

Nineteenth-Century
Literature Criticism

NCLC

194

Volume 194

Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Philosophers, and Other
Creative Writers Who Died between 1800
and 1899, from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations



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Preface

Since its inception in 1981, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC) has been a valuable resource for students and librarians seeking critical commentary on writers of this transitional period in world history. Designated an “Outstanding Reference Source” by the American Library Association with the publication of its first volume, NCLC has since been purchased by over 6,000 school, public, and university libraries. The series has covered more than 500 authors representing 38 nationalities and over 28,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical reaction to nineteenth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as NCLC.

Scope of the Series

NCLC is designed to introduce students and advanced readers to the authors of the nineteenth century and to the most significant interpretations of these authors’ works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. By organizing and reprinting commentary written on these authors, NCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in NCLC presents a comprehensive survey of an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of NCLC is devoted to literary topics that cannot be covered under the author approach used in the rest of the series. Such topics include literary movements, prominent themes in nineteenth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

NCLC continues the survey of criticism of world literature begun by Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC) and *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC).

Organization of the Book

An NCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the list will focus primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting those works most commonly considered the best by critics. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
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- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *NCLC*, with the exception of the Topics volumes. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual paperbound edition of the *NCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Frank, Joseph. "The Gambler: A Study in Ethnopsychology." In *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Louis Jackson*, edited by Elizabeth Cheres Allen and Gary Saul Morson, 69-85. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1995. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Vol. 168, edited by Jessica Bomarito and Russel Whitaker, 75-84. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006.

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Archibald Lampman

1861-1899

Canadian poet, journalist, and essayist.

The following entry provides an overview of Lampman's life and works. For additional information on his career, see *NCLC*, Volume 25.

INTRODUCTION

A central figure in the development of Canadian poetry, Lampman is recognized as the most prominent of the "Confederation Poets," a group of writers who, in the era following the formation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867, were the first to manifest a sense of national identity in their works. While his reputation rests primarily on poems that sensitively and vividly describe the Canadian landscape, Lampman also wrote several other important poems concerning social issues. Lampman was a conscientious craftsman who laboriously revised his work and experimented with a variety of verse forms and styles. Critics assert that Lampman best displayed his artistry in lyric poems and sonnets, although a few of his long narratives have been praised. Because Lampman's verse reveals the influence of English Romantic and Victorian poets, some commentators questioned his identity as a Canadian poet; other critics, however, have argued that Lampman transformed English poetic traditions to create a complex and often contradictory vision that heralded the advance of modern Canadian poetry.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The first of Archibald and Susannah Gessner Lampman's four children, Lampman was born in Morpeth, a village on Lake Erie's northern shore. In 1866, the family moved to Parrytown, in what is now central Ontario, and the following year they moved to Gore's Landing in the Rice Lake district. While these areas, then bordering the Canadian wilderness, instilled in Lampman a love of nature that he later expressed in his poetry, other childhood influences also stimulated his interest in literature. Lampman's father introduced him to poetry at an early age, and in Gore's Landing Lampman made the acquaintance of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill, two sisters known for their narratives treating frontier life. In November 1868 Lampman contracted rheumatic fever, which permanently dam-

aged his heart and left him physically diminished. Despite his poor health, he started school in Gore's Landing in 1870, and later attended the Cobourg Collegiate Institute and a school in Port Hope in preparation for his enrollment at Trinity College, Toronto in 1879. Although he was a gifted and popular student in his pre-college days, social and extracurricular activities interfered with his studies at Trinity. He joined a literary club at the college and then became an editor of and contributor to the student magazine *Rouge et noir*, where his first published work, an essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Revolt of Islam*, appeared in 1880. Shortly afterwards, Lampman read *Orion and Other Poems*, a collection of verse by Canadian writer Charles G. D. Roberts, and this volume affected him profoundly. Lampman assiduously applied himself to writing poetry, and his first published poem, "Verses," appeared in *Rouge et noir* early in 1882, the year he completed a degree in classics from Trinity College. In September 1882, Lampman began teaching at Orangeville High School near Toronto, but quickly became disillusioned by what he assessed as his students' and fellow teachers' lack of enthusiasm for learning and quit after three months. The following January, Lampman moved to Ottawa and accepted an appointment as a clerk in the post office, where he remained employed for the rest of his life.

