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IN
CANADIAN NATURE POETRY

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by

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis comprises a group of historical and critical studies of the Canadian nature poetry which appeared in both English and French from the time of Canada's earliest literary beginnings up to the second decade of the present century. These studies deal in part with the parallels and contrasts to be found in the work of the leading English and French Canadian poets of the period designated. Unless otherwise indicated, the terms "English" and "French" stand throughout for English Canadian and French Canadian.

Biographical and bibliographical material is presented more extensively in the case of the French poets since it is the aim of the writer to make a definite contribution to the meagre store of factual knowledge English Canadians have of the literary history of their French compatriots.

The majority of Canada's poets, both English and French, demonstrated in varying degree their powers of observation and detailed reportage as well as their emotional or aesthetic appreciation of their subject. The French poets, however, stopped considerably short of the philosophical approach; they had yet to show an awareness of the opportunity and the challenge in a philosophical view of nature.

Archibald MacMechan states that nature has been the theme of all Canadian poets, English and French--of Lozeau

as well as of Roberts. Although MacMechan's happy choice of representatives would seem to justify his generalization, the evidence does not bear it out. There was one fundamental difference between the English and the French use of nature. For the English writers, nature was an end in itself; for the French it was a means to an end.

It has been said that Confederation brought a fuller consciousness of national life and with this a new poetic activity expressed in the work of Charles G. D. Roberts, Bliss Carman, Archibald Lampman, and Duncan Campbell Scott. The French poets had no need of Confederation to quicken their national consciousness. In them--Crémazie, Fréchette, and their confreres--it had been brought to life by a single literary work, François-Xavier Garneau's History of Canada, the first volume of which appeared in 1845. It is no exaggeration to say that the young French writers of the day acclaimed with wild enthusiasm Garneau's historic declaration, made on one occasion when, taunted with the charge that he was a member of a conquered race and that French Canadians had no history, he replied, "Our history! Very well, I shall tell it! And you will see how our ancestors were conquered, and whether such a defeat was not as glorious as a victory!"

This source of inspiration set the tone of the work of the early French poets; it was nationalistic--a paean to

the founders of New France. Canadian nature, when it served them, served as a backdrop only--a descriptive canvas on which they depicted the pageant of their past. Herein lies the main difference between the English and French poets of the last century: for the leading English poets, nature itself was the main theme; for the French, history, religion, and the establishment and continuance of the race predominated.

Isolated French figures reached out to touch the grandeur of the Great Lakes, the Far North, the Saint Lawrence, and the Saguenay, but there was no large group of accomplished nature writers comparable in poetic stature with those of the School of Roberts. It will be shown, however, that occasionally, and more frequently since 1900, a French writer did succeed in bringing to nature poetry a new and vital approach, comparable in quality with the best of the English group.

The writings of the French poets of the nineteenth century reflect the long dependence of their people on the soil, on the farms and villages of Old Quebec. The habitant's love of the land, his quiet submission to its demands, the daily round of chores which brought him into the closest possible touch with the land--all these inspired the poets of French Canada to record the rustic story of their countrymen.

Nature was often their inspiration, but it was a fire-side, fence-corner nature. French Canadian poets as a group had yet to write the poetry of which their land was worthy.

The English Canadian poets of this period, stimulated by the tradition of the Romantic Movement in England, produced a large volume of nature verse. The work of Roberts, Carman, Lampman, and D. C. Scott was the culmination of this endeavour.

"The poets of Quebec," states V. B. Rhodenizer, "have a special appeal to Canadian readers because of their literary expression of their love of the natural beauty of their own Canadian home." That these French poets loved the beauty of Canadian nature is not to be denied, but the literary expression of this love, as this study will show, was not on the whole as satisfying a descriptive and interpretive recording of nature as that found in the works of the chief English poets of the time.

CHAPTER I

FORERUNNERS

The production of nature poetry in English in appreciable quantities did not begin until 1880, the year Charles G. D. Roberts' Orion and Other Poems was published. Within the short space of thirty years following this date a great deal of nature poetry was written. This period was marked by the appearance in print of Wilfred Campbell, Bliss Carman, Isabella Valancy Crawford, Pauline Johnson, Archibald Lampman, Duncan Campbell Scott, as well as Charles G. D. Roberts.

This vast school of nature poetry, with all its classrooms, corridors, laboratories, libraries, and museums, was built on a foundation already poured and set some thirty years before Roberts began construction on the Orion wing. And this foundation was, in a sense, incidental to a larger project envisioned by the firm of Sangster and Mair, Builders of Empire. In 1856 blueprints were drawn and matériel was assembled by Charles Sangster in his book The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay and Other Poems and the work was accomplished through the collaboration of Charles Mair and his Dreamland and Other Poems, published in 1868.

Before Sangster there had been little recognition in verse of the possibilities in Canadian nature. Pre-Confederation writers dealt almost exclusively in history,

customs, religion, and the binding ties of empire. One of these, Oliver Goldsmith (1787-1861), in his poem The Rising Village (1825), had followed the pattern of his grand-uncle's The Deserted Village in telling the story of a Loyalist settlement in Nova Scotia. In commenting on Goldsmith's poem Lorne Pierce has written: "While too derivative in manner and metaphor, it is a good example of rhyming by a cultured gentleman of the period, showing refined taste and sincerity, with an occasionally felicitous line in the descriptive passages:

> There verdant meads among the uplands spring,
> And grateful odors to the breezes fling. . . .
> The farmer's cottage, bosomed 'mong the trees,
> Whose spreading branches shelter from the breeze;
> The winding stream that turns the busy mill,
> Whose clanking echoes o'er the distant hill;
> The neat white church beside whose walls are spread
> The grass-clad hillocks of the sacred dead."1

These are felicitous lines, perhaps, but they and their like can hardly claim for their author any lengthy consideration in an examination of Canadian nature poetry. In these lines, as in most of the poem's descriptive passages, one seems to recognize English rather than Canadian scenes.

It is with Sangster and Mair, then, that English Canadian nature poetry has its beginning. In them is found the first conscious expression of a feeling for Canadian

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1 Lorne Pierce, An Outline of Canadian Literature, p. 63.

landscape as well as the first tentative gropings toward a sense of Canadian nationalism.

Charles Sangster. E. K. Brown has said that Charles Sangster wrote for his fellow-Canadians and about them and with a Canadian or at the widest, a North American range of attitude.[2] Lorne Pierce and A. J. M. Smith concur in this opinion.[3] The total absence of noteworthy competitors in the field, either English or French, make Sangster's descriptions of the Canadian scene stand out boldly. His nature poetry is best in its pictorial phase, despite numberless capitalized personifications, classical allusions, and outworn romantic images. These traits are exemplified in the following passage from "Morning in Summer":

> Darkness has disappeared, and all the stars,
> Save one, have ceased to twinkle in the heavens.
> Like some lone sentinel, whose comrades all
> Have sunk into luxurious repose,
> This solitary orb remains behind
> To greet the Morn, a silent, truthful witness,
> Ordained by the Creator to attest
> To the first dawning of another day,
> Of every day throughout the lengthened year.
> The silver Dawn flies up the dusky slope,
> Like a white dove emerging from a cloud;
> Morning imprints its first impassioned kiss
> Upon the Orient's lips, her rose-hued cheeks
> Blushing with love, and all her being moved
> With heart-beats mighty as the throes of Jove.[4]

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2 E. K. Brown, On Canadian Poetry, p. 32.

3 Pierce, op. cit., p. 65.
A. J. M. Smith, The Book of Canadian Poetry, p. 8.

4 Charles Sangster, The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay and Other Poems, p. 102.

A more observant sketch, couched in less flamboyant language, may be found in "Autumn," where the poet achieves a startling piece of description:

> The marsh,
> Like to an indolent sluggard, has lain down
> Beneath its faded covering, to dream
> Of a long rest: its putrid breath no more
> Poisons the air with a malarian stench,
> Inducing fevers that burn up the frame,
> As the hot summer burns the parchèd leaf--
> The purifying air of Autumn has passed o'er
> The feverish waste, and given it new health,
> E'en in its swift decay; as the free'd soul
> Ascends to heaven when the body dies.5

Not all of Sangster's longest poem, "The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay," deserves the acclaim accorded by anthologists and critics to its most frequently quoted part, the "Lyric to the Isles." It is an enthusiastic travelogue on the St. Lawrence, consisting of a series of fragments ranging in subject matter from the traveler's canoe to Cape Diamond "with its sombre-coloured bust." There is little detailed description. The places "visited" on the journey down river are each hailed with one all-inclusive epithet. We see the "startled Galloppes," "graceful Cedars," "terrible Lachine," "St. Helen's, fair enchanted," "fair Batiscan," Quebec "a tanned giant on a solid throne," "the black and frowning Saguenay." The poet barely hesitates before the spectacle of Montmorency, one of Canada's most awe-inspiring sights:

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5 Ibid., p. 125.

> Down the rough slope Montmorenci's torrent pours,
> We cannot view it by this feeble ray,
> But, hark! its thunders leap along the shores,
> Thrilling the cliffs that guard the beauteous bay;

One wonders why he did not accept the challenge of Montmorency and put off the remainder of the trip until the next day! Capes Trinity and Eternity receive the same hasty treatment. There is no attempt to scale these heights or to give them even a slight portion of the obeisance they deserve. Indeed, it may be said here that none of the English poets of the period under study rose to the occasion before the Capes. It was necessary to wait for Charles Gill to do them justice in his masterpiece Le Cap Eternité, published in 1919.[6]

The trend toward nature poetry which begins in Sangster's first book gathers considerable momentum in Hesperus and Other Poems which appeared four years later and which, according to Oliver Wendell Holmes, "added new interest to the woods and streams."[7] Although the poet continues to follow Cowper and Thomson as models and again makes use of his not over-large store of conventional epithets and classical personifications, he succeeds in effecting a more personal approach with a hint of the cosmic philosophy which was to appear later in Roberts and Carman. It is a hint only,

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6 Cf. p. 115.

7 Cit. by R. P. Baker in A History of English-Canadian Literature to the Confederation, p. 163.

however, for his strongest inspiration from nature, as Professor Baker has said, leans more toward the religious than the philosophical.[8] This is clearly seen in the opening lines of one of the best poems in the book, "The Falls of the Chaudière":

> I have laid my cheek to Nature's, placed my puny hand
> in hers,
> Felt a kindred spirit warming all the life blood of
> my face,
> Moved amid the very foremost of her truest worshippers,
> Studying each curve of beauty, marking every minute
> grace;

and further on:

> Thou wert true
> To nature and thyself. Be thy example
> The harbinger of times
> When the Chaudière's imposing majesty
> Will awe the spirits of the heartless mimes
> To worship God in truth, with nature's constancy.[9]

The same religious feeling appears again in the closing lines of the "Proem" which prefaces a series of sonnets in the same book:

> And these leaves
> Of meditation are but perfumes from
> The censer of my feelings; honied drops
> Wrung from the busy hives of heart and brain;
> Mere etchings of the artist; grains of sand
> From the calm shores of that unsounded deep
> Of speculation, where all thought is lost
> Amid the realms of Nature and of God.[10]

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8 Baker, loc. cit.

9 Charles Sangster, Hesperus and Other Poems, pp. 53,57.

10 Ibid., p. 161.

For a more intense and truly poetic expression of the poet's sense of God in Nature and of Nature as the shepherd of Man, one must turn back to his dramatic idyll, "Bertram and Lorenzo," in the earlier volume. Here we come upon clear signposts pointing the way for Sangster's followers:

> Call it not lonely;
> Say, rather, that the God of Nature hath
> Peopled these wilds with spiritual forms,
> With which the man of an exalted mind
> Can hold sweet converse in his studious hours.
> . . . . . .
> The trees that nod upon the piney height;
> The humble shrubbery that men pass by
> Unnoticed; the soft moss that grows upon
> The flinty granite; the pale, meek-eyed flower,
> Half hidden by the rank, luxuriant weeds
> . . . . . .
> Do each and all possess a powerful claim
> Upon the sober mind.
> . . . . . .
> Young man, thou dost not know the peace
> That falls upon the spirit in these wilds,
> Like gentle dew upon the parched leaf.
> Learn to aspire to God; clutch at the stars;
> . . . . . .
> But to be lonely here,
> Where every breeze that passeth by interprets
> God's everlasting, all-pervading truths
> Unto our inmost souls; where we can feast
> Our hungry mind's eye on the rich repast
> Which the wild wilderness contains; is to
> Be blind--insensible--to all the beauty
> Which nature hath in vast profusion strewn,
> With an unsparing hand, about our path.
> Give me the place where I can hold communion
> With Nature and with Nature's God;
> . . . . . .
> I would fain convince thee, friend,
> That God sits throned upon these lofty wilds,
> And prove to thy half-unbelieving mind
> That the still voice of august nature speaks
> Audibly and incessantly to man.
> Let's to the mountains.
> . . . . . .

> Nature for our guide,
> Depend upon it we will learn far more
> Than any pair of beardling adepts did
> In those cold, formal universities,
> Where young men's heads are crammed like Christmas
> turkeys,
> Making them passive as a sweating group
> Of listless Dutchmen o'er their meerschaum pipes
> That deaden all their faculties of mind.11

In The Book of Canadian Poetry A. J. M. Smith describes "Bertram and Lorenzo" as "an ambitious poem in excellent Wordsworthian blank verse that tells a somewhat Alastor-like story of a poet's love and death in a romantic setting of soul-enkindling mountains."12

The implication was made earlier that Sangster and Mair were Empire Builders--Canadians whose expressions of patriotism were, for the most part, avowals of loyalty to England. This is true, but it is also true that these two poets, and Mair especially, represent through their interest in nature the changes that were taking place in Canadian thinking. The poets turned more and more toward Canada as a geographic entity and thus eventually toward her as a political and social one. W. E. Collin writes of this period: "Patriotism was changing its complexion. It had meant loyalty to Britain; but in the sons of colonists, with a belief in independence,

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11 Charles Sangster, The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay and Other Poems, pp. 237-62.

12 Smith, op. cit., p. 89.

the idea of loyalty was changing into a reverence for the Canadian soil. This was a departure. It opened the way to what there is of uniqueness in the Canadian poets of the Lampman period: not ideas, not mysticism, not dialectic, but the smell of the Canadian soil."13

The man who did most to open the way was Charles Mair, the true founder of that nature school of descriptive writing of which Charles G. D. Roberts was to become dean some thirty years after Mair's first book was published.

Charles Mair. Charles Mair was an out-door man who would have been marked today as the "rugged" type, at home in the saddle or by the camp-fire. And in his pack would be found pencil and paper to be used often in recording his activities and impressions of life in the North. He was in turn medical student, paymaster on an expedition to the Northwest, Riel Rebellion prisoner, "Canada First" party organizer, fur trader, quartermaster in the Second Rebellion, Immigration Officer, LL.D. and F.R.C.S.--a dramatic life and the very background of experience needed for writing Tecumseh, a Drama, which appeared in 1886. Out of such an experience must surely have come a wider acquaintance with Canadian nature than Sangster, journalist and Post Office Department official, could have had.

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13 W. E. Collin, The White Savannahs, p. 14.

Mair carried on the exploitation of the vein Sangster had struck. His first volume, Dreamland and Other Poems, reveals the same interest in the Canadian landscape written with a more observant eye for detail, more feeling, fewer classical references and more realistic language. This language brings with it a sympathetic love for and an understanding of the various aspects of nature which seem to replace the pious reverence one finds in Sangster. Mair appears to have been not only a more accurate observer but also a calmer, more impersonal one than the older poet. There is, to be sure, a certain descriptive quality in many of Sangster's verses, as in the following lines from "Autumn," where the picture is skillfully coloured by the personification of the season as a "rich fancy dyer":

> Yon group of trees upon the faded bank,
> Spreading their broad deep shadows on the wave,
> Gaze in the water at their roots, and watch
> The gradual fading of their summer-green,
> As Autumn, the rich fancy dyer, comes,
> Puts on his motley, Joseph-coat of leaves,
> And steeps them all in hues of gold and brown,
> And glowing scarlet, yellow, green, and dun--
> Bright favorite of the undulating shore.14

This poem, together with "A Morning in Summer," "Rideau Lake," "The Indian Summer," "The Rapids," and "Lyric to the Isles," is the choicest of Sangster's poems for description and an expression of his interest in the nature world. None of

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14 Charles Sangster, The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay and Other Poems, p. 125.

these, however, seem to express what the poet sees and hears with as much clarity and colour as do the following excerpts from Mair's "August":

> Dull August! Maiden of the sultry days,
> And Summer's latest born! When all the woods
> Grow dim with smoke, and smirch their lively green
> With haze of long-continued drought begot;
> . . . . . .
> When streamlets die upon the lichened rocks,
> And leave the bleaching pebbles shining bare,
> And every mussel shell agape and parched,
> And small snail-craft quite emptied of their crews;
> . . . . . .
> The beetle in the tree-top sits and sings
> His brassy tune with increase to the end,
> And one may peep and peer amongst the leaves,
> Yet see him not though still he sits aloft,
> And winds his reedy horn into the noon.
> . . . . . .
> Now one may sit within a little vale,
> Close to the umbrage of some wood whose gums
> Give heavy odours to the heavy air,
> And watch the dusty crackers snap their wings,
> Whilst gangs of blue-flies fetch a buzzing teaze
> Of mad, uneasy whirlings overhead.
> . . . . . .
> And from the lofty woods crow-blackbird trains
> Chuck o'er the barren leas with long-drawn flight.
> Far o'er the hills the grouse's feath'ry drum
> Beats quick and loud within a beechen copse,
> And, sometimes, when the heavy woods are still,
> A single tap upon a hemlock spire
> Dwells with the lonely glades in echoes deep.[15]

In this, as in other poems of Mair, there are faint echoes of the sensuous imagery of Keats and occasionally a typically "English" note--befitting Mair, the Colonial--in phrases like "beechen copse" and "barren leas." But the pictures evoked

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15 Charles Mair, Dreamland and Other Poems, pp. 119-123.

are for the most part Canadian in character and setting: the smoke-dimmed green of the woods, the heavy fragrance of the evergreens, the deep stillness of the tall hemlock groves.

