

# 5

---

## **Rummagings 18: The Afterlife of Archibald Lampman**

Of all the members of the Confederation Group, Archibald Lampman has enjoyed the longest and happiest afterlife. The day after he died on 10 February 1899, the Toronto *Globe* announced his death with a front-page headline and story. A little over a year later, a collected edition of his poems was published with a lengthy “Memoir” by Duncan Campbell Scott, and six years after that a medallion bearing an effigy of Lampman was unveiled in the chapel of Trinity College, Toronto, which the poet attended from 1879 to 1882 (see Lee). In the ensuing decades a steady stream of appreciative essays appeared, as well as a monograph by Norman G. Guthrie (1927) and a biography by Carl Y. Connor (1929). At the suggestion of Arthur Stringer and under the leadership of W. Sherwood Fox funds were raised for the Archibald Lampman Memorial Cairn in Morpeth, Ontario that was dedicated in 1930, accompanied by several tributes, including a creditable poem by Wilson Macdonald.

While the arrival of Modernism and New Criticism in Canada had by then begun to undermine the reputations of Bliss Carman and Charles G.D. Roberts, they enhanced rather than diminished the reputations of Lampman and Scott, with notable contributions to the process by W.E. Collin (1936), E.K. Brown (1943), and Desmond Pacey (1958). Prominent Modern poets as different as Margaret Avison (in “The Iconoclasts”), Raymond Souster (in “A Letter to Archibald Lampman”), and Al Purdy (in “Lampman in Heat”) paid their respects in varying degrees and ways to Lampman,<sup>1</sup> whose supposed relationship with Katherine Waddell in due course spawned one of D.G. Jones’s finest poems (“Kate, These Flowers [The Lampman Poems]” [1977]) and the figure of the artist Patrick and his relationship with Flea in Jane Urquhart’s *The Whirlpool* (1986). Not surprisingly, Lampman was the first and for many years the only member of the Confederation group to be the subject of a symposium in the University of Ottawa’s Reappraisals series (1975), and he remains the only English Canadian poet to appear on a postage stamp (1989) (see Bentley 1: 326-28). Nor did scholarly and creative interest in Lampman decline near the end or after the turn of the century: almost all his works, including his humorous student poems and drawings, are now in print, and Eric Ball’s book-length study *Archibald Lampman: Memory, Nature, Progress* appeared in 2013. Lampman puts in a substantial appearance in Robert Cumyn’s *The View from Tamischeira* (2003) as a “Casaubon” figure and as

the steamy lover of Katherine Waddell, whose grief over his death drives her and her “unfettered libido” to the Caucasus Mountains (50, 61). Less flamboyantly, he is a presence through reference and allusion in Gerald Lynch’s wonderfully humorous and dark *Troutstream* (1995) and *Missing Children* (2015).

Of course, it is tempting but too simplistic to assume that Lampman has been remembered, revisited, studied, edited, and, taught over the last century and more because of the self-evident merit and appeal of his work. Certainly, this is part of the explanation, but there are other factors of very considerable importance. In fact, in *Etched in Memory: The Building and Survival of Artistic Reputation*, the American sociologists Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang identify four factors that can contribute to “the process whereby some producers of culture but not others come to be considered worth remembering” (xii):

1. “the artist’s own efforts,<sup>2</sup> in his or her lifetime, to protect and project his/her reputation”;
2. “the availability of others who, after the artist’s death, have a stake in preserving or giving a boost to that reputation”;
3. “linkages to artistic, literary, or political networks that facilitate entry into the cultural archives”; and
4. “symbolic associations with emerging cultural or political entities.” (318-19)

The applicability of all four of these factors to Lampman is readily apparent, but each warrants elaboration with specific reference to the construction and endurance of his literary reputation.

1. Although by no means a prolific writer, Lampman placed a substantial number of his poems not only in Canadian publications such as *The Week* (26 poems), but also in mass-circulation American magazines, including *Cosmopolitan* (5 poems), *Harper’s* (8 poems), *Scribner’s* (25 poems), and the prestigious *Atlantic Monthly* (5 poems). He also drew upon the good offices of two Canadian friends, Bliss Carman and Edward William Thomson, to place his material in the American periodicals in which they held editorial positions, respectively, the *Independent* (15 poems) and the *Youth’s Companion* (26 poems). After self-publishing *Among the Millet, and Other Poems* (1888) in Ottawa, he attempted to interest a variety of publishers in collections of poems and, with Thomson’s help, eventually succeeded in placing *Lyrics of Earth* (1895) with the Boston firm of Copeland and Day, to whom he sent a list of Canadian publications that should receive review copies and a list of “booksellers to whom circulars “announcing its publication “might be sent” (Greig 17-18).

# 7

---

Disappointed with the resulting sales (“the books [Copeland and Day] publish are not really *published*,” he complained, “only printed and bound” [Lynn 193]), he reverted to self-publication: at the time of his death in 1899, his third collection, *Alcyone*, was in the process of being printed by Constable and Company in Edinburgh. Shy by nature, Lampman was not a fierce and unscrupulous self-promoter like Charles G.D. Roberts, but he was successful in getting his poetry published in both book and magazine form, and on the whole his work was favourably received on both sides of the border and, indeed, on both sides of the Atlantic.