Lampman's new job allowed him plenty of time to write poetry, and he also frequented intellectual circles in Ottawa, joining the Ottawa Social Science Club and the Fabian Society. From 1883 to 1887, several of his poems were published in *Rouge et noir* and the *Week*, a literary magazine edited by Roberts, and two of his sonnets were published in the popular American periodical *Scribner's*. In 1887, Lampman married Maud Playter, a woman he had courted for three years. The following year, with the help of a modest inheritance that Maud had received, Lampman privately published his first collection of poetry, *Among the Millet, and Other Poems* (1888). The collection was praised by Canadian, British, and American reviewers, including American literary notable William Dean Howells.

From 1892 to 1893 Lampman and two friends, poets Duncan Campbell Scott and William Wilfred Campbell, collaborated on "At the Mermaid Inn," a weekly column for the Toronto *Globe* featuring literary and social topics. During this time, Lampman also prepared a second volume of poetry for publication, *Lyrics of Earth*

(1895), but encountered difficulty securing a publisher. In 1894 Lampman's second child died at the age of four months, and he became increasingly despondent. Furthermore, biographers speculate that Lampman's romantic advances toward Katherine Waddell, a postal worker for whom he had a passionate attraction and to whom he addressed several poems, were rejected around this same time. Much of Lampman's verse written during this time is melancholy in mood; nevertheless, his mental outlook improved in late 1895 when *Lyrics of Earth* was published. In autumn of 1896 Lampman went on a long canoeing trip that, according to Lampman's eventual literary executor Scott, significantly strained his health. Though ill, Lampman continued to write, finishing his last poem, "Winter Uplands," ten days before his death. Lampman died on February 10, 1899, while his third collection of poetry, *Alcyone* (1899), was in press.

MAJOR WORKS

Lampman's early death and his difficulty finding publishers for his works left almost three-fourths of his nearly 450 poems unpublished at the time of his death. Although Scott later published several collected editions of Lampman's poetry, his editorial merit has been questioned, since he revised many of Lampman's poems and failed to provide dates of composition, compromising scholarly study of Lampman's development as a poet. Despite these concerns, critics have generally agreed that Lampman's best poetry describes the scenery of the Ottawa countryside. In such poems as "Heat," "Late November," "Among the Timothy," and "The Frogs," Lampman renders in precise detail every subtle movement, color, and sound of a scene as well as suffusing the image with his own mood. Some critics have speculated that Lampman was lulled into a restorative, dreamlike state by nature that affected his consciousness. However, this concept of nature as a healing force, which also informs the works of English Romantic poets William Wordsworth and John Keats, is not reflected in all of Lampman's works. Commentators have noted that many of Lampman's later nature poems are melancholy or pessimistic in tone, equating passive communion with nature with humankind's inability to halt the growing mechanization of everyday life. Several critics have argued that personal and social concerns awakened Lampman to the inadequacies of the Romantic point of view, and he therefore turned to the treatment of society, philosophy, and love in his poetry. Lampman's poems that treat social issues often reflect his dissatisfaction with the daily routine of city life, which many critics attribute to his job in the postal service. Commentators have maintained that Lampman most powerfully conveys his discontent in the apocalyptic poem "The City of the End of Things," a nightmarish vision of industrial society stifling all artistic expression