More Canadian still in character, and at the same time an instance of the subjective view so frequent in Sangster but so seldom encountered in Mair, is this short expostulation from "Winter":

> When morn is bleak, and sunshine cool,
> And trav'llers' beards with rime are grey;
> When frost-nipt urchins weep in school,
> And sleighs creak o'er the drifted way;
> When smoke goes quick from chimney-top,
> And mist flies through the open hatch;
> When snow-flecks to the window hop,
> And childrens' tongues cling to the latch,--
> Then do I sigh for summer wind,
> And wish the winter less unkind.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> When great pines crack with mighty sound,
> And ice doth rift with doleful moan;
> When luckless wanderers are found
> Quite stiff in wooded valleys lone;
> When ragged mothers have no sheet
> To shield their babes from winter's flaw;
> When milk is frozen in the teat,
> And beggars shiver in their straw,--
> Then do I hate the winter's cheer,
> And weep for springtime of the year.16

No study of Mair's contribution to Canadian nature poetry, however cursory, can be adequate without mention of the piece which most frequently appears in the anthologies, "The Fire-Flies." Here is Mair at his best. Though

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16 Ibid., pp. 72-73.

reminiscent, perhaps, of Cowper and Thomson, as some claim,[17] his touch is nevertheless sure and lines such as the following cannot escape the attention of the reader or fail to make a warm appeal:

> The plodding oxen, dragging creaky wains
> O'er bosky roads, their ancient horns entwine,
> Lick their huge joles, and think of bedded stalls,
> And munching of sweet corn. The lick'rous swine
> Huddled in routed turf, neglect the calls
> And pinches of their young, and hide their dugs,
> Swoll'n with a lazy milk, whilst timid sheep,
> Far from their winter-folds of knotty fir,
> Dream of lean wolves and bleatings in their sleep.
> . . . . . .
> And, in the hollows where the river lies,
> The hoarse frogs sprawl among the bedded reeds,
> And croak harsh ditties to their uncouth mates.
> . . . . . .
> And now they make rich spangles in the grass,
> Gilding the night-dew on the tender blade;
> Then hover o'er the meadow-pools to gaze
> At their bright forms shrined in the dreamy glass
> Which earth, and air, and bounteous rain have made.
> . . . . . .
> At length the sky is flecked with dingy streaks,
> And Morn comes striding o'er the eastern hills,
> Muffled in angry trappings which foretell
> A coming storm; and now each fire-fly seeks
> Its distant home, to drink from leafy rills,
> And feed on mulse and sweetest hydromel.
> Hark to the chirrup and the tinkling bell!
> Rude chanticleer now winds his drowsy horn
> To the bleached darkness of the drizzly morn.[18]

These lines may have "mildly romantic connotations," as A. J. M. Smith suggests,[19] but it would be unfair to the poet

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17 A. J. M. Smith, The Book of Canadian Poetry, p. 13.

18 Mair, op. cit., pp. 112-117.

19 A. J. M. Smith, "Canadian Poetry, A Minority Report," University of Toronto Quarterly, 8:134, January, 1939.

to insist that there is "no detail" here, "no picture or concrete image," or that the lines are "vague and abstract."

Charles Mair was the acknowledged founder of the school of English Canadian nature poetry which was to flourish during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Mair's French language counterpart was Pamphile Lemay. Lemay was the forerunner of a line of nature poets, though founder of no distinct school. The Quebec School of which he was a member and the regionalist group which he preceded were dissimilar in many respects to the School of Roberts. These dissimilarities will be noted in the following discussion of Mair's French contemporaries.

CHAPTER II

PAMPHILE LEMAY

The most productive of the French poets of the last century, all members of what is called the Quebec School, were contemporaries, shared the same inspirational stimulus--Garneau's famous History of Canada--and enjoyed the privileges of a common meeting place for companionship, instruction, and not infrequent disputation. They were: Garneau himself, Octave Crémazie, Louis Fréchette, and Pamphile Lemay. Garneau, the historian, was the founder of the Quebec School; Crémazie was its host and first poet, Fréchette its most popular poet and protagonist. It was Lemay, however, who was to become its leading writer of distinctive nature verse. Garneau, Crémazie, and Fréchette did not ignore their country's forests and streams, but their scattered references to Canadian geography and their descriptive passages were background only, helpful but relatively unimportant in the scheme of their panoramic presentation of Canada's early history. Lemay, on the other hand, though an able recorder of his compatriots' exploits, was the kind of man who could turn away from the provocative pages of history and commune with the trees and flowers of his beloved Quebec countryside.

Pamphile Lemay was born at Lotbinière in 1837 and died at Saint-Jean-Deschaillons in 1918. His education--classical

Studies at the Séminaire in Quebec, a two year course in theology, and a noteworthy achievement in law--prepared him for his life work as translator and librarian of the Quebec Legislative Assembly. His place in the "bonne entente" of English-French literary history is well secured by his competent translations of Longfellow's "Evangeline" and Kirby's The Golden Dog. His first book of poems, Essais poétiques, was published in 1865, shortly after his graduation from law school. Les Vengeances, a verse romance of early Canada, appeared in 1875, (reprinted in 1888 under the title Tonkourou), to be followed by Une Gerbe (1879), Fables canadiennes (1882), Petits poèmes (1883), and Les Gouttelettes (1904). He was also the author of numerous prose tales, romances, and comedies.

Lemay belonged to the school of Crémazie and Fréchette but he did not hew as close to the Victor Hugo line as they. He managed to avoid most of the influences which made the Quebec School a kindergarten of romanticism run by remote control from Paris. More truly Canadian than any of his great contemporaries, he showed finer powers of observation in his presentation of the Canadian scene and the life and customs of the Canadian people. Through an inclination to reverie and a personal approach to his subject, Lemay forms the main link between the vigorous and often pompous declamations of Crémazie and Fréchette and the essentially subjective poetry

of Lozeau, one of the leading poets of the Ecole littéraire de Montréal which flourished at the beginning of the present century. If Charles Mair can be called the "legitimate forerunner and founder of the nature school of Canadian poetry,"[1] Pamphile Lemay is his French counterpart.

Lemay made a further bid for distinction in his use of the sonnet, being the first to use this form to any extent in French Canada. In the opinion of the majority of critics, he remains unchallenged in this field. The book of sonnets published in 1904 under the title Les Gouttelettes provides the best means of judging his work and stands as his most important contribution to Canadian literature. These sonnets receive high praise from Camille Roy in his preface to the 1937 edition: "If the family, national, and religious traditions of our people ever became lost, they would all be found again in Les Gouttelettes."[2]

This book is noteworthy in that it presents poems of an intimate character inspired by a deep feeling for the sights and sounds of the country and a sympathy for the activities and customs of country folk. Lemay not only shows an appreciation of the poetic values in the sights and sounds

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1 Lorne Pierce, An Outline of Canadian Literature, p. 66.

2 Pamphile Lemay, Les Gouttelettes, p. xii. (tr.)

of nature but is also able to identify himself with them, to lose himself in their delights. In this respect he is one with Lampman, Carman, and Roberts, though perhaps not as keen an observer of detail as they. Camille Roy has said of him: "Lemay is a lover of beauty. He forgets all else in the contemplation of a flower. That is why his vision of his object is so clear and why he is able to describe it with a precision which raises it above the commonplace."3

The two hundred and seventy-five sonnets in Les Gouttelettes are divided into sections, the captions of which indicate the comprehensive treatment of French Canadian family, national, and religious traditions referred to by Roy. These captions are: Sonnets bibliques, Sonnets évangéliques, Souffle religieux, Hommage, Dans l'antiquité, Chez les Romains, Au foyer, Glané dans notre histoire, Grains de philosophie, Sonnets rustiques, Domaine politique, Souffle d'amour, les Astres, Fantaisie, Paysages, Sur les eaux, Sport, Ultima verba. The group entitled "Sonnets rustiques," the largest, contains those sonnets which are pertinent to this study. One of the best of these--and the most characteristic of the poet's method--is "A un vieil arbre":

> Tu réveilles en moi des souvenirs confus.
> Je t'ai vu, n'est-ce pas? moins triste et moins modeste;

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3 Camille Roy, Essais sur la littérature canadienne, p. 123. (tr.)

Ta tête sous l'orage avait un noble geste,
Et l'amour se cachait dans tes rameaux touffus.

D'autres, autour de toi, comme de riches fûts,
Poussaient leurs troncs noueux vers la voûte céleste;
Ils sont tombés; et rien de leur beauté ne reste;
Et toi-même aujourd'hui, sait-on ce que tu fus?

O vieil arbre tremblant dans ton écorce grise,
Sens-tu couler encore une sève qui grise?
Les oiseaux chantent-ils sur tes rameaux gercés?

Moi, je suis un vieil arbre oublié dans la plaine;
Et pour tromper l'ennui dont ma pauvre âme est pleine,
J'aime à me souvenir des nids que j'ai bercés.4

Here the poet identifies himself with external nature, comparing himself, an aged man, to an old tree "forgotten on the plain." The language is simple yet suggestive. There are no forced epithets to mar the calm, friendly tone in which the old poet addresses the tree. The melancholy, reminiscent mood of the poet, inspired by the sight of the tree, is expressed succinctly in the lines:

> Et pour tromper l'ennui dont ma pauvre âme est pleine,
> J'aime à me souvenir des nids que j'ai bercés.

There is a personal touch, a subjective approach in evidence here that is seldom found in the work of Lemay's Quebec School confreres. The descriptive phrases, though distinct and exact, are few: leafy branches, knotted trunks, gray bark, chapped limbs. The poet is speaking to the tree as to a brother and it is his old man's heart that speaks. Precise

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4 Lemay, op. cit., p. 144.

observation of natural details has no place in his sympathy for the old tree or in his musing on the lives they both have enjoyed; the nest-children image of the final line seals this bond between them. In this sonnet there is neither the finely polished descriptive pattern of a Lampman, nor the wild blood-brotherhood abandon of a Carman. Lemay stands somewhere between the two, singing a less rousing musical note than Carman might in the same circumstance, giving fewer picturesque details than Lampman would, yet expressing an understanding of Nature and a deep sympathy with her moods.

Although Lemay's place in Canadian literature may have been secured by his patriotic and religious pieces, he wished to be known as "un poète du terroir," a poet of the soil, and it is as such that he is most effective, especially in these rustic sonnets. It is here that he reveals his prime concern. The titles show it: The Land, The Sugarbush, Forest Fire, Spring, The Sower, Plowing, The Brook, The Milkmaid, Growth, Wheat, Harvest, The Mill, The Thresher.

Virtually all of these rustic sonnets end on a personal note evoked by some aspect of nature. "Sécheresse"[5] follows this pattern, as well as demonstrating the poet's descriptive powers. The following prose translation will show how he progresses from an almost photographic picture of the drought

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5 Ibid., p. 137.

to a comforting, if sad, note of promise:

> The fields are bare whence the herds went to feast. Nothing blooms. The lamb bleats sorrowfully. The cowbell cracks with the weeping of its knell. On the roads swirl waves of dust. The parching wind snarls incessantly. The brooks run dry. Bitter thistles and spindling grain stalks mingle on the meagre furrows. Over all the searing sun flames.
>
> But should the calm sky send down its refreshing shower, the earth, now groaning like a barren woman, would see the bristling beauty of the grain o'er the plowed land.
>
> So it is when hope of God seems lost, for, as the rain on the parched fields, our tears will bring forth from our dry souls a harvest of love.

In "Sécheresse" the sound values of the diction are noteworthy. One can hear the dry crackling of leaf, twig, and stubble in the words: champs, festoyer, tristement, poussière, and, most vividly, in the line:

Un souffle déssechant ne cesse d'aboyer.

The imagery is striking. The cowbell does not tinkle, it cries. The thistle is not just sharp, it is biting, acrid. The furrows are more than dry; they are lean. And over them the sun does not merely shine, it flames--and it flames with a vicious pleasure.

In "Première neige," as in "Sécheresse," the poet gives a clear picture of the sombreness of early winter. The bright sun is hidden, the gay songs of birds are hushed, and the sky "weighs us down." The last two lines again bring the melancholy image of old age:

Sur mon front qui s'incline, ainsi que sur les champs,
Voici les blancs flocons de la première neige.6

The same figure appears in "L'Hiver":

L'hiver de notre vie est triste ainsi pourtant.
Sous nos cheveux de neige, hélas! à jamais dorment
Les suaves espoirs que nous caressions tant.7

In these old man's thoughts there is much communion with Nature but no gay, carefree yielding to her delights. The touches of homely philosophy with which nearly every sonnet closes would contrast sharply with Carman's unrestrained joy in nature as expressed in The Pipes of Pan series.

The descriptive artist in Lemay comes most often and most effectively to the fore in this "Sonnets rustiques" group of Les Gouttelettes. Lemay is a wanderer in the fields. He is a boon companion of Archibald Lampman on evening walks up and down country lanes. These two are lovers of Nature; they know her well. But Lemay retreats always from the scene before him to its reflection in his own heart. With a few deft strokes he paints his picture but reserves his most striking colours for the signature, his own feelings. His companion sees more, catches the smallest detail of light and shadow and movement, and with a sense of beauty not possessed by the other, brings to his canvas a surer and more satisfying

6 Ibid., p. 150.

7 Ibid., p. 152.

revelation of the scene.

Considering all of Lemay's writings which may be said to merit in some measure the name of nature poetry, the conclusion can be drawn that in comparison with his English contemporaries he does not rank as a descriptive writer. He does, however, make a valuable contribution in the interpretive field, above all in his cameo-like pictures of rural life and in his sympathetic expression of the thoughts and feelings of those men of the soil whose simple virtues and joys he was so anxious to proclaim. Lemay made no attempt to record the beauties and the attractions of the St. Lawrence valley as Charles Sangster had done in "The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay" and as Charles Gill was to do more successfully in Le Cap Eternité. Nor could he give his rustic canvases the profusion of colour and sharp detail that is found in Lampman. Yet his scenes of country life with their personal touch and their sense of the mysterious bonds which link Man and Nature and God have gained a high place in the poetry of Old Quebec.

CHAPTER III

THE QUEBEC SCHOOL

Were this a survey of the entire field of French Canadian poetry, an exhaustive study would be made of Pamphile Lemay's confreres of the Quebec School of 1860: Lenoir-Rolland, Crémazie, Fréchette, Alfred Garneau, Chapman, and Beauchemin. The limited scope of this work requires mention of these poets only as forerunners of Lemay or as his collaborators in the creation of a French Canadian literature. All of these contributed in some measure to the growth of nature poetry. This contribution assumed many forms, ranging from the scattered descriptive passages in La Légende d'un peuple, Fréchette's epic of New France and early Canada, to the delicately phrased, sentimental lyrics of Nérée Beauchemin, "the flower on the stem of Crémazie, Fréchette, and Lemay."[1]

Joseph Lenoir-Rolland. Among the few poetic voices heard but faintly before Crémazie, one only deserves mention in relation to nature poetry. Joseph Lenoir-Rolland (1822-1861) was a lyricist, a disciple of Lamartine in phrasing and sensitivity, and the author of a small collection of pieces, Poèmes Epars, edited in 1916 by Casimir Hébert. Most of

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1 Fr. Carmel Brouillard, Sous le signe des muses, p. 31.

these pieces are patriotic in tone and historical in content. One, "Les Laboureurs," expresses the life of the farmer and the love of the land which was to be the dominating theme of the regionalist poets after 1900:

> Ne méprisons jamais le sol qui nous vit naître,
> Ni l'homme dont les bras pour notre seul bien-être
> S'usent à force de labeurs,
> Ni ces robustes fils ployés sur leurs faucilles,
> Ni son modeste toit, ni le chant de ses filles,
> Qui reviennent le soir avec les travailleurs.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Notre avenir est là! nos champs gardent le germe
> D'hommes propres à tout, au coeur changeant ou ferme,
> Prenant un bon ou mauvais pli;
> Dirigeons vers le bien leur mâle intelligence,
> Instruisons-les; savoir, c'est narguer l'indigence,
> Et peut-être sauver un peuple de l'oubli.
>
> Il n'est que ce moyen d'atteindre un long bien-être,
> D'attacher à ce sol fécond qui les vit naître
> Les hommes aimant les labeurs,
> De voir leurs nombreux fils ployés sur leurs faucilles,
> Et d'entendre, le soir, le doux chant de leurs filles
> Se mêler à celui des rudes travailleurs.2

Octave Crémazie. Co-owner with his brother of a book-store in Quebec and a voracious reader of its stock--the contents of its shelves meant far more to him than the entries in its ledger--, Octave Crémazie (1827-1879) remains in undisputed possession of the title of father of French Canadian poetry. This fact is all the more remarkable when one considers the exceedingly small volume of verse produced by him--

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2 Joseph Lenoir-Rolland, Poèmes Epars, p. 55.

about thirty poems in all. Yet it was Crémazie who first put the Muse to work on the subject matter of Garneau's History of Canada and it was his little bookstore that became the meeting place of a large group of writers which included the leading authors of the day as well as their younger and less famous colleagues. It was Crémazie whose staunch nationalism, stimulating all those who knew him or read his poems, found its finest expression in "Le Drapeau de Carillon," a poignant, dramatic tale of an old soldier's devotion to his king and one which will continue to hold the minds and hearts of his countrymen always. All students and critics of French Canadian literature confirm the following judgement of Charles ab der Halden: "Crémazie gave the intellectual youth of his time a taste for poetry and permitted Canadian poetry to become aware of itself. All Canadian poets can say to him, with Fréchette, 'My songs were born of your songs.'"3

Crémazie's poems exemplify the use of nature as a vehicle for patriotic and religious expression and are therefore typical of the work of most of his colleagues of the Quebec School. Two lines from "Les Mille-Iles" strike a note which remains characteristic wherever the poet speaks of his native land:

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3 C. ab der Halden, Etudes de littérature canadienne-française, p. 72. (tr.)

O vieilles forêts ondoyantes
Teintes du sang de nos aïeux![4]

His forests are always "old" or "vast" and he never allows his compatriots to forget that their land is tinged with the blood of their ancestors. He listens always for "the sweet voice of the homeland--la patrie--singing through the pines."

Crémazie's lyrical tribute to the beauties of the Thousand Islands echoes Sangster's lines on the same subject but carry a more touching expression of their beauty and their place in the memory and heart of the poet. The following verses convey the style and theme of the poem and show the writer's ability to create a striking metaphor:

Quand Eve à l'arbre de la vie
De sa main eut cueilli la mort,
Sur la terre à jamais flétrie
On vit paraître le remord.

Puis Adam s'en fut sur la terre,
Qui déjà pleurait avec lui,
S'abreuver à la source amère
Où nous allons boire aujourd'hui.

Et les archanges, sur leurs ailes
Prenant l'Eden silencieux,
Au haut des sphères éternelles,
Le déposèrent dans les cieux.

Mais, en s'élançant dans l'espace,
Ils laissèrent sur leur chemin
Tomber, pour indiquer leur trace,
Quelques fleurs du jardin divin.