Had Lampman lived longer, he would probably have produced a more substantial body of writing; however, that would not necessarily have been beneficial to his literary reputation, for, as the Langs observe, “producers of culture” who die before fulfilling a “promising career...may be better remembered than they might have been had they lived out their full lives” (330). “[I]n the cultural world, early death can actually enhance a reputation,” observes Gary Taylor in *Cultural Selection*; “[i]f makers...die young, the works...they produce may be cherished by survivors” (73). As it was, Lampman’s early death not only aligned him with Chatterton, Byron, P.B. Shelley, and, especially, Keats who all died before a Wordsworthian decline could set in, but also made him indisputably Canada’s finest nineteenth-century or Victorian poet. “It is near the anniversary of Lampman’s death—fourteen years ago,” Scott wrote in January 1913; “[h]e must have realized if he had lived how greatly things have changed. If he had gone on producing in his old style no one would have cared for it and he would have been discouraged” (Letter). As Lampman’s difficulty in finding a publisher for his second collection indicates, by the early eighties interest had already begun to flow away from “his old style” and subject-matter towards the proto-Modernism of the period.

2. With regard to their second factor, the Langs argue compellingly (and almost as if they had Lampman in mind) that “[t]he remembrance of most ...artists...is highly dependent on survivors with an emotional and/or financial stake in the perpetuation of their reputation,” and they identify a “[f]inancially strapped widow...with young children” as a possible motivation for “preserving or giving a boost” to an artist’s reputation (326-27). This was exactly why “a circle of [Lampman’s] friends and admirers” (329), namely, Scott, S.E. Dawson, and William D. LeSeur, speedily arranged for the Toronto publisher Morang to issue an almost complete edition of his poems within a year of his death. In their letter soliciting advance orders of *Poems* (1900) at \$2.25 a copy, they explained that “[t]his somewhat unusual method of direct application has been adopted...to

secure to...[Lampman's] widow the full and entire return without deduction or discount of any kind whatsoever" (qtd. in Whitridge xxxiii). A two-volume edition of *Poems* aimed at the lucrative Christmas market was published in 1901, and by 1915 four editions (or, rather, printings) of the book had appeared. No doubt partly out of self-interest Scott continued until the end of his life to preserve and boost his friend's literary reputation by publishing editions of his poems—*Lyrics of Earth: Sonnets and Ballads* in 1925, *At the Long Sault, and Other Poems* in 1943, and *Selected Poems of Archibald Lampman* in 1947 (the year of his death).

3. The Langs cite the Bloomsbury Group as an example of the "posthumous advantage" that stems from belonging to a "literary circle," especially one "where artists and writers cross paths" (334).<sup>3</sup> The Confederation Group consisted of writers only, but belonging to what came to be regarded as the first school of Canadian poets was most definitely a "posthumous advantage" to Lampman's literary reputation because it provided a historical, aesthetic, and intellectual context in which to read and study his work. Never was this more important than in the decades following the Second World War when the avatars of Modernism and New Criticism had almost succeeded in replacing the Confederation Group with the McGill Group as the first authentic school of Canadian poetry. By comparison with A.J.M. Smith, F.R. Scott, A.M. Klein, and other Modernists, what were the members of the Confederation Group but the Canadian heirs of a sentimental, effeminate, and overly subjective Romantic-Victorian tradition who had written a few poems such as Lampman's "Heat" that could sustain a close reading? Malcolm Ross's answer was an inexpensive paperback anthology, *Poets of the Confederation* (1960), whose "purpose...[was] to give the general reader a fuller selection of the four 'large' Confederation Poets [Roberts, Carman, Lampman, and Scott] than is available in any of the current anthologies" and to "remind us that we possess a poetic tradition of considerable merit and of recognizable character" (xii). In *Poets of the Confederation*, Lampman does not merely bask in the reflected glory of his fellow poets; he shines, revealing for some readers no doubt an unexpected variety of themes, concerns, and tones. The Langs make a terminological distinction between "recognition"—"the esteem in which 'insiders' hold...[an] artist"—and "renown"—"a more cosmopolitan form of recognition, measured by how well the artist is known beyond the professional network" (6). If Lampman has ever achieved the latter, much of the credit must go first to Scott and his many editions and then, for later generations, to Ross and *Poets of the Confederation*, which has a fine successor in Tracy Ware's *A Northern*

*Romanticism: Poets of the Confederation* (2000), which does the valuable service of bringing together extensive selections of poems, key essays by the poets, and a judicious assortment of criticism.

4. As Ross's very title indicates, Lampman's literary reputation benefited greatly from his "association" with one "emerging" identity in particular: Canada. From long before Confederation and for long after—indeed, even now—the Canadian identity has been linked in many minds with Canada's landscapes, climate, and geographical position—its sublimities, its extremes, its northernness, its flora and fauna. Lampman was suspicious of nationalism and guarded in his endorsement of the view that environment determines national characteristics that are in turn reflected in a nation's literature. Nevertheless, his so-called Nature poems served the argument well, as, of course, did similarly typecast poems by other members of the Confederation Group, especially Scott and William Wilfred Campbell, who, like Lampman, and unlike Roberts and Carman, spent nearly all their life not just in Canada, but in the nation's capital. No poets were better placed or equipped than Lampman, Scott, and Campbell to reflect in their poetry the distinctively Canadian "life of which...[they were] a part" (Baker 7).