and ultimately grinding to a halt. Critics also note that in other poems, such as "Avarice" and "To a Millionaire," Lampman attacks personal greed and capitalism and reveals his belief in socialism. Lampman's love poetry, which includes such poems as "A Portrait in Six Sonnets" and "The Story of an Affinity," has been faulted as lacking passion and is generally considered inferior to his nature poetry; nevertheless, critics carefully analyze Lampman's love poetry to discern the nature of his relationship with Katharine Waddell.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Most critics note that Lampman's talent for detailed descriptions lends itself to shorter forms of poetry, and Lampman himself preferred the sonnet. His narratives have been negatively assessed as conventional and highly imitative of Keats and Alfred, Lord Tennyson, with undeveloped plots and flat characters who are clearly vehicles for the poet's own thoughts. The fact that most of Lampman's poems published during his lifetime portrayed natural scenery helped shape the opinions of nineteenth-century reviewers, who considered him exclusively a descriptive nature poet. This view went unchallenged until the publication of *The Poems of Archibald Lampman* (1900), a collection of Lampman's first three volumes of poetry and nearly 100 other works. Many early twentieth-century commentators characterized Lampman as an escapist who sought refuge from the city in nature, some praised the immediacy of the poet's descriptions of nature, and others faulted Lampman's work as wholly derivative of earlier English poets and devoid of social consciousness. Later critics attributed much of this earlier negative commentary as part of a movement by Canadian modernist writers to diminish the reputation of Confederation poets in order to redirect the public's taste toward new authors. From the 1950s to the present, Lampman has been consistently praised. Pointing to the theme of alienation in Lampman's verse, evidenced by the poet's uneasiness in both the city and in nature, many commentators now consider Lampman a precursor to the modernist movement in Canadian poetry. Scholarly analyses of Lampman's body of work have led some critics to view it as a unified vision informed by humanitarian and theoretical concerns and others to view it as a largely contradictory vision informed by a pessimistic view of society and adherence to the optimistic ideals of the Romantic poets.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Among the Millet, and Other Poems (poetry) 1888
Lyrics of Earth (poetry) 1895
Alcyone (poetry) 1899

- The Poems of Archibald Lampman* [edited by Duncan Campbell Scott] (poetry) 1900
Lyrics of Earth, Sonnets, and Ballads [edited by Scott] (poetry) 1925
At the Long Sault, and Other New Poems [edited by Scott and E. K. Brown] (poetry) 1943
Selected Poems [edited by Scott] (poetry) 1947
Archibald Lampman's Letters to Edward William Thomson, 1890-1898 [edited by Arthur S. Bourinot] (letters) 1956
Lampman's Kate: Late Love Poems of Archibald Lampman, 1887-1897 [edited by Margaret Coulby Whitridge] (poetry) 1975
Selected Prose of Archibald Lampman [edited by Barrie Davies] (essays and letters) 1975
Lampman's Sonnets, 1887-1889 [edited by Whitridge] (poetry) 1976
At the Mermaid Inn: Wilfred Campbell, Archibald Lampman, Duncan Campbell Scott in The Globe, 1892-93 [with Wilfred Campbell and Duncan Campbell Scott] (essays) 1979
An Annotated Edition of the Correspondence between Archibald Lampman and Edward William Thomson, 1890-1898 [edited by Helen Lynn] (letters) 1980
Selected Poetry of Archibald Lampman (poetry) 1980
Selected Poetry of Archibald Lampman [edited by Michael Gnarowski] (poetry) 1990
The Story of An Affinity [edited by D. M. R. Bentley] (poetry) 1990
The Fairy Tales of Archibald Lampman [edited by Bentley] (poetry) 1999

CRITICISM

E. W. Thomson (review date 10 August 1889)

SOURCE: Thomson, E. W. Review of *Among the Millet*, by Archibald Lampman. *Canadian Poetry*, no. 20 (spring-summer 1987): 98-9.

[The following reprinted edition of a favorable review of *Among the Millet*, originally unsigned and published on August 10, 1889 in the *Toronto Globe*, is annotated by critic Eric Ball.]