Et ces fleurs aux couleurs mobiles,
Tombant dans le fleuve géant,

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4 Octave Crémazie, Oeuvres complètes, p. 192.

Firent éclore les Mille-Iles,
Ce paradis du Saint-Laurent...5

Crémazie's first poems appeared in Le Journal de Québec in 1854. Had he not been forced into inglorious exile by financial troubles in 1862, he might have produced a larger volume of verse. In Paris, however, he was compelled to grub a meagre living, deserted by his Muse. His prose diary, Le Journal du Siège de Paris, and a few letters to his mother and friends in Canada make up the total of his published works which appeared in a definitive edition under the auspices of the Institut Canadien de Québec in 1882. All of Crémazie's poetry shows the profound influence of his revered master, Victor Hugo. His grandiloquent recordings of contemporary events follow closely the form and manner of Hugo's Les Orientales, just as Fréchette's masterpiece, La Légende d'un peuple is a Canadian echo of La Légende des siècles. For the greater part of the nineteenth century, Crémazie was the national poet of French Canada and although he is still considered the master trail-blazer of his time, a more critical estimate is now putting him in his proper place as forerunner of more competent writers. In fact Laure Rièse, in a review of Guy Sylvestre's anthology of French Canadian poetry published in 1944, goes so far as to designate Crémazie's metaphors as too sonorous, his epithets too pedantic, his form

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5 Ibid., "Les Mille-Iles," pp. 188-89.

too conventional; "they descend in direct lineage from the worst eighteenth century French patriotism."[6] But a beginning had to be made for French Canadian poetry and it was Octave Crémazie who made it.

Louis Fréchette. Crémazie's most promising disciple and the first Canadian poet to gain the recognition and unstinted admiration of the French Academy was Louis Fréchette,[7] romanticist par excellence of French Canada and its most influential literary figure from 1870 to 1900. Fréchette found Crémazie's trail to the forest, dimly marked as it was, and pushed farther along, viewing more distant stretches of country, observing more, communing with Canada's rugged nature more frequently and with deeper passion. Yet this communion, like that of his master, was in the final sense a communion with his ancestors rather than with nature itself.

The best of Fréchette's descriptive lines usher in memories of bygone heroes and their exploits in the turbulent years of discovery and exploration, as in these lines from La Légende d'un peuple:

> Et pourtant, à travers les spirales mouvantes
> Que l'ouragan soulève en bonds désordonnés,
> Luttant contre le choc des blizzards déchaînés,

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6 Laure Rièse, "French Canadian Poetry," Canadian Forum, 23:280-82, March, 1944.

7 Received the Montyon prize for "Fleurs boréales et Oiseaux de neige" in 1881.

Des voyageurs, là-bas, affrontent la bourrasque.
L'ombre les enveloppe et le brouillard les masque.
Qui sont-ils? Où vont-ils? Quels Titans orgueilleux
Peuvent narguer ainsi tant d'éléments fougueux?

Ce sont de fiers enfants de la Nouvelle-France.
Sans songer aux périls, sans compter la souffrance,
Ils vont, traçant toujours leur immortel sillon,
Au pôle, s'il le faut, planter leur pavillon![8]

Here is the North American weather at its most tempestuous and the ultimate picture is of the proud sons of New France, heedless of hardship and peril, blazing their immortal trail to the very pole, if need be, to set up their country's flag. Similar passages throughout La Légende d'un peuple merge into a portrayal of an almost primordial nature, its grandiose tone overdone, perhaps, by today's standards, yet suitable as a backdrop for the daring adventurers from the Old World.

As an expression of the bleakness and elemental fury of the Canadian winter the following stanza is effective:

C'est l'hiver, l'âpre hiver, et la tempête embouche
Des grands vents boréaux la trompette farouche.
Dans la rafale, au loin, la neige à flots pressés
Roule sur le désert ses tourbillons glacés,
Tandis que la tourmente ébranle en ses colères
Les vieux chênes rugueux et les pins séculaires.
L'horrible giboulée aveugle; le froid mord;
La nuit s'approche aussi--la sombre nuit du Nord--
Apportant son surcroît de mornes épouvantes.[9]

Here is the first striking picture of that nature which, as Northrop Frye observes, is consistently sinister and menacing

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8 Louis Fréchette, La Légende d'un peuple, p. 106.

9 Ibid., p. 105.

in Canadian poetry.10 Shortly after Fréchette's poem appeared, Wilfred Campbell was to express a similar thought:

> Lands that loom like spectres, whited regions of winter,
> Wastes of desolate woods, deserts of water and shore;
> A world of winter and death, within these regions who enter,
> Lost to summer and life, go to return no more.11

Campbell's approach is more direct, more realistic, less verbose--a step in retreat from the declamatory style of the French romanticist. Yet in spite of this directness, this glimpse into a "frozen hell of utter moral nihilism,"12 the last three lines of Fréchette's stanza give a more telling interpretation of the stark and terrifying Canadian winter:

> The dread hail blinds, the cold bites.
> Night, too, approaches--the sombre northern night--
> Bringing its burden of dismal terrors.

It will be readily acknowledged that a translation cannot do justice to these grim lines. The phrase, "la sombre nuit du nord," is real, perfect; no part of Campbell's verse can equal it.

There are few if any accurately realistic descriptions in La Légende d'un peuple, or in Fréchette's other volumes of verse: Pêle-Mêle (1877), Les Fleurs boréales et les Oiseaux de neige (1879), and Feuilles volantes (1891). Fréchette's

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10 Northrop Frye, "Canada and Its Poetry," Canadian Forum, 23:207-10, December, 1943.

11 Wilfred Campbell, "The Winter Lakes," Collected Poems, pp. 346-47.

12 Frye, loc. cit.

descriptive talent was superior to that of Crémazie in variety, colour, and harmony of sound and rhyme, yet the same grand-scale epithets appear: "vast amphitheatre of hills," "majestic pines," "colossal mountain rim," "clamours rushing into the abyss," "roaring avalanche of waters." His best lines evoke the grandeur of the natural beauties of his country as a framework for its history. Seldom did he find time to stoop to admire the wayside flower or to recognize a bond of feeling between himself and Nature's humbler creatures, as did Pamphile Lemay. He was regarded as a poet of Canadian nature by his contemporaries and, indeed, by more recent literary historians and critics,[13] but his nature poetry, if it can be called such, is a far cry from that of Lampman, D. C. Scott, and Roberts, or even from that of his own confreres and successors, Lemay, Gill, Beauchemin, and Albert Ferland.

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13 "He is one of the singers of Canadian nature."--C. ab der Halden, Etudes de littérature canadienne-française, p. 233. (tr.)

"Of his talents as word painter and as verbal musician, which predominates? It is perhaps that of the descriptive artist. Fréchette's evocative powers are great. Through his choice of strong or delicate images he sets forth a figure, creates a landscape or a 'scène de genre.' His faculties of observation and description are supplemented to an unusual degree by a feeling for the musical value of words."--Henri D'Arles, Essais et conférences, p. 94. (tr.)

CHAPTER IV

TRANSITION IN QUEBEC

During the period of transition from the history-conscious orators of the Quebec School to the introspective lyrists of Montreal there was very little activity in the poetic field. Parliamentary orators, journalists, essayists, historians, and novelists crowded the stage. Antoine Gérin-Lajoie wrote Jean Rivard, a semi-autobiographical novel of colonization propaganda, considered the first novel of merit in French Canadian literature. Gérin-Lajoie was also the author of "Un Canadien errant," one of the most popular of Canadian songs. The psychological and historical novels of the first French woman writer, Laure Conan, appeared during this period and Philippe-Aubert de Gaspé wrote Les Anciens Canadiens, a novel of manners set in the historical background of the years of the Conquest. With these came the works of the essayist Adolphe Routhier, and the essays, journals, and speeches of the great political figures, Georges-Etienne Cartier, Joseph Chapleau, and Sir Wilfred Laurier.

Only four significant poetic voices were heard at this time: those of Alfred Garneau, Benjamin Sulte, William Chapman, and Nérée Beauchemin. These men were loyal followers of François-Xavier Garneau and Crémazie in their preoccupation with the history of their people, the daily round

of the diligent habitant farmer, and the ministrations of their church. They clung more or less tenaciously to the stout hand of their hero-leader, Louis Fréchette, and, consequently, did not produce a very large volume of work in the field of nature poetry. Occasionally Pamphile Lemay led them gently into the paths that skirted the forests looming behind their close-set villages, but they seldom strayed far beyond the sound of the village churchbell. Though they cannot be called nature poets in the sense that Lampman, Carman, or Roberts were nature poets, each made gestures toward the standard subjects of Quebec nature verse: the farms, the woodlots, the maples, the Laurentian hills.

It is in their more subjective approach to nature that these writers differ from Crémazie and Fréchette. The personal element introduced by Lemay is more pronounced in their work and personification and metaphor are used more extensively. Straightforward description is now giving way to a more interpretive style of writing and there are definite indications of the more intensely lyrical and profoundly emotional expression of the poets of the Montreal group of 1900.

Alfred Garneau. Characteristic of the poetry of this period of transition, in its restricted description and more personal approach to nature, is the phrase "la maison touche au bois" from Alfred Garneau's poem "Le Bois."[1] The poet

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1 Alfred Garneau, Poésies, p. 120.

goes no farther than the threshold of his house to enjoy the fragrance of the fallen leaves and feel the breath of autumn fan his cheek. Sunset flashes on the nearby trees remind him of reflections from old cathedral windows. At another time, seeing evening shadows take shape at the foot of sinister pines--"ugly spectres crouching in the ravines"--he makes a plaintive protest to Autumn:

> Automne, automne, reine au lourd manteau de brume,
> Ta beauté trop sévère est sans charme pour moi.
> Ah! qu'un autre au long bruit d'un orage qui fume
> Chante le dur grésil bondissant devant toi.
>
> Je n'aime que les pleurs de l'aurore embrasée,
> Tout oiseau, toute fleur, et le céleste azur.
> Les oiseaux, ils ont fui; la fleur, tu l'as brisée,
> Et dans les vallons nus traîne un rayon obscur.
>
> Quand tu paraîs, adieu les sourires sans nombre
> Qui flottaient par le ciel et la terre et les coeurs...
> Fleur éclose du soleil, ma gaîté meurt dans l'ombre
> Rends-lui les beaux matins et leurs douces lueurs.[2]

Camille Roy accords Garneau a refined delicacy of feeling and a more painstaking regard for form than most of his contemporaries.[3] Sonnet II, untitled, exemplifies his simplicity of expression and delicacy of feeling--traits which readily distinguish him from Fréchette, the rhetorician:

> Est-il une âme triste et lasse de la vie,--
> O les soucis trop lourds à notre humanité--
> Qui ne se sente pas pour un moment ravie
> Par cette nuit si belle en sa sérénité!

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2 Ibid., "Octobre," pp. 75-76.

3 Camille Roy, French Canadian Literature, p. 469.

A perte de regard je suis avec envie
Un grand oiseau montant dans l'espace enchanté
Devers la blanche voie, et par tant d'yeux suivie,
Qui traverse le ciel de sa pâle clarté...

Pour cette heure d'oubli, douce comme une trève,
Pour cet apaisement de l'âme qui se lève
Comme l'oiseau muet attiré dans l'azur;
Pour cette nuit brillante au triple diadème,
Dont chaque étoile semble un diamant plus pur.
O Dieu bon, je vous aime.[4]

Benjamin Sulte. To the English Canadian the title of Benjamin Sulte's first book of verse, Les Laurentiennes (1870), might be misleading. Life in the St. Lawrence valley is the theme here, not the Laurentian hills. In Les Laurentiennes and Les Chants nouveaux (1890) Camille Roy finds more "bonhomie" than true inspiration.[5] Four lines from "Au Saint-Laurent" give the keynote of Sulte's poems:

Canada! Saint-Laurent! quels beaux noms pour la gloire!
Ces deux noms dans mes vers cent fois je les inscris.
Ma muse, qui s'inspire aux pages de l'Histoire,
Redira mon amour pour mon noble pays.[6]

Those pieces of Sulte which touch the margins of nature poetry are quite singable refrains expressing high-spirited praise of the coureurs des bois, pioneers, colonists, and soldiers who formed the backbone of Quebec society in its early days. Only occasionally does Sulte calm his joviality

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4 Garneau, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

5 Camille Roy, Manuel d'histoire de la littérature canadienne de langue française, p. 53.

6 Benjamin Sulte, Les Laurentiennes, p. 8.

down to a more thoughtful and more sympathetic contemplation of external nature, as in "Le Soir":

> J'aime laisser ma marche solitaire
> Fouler sans but vingt sentiers différents,
> Mon âme écoule à l'heure du mystère
> Les murmures des champs.7

Yet Sulte progresses no farther into the woods than Garneau, in spite of repeated exclamations on the beauties of nature "far, far from the town." His "twenty different paths" always bring him back to the fields in sight of the house.

It is the clear music and lively rhythm of Sulte's lyrics that distinguish them from the minor chords of Lemay as well as from the resounding basso profundo of Fréchette. Music surpasses both thought and imagery. The descriptive touches in the following stanzas from "Chant du soir" are secondary to the memories of a past love, yet the poet's interpretive effort is successful:

> Le soleil qui s'enfuit marque de flots rougeâtres
> Les bords du lointain horizon;
> L'ombre des sapins verts tremble aux lueurs folâtres
> Du jour mourant sur le gazon.
>
> Le ruisseau, calme et pur, coule ses eaux tranquilles
> Sur sa couche de blancs cailloux.
> La rivière se tait en contournant ses îles
> Et s'endort sur le sable doux.
>
> Seul avec ma pensée, au pied rugueux d'un hêtre,
> Je viens m'asseoir silencieux,
> Emu par ce tableau que j'apprends à connaître
> Et dont l'artiste est dans les cieux.
>
> . . . . . .

7 Ibid., p. 84.

Sur tout ce qui m'entoure, arbres, fleurs et prairie,
Je retrouve un amour perdu dans le passé,
Un écho de mon coeur, un reflet de ma vie
Etouffé quelquefois, mais jamais effacé![8]

William Chapman. The most prolific of the four principal poets of the transitional period was William Chapman (1850-1917). Five large volumes of verse and two books of criticism constitute Chapman's works.[9] Had he been able to condense this profusion of verse--especially that of Les Aspirations--as a diamond cutter shears off worthless fragments of his stone, Chapman would have produced many finely cut gems.

The critic Charles ab der Halden considered Chapman a dangerous model for the young writers of Canada, insisting that such an example would be bad for Canadian poetry.[10] The term "bombastic" appears to be the favorite tag for Chapman among the critics in both Canada and France. His inspiration, which deserts him often in the many hundreds of lines that flow so grandiloquently from his pen, might have been more sustained had he been able to stop the flow of words when all

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8 Ibid., pp. 174-75.

9 Les Québecquoises (1876), Les Feuilles d'érable (1890), Les Aspirations (1904), Les Rayons du Nord (1910), Les Fleurs de givre (1912), Le Lauréat (1892), (A mean-spirited criticism of Louis Fréchette.), Deux copains, Réplique à MM. Fréchette et Sauvalle (1894).

10 Charles ab der Halden, Etudes de littérature canadienne-française, p. 263.

his ideas had run out. Some of his poems are, in part, no more than metrical prose--second rate prose abounding in unusual words, mixed metaphors, and improprieties of phrasing.

While Lemay retreated before the grander aspects of Canadian nature, Chapman stepped brashly forward, confident of his descriptive powers, and, with vocabulary straining, swept all before him in long rhetorical periods.

Chapman's heart was in France; he could not say enough in her praise--"La France! elle défend toutes les causes justes! . . . La France! c'est le coeur qui fait vivre l'Europe. . . ."[11] Yet he chose purely Canadian subjects when he looked upon nature. The best nature pieces in Les Feuilles d'érable are: "L'Erable," "Le Huron," "Renouveau," "La Forêt vierge," "L'Aurore boréale," "Un rayon de soleil." The following short excerpts from these pieces will give some idea of Chapman's descriptive style and his emphasis on colour:

> Son feuillage, à la mi-septembre,
> Au souffle du vent boréal,
> Se couvrant d'or, de pourpre et d'ambre,
> Brille comme un manteau royal.
>
> (L'Erable, p. 6.)

> La lune, à l'horizon, comme un ballon d'opale,
> Se balance, baignant, de son doux reflet pâle,
> La vague modulant son suave sanglot,
> Et, comme pour lui faire un cortége de reine,

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[11] William Chapman, "La France," Les Feuilles d'érable, pp. 2-3.

Chaque étoile, versant sa lumière sereine,
Met un astre dans chaque flot.
(Le Huron, p. 70.)

La sève à jets pressés dans les rameaux bouillonne;
La mousse agrafe aux rocs son manteau de satin;
Sur le trèfle odorant l'abeille tourbillonne;
Sur les roses s'abat le papillon mutin;
Et parmi les ajoncs la source qui rayonne
Berce les nids rêveurs, d'un murmure argentin.
(Renouveau, p. 158.)

Inextricable amas de fleurs et de lianes,
Dédales odorants que forment les grands fûts
D'arbres pensifs mirant leur ombrage diffus
Aux flots où le castor élève ses cabanes;

Sentiers profonds creusés, sous les halliers touffus,
Par le sabot des cerfs courant en caravanes;
Calme majestueux des lacs et des savanes
Qu'enivrent des oiseaux les ramages confus....

C'est l'immense forêt dans sa majesté sainte,
Où pas un pied humain n'a laissé son empreinte,
Où seul le vieil esprit des bois s'est reposé.
Elle dort... Mais soudain un coup de feu résonne...
A ce bruit, la forêt séculaire frissonne
Et s'incline devant l'homme civilisé.
(La Forêt vierge, pp. 177-78.)

Cependant quelquefois à travers mon ciel noir
Un reflet radieux glisse à mon front morose--
Alors dans le passé lumineux je crois voir
De mes bonheurs enfuis flotter l'image rose.
(Un rayon de soleil, p. 233.)

