancholy"---"So sere, so melancholy bright"---is inaccessible to the visual eye because it is already burdened with human or mythic reflections, "the half-reflected gleam / Or shadow of some former dream. . . . " This obscuring of light to the visual sense is quite different from the eye's work through, and with, a naturally obscuring medium, as in "Heat." In "Comfort of the Fields" (PAL 148), Lampman speaks of draining "The comfort of wide fields unto tired eyes," but rather often Lampman conflates the "mist of light" with the mist of dreams. Actually, Lampman didn't much like his "Comfort of the Fields." Writing to Thomson (28 Oct 1891), he says, "It is called `Comfort of the Fields.' It is written out in six or seven long heavy stanzas. I do not know what they [Scribners] took it for. They have refused and sent back many a better piece of work . . . " (Bourinot 11). One suspects he preferred his "transcripts from nature" (Bourinot 12). There is, however, in the otherwise prescriptive "Comfort of the Fields"---"Drink, and be filled, and ye shall understand!"---the lovely line: "Far violet hills, horizons filmed with showers. . . . "

Lampman's poetry is quite simply at its best when he limits himself to the jubilance of the senses, but when what is heard or seen is attributed to Nature "in her common rounds" ("Voices of Earth") or to the "earth our mother" ("The Frogs") or to the residue of "some former dream" ("In November"), Lampman loses, or sacrifices, precision to platitude. The meteorological "A Thunderstorm" (PAL 214-15), focused on a pivotal atmospheric change, has a great deal more to say about "nature's altitude" than the platitudinous "Outlook" (PAL 107-08) where the mind broods "On life's deep meaning, nature's altitude / Of loveliness, and time's mysterious ways. . . . " Depth of atmosphere, which usually interests Lampman, is concentrated in "A Thunderstorm" into frontal force. Nature's mustering and deployment of force is expressed in a military metaphor (MacKendrick 57), one which has, what T.E. Hulme thought requisite in a metaphor, the effect of a direct impression (Gage 19). There is little figurative language in these landscapes; there is, however, more "brooding" than this analysis has so far indicated.

The preponderance of dream in Lampman's poetry has frequently been remarked upon, but how, one might wonder, can the dream-state co-exist with the empirically based nature poetry of sensation and perception. Certainly there is in Impressionist novels, by Conrad and Woolf for example, a similar emphasis on sensation co-existing with dreamlike qualities. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* opens with a breath-taking impressionist sweep of sky over Thames, the setting for Marlow's narration of his very specific sensations in the Belgian Congo, yet the narrator knows the experiences whereof he speaks can have no more solidity for his listeners than a dream. Indeed, even for the narrator recalling them, those experiences have a dream-like quality: "It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream---making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation . . . " (57).

For the impressionist, reality is visual and the visual is ephemeral, evanescent, and transitory---is, in fact, fleeting as a dream. The impressionist's project---to render the one and unique moment---parallels the dreamer's effort to convey the dream. The dreamer does his utmost to reproduce the sensations of the dream experience, an experience of discontinuities, of seemingly unconnected but significant images, which combining bequeath to the waking consciousness the dream's effect. The dematerialization in the dream parallels the dissolution of landscape in ever-changeful light. The seeming impossibility of recording things just as they are in the one and unique moment is analogous to the effort of narrating the dream. The dream in Lampman's nature poetry appears frequently concluding the effort of rendering an experience and acknowledges, in spite of the effort involved, a reality as elusive as dream. Moreover, as Kronegger explains it, the impressionist experiences, in this effort, a dissolution, a merging into his subject. There are very good reasons why Lampman might have recourse to the metaphor of the dream to describe his experience.

The distinctly other kind of dream in Lampman's poetry envisions or prescribes an ideal relationship to nature and occurs in poems such as "An Old Lesson From the Fields," "A Prayer," "Comfort of the Fields," and "The Frogs," hymns to nature's putative majesty, simplicity, and opiate-effect. Nature seems in these poems "muffled"; images are marshalled to serve prescription. In such poems, as Sandra Djwa points out, Lampman sees "into a fixed plan or `dream,' which he hypothesizes as underlying the active surface motion of nature and the universe" (29). The difference between the two kinds of dream parallels the difference aesthetically between Impressionism and Symbolism: "`[impression-ism] holds to the real, stabilizes the ephemeral; the other [symbolism] is turned toward the absolute, the dream and the ideal'" (qtd. in Kronegger 27, 119). In poems such as "Heat" and the "In November" sonnet, Lampman is not dreaming after some great truth, some underlying truth; he is content to stop with the reality apprehended by sensation. Although the landscape can be dream productive, the dream remains, in "In November," in content and in mood undefined: "I alone / Am neither sad, nor shelterless, nor gray, / Wrapped round with thought, content to watch and dream" (PAL 117). "`A clean grasp of the facts . . . a succession of clear cut statements'" (Ball 96) characterizes, according to E.W. Thomson, "In November," a sonnet which arrives, through a fidelity to what is seen and heard, at dream. The poet's dream, as different from the idealist's dream or the visionary's, generates no world beyond the poem itself.