Since the publication of Archibald Lampman's poems [in *Among the Millet, and Other Poems*] last year, there has been no truth in the assertion so frequently made that Canada has never produced a great poet. Minor poets we have with us always. Their thin volumes, appearing with the regularity and frequency of the seasons, are almost invariably marked with poetic fancy and feeling, expressed with refined taste. Occasionally, by happy accident, there is a note of pure inspiration

that faints and falls to earth in the next page or in the next stanza. There are much be-praised books of Canadian verse that fall short even of this—that are merely models of mechanical excellence in thought and feeling, as in print and binding. The ordinary emotions, fears, loves, griefs, desires and regrets of humanity are correctly, even beautifully, expressed, but the hard heart of the reviewer is touched not by what is done well—that is common enough—but by what is done superlatively, unapproachably, miraculously well. The poem that most men would wish to have written, that only one man could have written, that is the truly great poem; and not all the trumpetings of the press, nor the fervors of admiring friends, nor acceptance by leading periodicals, nor the praise of the great and gifted has ever purchased immortality for a bit of verse, or a book of verses, that had not in itself the spiritual seeds of eternal life. "I will show you," says Holmes, "that rhyming's as easy as lying," and the proof of this is shown in the repetition, in almost every review of mediocre poetry, of such phrases as "remarkable facility," "very gracefully written," "master of a charmingly easy and fluent style." The aspiring poet, having, in common with the rest of humanity, some capacity for describing beautiful objects, for expressing his feelings, and particularly for setting forth that he is having a harder time of it in this world than the dull clods about him, has but to manifest these capacities in verse when he is spoken of in print as displaying deep poetic feeling, great susceptibility to the beauties of nature, and the soul-sadness that inevitably marks the artistic temperament. Indeed it is a difficult matter for any one who knows how to read and write and rhyme to produce a volume of verses bad enough to escape praise. Critics have thrust their rough fingers among the heartstrings of true poets and wrought them incalculable injury in times gone past, but not since the invention of a number of pleasantly-worded, non-committal phrases, which are intended to deceive the innocent rhymers, and which make no impression on a public too long familiar with their meaninglessness.

It is because readers have grown rightfully incredulous of the value of adjectival admiration that reviewers, who have faith in the author under consideration, are compelled to turn their backs on the crowd of high-pitched and hard-worked superlatives, for such cases made and provided, and set forth their impressions in the plain language of truth and soberness.

The qualities which make Mr. Lampman not only greatest among Canadian poets, but one whom any nation might be proud to own, are, first of all, sincerity; next, the ability to see infinitude in common things, and then a noble ability to convey his impressions melodiously, clearly and accurately. Of his sincerity, his utter freedom from affectations, it is only necessary to open his book at any page to find proof. Here, for instance, where "through the long sweetness of an April day," he

Wandered with happy feet, and quite forgot
 The shallow toil, the strife against the grain,
 Near souls that hear us call and answer not,
 The loneliness, perplexity and pain,
 And high thoughts cankered with an earthly
 strain,

And then, the long draught emptied to the lees,
 I turn me homeward in slow-pacing ease,

Cleaving the cedar shadows and the thin
 Mist of grey gnats that cloud the river shore,
 Sweet, even choruses, that dance and spin
 Soft tangles in the sunset; and once more
 The city smites me with its dissonant roar,
 To its hot heart I pass, untroubled, yet
 Fed with calm hope, without desire or fret.

So to the year's first altar-step I bring
 Gifts of meek song, and make my spirit free
 With the blind working of unanxious spring,
 Careless with her, whether the days that flee
 Pale drouth or golden fruited plenty see;
 So that we toil, brothers, without distress,
 In calm-eyed peace and god-like blamelessness.²

In another and darker mood of the poet's mind there is the same entire absence of strain, and fever, and exaggeration. Mark the absolute honesty of the second line:—

Here I will wait a little; I am weary,
 Not torn with pain of any lurid hue,
 But only still, and very grey and dreary,
 Sweet, sombre lands, like you.³

The fruits of sincerity are quietness, steadiness, a deliberate choice of ordinary every-day words, as deliberate an avoidance of quaint fancies and far-fetched conceits all expressed as much as possible in compound adjectives and stilted phrases. Here are lines that wear the unconscious beauty and nobility of a Greek statue:—

"Outlook"

Not to be conquered by these headlong days,
 But to stand free; to keep the mind at brood
 On life's deep meaning, nature's altitude
 Of loveliness, and time's mysterious ways;
 At every thought and deed to clear the haze
 Out of our eyes, considering only this,
 What man, what life, what love, what beauty is,
 This is to live, and win the final praise.