There is something of the painter in William Chapman, although he is inferior to Gill, Lampman, and Carman in this respect. Chapman appears, consciously or otherwise, to have absorbed some of the technique of Théophile Gautier and other European writers who were interested in the possibilities of the transposition of the vocabulary of painting and music to

poetry. Forms, shadings, colours, and tones abound in "L'Aurore boréale" to such an extent that the poet is often guilty of overdoing a good thing. This tendency, as well as his preoccupation with precious stones, can be seen in the following lines:

> Tout à coup, vers le Nord, du vaste horizon pur
> Une rose lueur émerge dans l'azur,
> Et, fluide clavier dont les étranges touches
> Battent de l'aile ainsi que des oiseaux farouches,
> Eparpillant partout des diamants dans l'air,
> Elle envahit le vague océan de l'éther.
> Aussitôt ce clavier, zébré d'or et d'agate,
> Se change en un rideau dont la blancheur éclate,
> Dont les replis moelleux, aussi prompts que l'éclair,
> Ondulent sans arrêt sur le firmament clair.
> Quel est ce voile étrange ou plutôt ce prodige?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Sous le souffle effréné d'un vent mystérieux,
> Dans un écroulement d'ombres et de lumières,
> Le voile se déchire, et de larges rivières
> De perles et d'onyx roulent dans le ciel bleu,
> Et leurs flots, tout hachés de volutes de feu,
> S'écrasent, et, trouant des archipels d'opale,
> Déferlent par-dessus une montagne pâle
> De nuages pareils à des vaisseaux ancrés
> Dans les immensités des golfes éthérés,
> Et puis, rejaillissant sur des vapeurs compactes,
> Inondent l'horizon de roses cataractes.[12]

Characteristic of Chapman's penchant for an overpowering display of images--some painfully unsuccessful--is the final picture in the same poem. At one moment the aurora borealis is a pyrotechnic display which becomes, successively, a fantastic witches' sabbath, a nacreous scarf flourished by

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12 Ibid., "L'Aurore boréale", pp. 114-15.

houris, Prometheus' star-catching net, and, finally, a limitless threshing-floor from which angels winnow roses to deck the heavens. These images, though somewhat bewildering, are in a sense as breath-taking as the subject itself and therefore acceptable. But the whole effect is spoiled--in typical Chapman style--by the appearance, upon the heels of the rose-winnowing angels, of a lone, trembling moose, nose up, four feet planted on a white hillock, his wild ecstasy distilled into two tears as he fixes his gaze on the sky. This is truly "une scène inouïe."[13]

Nérée Beauchemin. Of all the French poets before Albert Ferland and Gonzalve Desaulniers, Nérée Beauchemin, the village doctor of Yamachiche, was the only one whose depth of feeling for the beauties and harmonies of nature equalled that of his English contemporaries, Roberts, Carman, et al., and whose interpretation of that feeling reached the same high level of quality.

Beauchemin's response to the call of nature was relatively small in volume[14] but it was just as enthusiastic and sincere as that of any member of the English group. With Carman he could rejoice in the coming of Spring--not as often,

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13 Ibid., p. 116.

14 Two books: Les Floraisons matutinales (1897), and Patrie intime (1928).

to be sure, but just as gaily and wholeheartedly. Similar in tone and form to many of Carman's April lyrics is the poem "L'Avril boréal" from which the following stanzas are taken:

Déjà collines et vallées
Ont vu se fondre aux soleillées
    Neige et glaçons;
Et, quand midi flambe, il s'élève
Des senteurs de gomme et de sève
    Dans les buissons.

. . . . . .

Tout était mort dans les futaies;
Voici, tout à coup, plein les haies,
    Plein les sillons,
Du soleil, des oiseaux, des brises,
Plein le ciel, plein les forêts grises,
    Plein les vallons.

Ce n'est plus une voix timide
Qui prélude dans l'air humide,
    Sous les taillis;
C'est une aubade universelle;
On dirait que l'azur ruisselle
    De gazouillis.

Devant ce renouveau des choses,
Je rêve des idylles roses;
    Je vous revois,
Prime saison, belles années,
De fleurs de rêve couronnées,
    Comme autrefois.15

"Fleurs d'aurore" is in the same vein:

Eternel renouveau, tes sèves
Montent même aux coeurs refroidis,
Et tes capiteuses fleurs brèves
Nous grisent comme au temps jadis.

Oh! oui, nous cueillerons encore,
Aussi frais qu'à l'autre matin,

---

15 Nérée Beauchemin, Les Floraisons matutinales, pp. 28-29.

Ces beaux bouquets couleur d'aurore
Qui fleurent la rose et le thym.16

With Archibald Lampman he could celebrate the brilliant colours late autumn brings to the Canadian countryside. The poem "Rayons d'octobre" is a description of life on the farm during the last days of the harvest:

Octobre glorieux sourit à la nature.
On dirait que l'été ranime les buissons.
Un vent frais, que l'odeur des bois fanés sature,
Sur l'herbe et sur les eaux fait courir ses frissons.

. . . . . .

A mi-côte, là-bas, la ferme ensoleillée,
Avec son toit pointu festonné de houblons,
Paraît toute rieuse et comme émerveillée
De ses éteules roux et de ses chaumes blonds.

. . . . . .

Fécondité des champs! cette glèbe qui fume,
Ce riche et fauve humus, recèle en ses lambeaux
La sève qui nourrit et colore et parfume
Les éternels trésors des futurs renouveaux.

. . . . . .

Pour musique, le souffle errant des matinées;
La chanson du cylindre égrenant les épis;
Les oiseaux et ces bruits d'abeilles mutinées
Que font les gais enfants dans les meules tapis.

. . . . . .

Adieu, soupirs des bois, mélodieuses brises,
Murmure éolien du feuillage agité.
Adieu dernières fleurs que le givre a surprises,
Lambeaux épars du voile étoilé de l'été.

Le jour meurt, l'eau s'éplore et la terre agonise.
Les oiseaux partent. Seul, le roitelet, bravant

16 Ibid., p. 67.

Froidure et neige, reste, et son cri s'harmonise
Avec le sifflement monotone du vent.17

There are descriptive details here that escaped the attention of Beauchemin's predecessor, Lemay. Lemay's restricted sonnet form was not sufficient for Beauchemin, who saw and heard much and whose intense feeling for his subject prompted him to record all.

Beauchemin's poetry is full of sound. His ear is keener than his eye and his best lines are those which interpret the music of forest and field. His appreciation of the tone values of words is greater than that of any of his predecessors or contemporaries. There are harmonies everywhere in his poems, for he is one of the few Canadian writers who not only loved the voices of nature but listened eagerly and attentively and had the ability to transpose them into beautiful poetry. The onomatopoeia in the following selections from Les Floraisons matutinales gives ample evidence of his skill in tone evocation:

La mer calme, la mer au murmure endormeur,
Au large, tout là-bas, lente s'est retirée,
Et son sanglot d'amour dans l'air du soir se meurt.
(La Mer, p. 44.)

Sur les toits, globule à globule,
Pétillent grésil et grêlons;
Et la vitre tintinnabule:
On croit ouïr des carillons.
(La Giboulée, p. 74.)

17 Ibid., pp. 106-9.

Le carillon multisonore
Des clochettes au timbre clair
Tinte, étincelle, tinte encore
Et tintinnabule dans l'air.

En double file, sur la neige,
Secouant pompons et clinquants,
Se croisent--triomphal cortège--
Aux éclats des grands fouets claquants,

. . . . . .

Clochettes à voix argentines,
Gros grelots de bronze aux sons sourds
Tintent et vannent à merveille . . .
(Les Clochettes, pp. 97-99.)

In one respect Beauchemin is far in advance of all his confreres of the Quebec School on the road toward realistic description of nature: he searches always for the exact word; he is not content with abstractions and collective nouns. For Lemay and Fréchette the terms "trees," "flowers," and "birds," sufficed. Beauchemin's trees are carefully named. Shunning vague generalizations, he writes of the maple, elm, beech, service-tree, wild-cherry, pine. As with trees, so with flowers; he interests himself in the specific individuality of the flowers--the snow-drop, wild-thyme, wood-sage, corn-poppy, rose. Finches, wrens, linnets, blackbirds provide movement and music in many of his poems. Although Beauchemin was by no means as prolific a writer of descriptive lyrics as Bliss Carman, his work in this field compares favorably in quality with that of the English poet. Like Carman he knew how to portray effectively nature's more secret

beauties by a painstaking selection of word and phrase.

Two of the finest pieces in Les Floraisons matutinales are "Mirages" and "Hantise" (Obsession). Though not nature poetry, strictly speaking, these poems establish their author as one of the greatest lyric poets of the Quebec School. The intensity of the poet's emotion and the music that lives in his words make "Hantise" an extremely effective expression of his artistic aspirations. Four significant stanzas carry the burden of the theme:

> Je rêve les rythmes, les phrases
> Qui montent dans un vol de feu,
> A travers le ciel des extases,
> Vers le beau, vers le vrai, vers Dieu.
> Mon oreille éperdue essaie
> De saisir l'infini concert:
> Le son précis, la note vraie,
> Fuit, revient, et fuit, et se perd.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> O désespérante hantise!
> O charme du rythme obsesseur!
> Quelle est la voix qui s'harmonise
> Avec ta céleste douceur?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> J'ai beau pleurer, j'ai beau me plaindre,
> Oh! non, jamais je ne pourrai,
> Je ne pourrai jamais atteindre
> Aux divines splendeurs du vrai.[18]

The poet dreams of rhythms and phrases which will carry him toward the beautiful, toward the good, toward God. He is

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18 Ibid., pp. 83-85.

obsessed with a desire to find the precise sound, the true note; it eludes him, returns only to die away at last, lost forever. The closing stanza expresses the poet's agony of resignation: he will never attain the divine splendor of truth. The melody of this poem is as hauntingly beautiful as the things to which the poet aspires. One is moved to assure him that in this very poem he has reached the poetic goal he sought.

CHAPTER V

ENGLISH CANADIAN VOICES

The beginnings of English Canadian nature poetry have been sketched briefly in the study of the work of Charles Sangster and Charles Mair in Chapter I. Mention has been made of the large group of writers who followed the lead of Sangster and Mair some thirty years later. A survey of this group is the concern of this chapter and the following. A rather arbitrary classification has been made to facilitate the construction of this survey. The present chapter will deal with a group of writers who may be termed minor poets in so far as their contribution to nature poetry is concerned. None of these approached the stature of the "Big Four" of nineteenth century Canadian poetry--Roberts, Lampman, Carman, and D. C. Scott--who will be studied in the next chapter. This preliminary grouping includes: Isabella Valancy Crawford, Pauline Johnson, and Marjorie Pickthall--leading women poets of the period; Wilfred Campbell and Robert Service, who are singled out for their contribution to descriptive verse; and Frederick George Scott and Albert Durrant Watson, who are selected for their effort in the more serious vein of reflective and philosophical poetry.

Isabella Valancy Crawford.[1] For the only enduring poetry of the last century on the subject of the exciting days of settlement and colonization in northern Ontario and on the western frontier one must turn to "Malcolm's Katie," Isabella Valancy Crawford's dramatic tale of life and love during those turbulent years. This poem is a moderately successful attempt in the pastoral epic genre. Its numerous descriptive passages reveal the author's dramatic style and her predilection for vivid and arresting imagery. A random choice will hit upon lines which exemplify these traits:

> The crackling rice-beds scolded harsh like squaws;
> The small ponds pouted up their silver lips;
> The great lakes ey'd the mountains, whisper'd "Ugh!"
> "Are ye so tall, O chiefs? Not taller than
> Our plumes can reach." And rose a little way,
> As panthers stretch to try their velvet limbs,
> And then retreat to purr and bide their time.[2]

There are imaginative lines of equal vividness in "The Canoe":

> Into the hollow hearts of brakes,
> Yet warm from sides of does and stags,
> Pass'd to the crisp dark river flags;
> Sinuous, red as copper snakes,
> Sharp-headed serpents, made of light,
> Glided and hid themselves in night.
>
> . . . . . .

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1 Isabella Valancy Crawford (1850-1887). Born in Dublin, Ireland; emigrated to Upper Canada in 1858. First book, Old Spookses' Pass and Other Poems, published at author's expense in 1884; Collected Poems edited by John W. Garvin in 1905.

2 Isabella Valancy Crawford, Old Spookses' Pass and Other Poems, p. 45.

They hung the slaughter'd fish like swords
On saplings slender--like scimitars
Bright, and ruddied from the new-dead wars,
Blaz'd in the light--the scaly hordes.

. . . . . .

The darkness built its wigwam walls
Close round the camp, and at its curtain
Press'd shapes, thin woven and uncertain,
As white locks of tall waterfalls.3

Compared with Miss Crawford's striking images and brilliant colouring, Louis Fréchette's portrayals of the frontier scene, sonorous as they are, provide no memorable pictures for the eye of the reader. The only other writer of the period who gives as true a portrayal of wild nature on the Canadian frontier is Duncan Campbell Scott.

E. K. Brown has said that the teeming vitality of Canadian nature is reflected in "Malcolm's Katie" and that Miss Crawford's wildly fantastic imagination has produced a wild and exciting nature poetry which makes the reader feel that nature is enormously and terrifyingly alive.4 One is tempted to quote at length in supporting this claim, but the following excerpts must suffice:

The late, last thunders of the summer crash'd,
Where shrieked great eagles, lords of naked cliffs.
. . . . . .
In this shrill moon the scouts of winter ran
From the ice-belted north, and whistling shafts
Struck maple and struck sumach--and a blaze

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3 Ibid., pp. 197, 199.

4 E. K. Brown, On Canadian Poetry, p. 41.

Ran swift from leaf to leaf, from bough to bough;
Till round the forest flash'd a belt of flame
And inward lick'd its tongues of red and gold
To the deep, tranied inmost heart of all.
. . . . . .
Then roar'd the crackling mountains, and their fires
Met in high heaven, clasping flame with flame.
The thin winds swept a cosmos of red sparks
Across the bleak, midnight sky; and the sun
Walk'd pale behind the resinous, black smoke.5

V. B. Rhodenizer speaks of Miss Crawford's Shelley-like interpretation of personified natural objects and concludes his remarks with the statement that she is Canada's greatest female (sic) poet.6 Lorne Pierce claims for her a fine lyrical skill, mastery of metaphor, winged imagination. He concludes with the following rather sweeping acknowledgement: "Her best work has a breadth and originality, a depth and strength unsurpassed in our literature."7 All this is high praise indeed, and much of it is well-deserved, but it should be remembered that these opinions were expressed in the 1920's. Today, the work of later writers, such as Katherine Hale, Louise Morey Bowman, Marjorie Pickthall, Isabel Ecclestone Mackay, Audrey Alexandra Brown and others, would be taken into consideration and a more conservative appreciation of Miss Crawford's place in Canadian literature

5 Crawford, op. cit., pp. 46 ff.

6 Vernon B. Rhodenizer, Handbook of Canadian Literature, p. 167.

7 Lorne Pierce, An Outline of Canadian Literature, p. 68.

would be in order. Any appreciation of Miss Crawford's accomplishments, however, would have to recognize the fact that she is perhaps the most Canadian of the entire group of women poets who followed her. A. J. M. Smith suggests that if there is a Canadian poetry that exists as something distinct from English poetry, it is Miss Crawford's work alone. After reading Isabella Valancy Crawford's poems one finds it difficult not to second Smith's fine tribute to her work: ". . . where her imagination catches fire, as it does in her poems of the Canadian wilderness, she writes cleanly and vigorously, with a rushing sweep of energy and a boldness of imagery unapproached in Canadian poetry until we come to the contemporary work of E. J. Pratt. In 'Malcolm's Katie' and 'The Canoe' the spirit of the northern woods under the impact of the changing seasons has passed into the imagery and rhythm of the verse."[8]

Pauline Johnson.[9] Pauline Johnson, the first native-born poetess of Canada, combined a knowledge of the great figures of English literature with a sympathetic understanding

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8 A. J. M. Smith, The Book of Canadian Poetry, p. 14.

9 Pauline Johnson (1860-1913). Born on the Grand River Reserve at "Chiefswood," Brantford, Ontario; daughter of Chief Johnson, head of the Six Nations, and Emily S. Howells. First book of poems, The White Wampum, published in London, England, in 1894. Collected verse, entitled Flint and Feather, first edited and published by Theodore Watts-Dunton in 1913.

of the Mohawk race into which she was born. Miss Johnson gained greater fame as a recitalist than as a writer. Her verse will be remembered for its author's unique racial status and its first-hand portrayal of Indian life and legend, rather than for its poetic qualities. Isabella Valancy Crawford's descriptions are effectively dramatic; Pauline Johnson's are either melodramatic, as in "Under Canvas,"

> And Night, star-crested, wanders up the mere
> With opiates for idleness to quaff,
> And while she ministers, far off I hear
> The owl's uncanny cry, the wild loon's laugh.10

and "Penseroso,"

> Let me but feel the pulse of Nature's soul
> Athrob on mine, let seas and thunders roll
> O'er night and me; sands whirl; winds, waters beat;
> For God's grey earth has no cheap counterfeit.11

or conventionally staid, as in "Low Tide at St. Andrews,"

> The long red flats stretch open to the sky,
> Breathing their moisture on the August air.
> The sea-weeds cling with flesh-like fingers where
> The rocks give shelter that the sands deny;
> And wrapped in all her summer harmonies
> St. Andrews sleeps beside her sleeping seas.
>
> The far-off shores swim blue and indistinct,
> Like half-lost memories of some old dream.
> The listless waves that catch each sunny gleam
> Are idling up the waterways land-linked
> And, yellowing along the harbour's breast,
> The light is leaping shoreward from the west.12

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10 Pauline Johnson, Flint and Feather, p. 50.

11 Ibid., p. 64.

12 Ibid., p. 87.

Miss Johnson's attempts to capture the sounds in nature are more successful, especially where she sings her own canoeing songs, as in her best known piece, "The Song My Paddle Sings." But here as elsewhere may be seen direct imitations of Tennyson and Swinburne:

> West wind, blow from your prairie nest,
> Blow from the mountains, blow from the west.
> The sail is idle, the sailor too;
> O! wind of the west, we wait for you.
> Blow! blow!
> I have wooed you so,
> But never a favour you bestow.
> You rock your cradle the hills between,
> But scorn to notice my white lateen.
>
> I stow the sail, unship the mast:
> I wooed you long but my wooing's past;
> My paddle will lull you into rest.
> O! drowsy wind of the drowsy west,
> Sleep, sleep,
> By your mountain steep,
> Or down where the prairie grasses sweep!
> Now fold in slumber your laggard wings,
> For soft is the song my paddle sings.13

Conventional images are numerous in Miss Johnson's poems:

> . . . when the Northern candles light the Northern sky,
> Those pale, uncertain candle flames, that shiver, dart and die,
> Those dead men's icy finger tips,
> Athwart the Northern sky.
> (Dawendine, p. 20.)
>
> A dash of yellow sand,
> Wind-scattered and sun-tanned;
> Some waves that curl and cream along the margin of the strand;
> (Erie Waters, p. 39.)