Another facet of Lampman's work that served his "posthumous reputation" well, especially in the academy, was his socialism. For some time before his death in 1918, Campbell put himself on the wrong side of history by being an often blustering proponent of the increasingly unpopular concept of "vaster Britain," and Scott's role in what has come to be known as the "cultural genocide" of Canada's Native Peoples has placed him in the company of Canada's most despised men.<sup>4</sup> As members of the Ottawa ("Inside") civil service both Scott and Lampman were bound by the convention of political neutrality and, after the Civil Service Amendment Act of 1908, Scott was prohibited by law from publicly criticizing government policies. In very generalized terms, Lampman expressed his hostility to political corruption, capitalist rapacity, and religious hypocrisy and excess in "The Modern Politician," "To a Millionaire," "Liberty," "The Usurer," "To an Ultra Protestant," "Epitaph on a Rich Man," and *The Story of an Affinity*, all of which Scott published for the first time either in *Poems* or in *At the Long Sault, and Other Poems*. Together with the Morrissian utopia of "The Land of Pallas" and the apocalyptic vision of the consequences of materialism in "The City of the End of Things" (both of which are included in *Alcyone*), these posthumously published poems enhanced Lampman's reputation among left-leaning scholars and professor-poets of the nineteen fifties and later: F.W. Watt hailed his "detestation of the new

plutocracy of industrial civilization” (215); Louis Dudek found in him a “real radicalism in politics” (186); and F.R. Scott and Smith included “The Modern Politician,” “To a Millionaire,” and “To an Ultra Protestant” in *The Blasted Pine* (1960), and used “The City of the End of Things” to conclude the anthology. No other member of the Confederation Group was included in the volume.<sup>5</sup>

It is impossible to know and futile to speculate on how Lampman’s literary reputation will fare in the future, but the outlook is not promising. His anti-capitalist writings will continue to appeal to readers on the political left and his precise and affectionate depictions of the natural and rural worlds may gain the admiration that they deserve among ecologically sensitive readers. Yet other factors that helped to secure his literary reputation in the past—his association with the emergence of Canada as a nation and his membership of an all-male group of writers—run counter to trending ideological interests and are already casting him in shadow, as also may be his close friendship with the most widely reviled civil servant in Canadian history. And where are the Native peoples in your poems, Archie? Sadly, however, all these negative considerations may pale in comparison with the fact that Archibald Lampman was first and foremost a poet, and interest in poetry, both general and scholarly, is on the wane and shows no signs of reviving.

## Notes

- 1 For a longer and more detailed account of literary and other responses to Lampman and his work, see Bentley 1: 313-28.
- 2 The primary focus of the Lang’s study is artists, but with some exceptions their ideas apply equally well to authors.
- 3 In this instance the Lang’s ideas are only partly transferable from artists to authors.
- 4 Gerald Lynch gives an excellent account of the presentism involved in the blackening of Scott’s name.
- 5 Lampman is also the only member of the Confederation Group included in *The Stone, The Axe, The Sword, and Other Canadian Poems* (1955), a pamphlet edited by Margaret Fairley and published by the Marxist magazine *New Frontiers*.

---

## Works Cited

- Bentley, D.M.R. *Mnemographia Canadensis: Essays on Memory, Community, and Environment in Canada, with Particular Reference to London, Ontario*. 2 vols. London: Canadian Poetry Press, 1999.
- Dudek, Louis. "The Significance of Lampman." In Gnarowski. 185-201.
- Gnarowski, Michael, ed. *Archibald Lampman*. Critical Views of Canadian Writers. Toronto: Ryerson, 1970.
- Grieg, Peter E. "A Check List of Lampman Manuscript Materials in the Douglas Library Archives." *Douglas Library Notes* 16.1 (Autumn 1967): 12-27.
- Lang, Gladys, and Kurt Lang. *Etched in Memory: The Building and Survival of Artistic Reputation*. Chapel Hill and London: U of North Carolina P, 1990.
- Lee, Gail. "The Lampman Medallion in the Trinity College Chapel." *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 51 (Fall/Winter 2002): 86-90.
- Lynch, Gerald. "Duncan Campbell Scott and Presentism." *Ottawa Citizen* 30 Aug 2013. A13.
- Lynn, Helen. *An Annotated Edition of the Correspondence between Archibald Lampman and Edward William Thomson (1890-1898)*. Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1980.
- Ross, Malcolm. "Introduction." *Poets of the Confederation*. Ed. Malcolm Ross. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960. vii-xii.
- Taylor, Gary. *Cultural Selection*. New York: BasicBooks, 1996.
- Watt, F.W. "The Masks of Archibald Lampman." In Gnarowski. 202-22.