Though strife, ill fortune and harsh human need
 Beat down the soul, at moments blind and dumb
 With agony; yet, patience—there shall come
 Many great voices from life's outer sea,
 Hours of strange triumph, and, when few men heed,
 Murmurs and glimpses of eternity.⁴

The same thought is pursued in part of "An Athenian Reverie":

To most men life is but a common thing,
 The hours a sort of coin to barter with,

Whose worth is reckoned by the sum they buy
 In gold or power or pleasure; each short day
 That brings not these deemed fruitless as dry sand.
 Their lives are but a blind activity,
 And death to them is but the end of motion—
 Grey children who have madly eat and drunk,
 Won the high seats or filled their chests with gold;
 And yet, for all their years, have never seen
 The picture of their lives or how life looks
 To him who hath the deep, uneager eye—
 How sweet and large and beautiful it was,
 How strange the part they played.⁵

This is not preaching. It is a simple and noble expression of the grandest spiritual truth that underlies our sordid lives. Mr. Lampman puts a sensitive conscience into every line of his work. He is absolutely faithful to what he has seen and felt. The utmost precision of scientific statement could not make so definite an impression on the mind as the poetic accuracy of these lines:—

The grasshoppers spin into mine ear
 A small, innumerable sound.⁶

Or of these:—

Not far to fieldward in the central heat,
 Shadowing the clover, a pale poplar stands,
 With glimmering leaves that, when the wind comes,
 beat
 Together like innumerable small hands.⁷

Always with this miracle-working touch of the imagination there is a clean grasp of the facts. Sometimes there is a succession of clear-cut statements, each one giving indispensable aid to the completion of a picture that receives its finishing touch in the last line. How admirable is the picture of November thus presented:—

The hills and leafless forests slowly yield
 To the thick, driving snow. A little while
 And night shall darken down. In shouting file
 The woodmen's carts go by me homeward wheeled,
 Past the thin, fading stubbles, half concealed,
 Now golden-grey, sowed softly through with
 snow,
 Where the last ploughman follows still his row,
 Turning black furrows through the whitening field.

Far off the village lamps begin to gleam,
 Fast drives the snow, and no man comes this
 way;
 The hills grow wintry white, and bleak winds
 moan
 About the naked uplands. I alone
 Am neither sad, nor shelterless, nor grey,
 Wrapped round with thought, content to watch and
 dream.⁸

With this must be given a spring picture, very beautiful by sheer force of its ideal truthfulness to fact:—

The old year's cloaking of brown leaves, that bind
 The forest floor-ways, plaited close and true—

The last love's labor of the autumn wind—
 Is broken with curled flower buds white and blue,
 In all the matted hollows, and speared through
 With thousand serpent-spotted blades up-sprung,
 Yet bloomless, of the slender adder tongue.

In the warm noon the south wind creeps and cools,
 Where the red-budded stems of maples throw
 Still tangled etchings on the amber pools,
 Quite silent now, forgetful of the slow
 Drip of the taps, the troughs and trampled snow,
 The keen March mornings, and the silvering rime
 And mirthful labor of the sugar prime.⁹

There is real substance and satisfaction in such poems as these. They are wholly free from pretence and artificiality. The thought is invariably finer than the words that clothe it. The book is charged with reality, and it fails not to teach the poet's indestructible lesson to mankind:—

That change and pain are shadows faint and fleet,
 And dreams are real, and life is only sweet.¹⁰