13 Ibid., p. 31.

The most commendable of Miss Johnson's descriptive lines are to be found in "Marshlands":

> A thin wet sky, that yellows at the rim,
> And meets with sun-lost lip the marsh's brim.
>
> The pools low lying, dank with moss and mould,
> Glint through their mildews like large cups of gold.
>
> Among the wild rice in the still lagoon,
> In monotone the lizard shrills his tune.
>
> The wild goose, homing, seeks a sheltering,
> Where rushes grow, and oozing lichens cling.
>
> Late cranes with heavy wing, and lazy flight,
> Sail up the silence with the nearing night.
>
> And like a spirit, swathed in some soft veil,
> Steals twilight and its shadows o'er the swale.
>
> Hushed lie the sedges, and the vapours creep,
> Thick, grey and humid, while the marshes sleep.14

Pauline Johnson's best poems, "The Song My Paddle Sings" and "Shadow Lake," are pleasingly lyrical in their swinging cadences, graceful form, and gentle, feminine feeling, but they do not rank high in the field of Canadian nature poetry. Her evocations of Indian thought and feeling have a definite Canadian background but their expression is more civilized and cultured than primitive. In this respect they correspond to poems on similar themes by Pamphile Lemay in Tonkourou and to Gonzalve Desaulniers' "La Fille des bois" and "Le Pardon des bois." A. J. M. Smith points out that Miss Johnson's portrayals of the feelings of the aborigines

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14 Ibid., p. 43.

are theatrical and crude, written with a heavy rhythm, conventional imagery, and forced melodramatic language.[15] Lemay and Desaulniers are theatrical but not crude. In Desaulniers' Indian pieces especially, one finds a touch of the melodramatic, perhaps, but one also finds a poetic expression that is anything but crude in form. Of all Canadian poets, English or French, Duncan Campbell Scott shows the greatest skill and the deepest sympathy in dealing with Indian culture and feeling. The voice of Scott in "The Forsaken," "Powassan's Drum," and "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris" is more authentic than the voice of Pauline Johnson, despite the latter's Indian heritage.

Marjorie Pickthall.[16]

> He saw the moonlit rafters of the world,
> Hollowed in thunder, walled with exquisite air,
> Most beautiful. The leaves were laced with showers.
> And motionless beneath them couched the flies,
> Bright as small seraphs lately loosed from heaven
> Upon the river'd garden beautiful,
> Beautiful they, and beautiful the bird
> That flashed on him a sudden breast and fled.[17]

These lines from Marjorie Pickthall's "The Young Baptist" describe a moment in the emotional experience of the poet's

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15 Smith, op. cit., p. 21.

16 Marjorie Pickthall (1883-1922). Born in London, England; emigrated to Canada in 1890. Published poetical works: The Drift of Pinions (1913), The Lamp of Poor Souls (1917), The Woodcarver's Wife and Other Poems (1922), Complete Poems (1936).

17 Marjorie Pickthall, Complete Poems, p. 107.

subject. With the change of one pronoun, "he" to "she," these lines could epitomize the entire work of the poet herself, for Marjorie Pickthall was before all else a lover of beauty--beauty in music, art, and literature, but most of all beauty in external nature. And the nature that she loved was nature in its exquisite little details. The romantic emotional approach to nature which was the dominant characteristic of the front rank English Canadian poets of the late nineteenth century reached its most refined expression in Marjorie Pickthall's poems.

From a fleeting perception of visible beauties in nature Miss Pickthall moves to an imaginative expression of the emotions these beauties arouse within her, and her inner spiritual harmonies are expressed in verse which is flawless in its verbal music and imagery. There is no better example of this than the poem entitled "The Spell":

> Rainy moors and a green hollow of rushes,
> A pool like glass that gives on an empty room,
> An orchard full of the happy fluting of thrushes,
> And a lilac hedge in bloom;
>
> The towered beech-wood, barren of blade or flower,
> Leaf on leaf in a depth like the depth of the sea,
> Dewy at noon--these things from of old have power
> To set my spirit free.
>
> But only the grey down's gold in the cowslip weather,
> Curve on curve as clean as the breast of the foam,
> And the cloud-white thorn and the white cloud blowing
> together
> Can call my spirit home.[18]

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[18] Ibid., p. 65.

Only occasionally is there realistic accuracy in the descriptive writing of the poets under discussion in this study. In Marjorie Pickthall's work it appears least of all, for she is not so much a student of nature as a student of her own heart and its reactions to the natural world. For her the dream was everything, the reality of nature but a stepping-stone to fantasy. Lorne Pierce writes in his memorable tribute to Miss Pickthall: "Her contact with nature purified her spirit, cleansed it of all morbidity, and thus, while her contemporaries were wearing themselves out in inartistic disputations over sex, psycho-analysis, and kindred concerns, she was pursuing essential truth and beauty to their happiest and holiest hiding-place."[19] This "sanctified sensuousness" in the direct tradition of Keats is seen in the lovely poem "The Immortal":

> Beauty is still immortal in our eyes;
> When sways no more the spirit-haunted reed,
> When the wild grape shall build
> No more her canopies,
> When blows no more the moon-gray thistle seed,
> When the last bell has lulled the white flocks home,
> When the last eve has stilled
> The wandering wing and touched the dying foam,
> When the last moon burns low, and, spark by spark,
> The little worlds die out along the dark,--
>
> Beauty that rosed the moth-wing, touched the land
> With clover-horns and delicate faint flowers,
> Beauty that bade the showers
> Beat on the violet's face,

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19 Lorne Pierce, Marjorie Pickthall; A Book of Remembrance, p. 166.

Shall hold the eternal heavens within their place
And hear new stars come singing from God's hand.20

"Dream River" is a noteworthy example of Marjorie Pickthall's skill in impressionistic word-painting:

Wind-silvered willows hedge the stream,
And all within is hushed and cool.
The water, in an endless dream,
Goes sliding down from pool to pool.
And every pool a sapphire is,
From shadowy deep to sunlit edge,
Ribboned around with irises
And cleft with emerald spears of sedge.

O, every morn the winds are stilled,
The sunlight falls in amber bars.
O, every night the pools are filled
With silver brede of shaken stars.
O, every morn the sparrow flings
His elfin trills athwart the hush,
And here unseen at eve there sings
One crystal-throated hermit-thrush.21

A beautiful interpretation of a very ordinary scene is achieved here through a perfect blending of mood, metaphor, and cadence.

Marjorie Pickthall's approach to nature is emotional rather than reflective or philosophical. Her constant search for all forms of beauty in nature and her almost pious adoration of these forms bring her within the circle of those poets in whom Canada's natural grandeur had awakened a cult of restrained pantheism, namely, Roberts, Carman, and Watson.

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20 Pickthall, op. cit., p. 146.

21 Ibid., p. 47.

But Miss Pickthall's participation in this pantheistic faith is limited; it is purely emotional. She discovers as much truth and beauty in the natural world as did the three poets mentioned, but she does not evince any intellectual or philosophical tendencies in her contemplation of this truth and beauty. The cosmic consciousness of some of her contemporaries is not shared by her.

Although Miss Pickthall's poetry is the expression of an essentially romantic personality, and although it is escape literature in a very real sense, it is none the less inspiring. One cannot fail to be moved by the purity and nobility of her character as it makes itself felt in such poems as "The Immortal" and "The Spell." In all her poetry there is deep sentiment but no sentimentality. For any lack of vigour, social consciousness, or intellectuality in her work, there is more than adequate compensation in its exquisite grace, formal perfection, and honest human emotion.

It should be noted in conclusion that in order to find a French counterpart for Marjorie Pickthall it would be necessary to combine the outstanding qualities of two of her French contemporaries, Albert Lozeau and Gonzalve Desaulniers. Lozeau was fundamentally a dreamer like Miss Pickthall, and Desaulniers shared her intense love of beauty and her almost classic precision of form. Marjorie Pickthall would have been welcomed with enthusiasm by both Parnassians and Symbolists.

Wilfred Campbell.[22] The "Lake Lyrics" of Wilfred Campbell comprise only twelve pages in the 354 page edition of his Collected Poems, yet these few lyrics describing the vast and lonely emptiness of the shores of the Great Lakes in northwestern Ontario will remain his most important contribution to Canadian literature. The judgement of the majority of critics on Campbell is given by A. J. M. Smith in The Book of Canadian Poetry: "His best poetry is found in the 'Lake Lyrics' . . . Except for the lake poems, his work is for the most part bookish and derivative . . . Neither his thought nor his personality is very attractive, but the effectiveness of his simpler nature lyrics remains undiminished."[23] Most of the poems in the 1905 collection reveal more good intentions than good workmanship. Campbell was a Victorian moralist and just as much an imperialist as either Sangster or Mair. His constant search for high moral tone and conventional truth led him to place a secondary importance on poetic artistry. As his memoirist, W. J. Sykes suggests, artistic craftsmanship was not Campbell's main aim in

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22 Wilfred Campbell (1861-1919). Born in Kitchener, Ontario; ordained minister, civil servant in Dominion Archives Bureau, Ottawa; associated with Lampman, Scott on Toronto Globe. Published poetical works: Collected Poems (1905), Poetical Tragedies (1908), Sagas of a Vaster Britain (1914), The Poetical Works of Wilfred Campbell, with Memoir by W. J. Sykes (1919).

23 Smith, op. cit., p. 191.

poetry.[24]

One of the principal themes of Campbell's more famous literary colleagues, Roberts, Lampman, and Carman, was their feeling of kinship with nature. Campbell makes his contribution to this philosophy in "An August Reverie":

> So comes the slow revolving of the year,
> The glory of nature ripening to decay,
> When in those paths, by which, through loves austere,
> All men and beasts and blossoms find their way,
> By steady easings of the Spirit's dream,
> From sunlight past the pallid starlight's beam.
>
> Nor should the spirit sorrow as it passes,
> Declining slowly by the heights it came;
> We are but brothers to the birds and grasses,
> In our brief coming and our end the same:
> And though we glory, godlike in our day,
> Perchance some kindred law their lives obey.[25]

A clearer and more personal expression of the same thought appears in "The Mystery":

> What is this glory nature makes us feel,
> And riots so sweet within us? Can it be
> That there with man is kindred mystery
> Of being, old heredity
> Of bud and leaf, of pulsing plant and tree,
> And earth and air;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Yea, it must be: for often unto me
> A fallen leaf hath greater power to stir
> Than mighty volumes of earth's history,
> Or all the tragedy of life's great blur.[26]

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24 W. J. Sykes, "Memoir," The Poetical Works of Wilfred Campbell, p. xxii.

25 Wilfred Campbell, Collected Poems, pp. 117-18.

26 Ibid., p. 104.

The sonnet "The Higher Kinship," despite its moralizing tone, is Campbell's best offering on the subject of nature's power to give solace through spiritual communion:

> Life is too grim with anxious, eating care
> To cherish what is best. Our souls are scarred
> By daily agonies, and our conscience marred
> By petty tyrannies that waste and wear.
> Why is this human fate so hard to bear?
> Could we but live with hill-lakes silver-starred,
> Or where the eternal silence leaneth toward
> The awful front of nature, waste and bare:
> Then might we, brothers to the lofty thought
> And inward self-communion of her dream,
> Into that closer kin with love be brought,
> Where mighty hills and woods and waters, wan,
> Moon-paved at midnight or godlike at dawn,
> Hold all earth's aspirations in their gleam.27

This is a commendable expression of a thought that is clearly in the great Wordsworthian tradition, but when one recalls "The world is too much with us . . ." an odious comparison presents itself. Further study of this theme in connection with the work of Campbell's fellow poets will show that his feeling is as deep and sincere as theirs but falters in comparison as to form.

When Campbell the philosopher yields to Campbell the descriptive artist more satisfactory work is the result. All the pieces in the "Lake Lyrics" group are effective. The loneliness of the far reaches of Lake Huron's bleak shore in the varying moods of nature is rendered graphically visible to the eye of the reader. In "Children of the Foam" the poet

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27 Ibid., p. 274.

succeeds in portraying the bleakness of the windswept beach and the wild, sad song of the waves as they ride toward the shore. One cannot deny that he achieves a notable interpretation of the music and the rhythm of the waves in these stanzas:

> In the wild October dawning,
> When the heaven's angry awning
> Leans to lakeward, bleak and drear;
> And along the black, wet ledges,
> Under icy, caverned edges,
> Breaks the lake in maddened fear;
> And the woods in shore are moaning;
> Then you hear our weird intoning,
> Mad, late children of the year;
> Ride we, ride we, ever home,
> Lost, white children of the foam.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And at midnight, when the glimmer
> Of the moon grows dank and dimmer,
> Then we lift our gleaming eyes;
> Then you see our white arms tossing,
> Our wan breasts the moon embossing,
> Under gloom of lake and skies;
> You may hear our mournful chanting,
> And our voices haunting, haunting,
> Through the night's mad melodies;
> Riding, riding, ever home,
> Wild, white children of the foam.[28]

Nature the tyrant appears more often in French Canadian poetry than in English. Nature for the English poets is almost always a benign entity, a protecting or at least comforting mother. The majority of the English poets of the period shut their eyes to the "world of winter and death"

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[28] Ibid., pp. 342-43.

that can often confront man in this northern land. Campbell is one who knew this aspect of Canadian nature and who could evoke its terror in memorable lines. The most poetic of his descriptive lyrics, in both sound and imagery, is "The Winter Lakes." It is for this poem, if for no other, that Wilfred Campbell will be remembered:

Out in a world of death far to the northward lying,
  Under the sun and the moon, under the dusk and the day;
Under the glimmer of stars and the purple of sunsets
    dying,
  Wan and waste and white, stretch the great lakes away.

Never a bud of spring, never a laugh of summer,
  Never a dream of love, never a song of bird;
But only the silence and white, the shores that grow
    chiller and dumber,
  Wherever the ice winds sob, and the griefs of winter
    are heard.

Crags that are black and wet out of the grey lake looming,
  Under the sunset's flush and the pallid, faint glimmer
    of dawn;
Shadowy, ghost-like shores, where midnight surfs are
    booming
  Thunders of wintry woe over the spaces wan.

Lands that loom like spectres, whited regions of winter,
  Wastes of desolate woods, deserts of water and shore;
A world of winter and death, within these regions who
    enter,
  Lost to summer and life, go to return no more.

Moons that glimmer above, waters that lie white under,
  Miles and miles of lake far out under the night;
Foaming crests of waves, surfs that shoreward thunder,
  Shadowy shapes that flee, haunting the spaces white.

Lonely hidden bays, moon-lit, ice-rimmed, winding,
  Fringed by forests and crags, haunted by shadowy shores;

> Hushed from the outward strife, where the mighty surf is grinding
> Death and hate on the rocks, as sandward and landward it roars.29

Robert Service.[30] Anyone who has lived through the rough and tumble Yukon gold rush era with Robert Service's notorious pair, Dan McGrew and Sam McGee, may wonder at the inclusion of his work in a study of nature poetry. Yet Robert Service has a real contribution to make. One has only to read such poems as "The Spell of the Yukon," "The Call of the Wild," "The Ballad of the Northern Lights," "The Pines," and "Men of the High North" to be convinced that Robert Service saw nature as few of his poetic contemporaries saw it, and that he was able to describe it in terms that are always colourful and often breathtaking. He achieves virile description in a boisterous, Kiplingesque style that for rhythm and a sense of the grandeur of the North has no counterpart in any Canadian work.

Service's melodramatic stories of strong men and stronger passions had a popular appeal that is now part of

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29 Ibid., pp. 346-47.

30 Robert Service (1876-). Born in Lancashire, England; emigrated to Canada in 1896; bank clerk in Victoria, B. C. and in White Horse; correspondent and ambulance driver in World War I. Published works: Songs of a Sourdough (1907), Ballads of a Cheechako (1909), Rhymes of a Rolling Stone (1912), Rhymes of a Red Cross Man (1916), Ballads of a Bohemian (1921), Bar-Room Ballads (1940), Collected Poems (1941).

the literary past. Yet here and there in his poems may be found lines which demand attention in a comparative study of Canadian nature verse. "The Ballad of the Northern Lights" is characteristic of Service's manner:

> Oh, it was wild and weird and wan, and ever in camp o' nights
> We would watch and watch the silver dance of the mystic Northern Lights.
> And soft they danced from the Polar sky and swept in primrose haze;
> And swift they pranced with their silver feet, and pierced with a blinding blaze.
> They danced a cotillion in the sky; they were rose and silver shod;
> It was not good for the eyes of man--'twas a sight for the eyes of God.
> . . . . . .
> And the skies of night were alive with light, with a throbbing, thrilling flame;
> Amber and rose and violet, opal and gold it came.
> It swept the sky like a giant scythe, it quivered back to a wedge;
> Argently bright, it cleft the night with a wavy golden edge.
> Pennants of silver waved and streamed, lazy banners unfurled;
> Sudden splendours of sabres gleamed, lightning javelins were hurled.
> There in our awe we crouched and saw with our wild, uplifted eyes
> Charge and retire the hosts of fire in the battle-field of the skies.31

One can readily imagine how Service stimulated the imagination of his city-confined readers with "The Call of the Wild":

> Have you gazed on naked grandeur where there's nothing else to gaze on,
> Set pieces and drop-curtain scenes galore,
> Big mountains heaved to heaven, which the blinding sunsets blazon,

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31 Robert Service, Collected Verse, pp. 138-39.

Black canyons where the rapids rip and roar?
Have you swept the visioned valley with the green
stream streaking through it,
Searched the Vastness for a something you have lost?

. . . . . .

Have you seen God in his splendours, heard the text
that nature renders?
(You'll never hear it in the family pew.)
The simple things, the true things, the silent men who
do things--
Then listen to the wild--it's calling you.32

Lorne Pierce has written: "Service, an Englishman, fascinated by a passing phase of pioneer life, and having to hand the popular anapestic, galloping verse form popularized by Kipling, added his own syncopating and barbarous alliteration. With a keen eye for the dramatic human element, and a grim sense of humour, and aiming at the man in the street, he beat out his violent lines."33 Criticism of Service will doubtless continue in this vein; nevertheless, an acknowledgement of his slight but memorable addition to Canadian descriptive verse must be made here. In surveying Canadian nature poetry one cannot disregard the robust vitality of such lines as the following from "The Spell of the Yukon":

I've stood in some mighty-mouthed hollow
That's plumb-full of hush to the brim;
I've watched the big, husky sun wallow
In crimson and gold, and grow dim,
Till the moon set the pearly peaks gleaming,

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32 Ibid., pp. 24,26.