Sandra Djwa, in her comprehensive "Lampman's Fleeting Vision," explores as well as Lampman's dreams in relation to nature, those "dreams" which carry implications of religious or social vision (22-39), and Early, in his *Archibald Lampman*, provides a typology of Lampman's dreams: the dream as transcendence, the actual (nocturnal) dream, but in "most of Lampman's poetry, `dream' occurs as a metaphor . . . in two utterly contrary metaphorical senses"---"life-as-dream" and "Art as dream." In this last usage, Early continues, "the dream becomes identified with the poem itself" (41-42). In the impressionistic landscapes, the dream is part of the poetic process, often its conclusion. In these poems, the poet-impressionist acknowledges that what he has been doing---rendering transitoriness---is as impossible as narrating a dream. The metaphor of the dream appropriately renders "the stir in the soul" created by that effort. Such dreams refer to nothing beyond the experience itself.

The poet-impressionist is selective rather than inclusive in presenting landscape. The eye sweeps a scene---distant, near-at-hand, distant again---selects only the essential elements and ruthlessly shears away, like a mower, all else. In "Among the Timothy" (PAL 13-16), the speaker places himself in "A circle clean and gray," a mower-made circle, where at least initially, "it is sweet to lie" lethargically, "Nor think but only dream," an enterprise which in its nature seems little different from "the drifting hours" spent in the city, which he is avoiding. The city is antipathetic to "A sweeter world"---a dream world---"where I in wonder strayed" among "dreams that moved through that enchanted clime," not, it would seem, a very profitable expenditure of time since it "beareth nought." The poet turns himself over, in this clean circle, not to dreams but to the effects of wind and sun: "so I lie and feel the soft hours wane / To wind and sun and peaceful sound laid bare. . . . " This passage of time registers as tactility of wind and as "bare," distinct, sound. This sensory experience is inspiriting and activating: "I bid my spirit pass / Out into the pale green ever-swaying grass / To brood, but no more fret." He is "surely," writes D.M.R. Bentley, "indicating the power of nature to awaken fully the faculties of even the most `sleepy' and `languid,' the strayed revellers, among us" ("Watchful Dream" 22). The boon of this attentiveness is "an eye made quiet," as Wordsworth describes a similar effect ("Tintern Abbey"), regardful, now that fret has passed, and capable of impressions.

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 blown,
And I are soaked with him.
(PAL 16)

The locus of the poet's passage from dream-nostalgia to sharp attentiveness---"I feel and hear and with quiet eyes behold"---is the "circle clean and gray," a space which presages (see Early's dating, "Chronology" 78-79), the "full furnace" of the "heat-held land" ("Heat"), where thoughts "grow keen and clear."

The "sweet unrest" of this active/receptive state is contrasted with his earlier, early afternoon, lying about: "it is sweet to lie / . . . / Nor think but only dream." The "unrest" is produced by the sights, which "come and go," of shapes "that grow" in colour. Responsible for perceptual shift, light is also is an integral principle of organic change, and of human change. The light of "the ever-journeying sun" viscerally affects the poet. The full impression of this scene comprehends, beyond the surface of the scene, a change wrought deep within place and speaker: "every cranny brown, / And I are soaked with him." One of the titles which Lampman considered for his second volume, *Lyrics of Earth* 1895, was "A Gift of the Sun" (Bentley, "Introduction" 8). Landscape for Archibald Lampman is really an account of light, and the changeful effects of light are cognate with the transforming power of the sun. The report from the mowed field, "Among the Timothy," celebrates the light that touches and transmutes. The "immersion," which occurs in impressionist literature, results in change not in transcendence.

For the sake of his harvest, the mower shears away what has grown up. "Dead daisies" are mixed with harvest swathe. The poet, like the mower, must shear away those "high moods of mine that sometime made / My heart a heaven, opening like a flower" so that he can gather the second harvest in the field---the sensations "I feel and hear and with quiet eyes behold." As rigorously attentive as the painters, Lampman, in these poems, establishes the instability of landscape in light which leaves "no spot the same," and like other writers in the impressionist manner, his fidelity to impressions as they occur moment by moment results in "a thing most keenly real" ("Winter Hues Recalled").

If we take seriously Lampman's impressionism and do not apply the term casually as a synonym for descriptiveness, we begin to appreciate his realistic and relativistic world view. The spokesman for the adequacy of the ordinary and the sufficiency of sensation is neither a transcendentalist nor an apologist for a late, lost golden age. Nor is he a pessimist. Against the notion of Lampman, the troubled prophet of urban and industrial malaise, we must place Lampman, the poet of light.

Notes

1 Of the thirty artists represented in the exhibition *Impressionism in Canada: 1895-1935* at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1973, twenty-four of them studied in Paris between 1890 and 1920. All of them, with the exception of Robert Harris and William Brymmer, came back to Canada influenced by Impressionism, and Harris and Brymmer later, in Canada, assimilated the style (Murray 10).

2 *The Poems of Archibald Lampman (including At the Long Sault)*, intro. Margaret Coulby Whitridge (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1974) 12-13. All Lampman poems are quoted from this collection. Those from *At the Long Sault*, included in Whitridge's text, are indicated ALS. For the dating---composition and publication---of this and other Lampman poems, see L.R. Early, "A Chronology of Lampman's Poems," *Canadian Poetry* 14(1984): 75-87.

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