Not that *Among the Millet* is entirely free from sadness. That is the disease of the age, and the sensitive mind of the poet must reflect the environment in which he lives. Any one who is able to "recapture the first fine careless rapture" of life may cast the first stone.¹¹ The rest of us will find between the dull-red covers of this most important volume of Canadian verse food for thought and inspiration in a generation that is distinctly not given to thoughtfulness, and that is not inspiring. The common sweet realities of life as it is every day, of nature as it is almost everywhere, will be made dearer to us by reason of the services of this most observant, most exact and most sympathetic of interpreters. Mr. Lampman shall not suffer at our hands the injustice of over-praise. It was on the tip of the critical pen to say that the uplifting sound caused by the rushing wings of the imagination was not always audible *Among the Millet*. But the fancy is immediately contradicted by the far-reaching suggestiveness of "*An Impression*":—

I heard the city time-bells call
 Far off in hollow towers,
 And one by one with measured fall
 Count out the old, dead hours.

I felt the march, the silent press
 Of time, and held my breath;
 I saw the haggard dreadfulness
 Of dim old age and death.¹²

And as if this were not enough, the very spirit of the storm is caught and chained in the poem of that name, and the human spirit leaps to meet it in the concluding stanzas:—

You, in your cave of snows, we in our narrow girth
 Of need and sense, forever chafe and pine;

Only in moods of some demonic birth
 Our souls take fire, our flashing wings untwine,
 Even like you, mad wind, above our broken prison,
 With streaming hair and maddened eyes uprisen,
 We dream ourselves divine;

Mad moods that come and go in some mysterious way,
 That flash and fall, none knoweth how or why,
 Oh wind, our brother, they are yours to-day,
 The stormy joy, the sweeping mastery;
 Deep in our narrow cells we hear you, we awaken,
 With hands afret and bosoms strongly shaken,
 We answer to your cry.

I most that love you, wind, when you are fierce and free,
 In these dull fetters cannot long remain;
 Lo, I will rise and break my thongs and flee
 Forth to your drift and beating, till by brain
 Even for an hour grow wild in your divine embraces,
 And then creep back into mine earthly traces,
 And bind me with my chain.

Nay, wind, I hear you, desperate brother in your might
 Whistle and howl; I shall not tarry long,
 And though the day be blind and fierce, the night
 Be dense and wild, I still am glad and strong
 To meet you face to face, through all your gust and drifting,
 With brow held high, my joyous hands uplifting,
 I cry you song for song.¹³

Notes

1. This is probably Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894), American essayist, novelist, and poet, but the source of the quotation has not been identified.
2. "April", stanzas 9, 10 and 11, pp. 4-5. *AM* has "but" for "and" (1. 3) and "stain" for "strain" (1. 5).
3. "In October", stanza 4, p. 24.
4. "Outlook", p. 128.
5. "An Athenian Reverie", pp. 112-13.
6. "Heat", stanza 5, p. 13.
7. "Among the Timothy", stanza 6, p. 16.
8. "In November", p. 144.
9. "April", stanzas 6 and 7, pp. 3-4.
10. "The Frogs", sonnet 5, p. 9.
11. Quoted passage is from Browning's "Home Thoughts, from Abroad", 11. 15-16, where a thrush is described as repeating its song

Lest you should think he never could recapture
 The first fine careless rapture!
12. "An Impression", p. 9.

13. "Storm", stanzas 8,9,10, and 11, pp. 36-37. *AM* has "strangely" for "strongly" (l. 13).

Works Cited

All page references given here for the poems or passages from poems quoted by Thomson apply to *Among the Millet* (Ottawa: J. Dune and Son, 1888). Line references are to the numbers of the lines quoted, not their numbers in the complete poems.

F. W. Watt (essay date January 1957-1958)

SOURCE: Watt, F. W. "The Masks of Archibald Lampman." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (January 1957-1958): 169-84.

[In the following essay, Watt explores some of the social issues treated in Lampman's works.]

They who shall see me in that hour will ask
What spirit or what fire could ever have been
Within that yellow and discoloured mask. . . .