33 Lorne Pierce, An Outline of Canadian Literature, pp. 98-99.

And the stars tumbled out, neck and crop;
And I've thought that I surely was dreaming,
With the peace o' the world piled on top.[34]

Frederick George Scott.[35] It is a far cry from the sententious moralizing of Wilfred Campbell to the deeply religious poetic message of Frederick George Scott. In his poems, as in his sermons and his daily living, Scott expresses the personal convictions of a man for whom the Christian God was also the God of Nature. Scott's philosophy transcends the romanticized pantheism of the naturists. Whether he is setting forth the elements of his faith or painting a Laurentian scene, he writes expressive poetry with a sustained inspiration. He attempts no new forms or subjects, but his observant sketches of the Laurentian scene and his noble reflections on the soul of man in the universe constitute a noteworthy addition to the volume of Canadian nature poetry.

Some of Scott's best descriptive pieces are "The Unnamed Lake," "The Laurentians," and "Out of the Storm." Quite different in form and mood, yet indicative of the poet's

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34 Service, op. cit., p. 21.

35 Frederick George Scott (1861-1944). Born in Montreal; Canon, Holy Trinity Cathedral, Quebec; Senior Chaplain, First Canadian Division, World War I. Published poetical works: The Soul's Quest and Other Poems (1888), My Lattice and Other Poems (1894), The Unnamed Lake and Other Poems (1897), Poems Old and New (1900), The Hymn of Empire and Other Poems (1906), Collected Poems (1910), In the Battle Silences (1916), Lift Up Your Hearts (1941).

scope, are the two selections which follow. The first is from "The Unnamed Lake," the second from "Out of the Storm."

'Twas in the grey of the early dawn
When first the lake we spied.
And fragments of a cloud were drawn
Half down the mountain side.

Along the shore a heron flew,
And from a speck on high
That hovered in the deepening blue,
We heard the fish-hawk's cry.

Among the cloud-capt solitudes,
No sound the silence broke,
Save when, in whispers down the woods,
The guardian mountains spoke.

Through tangled brush and dewy brake,
Returning whence we came,
We passed in silence, and the lake
We left without a name.[36]

The huge winds gather on the midnight lake,
Shaggy with rain and loud with foam-white feet,
Then bound through miles of darkness till they meet
The harboured ships and city's squares, and wake
From steeples, domes and houses, sounds that take
A human speech, the storm's mad course to greet;
And nightmare voices through the rain and sleet
Pass shrieking, till the town's rock-sinews shake.[37]

Frederick George Scott has written significant lines on the spiritual implications of the theory of evolution, a subject which inspired some of the best and some of the least commendable poetry of this period. His reflections on the relationships between man and his natural environment are expressed in sonorous tones, with imagery which does not confuse

36 Frederick George Scott, Collected Poems, pp. 8-9.

37 Ibid., p. 126.

the clearly defined thought. In this category are the poems "On the Threshold," "The Burden of Time," "Nirvana," "The Hermit," "A Dream of the Prehistoric," and "A Song of Triumph." The poet gives the circumstances of the writing of "On the Threshold" in the 1934 edition of his collected poems. He writes: "Written in a red sandstone cave on Grindstone Island, one of the Magdalen Islands in the Gulf of the St. Lawrence . . . It was a cold Sunday afternoon, and the clouds were torn with the wind as they sent rain down every now and then. The sea was a dull grey, and the breakers were long and white as they broke on the beautiful red sand. I had a swim by myself, and then, after dressing, I sat down on a rock and wrote the poem. One longed to know what was behind the cold heartlessness of the material universe; what goal lies beyond the race of evolution and the mysteries of the stellar universe."[38] The complete poem follows:

Throw wide thy gates, O Ageless Mystery,
Prone on thy threshold and outworn am I,
Baffled by lonely winds and heartless sky
And restless seas
Never at ease;
I seek the ultimate truth
Not found in Youth.

Remove those bars 'gainst which I press my face;
Unfold that vision which the eyes of space
Gaze at continually, as the star-clouds race
Across the infinite
Dark paths of light.

Attune my ear to catch the silent song

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38 Ibid., p. 188.

Of myriad-teeming life, pulsing along
From living soul to soul
Seeking some baffling goal.

Lead me beyond the garnerings of death
Who is the universe's vital breath,
And wrecks all forms
With tides and storms,
Till I can touch the mighty moulding hand
On whose great palm star-systems lie like sand.

Break down all barriers which my thought confine,
Till I behold at last,
Out of the vast,
Chaotic order shine.

Then shall I grasp, unvolumed and sublime,
The eternal poem in the heart of time,
Its mighty rhythm, its stupendous rhyme--
The epic pathos of the infinite Will
Supreme and still.39

"On the Threshold," in which the author puts the question, is superior in poetic effect to "A Song of Triumph," where he attempts an answer. The latter poem betrays a forcing of the poet's technical artistry which makes the work seem overdone. This is evident in the following excerpt:

Man's body was fashioned and passioned in frenzy of
fury and pain.
He goes with his face upon space, like a god he is
girded with might,
His desire is the fire of a star that illumines a
limitless night.

. . . . . .

Ye tempests that sweep from the deep which the night
and the light overspan,
Assemble in splendour and render the praise of
magnificent Man;
In his hands are the sands of the ages, and gold of
unperishing youth,

39 Ibid., p. 69.

> On his brow, even now, is the shining of wisdom and justice and truth;
> His dower was the power to prevail, on the lion and dragon he trod,
> His birth was of earth but he mounts to a throne in the bosom of God.40

The tone and form are strained here, but the fault is partially excused by the author's own remarks on the poem: "The rhythm and sweep of the verses is intended to be a wild chorus of all those elements in Nature which by the constant urge of evolution, have resulted in the production of man, the flower of creation, whose home is in the bosom of God."41

Albert Durrant Watson.[42] Albert Watson was one of the few Canadian poets who were not only privileged to see clearly the vision of "the august infinitude of man" but were also endowed with the intellectual and spiritual power to put this vision into enduring poetic form. Watson's great sonnet "God and Man" sets forth his view of the cosmos in a poetic expression equal to anything achieved by other Canadian poets, such as Roberts and Carman, who in their time sang to a larger audience. All of Watson's poems--descriptive lyrics,

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40 Ibid., pp. 149-50.

41 Ibid., p. 197.

42 Albert Durrant Watson (1859-1926). Born in Dixie, Ontario; medical doctor; sometime president, Royal Astronomical Society of Canada. Published poetical works: Wing of the Wild Bird and Other Poems (1908), Love and the Universe (1913), Heart of the Hills (1917), The Dream of God (1922), Woman, a Poem (1923), Complete Poems (1923).

love songs, historical monologues--carry the same cheery optimism, the same deep faith in God, the same assurance of perfect harmony linking man, nature, and God that are implicit in "God and Man":

> God is eternity, the sky, the sea,
> The consciousness of universal space,
> The source of energy and living grace,
> Of life and light, of love and destiny.
> God is that deep, ethereal ocean, free,
> Whose billows keep their wide unbarriered place
> Amid the stars that move before His face
> In robes of hurricane and harmony.
> A light that twinkles in a distant star,
> A wave of ocean surging on the shore,
> One substance with the sea; a wing to soar
> Forever onward to the peaks afar,
> A soul to love, a mind to learn God's plan,
> A child of the eternal--such is man.[43]

Katherine Hale, in her appreciative introduction to Watson's Love and the Universe, writes that the fabric of his poetry is the mating in perfect accord of evolution and idealism, liberty and law, God and laughter, soul and body.[44] Albert Watson's first appeal is to the heart and mind of the reader rather than to his eye or fancy, and his lines convey always a sense of the fundamental goodness and happiness in life. These things are exemplified in the following excerpts from Watson's best known collection, Love and the Universe:

> When the stars are beginning to tremble
> And the dew-breath is sweet from afar,

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43 Albert Durrant Watson, Love and the Universe, p. 21.

44 Ibid., p. xii.

The earth-spirit sings
And all animate things
One kindred, one brotherhood are.
(Twilight, p. 53.)

All portals open, break all barriers down,
Enrich your heart with life's intenser day,
Till out of nature's elemental score,
Great cosmic organ-harmonies shall pour
And thrill your soul with God's triumphant May.
(May, p. 20.)

There is no gulf 'twixt great and small;
I find the wholesome duties and sweet cares
Transcend all pleasures, wealth, art, intellect.
Even democracy dwindles to measurable proportions
In comparison with common things
Agleam with good.
(Whitman, p. 181.)

The wildflower blooms and nods,
Subtly contributing the forces of its soul
To fine evolvement of the cosmic dream;
. . . . . .
This green, cylindric stem, this shrivelled spathe,
These dewy petals, golden-lipt,
With delicate breathing, tell
How for a thousand, thousand years,
The universe with tireless zeal,
Toiled to evolve and fashion
The frail, sweet image of a daffodil.
(The Daffodil, p. 18.)

The form of man--one with all outer nature
In heaven's wide orbits hurled,
One with the Universe in each clear feature
Of every swinging world--
Is but the emblem of his spirit forces,
Which, now clearly I saw,
Are also one with his eternal sources,
With universal Law.

. . . . . .

The voiceless symphony of moor and highland,
The rainbow on the mist,
The white moon-shield above the slumber-island,
The mirror-lake, star-kist,
The life of budding leaf and spray and branches,

The dew upon the sod,
The roar of downward-rushing avalanches,
Are eloquent of God.

(Love and the Universe, p. 1.)

CHAPTER VI

NATURE IN THE ASCENDANT

The English-speaking pioneers of Canada were a people who had been torn bodily out of a long-established and highly civilized society to be thrust into the heart of a wilderness. It was natural that they should hold to what few cultural ties they had with their home environment and put up a barrier between themselves and the wilderness which had enveloped them. Influences which might have been expected to act upon the literary minds of those early days were held in check by emotional ties with "the old country" and by intellectual ties with New England. The barrier stood through the first half of the nineteenth century. Sangster and Mair were virtually alone in making advances toward Canadian nature. The writers who possessed the poetic gift of seeing and feeling could not, however, remain forever oblivious to the influences that bore in upon them from the immensity and power of the Canadian scene. The four individuals most gifted in this respect were Charles G. D. Roberts, Bliss Carman, Archibald Lampman, and Duncan Campbell Scott. These four held the centre of the literary stage and produced a considerable volume of poetry during the period from 1880 to 1900. This period has been called Canada's Golden Age. Present-day criticism makes a more reserved estimate of the period

than that which the term "Golden Age" implies. This estimate will be discussed later in relation to the character of the work of this period. At this point it is necessary to consider the work of these four poets with a view to showing how they compare in thought and art with each other and with their French compatriots.

An impressive volume of work has already been done by critics and literary historians on Roberts, Carman, Lampman, and Scott.[1] Since so much material on these poets is ready to hand, the make-up of the present chapter will differ from that of preceding and succeeding chapters, biographical arrangement being supplanted by categories of method and subject matter. The four poets will be treated as different registers of a single voice--the voice of nature at a given moment in Canada's literary history. Observations will be made on the character of their response to nature, the originality of this response, the factors which influenced their work, their contribution to descriptive and interpretive poetry, and the tenor of their philosophy.

The dates of publication of the major poetical works of this period are presented in tabular form here to serve as a point of departure and as a reference. It will be seen at a glance that the production peak of the French writers came

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1 The chief contributions to this library are listed in the bibliography.

about a decade after the English had hit their stride.

Comparative Table of Publication Dates

English	French
1880 Roberts, *Orion and Other Poems*.	
1887 Lampman, *Among the Millet*.	
1893 Carman, *Low Tide on Grand Pré*.	
Lampman, *Lyrics of Earth*.	
Roberts, *Songs of the Common Day*.	
Scott, *The Magic House and Other Poems*.	
1896 Roberts, *The Book of the Native*.	
	1903 Nelligan, *Emile Nelligan et son oeuvre*.
1904 Carman, *The Pipes of Pan*.	
1905 Scott, *New World Lyrics and Ballads*.	
	1907 Lozeau, *L'Ame solitaire*.
	1910 Ferland, *Le Canada Chanté*.
	1912 Lozeau, *Le Miroir des jours*.
1915 Scott, *Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris*.	
	1916 Lozeau, *Lauriers et Feuilles d'érable*.
	1919 Gill, *Le Cap Eternité*.
	1930 Desaulniers, *Les Bois qui chantent*.

Originality in the response to nature. The response to nature was not particularly original in either the English or the French poets of the late nineteenth century. The main impulse was that of romanticism: to describe the scene and to express an esthetic appreciation of and a personal delight in nature's beauty, energy, and progress through time. All facets of naturism were involved: nature as an overpowering,

often tyrannical force, nature as a source of comfort and wisdom, nature as an embodiment of truth and beauty, nature as the manifestation of God in the universe. Just as Canadian artists were devoting themselves at this time almost exclusively to landscape, English Canadian poets were giving most of their attention to its evocation in patterns which matched their imaginative mood. Wild nature was touched upon rarely, the main picture being confined to an impressionistic reproduction of familiar fields and woods, known streams and lakes, the seashore. All the natural phenomena which charm the eye, distract the mind, or stimulate the imagination were grist to their mill. They gave some attention to ethical and religious ideals as they expounded the values of the simple country life--the plain living and high thinking of the Wordsworthian tradition. Finally, each member of the English group had something to say concerning nature as the activating principle of life. This pantheistic philosophy could scarcely be avoided by sensitive poets who were surrounded by so much natural grandeur and who were following the trail blazed by Goethe, Wordsworth, Thoreau and Emerson. The French poets were as intensely personal as their English compatriots in expressing their reaction to the visible beauties of nature, and were their equals in impressionistic landscape painting. Where the French did not compete was in the philosophical field; there are no French parallels for such poems as

Roberts' "Origins" or Lampman's "The Largest Life."

It has been said that the poet is one who deals with the emotional colouring which the facts of life have or may have for men according to their degree of intellectual and imaginative cultivation.[2] If this implies that the poet must deal with all phases of human existence, then the men under consideration here were a little less than true poets, for their major preoccupation was with external nature; they had little to do with sociology or psychology. What Professor Cappon has said of Roberts could be said of Carman, Lampman, and Scott as well: "He has not a little of the poet's high endowment, a lofty and picturesque form of imagination, flow and spontaneity of expression and free rhythmical movement, but the quality of his thought is less impressive; it has not the fundamental originality which deepens and renews our sense of life. At most he gives poetic expression to ideas which are the current stock of the time. His poetry has the charm of the impressionistic glance and vision, but is weak in the critical interpretation of life which our age is conscious of requiring from the poet."[3] This is now the general opinion on the poetry of the 'Nineties. W. E. Collin strikes

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2 Joseph Warren Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry, p. 477.

3 James Cappon, Charles G. D. Roberts, Makers of Canadian Literature, p. 107.

less gently at the same weaknesses in speaking of Archibald Lampman: "In the minds of Lampman's generation, brought up in the practices of the Christian religion and, at the same time, exposed to positivist scientific doctrine, intellectual conviction clashed with religious faith. What did they make of that state of mind? What action, what kind of artistic expression satisfied them? At this distance it would seem that they welcomed any prophet and any kind of art that promised relief from the pain of thinking and knowing."[4] Though these are hard words, they are à propos; Lampman's generation was still lending an attentive ear to Walt Whitman, the "prophet" who exalted the senses and pushed the intellect rudely aside. A. J. M. Smith, who agrees in principle with Cappon and Collin, states that literary criticism in Canada, which is firmly rooted in romanticism, has not often presented the view that our best Canadian poets have devoted themselves too much to an almost abstract form of nature poetry which has too little savour of the national life and the national sentiment about it and is more dependent on literary tradition than they seem to be aware of. Smith questions the validity of the term "Golden Age" as it is used in reference to the School of Roberts, stating that the claim of its poetry to be truly national, adequately sustained in the field of scenery

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4 W. E. Collin, The White Savannahs, p. 8.

and climate, must, on the whole, be denied to a body of work which ignored on principle the coarse bustle of humanity in the hurly-burly business of the developing nation.5

French Canadian poets received criticism equally severe but opposite in character. They were accused of paying too much attention to the development of their national life and not enough to the beauty and grandeur of the land in which they lived.

To find originality in the work of Roberts and his colleagues, one must search through numerous borrowings from other literatures, classical and modern, and a host of encumbering Romantic and Victorian traditions. What original flavor their work has must be attributed to the rugged country about which much of it is written. Only in the delineation of the elemental forces of Canada's northern climate is their descriptive writing truly original. Unfortunately this subject does not occupy a very large place in the poetry of the 'Nineties. Wilfred Campbell and Robert Service give what fleeting impression there is of the frightening loneliness of the vast Canadian frontier. Although Cappon accords Bliss Carman the clearest response to the new call of the time,6 the nature in which Carman roams in his youthful exuberance

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5 A. J. M. Smith, The Book of Canadian Poetry, p. 23.

6 James Cappon, Bliss Carman and the Literary Currents and Influences of His Time, p. 146.

is neither rugged in its appearance nor awe-inspiring in its immensity. Duncan Campbell Scott is the only one of the four who is truly at home in the wilderness. E. K. Brown contends that Roberts, Lampman, and Carman usually write of Canada as if it were a large English county, and that it is hard for them to convey in their nature verse any feeling which has not been more powerfully presented by one or other of the English poets.7 Scott was able to penetrate farther into the hinterland, therefore his pictures of what he saw and felt are more authentically Canadian. Scott is the only one of his time who succeeded in making great literature out of the distinctly Canadian material which the Indian provided; in this he strikes the most original note of the period. How poems such as "On the Way to the Mission," "The Forsaken," or "The Half-Breed Girl" rise in stature when compared with Pauline Johnson's forced sentiment and melodramatic situations! "The Forsaken" has no equal in the literature of the time for dramatic intensity and poetic finish.

Where Lampman and so many other writers find silence and repose in nature,

> 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,

7 E. K. Brown, On Canadian Poetry, p. 113.

Seems but to deepen, with its curling thread
Of sound, the shadowy sun-pierced silences.8

Scott finds intensity and violence. He gets closer than any of his colleagues to the still primordial nature of the country. "At Gull Lake: August, 1810" effectively demonstrates Scott's originality. The theme of this poem is the tragedy of an Indian girl, "daughter of Launay the Normandy hunter and Oshawan of the Saulteaux"; its form looks forward to less traditional styles; its description evokes a nature that is harsh, wild, and exciting:

A storm-cloud was marching
Vast on the prairie,
Scored with livid ropes of hail,
Quick with nervous vines of lightning--
. . . . . .
Keejigo went down a path by the lake;
Thick at the tangled edges,
The reeds and the sedges
Were gray as ashes
Against the death-black water;
. . . . . .
Then burst the storm--
The Indians' screams and the howls of the dogs
Lost in the crash of hail
That smashed the sedges and reeds,
Stripped the poplars of leaves,
Tore and blazed onwards,
Wasting itself with riot and tumult--
Supreme in the beauty of terror.9

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8 Archibald Lampman, Lyrics of Earth, p. 126.