("Death," July, 1891)

Historical and biographical criticism are likely to remain the chief approaches to Canadian literature for some while to come—indeed, for as long as the soil continues to offer so small a return for more intensive forms of cultivation. It is a sign of vitality, however, that the easy generalizations and simple conclusions which were once possible are becoming more difficult to make. Canadian literature as it is now being written and Canadian literary history alike can no longer be exploited with impunity by the casual amateur. With the increase in complexity and difficulty comes a new sense of interest and relevance. Writers once thought of as safely and finally placed in the Canadian literary tradition are threatening (although serious "revaluations" remain unlikely) to re-emerge with new vitality. Among these Archibald Lampman, formerly pigeon-holed as a minor nature Romantic of the late-Victorian era, may yet come to be looked upon less as a mildly interesting fossil of an outlived colonial past than as a type of the Canadian writer and his continuing special problems in this country.

Archibald Lampman went to Ottawa in 1883 to take up a minor clerical position in the Post Office Department, and he remained at that post except for brief vacations until a short time before his death in 1899, at the age of thirty-eight. During these sixteen years he wrote the handful of mild and sensitive nature poems upon which largely depends his claim to be the best of nineteenth-century Canadian poets; and he led a life which was externally as contemplative and uneventful as the poems imply. In a memoir his close friend D. C. Scott re-

marked on how fortunate the poet was to receive, during most of his creative life, the security of that undemanding Civil Service post, and to live in the small though growing city of Ottawa, which still permitted easy access to the rural scenes he so much loved. Yet from the evidence of letters and relatively unfamiliar parts of his prose and poetry, Lampman's life in Canada's capital city was not at all one of quiet fruitfulness, but on the contrary one of unrest, dissatisfaction often to the point of despair, and unresolved tension and conflict within himself and with the society in which he lived.

In the two years following his grateful acceptance of the Civil Service position (it relieved him of a brief and highly incompatible first career, that of school teacher), Lampman was complaining in letters to a friend¹ of a debilitating mood from which he could not escape and which was the opposite of contentment or happiness. He also referred in the letters to a curious species of writing he was attempting at this juncture:

I am in the midst now of the barren period; I cannot work; I have been writing at a voluminous fairy tale—and have composed many sheets of very monotonous rubbish.—I can do nothing but saw wood.

[Dec. 10, 1884]

I have been very dull and out of spirits.—oppressed with innumerable things—debts; ill-success in everything, incapacity to write and want of any hopes of ever succeeding in it if I do. I cannot do anything—I believe I am the feeblest and most good-for nothing mortal any where living. . . . I wrote another fairy tale the other day—much to 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. As to the story I made it in a dull lifeless state of mind, so I dare say it is bad enough. . . .

[Jan. 20, 1885]

In the first number of *Man* (Nov., 1885), the short-lived Ottawa periodical edited by Lampman's father-in-law, Dr. Edward Playter, there appeared what may well be a product of the kind of effort referred to in these letters, under the title "**Hans Fingerhut's Frog Lesson.**" It has since been forgotten; but it contains what can be considered, though in the form of a fairy-tale, a symptom of Lampman's essential artistic and spiritual dilemma at a revealing moment, and as such it may prove worthy of examination even at some length.

In 1880, while still at Trinity College, Lampman had already shown a more than academic interest in the plight of certain exceptional men for whom, according to literary tradition, an unsympathetic society proved a cause of dangerous disillusionment. "What a delicate thing to be entrusted to this stern world's keeping is a poet's nature . . .," he said in an essay on Shelley.²

"How easily it may be spoiled, embittered, and turned away from truth in an unaided struggle with the unsympathetic coldness and heartless oppression of society. . . ." Shelley's was such a nature, and Lampman described him as one who for this reason became a "pure worshipper of nature"; "his mind turned in weariness from the contemplation of what he had already seen of the deep-rooted evils of the world's society to a groping search [in nature] after truth." "**Hans Fingerhut's Frog Lesson**" tells of an experience in several respects not unlike this, but significantly only a hint or two is given in it of the existence of "evils of the world's society." In Lampman's story, as we shall see, the poet Hans Fingerhut is made to take upon his own shoulders all the responsibility for his alienation from the community.