9 Duncan Campbell Scott, cited by A. J. M. Smith in The Book of Canadian Poetry, pp. 224-25.

Influences. The literary influences which shaped the thought and expression of Roberts and his fellow poets came from the great figures of the English Romantic Movement. The Wordsworthian tradition, modified and enlarged by Keats, Arnold, and the American transcendentalists, gave to these English Canadians their fundamental theme of life in nature and nature's meaning in the life of man; just as the tradition of Hugo and Lamartine set the course for the poets of Quebec.

While credit must be given to the Canadian poets of the 'Nineties for a fresh approach to traditional subjects, one must recognize that there is much that is derivative in their work. Archibald Lampman felt that he was a sort of re-incarnation of his idol, Keats. In the introduction to Lampman's Lyrics of Earth, Duncan Campbell Scott has this to say: "The Keats influence on Lampman is at its best in the ever present desire to perfect the atmosphere of the poem, to translate the feeling for nature and life experienced keenly into correspondencies in the mind by devices of imagery, of verbal beauty and of cadence. These new flowers from the genius of Keats are not slavish imitations. They are kindred inspiration, of like felicity, without cunning or premeditation."10 Lampman departs from the Wordsworth tradition in that he takes refuge in nature to pursue his dream.

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10 Lampman, op. cit., p. 32.

Wordsworth found in nature that which gave him the desire and the strength to revive his interest in life. For Wordsworth nature was a hospital; for Lampman it was a hermitage.

What has been said of Lampman's relationship to Keats may be said in principle of Roberts, Carman, and Scott. Wordsworth was, of course, the prevailing influence. From Wordsworth, Lampman was drawn to Keats and Arnold, Roberts to Tennyson and Arnold, Scott to Tennyson, and Carman to Yeats and Emerson. Pre-Raphaelite and "Celtic Twilight" overtones are noticeable in all, just as all are interpenetrated with the freshness and directness of Stevenson. All but Roberts managed to escape the cold grasp of the French Decadent School; in Roberts' Book of the Rose one can see reminiscences of Beaudelaire. As Cappon suggests, the ecstatic self-abandonment, the faint odours of Beaudelaire, and the hot breath of Swinburne, all present in Roberts' later verse, make no addition to his poetic achievement.[11]

The general picture at this distance shows that these Canadian poets owed their fundamental approach to nature and their descriptive style to Wordsworth, their impressionism and their imaginative approach to Keats and Arnold, their measured melody, temperate estheticism, and mingled simplicity and ornateness of diction to Tennyson, and the

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[11] James Cappon, Charles G. D. Roberts, Makers of Canadian Literature, p. 111.

transcendental character of their philosophy to Emerson and Whitman.

Descriptive Poetry. As Duncan Campbell Scott represents what is most original in the poetry of the 'Nineties, so Archibald Lampman is the embodiment of what there is of excellence in this poetry's most important phase--that of descriptive and interpretive writing. Lampman's response to nature is the purest and most satisfying in its faithfulness not only to every aspect of natural beauty but also to the experience of the poet arising out of a close communion with this beauty. His belief was, as he once said, that the Canadian poet must depend solely on himself and nature. "Nature drew Lampman," writes E. K. Brown, "not only because it was great and beautiful in itself; but just as much because it was a refuge from the society he had found to be neither. Whatever might be said of Canadian politics and Canadian society and Canadian character, the Canadian landscape was grand and beautiful. For the time at least, he believed, the Canadian poet should make himself its sensitive recorder and thus reflect the nation without tarnishing his poetry."[12]

Lampman became one of Canadian nature's most sensitive recorders; his faithfulness to detail ranks him first among his colleagues. But he has more than fidelity to the scene

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12 Brown, op. cit., p. 87.

he depicts; he has the power to see clearly and to reveal clearly to the reader the essence of that scene in the manner of a skilled painter. Lampman is more than a recorder of pure nature; he is a poet of pure human emotion in harmony with nature. Nowhere is this more evident than in "Among the Timothy," "In November," "A Summer Evening," and "In October." There is an exquisite blending of exact detail, suggestive imagery, and sweet, melancholy music in "In October" that makes it a choice demonstration of Lampman's art:

> Here will I sit upon this naked stone,
> Draw my coat closer with my numbèd hands,
> And hear the ferns sigh, and the wet woods moan,
> And send my heart out to the ashen lands;
> And I will ask myself what golden madness,
> What balmèd breaths of dreamland spicery,
> What visions of soft laughter and light sadness
> Were sweet last month to me.
>
> The dry dead leaves flit by with thin weird tunes,
> Like failing murmurs of some conquered creed,
> Graven in mystic markings with strange runes,
> That none but stars and biting winds may read;
> Here I will wait a little; I am weary,
> Not torn with pain of any lurid hue,
> But only still and very gray, and dreary,
> Sweet sombre lands, like you.13

Lampman's special province is the creation of atmosphere by the use of pure, almost unimaginative description. The intense personal appeal of such poems as "A Thunderstorm" and "Heat" seems to come from this atmosphere rather than from any striking imagery or musical quality the lines may

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13 Lampman, op. cit., pp. 85-86.

have or from any thought they may express. "Heat" is a masterpiece of this kind of impressionistic description:

From plains that reel to southward, dim,
  The road runs by me white and bare;
Up the steep hill it seems to swim
  Beyond, and melt into the glare.
Upward half-way, or it may be
  Nearer the summit, slowly steals
A hay-cart, moving dustily
  With idly clacking wheels.

. . . . . .

Beyond me in the fields the sun
  Soaks in the grass and hath his will;
I count the marguerites one by one;
  Even the buttercups are still.
On the brook yonder not a breath
  Disturbs the spider or the midge.
The water-bugs draw close beneath
  The cool gloom of the bridge.

. . . . . .

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

And yet to me not this or that
  Is always sharp or always sweet;
In the sloped shadow of my hat
  I lean at rest, and drain the heat;
Nay more, I think some blessèd power
  Hath brought me wandering idly here:
In the full furnace of this hour
  My thoughts grow keen and clear.14

The portrayal of Canada's northland which Lampman

14 Ibid., pp. 77-78.

achieves in "Temagami," "In the Pine Groves," "The Lake in the Forest," "Night in the Wilderness," and "On Lake Tamiscamingue" is quite different from that of Duncan Campbell Scott, but no less effective. For Lampman the dreamer, the dramatic and often violent aspects of the northern wilderness do not have as much appeal as the colours of the changing seasons which entrance his eye and the solitudes which invite him to reverie. One can read the whole character of the poet between the lines of "In the Pine Groves":

> Here is a quiet place where one may dream
> The hours away and be content. It shines
> With many a shadow spot and golden gleam
> Under the murmur of these priestly pines.
> About the level russet-matted floor,
> Each like a star in his appointed station,
> The sole-flowered scented pyrolas by the score
> Stand with heads drooped in fragrant meditation.
> The pensive thrush, the hermit of the wood,
> Dreams far within, and piping at his leisure,
> Tells to the hills the forest's inmost mood
> Of memory and its solitary pleasure.
> Earth only and sun are here, and shadow and trees
> And thoughts that are eternal even as these.15

Of Lampman's nature sonnets D. C. Scott has written: "In perfection the majority of these sonnets take their place with the best in English literature, and bring a new train of beauties into the catalogue, beauties of our own fields and forests, cultured and familiar, untamed and remote."16 On reading Lampman one encounters memorable lines in such

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15 Ibid., p. 120.

16 Ibid., pp. 44-45.

profusion that it becomes difficult to make a selection with a view to building the train of beauties of which Scott speaks. Some of the extracts from Lyrics of Earth which are given here have been chosen for their pictorial quality, others, for their colour, the vaguer but no less satisfying beauties they suggest, or for their striking imagery. Each of these selections does much to explain why Lampman is considered the true nature poet of his generation.

> and now the whip-poor-will,
> Beyond the river margins glassed and thinned,
> Whips the cool hollows with his liquid note.
> (At Dusk, p. 119.)

> The sleek red horses o'er the sun-warmed ground
> Stand pensively about in companies,
> White all around them from the motionless trees
> The long clean shadows sleep without a sound.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And soon, too soon, around the cumbered eaves
> Sly frosts shall take the creepers by surprise,
> And through the wind-touched reddening woods shall rise
> October with the rain of ruined leaves.
> (September, p. 84.)

> And log-strewn rivers murmurous with mills.
> (Comfort of the Fields, p. 74.)

> The gold-green poplar, jocund as may be,
> The sunshine in its laughing heart receives,
> And shimmers in the wind innumerably
> Through all its host of little lacquered leaves.
> (Nesting Time, p. 118.)

> The full day rests upon the luminous land
> In one long noon of golden reverie.
> (A Niagara Landscape, p. 130.)

Full on the shrouded night-charged river broke
The sun, down the long mountain valley rolled,
A sudden swinging avalanche of gold,
Through mists that sprang and reeled aside like smoke.
And lo! before us, toward the east upborne,
Packed with curled forest, bunched and topped with pine,
Brow beyond brow, drawn deep with shade and shine,
The mount;

(A Dawn on the Lievre, p. 129.)

No survey, however brief, of Archibald Lampman's poetry would be adequate without mention of his best and most characteristic sonnet, "Across the Pea-Fields." This poem exemplifies better than any other the richness of his verbal expression and the clarity of his vision of nature. It shows a mastery of impressionistic design that makes Lampman the foremost descriptive poet of his time.

Field upon field to westward hum and shine
The gray-green sun-drenched mists of blossoming peas;
Beyond them are great elms and poplar trees
That guard the noon-stilled farm-yards, groves of pine,
And long dark fences muffled thick with vine;
Then the high city, murmurous with mills;
And last, upon the sultry west, blue hills,
Misty, far-lifted, a mere filmy line.
Across these blackening rails into the light
I lean and listen, lolling drowsily;
On the fence corner, yonder to the right,
A red squirrel whisks and chatters; nearer by
A little old brown woman on her knees
Searches the deep hot grass for strawberries.17

Although Lampman's descriptive poetry is being given a more extensive appreciation here than that of Roberts and Carman, it is not the intention of the writer to imply that the work of these two poets in this field is negligible.

17 Ibid., p. 127.

Much that has been said of Lampman could be repeated in reference to Roberts and Carman. The best work of both was done in descriptive nature verse; both share Lampman's general characteristics. Where Roberts deals with the everyday life and common aspects of nature on some Canadian farm, or where he gives a pictorial record of the New Brunswick coast and the fir forests and streams of his native maritime landscape, he is on sure ground. The artistic whole he constructs out of observation and recollection, as in his sonnet sequence "Songs of the Common Day," is a valuable addition to Canada's literature.

Roberts' popular masterpiece is "The Sower":

A brown, sad-coloured hillside, where the soil
  Fresh from the frequent harrow, deep and fine,
  Lies bare; no break in the remote sky-line,
Save where a flock of pigeons streams aloft,
Startled from feed in some low-lying croft,
  Or far-off spires with yellow of sunset shine;
  And here the Sower, unwittingly divine,
Exerts the silent forethought of his toil.

Alone he treads the glebe, his measured stride
  Dumb in the yielding soil; and though small joy
  Dwell in his heavy face, as spreads the blind
Pale grain from his dispensing palm aside,
  This plodding churl grows great in his employ;--
  Godlike, he makes provision for mankind.[18]

This sonnet is characteristic of the poet's method. It is in such reproductions of the surface of nature that Roberts excels. Cappon commends this sonnet for its golden mean between

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18 Charles G. D. Roberts, Poems, p. 46.

austerity and Keatsian luxuriance of style, for its balance of realistic detail and impressionistic finery, and for the nobility of its closing thought.19

Bliss Carman's nature poetry shows in every line that his primary concern is the ecstasy of communion. His ecstatic utterance has a sustained flow and a musical quality never approached by Lampman or Roberts. The realistic details of the scene do not escape his observant eye but before they reach his page they have set up such a wild succession of emotional reactions that the scene is no longer described--it is felt. It is reproduced in a wealth of sensuous imagery that is overwhelming in its verbal magic. A. J. M. Smith states that no other Canadian poet has ever quite achieved the strange union of rapture and awe that one experiences in Carman's lyrics.20

Carman's dominating passion is the sensuous image:

> Tropic moonlight, in great floods and fathoms pouring
> through the trees
> On a ground as white as sea-froth its fantastic traceries,
> While the poincianas, rustling like the rain, moved in
> the breeze,
>
> Showed a city, coral-streeted, melting in the mellow
> shine,

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19 James Cappon, Roberts and the Influences of His Time, p. 40.

20 A. J. M. Smith, "Canadian Poetry, A Minority Report," University of Toronto Quarterly, 8:128.

Built of creamstone and enchantment, fairy work in
every line,
In a velvet atmosphere that bids the heart her haste
resign.21

The following excerpts from "Low Tide on Grand Pré" are the most characteristic and the most memorable of all Bliss Carman's verses:

The sun goes down, and over all
These barren reaches by the tide
Such unelusive glories fall,
I almost dream they yet will bide
Until the coming of the tide.

. . . . . .

Was it a year or lives ago
We took the grasses in our hands,
And caught the summer flying low
Over the waving meadow lands,
And held it there between our hands?

The while the river at our feet--
A drowsy inland meadow stream--
At set of sun the after-heat
Made running gold, and in the gleam
We freed our birch upon the stream.

. . . . . .

And that we took into our hands
Spirit of life or subtler thing--
Breathed on us there, and loosed the bands
Of death, and taught us, whispering,
The secret of some wonder-thing.22

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21 Bliss Carman, Poems, "Bahaman," p. 359.

22 Ibid., pp. 3-4.

Cosmic overtones. The song of the 'Nineties was essentially an ecstatic utterance of a simple theme: the emotional response of a few gifted individuals to the beauties of nature. The most enduring notes of this song will remain those which describe the land these poets knew and loved. There were overtones, however, which had been caught from the symphony of nineteenth century naturism the theme of which was the personal problem of man's immortality. This problem was dealt with by philosophically-minded naturists as a question to be determined by scientific methods of observation and inference, and sought a solution through the premise that the human mind and spirit is a part of nature--the child of Mother Earth, sharing her powers and through them carrying out a preconceived plan.

Some of the simpler ethical overtones of this philosophy are heard again and again in the work of Roberts, Lampman, and Carman, with the burden of the music being carried by Carman. The general effect is one of mysticism, tentative and vague, in the direction of a cosmic philosophy for which the way had been prepared by Emerson. Emerson's transcendentalism shaped the cosmic process for the Canadian poets. Their philosophy is not a great contribution to world thought but it is interesting as a reflection of the trends of their time and is commendable if only for its brave intention. The scope of the ideas presented in their work is not

broad. Their feeling has more force than their thinking and is more poetically expressed. What thinking they do achieve stems from the fundamental pantheistic concept that God is in nature, that nature is good, that man is a part of it and has no quarrel with it. The idea they present most consistently is that the earth is a mother who gives protection and teaches wisdom. On this point Joseph Warren Beach writes that the most powerful and most primitive of the motives which lead man to religion is the need for protection, "the need to feel oneself at home in the world. In nature poetry the motherhood of nature corresponds to the fatherhood of God in supernatural religion. Essentially the same emotion reigns in naturalism as in traditional religion. In want of religion man rallies to nature in order not to feel himself an orphan in the universe."[23] The logical concomitant to this idea of an Earth Mother is that of the kinship or brotherhood which man has with things animal and vegetable. The frequent apostrophes our poets make to Mother Nature usually introduce pleas for or praise of the comfort, wisdom, and surcease of tribulation which she seems ready to give abundantly to man. One need not search far for apostrophes to the Earth Mother:

> Into the arms of our mother we come,
> Our broad strong mother, the innocent earth,
> Mother of all things beautiful, blameless,

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23 Beach, op. cit., p. 499.

Mother of hopes that her strength makes tameless,
  Where the voices of grief and of battle are dumb,
    And the whole world laughs with the light of her
      mirth.

. . . . . .

  Here we shall commune with her and no other;
    Care and the battle of life shall cease;
Men, her degenerate children, behind us,
Only the might of her beauty shall bind us,
  Full of rest, as we gaze on the face of our mother,
    Earth in the health and the strength of her peace.
(Lampman, "Freedom")

O mother of our days,
Hearing thy music call,
Teach us to know thy ways
And fear no more at all!
(Carman, "Now Is the Time of Year")

Back to wisdom take me, Mother;
  Comfort me with kindred hands;
    Tell me tales the world's forgetting,
      Till my spirit understands.
(Roberts, "Kinship")

Some of these appeals to Mother Earth are more emotional than poetic:

Make me over, mother April,
When the sap begins to stir!

. . . . . .

Make me man or make me woman,
Make me oaf or ape or human,
Cup of flower or cone of fir;
Make me anything but neuter
When the sap begins to stir!
(Carman, "Spring Song")

Kinship is the main theme of most of the reflective pieces of Roberts, Lampman, and Carman:

And so we are,
However far

We journey ere the journey ends,
One brotherhood
With leaf and bud
And everything that wakes or wends.
(Carman, "Wood-Folk Lore")

Tell me how some sightless impulse,
  Working out a hidden plan,
God for kin and clay for fellow,
  Wakes to find itself a man.
(Roberts, "Kinship")

I felt the soul of the trees--
Of the white, eternal seas--
  Of the flickering bats and night-moths
And my own soul kin to these.
(Roberts, "Earth's Complines")

Let us be much with Nature; . . .
. . . as children of one common birth,
Discerning in each natural fruit of earth
Kinship and bond with this diviner clay.
(Lampman, "On the Companionship with Nature")

A treasurer of immortal days,
I roam the glorious world with praise,
The hillsides and the woodland ways,
  Till earth and I are one.
(Lampman, "April in the Hills")

The essential value of this kinship for man is that man may learn joy and contentment through nature and may find in it a cure for his ills, a lesson for living:

O foolish Man and blind,
Here is Earth's healing grace
For thee and all thy kind
To build a perfect race.