The mythological pattern of the tale is familiar—that of a hero's separation or withdrawal from the world, his initiation into mysteries, and his return to society. "Long ago," it begins, "almost out of recollection, there lived in a small town in a woody German valley a poet named Hans Fingerhut." Hans, like Lampman himself, experienced a disappointing lack of success in his vocation. As a consequence the German's poems "began to grow peevish and querulous, and men would no longer listen to them as they had done to the fresh and joyous ones of his youth." This response only made him angrier, and now he "shrieked and thundered with songs full of wrath and bitterness," bringing ruin upon himself, for "the great people turned him from their gates." He then was obliged to set himself up as a tailor in order to support himself. "All day he sewed and stitched, and scowled at the passers by, and half the night he wandered about the streets, scrawling satires on the gates of all whom the people honoured." What relation this picture had to Lampman himself, chained to the drudgery of the Post Office clerkship of which he so often complained, is not difficult to see, and easier still with the details that follow:

Often as he sat and sewed, great songs seemed to come to him, beautiful visions and thoughts that dawned on him and sought to combine with the restless melody in his soul; but the remembrance of his disappointments and forlorn condition always turned them into chants so dreadful and ferocious that little children were afraid to pass his door.

Not unexpectedly Hans turned to the countryside for comfort, but he was so much at odds with his world that even the beauty of nature seemed to mock him. In a rage he tried to silence the music of a stream by which he had paused, and thereby he offended its guardian elf. A gesture from the elf, and Hans was transformed into that raucous and discordant creature, the frog, until he could learn to interpret correctly the "song of the stream" he had tried to destroy. The frog's life, he discovered, is miserable, precarious, and painful. Even his

fellow frogs, with whom he joined in stridently objecting to their lot, were alienated from him:

The other frogs would have nothing to do with him; nay, even sat sometimes and abused him. For there was something uncanny about Hans Fingerhut. He talked often to himself in a tongue unknown to them. Sometimes he wept in silence—a thing which astonished them very much, for no other frogs could weep. . . .

At last, after all Hans's interpretations of the song proved to be wrong, the elf relented in pity, and Hans's own tears became fairies that sang the song to him in a language he could understand. The story's somewhat anti-climactic turning point, the "Song of the Water Drops," is an expression of cosmic optimism based on a stoical acceptance of one's lot and faith in Nature's maternal purposes. Once free, Hans took this new faith back with him to the town, where his life was transformed by it:

He no longer walked with his usual defiant stride, downcast face and scowling brow. The portly figures and round faces of the busy burghers, and the well-filled purses at their girdles no longer made him fierce and envious, but he greeted them all with a quiet and pleasant "good morning". . . . But from that day the great songs that he made were nothing like his former ones. There was never anything bitter or complaining in them. They were all sweet and beautiful and wise.

The tale of Hans Fingerhut concludes with a consummation not achieved in Lampman's own life; and there is, as we shall see, stronger proof of this than the very relevant description D. C. Scott gives in his memoir of Lampman's normal physical bearing: "In the city, he walked habitually with a downcast glance, with his eyes fixed upon the ground; in the fields and woods he was alert and observant." But undoubtedly Lampman's continual resort to the natural world was in its own way, as he said of Shelley, "a groping search after truth." Hope of success led him to that intense concentration of detail and mood in his nature poems which is their best quality; but the obvious failure in that search makes their limitation. On the other hand, he was not always ready to assume the whole burden of his recurring sense of alienation from his society. Unlike Hans, Lampman often felt the need for regeneration not only of himself, but of the social order as well, and when he did so it was not easy to settle the conflict within himself and with his society by a simple fairy-tale resolution.

Lampman's response to the world or even to the world of nature was always more varied and complex than the modest, sensitive, meticulous craftsmanship of his few best nature poems, such as "**Heat**," "**In November**," "**A Sunset at Les Ebolements**," would alone suggest. It is true, as these poems show, that he continually turned to rural scenes as the simplest kind of anodyne