There springs no smallest flower
In all the wilderness
But God has given it power
To lighten some distress.
(Carman, "Materia Medica")

Far violet hills, horizons filmed with showers,
  The murmur of cool streams, the forest's gloom,
  The voices of the breathing grass, the hum
Of ancient gardens overbanked with flowers:
Thus, with a smile as golden as the dawn,
  And cool fair fingers radiantly divine,
  The mighty mother brings us in her hand,
For all tired eyes and foreheads pinched and wan,
Her restful cup, her beaker of bright wine;
  Drink, and be filled, and ye shall understand!
(Lampman, "Comfort of the Fields")

The larger life that awaits him who communes with nature is the underlying theme of these reflections. Here is an affirmation of the Wordsworth message, sincere and often truly poetic. When our poets move on to more profound thoughts on man and his origin and destiny they do not proceed as confidently. All agree, however, that there is a certain something in nature which gives man assurance of his own high place in the universal scheme:

So to men's souls, at sacred intervals,
Out of the dust of life takes wing and calls
A spirit that we know not, nor can trace,
And heart to heart makes answer with strange thrill,
It passes, and a moment face to face
We dream ourselves immortal, and are still.
(Lampman, "The Passing of the Spirit")

All believe that there is strength and wisdom to be gained through communion with the elemental forces of nature through which man has evolved. Man must unite with the earth if he would have immortality. Carman's "Easter Eve," Roberts' "Kinship," Lampman's "The Largest Life," and Scott's "The Height of Land" are noteworthy expressions of this belief.

"Easter Eve" is Carman's most direct and matter-of-fact presentation of his triumphant optimism and transcendental vision of human destiny:

> Well, I have an instinct as fine and valid, surely, as
> that of the beasts and birds,
> Concerning death and the life immortal, too deep for
> logic, too vague for words.
> No trace of beauty can pass nor perish, but other beauty
> is somewhere born;
> No seed of truth or good be planted, but the yield must
> grow as the growing corn.
>
> Therefore this ardent mind and spirit I give to the
> glowing days of earth,
> To be wrought by the Lord of life to something of last-
> ing import and lovely worth.
> If the toil I give be without self-seeking, bestowed to
> the limit of will and power,
> To fashion after some form ideal the instant task and
> the waiting hour,
>
> It matters not though defeat undo me, though faults be-
> tray me and sorrows scar,
> Already I share the life eternal with the April buds
> and the evening star.
> The slim new moon is my sister now; the rain, my brother;
> the wind, my friend.
> Is it not well with these forever? Can the soul of man
> fare ill in the end?24

Other expressions of the poet's cosmic consciousness, such as "Overlord," "Earth Voices," and "Beyond the Gamut," are far superior to "Easter Eve" as the poetic interpretation of an ideal but their profusion and diversity of symbols tend to be somewhat disconcerting to the average reader.

In "Kinship" Roberts conceives human life as a part of a great natural process guided by the overruling power of God:

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24 Carman, op. cit., pp. 225-26.

Back to wisdom take me, Mother;
  Comfort me with kindred hands;
Tell me tales the world's forgetting,
  Till my spirit understands.

Tell me how some sightless impulse,
  Working out a hidden plan,
God for kin and clay for fellow,
  Wakes to find itself a man.

Tell me how the life of mortal,
  Wavering from breath to breath,
Like a web of scarlet pattern
  Hurtles from the loom of death.

How the caged bright bird, desire,
  Which the hands of God deliver,
Beats aloft to drop unheeded
  At the confines of forever:

Faints unheeded for a season,
  Then outwings the farthest star,
To the wisdom and the stillness
  Where thy consummations are.[25]

Man's soul, the "caged bright bird, desire," is assured of ultimate immortality as it evolves through nature from the beginning of time. The vigorous, oracular phrasing corresponds to the lofty thought.

Roberts' brusque, Emersonian diction contrasts sharply with the delicate harmonies of Lampman's "The Largest Life":

> There is a beauty at the goal of life,
> A beauty growing since the world began,
> Through every age and race, through lapse and strife
> Till the great human soul complete her span.
> Beneath the waves of storm that lash and burn,
> The currents of blind passion that appall,
> To listen and keep watch till we discern
> The tide of sovereign truth that guides it all;

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25 Roberts, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

So to address our spirits to the height,
And so attune them to the valiant whole,
That the great light be clearer for our light,
And the great soul the stronger for our soul:
To have done this is to have lived, though fame
Remember us with no familiar name.[26]

There is a stronger personal appeal here than in "Easter Eve" or "Kinship." Cosmic overtones, which can be discordant at times, do not intrude on the exquisite music of this evocation of beauty. The underlying mysticism here is not a common feature of Lampman's art. The poet's ideal is expressed in tones which do not moralize or preach, yet the sermon implicit in "The Largest Life" has more meaning for mankind than all the philosophizing of the transcendentalists.

"The Height of Land," by Duncan Campbell Scott, has for the young Canadian of today more appeal than the three poems presented above. The reason for this may lie in the fact that "The Height of Land" is closer to present-day poetic style. Or it may be because Scott goes beyond the traditional and perhaps too familiar Earth Mother formula of the last century. Scott recognizes a "Something that comes in flashes and is deeper than peace," but he is not so sure of its meaning as Roberts or Carman would be. The doubts and questionings and fears which are a part of our present experience are foreshadowed by "The Height of Land":

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26 Lampman, op. cit., p. 168.

How often in the autumn of the world
Shall the crystal shrine of dawning be rebuilt
With deeper meaning! Shall the poet then,
Wrapped in his mantle on the height of land,
Brood on the welter of the lives of men
And dream of his ideal hope and promise
In the blush sunrise?
. . . . . .
Shall he stand
With deeper joy, with more complex emotion,
In closer commune with divinity,
With the deep fathomed, with the firmament charted,
With life as simple as a sheep-boy's song,
What lies beyond a romaunt that was read
Once on a morn of storm and laid aside
Memorious with strange immortal memories?
Or shall he see the sunrise as I see it
In shoals of misty fire the deluge-light
Dashes upon and whelms with purer radiance,
And feel the lulled earth, older in pulse and motion,
Turn the rich lands and the inundant oceans
To the flushed color, and hear as now I hear
The thrill of life beat up the planet's margin
And break in the clear susurrus of deep joy
That echoes and reechoes in my being?
O Life is intuition the measure of knowledge
And do I stand with heart entranced and burning
At the zenith of our wisdom when I feel
The long light flow, the long wind pause, the deep
Influx of spirit, of which no man may tell
The Secret, golden and inappellable?27

When one can feel that the words of the poet come from a clear depth of experience, the poet's thought and feeling can be shared with a greater personal satisfaction. Scott has the ability to bring about this partnership, for he combines the best qualities of the descriptive artist and the reflective writer to give a convincing evocation of experienced truth and beauty. Scott is not only the most accomplished

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27 Duncan Campbell Scott, Poems, pp. 50-51.

technician of his time but also a poet of ideas. As Lorne Pierce says, Duncan Campbell Scott thinks as he sings, and this blending of ideas and ecstasy, of felicitous phrasing, spiritual insight, and imaginative grace, are frequently sheer magic.[28]

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[28] Lorne Pierce, An Outline of Canadian Literature, p. 86.

CHAPTER VII

L'ECOLE LITTERAIRE DE MONTREAL

An important factor in the development of French Canadian literature is the tendency of French writers to organize. Let a half-dozen French literary enthusiasts come within hailing distance of each other and a coterie is born. Though their aims, literary preferences, and abilities be totally dissimilar, their desire for discussion, mutual encouragement, and liberal exchange of criticism will invariably bring them together. With reference to the English poets of Canada, such terms as "pre-Confederation School" and "School of Roberts" imply only contemporaneousness or similarities of style and subject matter. With the French, however, "school" is synonymous with "cénacle," a definite group of writers having a corporate name, meeting place, officers, publications, and similar organizational paraphernalia. The School of Quebec, counting some fifteen members, was organized by Abbé H. R. Casgrain in 1860. It met usually in the back room of Octave Crémazie's book shop. The results of its deliberations and some of the works of its individual members appeared in a publication called Les Soirées canadiennes, founded by Casgrain in 1861. Here the literature of French Canada had its beginning. The School of Quebec dominated all literary activity in the province until just before the turn

of the century.

In 1895-96 a second cénacle, L'Ecole littéraire de Montréal, was formed. As in the case of the Quebec School, this new organization was to give body and voice to the energies and aspirations of the young "littérateurs" of the day and was to influence the form and content of contemporary letters.

This group of youthful writers who struck out against the patriotic and religious themes and the rhetorical style of the Quebec romanticists dreamed of a battle reminiscent of the glorious days of Hernani.[1] They wanted to repeat the victory of 1830 with new leaders and new banners. Unfortunately, they had no Victor Hugo and their banners were too numerous and conflicting. New influences from France were at work: Leconte de Lisle the Parnassian and Verlaine the Symbolist were setting new standards of poetic expression. Essentially patriotic verse was losing ground. The lyric was supplanting the narrative, and religious expression was changing to a vague symbolistic religiosity. "Our young men are now voicing their admiration for the new French schools," writes Jean Charbonneau. "They will be Parnassian, Naturalist, or Symbolist, as they please, conserving always a pious adoration for Victor Hugo, whose prestige still holds even

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1 Jean Charbonneau, L'Ecole littéraire de Montréal, p. 19. (tr.)

at the end of the nineteenth century."2

Although the Montreal group of 1900 was obsessed by a desire to overthrow traditional values, there was no complete break with the past. Their diversity of credos and interests kept them from violent revolt. Indicative of this fact is that a volume of Victor Hugo occupied the place of honour in their first library and that Louis Fréchette, leader of the "old school," was their first honorary president.

The "revolt" began with a skirmish led by Jean Charbonneau and Paul de Martigny, two youths who met for the first time at a political banquet where they listened to interminable speeches on Canada's prosperity "well seasoned with Canadianisms, Anglicisms, and bad grammar."3 They resolved to protest against the torture to which "la belle langue française" was being subjected by a society dominated by materialistic motives. Their rallying cry, "Let us save our language from the slough into which it has sunk!" stirred the younger writers of the city, and the new literary movement was a going concern. At first, meetings were held in the homes of various members. As the organization grew, the Château de Ramezay became its headquarters and on two or three occasions the public was admitted. The group included lawyers, artists, professional writers, journalists, and

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2 Charbonneau, loc. cit. (tr.)

3 Ibid., p. 23. (tr.)

doctors. Subjects as diversified as the personnel were discussed. It was here that the leading poets of the years 1900-1925 read selections and received the helpful criticism of their friends.

Charles Gill describes these "séances" in the preface to Les Soirées du Château de Ramezay, the first volume to be published by the group: "The Ecole littéraire is a school without teachers, where none may raise his voice above that of his neighbour. Since there are no honours to be gained save the applause of friends, no hint of jealousy dampens our enthusiasm when a well-turned line emerges from the cigarette smoke or when an expressive page catches the breath. Here both compliments and criticisms are sincere. Each one is eager to submit his latest effort or to share what the week has brought him. This one will turn up with something hot off the press, another will bring along his very first production, a third will have something from Leconte de Lisle to quote during a heated discussion with a companion who knows Lamartine by heart. And after a strenuous session with the manuscripts comes the time for a chat, and paradoxes are given free rein. Projects are compared, whims indulged, and illusions gently but firmly shattered. . . . How good it is, at a time when so many serious-minded men are bored to death, to be able to enjoy such pleasures!"[4]

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4 Les Soirées du Château de Ramezay, pp. vi,viii. (tr.)

In the minds of the poets of this group, their well-established organization, their frequent meetings, and their publication Les Soirées du Château de Ramezay, constituted their best offensive weapon in their attack on a public which had turned a deaf ear to poetry during the closing years of the nineteenth century. In Les Soirées their voices rose in defiance of the sociologist Léon Gérin who had dared to tell the Royal Society that there was no career for the poet in Canada.5

The School found a career for many. By its influence and prestige it stimulated interest, aroused enthusiasm, created a store of instructive models, and was responsible for the publication of most of the literary works produced in Montreal from 1895 to 1925. In a recent article on Emile Nelligan, R. Chauvin states that the Ecole littéraire de Montréal disbanded after only five years.6 According to Jean Charbonneau's account, to cite only a few historical details, the School held thirty-two meetings in 1910, counted seventeen active members in 1912, published a second volume, Les Soirées de l'Ecole littéraire de Montréal, in 1925, and held meetings in November of 1933 and in January and June of the

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5 Léon Gérin, "Notre mouvement intellectuel," Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Second Series, 7:145-72, May, 1901.

6 R. Chauvin, "Emile Nelligan," Canadian Forum, 28:277-78, March, 1949.

following year. This meeting in June 1933 at the home of Jean Charbonneau appears to have been the last formal gathering of the School. In his concluding remarks on the achievement of the School, Jean Charbonneau pays a tribute no small share of which should return to Charbonneau himself. He writes: "If it (L'Ecole littéraire de Montréal) succeeded only in breaking with the past, in giving our literature a lift out of its slough of despond, and in blazing new trails, it would still merit more than our respect. But it did more than this. By bringing together a number of young men who were ardent lovers of beauty, and by proclaiming the existence of an elite group which was entirely devoted to the defense of the French language in America, it worthily pursued the task set by our modest predecessors and aided materially in the development of our literature."[7]

The most significant phase of this second renaissance of French Canadian literature was the activity of the Montreal School in the poetic field. Like that of the Quebec School, its poetry was derivative to a marked degree.[8] It

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7 Charbonneau, op. cit., p. 308.

8 "The poets of this country (Canada) appear to have taken as their motto François Coppée's line: 'Whom can I imitate to be original?' We regret to state that the Ecole littéraire de Montréal has fallen too often into this error. The most original thing it accomplished was a change of masters." - Charles ab der Halden, Etudes de littérature canadienne-française, p. 295. (tr.)

was even less Canadian in its descriptive aspects. It gave evidence of a greater interest in artistic form and a wider scope in content, and showed that poets were discovering new fields to explore in their own emotional experience. Five members of the Ecole littéraire de Montréal must be singled out for the contribution they made to Canadian nature poetry. They are, in the order in which they will be studied here, Charles Gill, Emile Nelligan, Albert Ferland, Albert Lozeau, and Gonzalve Desaulniers. It will be shown that each of these poets chose a different way to make his contribution to Canadian literature.

CHAPTER VIII

POETS OF THE ECOLE LITTERAIRE

Charles Gill.[1] The story of Charles Gill is the story of an unfulfilled promise--the promise of lasting greatness for Canadian literature inherent in his Le Cap Eternité, an unfinished symphony of poetic art. France and Canada had been waiting since the days of Crémazie for a poet with vision and power sufficient to answer the challenge of Canadian nature. Charles Gill had that vision and that power. He was the first to choose a part of the Canadian scene for the main theme of a great poetic work. Had he lived long enough to complete the truly colossal project he envisioned, Charles Gill might have become the most famous Canadian poet not only of his own time but of all time to come.

In the preface to Le Cap Eternité, Albert Lozeau, a close friend and fellow poet, designated its author as the most characteristic figure in contemporary French Canadian literature.[2] This statement remains somewhat meaningless, or at least ambiguous. When it is known that Gill's preferred

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1 Charles Gill (1871-1918). Studied at Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris (1890-95). Admitted to Ecole littéraire in 1896. Poetic works: Le Cap Eternité suivi des Etoiles filantes et de Traductions d'Horace, published in one volume, with preface by Albert Lozeau, in 1919.

2 Charles Gill, Le Cap Eternité, p. vii.

master was the great French romanticist, Lamartine; that he admired Leconte de Lisle, leader of the Parnassians; that he was exposed as a young man in Paris to the symbolism of Verlaine; that he was an incorrigible bohemian, a better talker than writer, and that he earned his living by painting and teaching art in Montreal--when these things are known, one is tempted to substitute the term "colourful" for "characteristic" in Lozeau's definition.

If Gill's rejection of the historical and religious inspiration of the Quebec School was typical of the members of L'Ecole littéraire de Montréal, his approach to poetry was not. He envisioned a far greater theme than any of them, although he actually produced a much smaller volume of verse. He entranced the soirées at the Château de Ramezay with his eloquence, yet found little time to put this eloquence into lasting form.

Le Cap Eternité is the tenth book, itself incomplete, of a projected epic poem of some twelve books which was to bear the title Le Saint-Laurent. Late in 1897 Gill sketched the plan of this poem for some of the members of the School at a gathering in his rooms. On the same occasion he recited a few stanzas from the address to Cape Trinity which was to become Canto VIII, the most important single part of the published work. Jean Charbonneau, in his account of this event, attempts to explain why the plan was never realized: "Like

all superior intellects, Gill was tormented by the concept of Infinity. The immensity of the universe haunted his imagination. He had constructed for himself a theory of Creation which he subjected to all the vagaries of his mood. Unlike Antaeus, who regained strength whenever he touched the earth, Gill found life unendurable when the burden of human nature pulled him down to the level of the common man. . . . He appeared to possess untold energy and strength, yet the struggle was too great for him when he came to grips with life in the raw. . . . He held himself aloof. He was suspicious of all. This weakness forestalled the achievement of his dream, for his search for solitude set him apart from those who might have encouraged his ambition and prevented it from becoming egotism. . . . He seemed at ease only when away from what he called 'the vile multitude' where he could enjoy the close fraternity of a few literary friends. . . . It was in his lonely study only that we became aware of the high quality of his mind. . . . He had found a part of Nature commensurate with his dream, and the contemplation of this scene (the Saguenay) gave him a vision which was to pursue him until he died--a vision which never took shape as a completed work of art."[3]

Charbonneau's remarks on Gill reflect throughout a

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[3] Jean Charbonneau, L'Ecole littéraire de Montréal, pp. 113 ff. (tr.)

deeply felt regret that the promise in the stanzas to Cape Trinity should have remained unfulfilled. Another highly respected member of the French literary circle, Monseigneur Olivier Maurault, has given concise expression to the general feeling with regard to Charles Gill: "How regrettable it is that the poet executed so little of the stupendous project he had dreamed. Think what this Saint-Laurent might have been, sung by a poet of the feeling and power of Charles Gill and written with the degree of perfection he demanded of all his published work.[4] Though the great epic we hope for is yet to be written, here, at least, we have a noble fragment of it."[5]

This fragment, published under the title of one of its major cantos, "Le Cap Eternité," consists of a prologue, ten complete and two incomplete cantos, and a closing hymn to "la patrie." Three main themes are treated: a description of the Saguenay, a memoir of the now vanished Montagnais Indian tribe, and meditations of the poet before Capes Trinity and Eternity.

The keynote of the entire book, man's physical and spiritual insignificance before the overpowering manifestations of nature, is struck in the canto entitled "Clair de

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4 Sixteen poems and three short stories by Gill were included in Les Soirées du Château de Ramezay, published in 1900 by L'Ecole littéraire de Montréal.

5 Mgr. Olivier Maurault, Brièvetés, pp. 140-41. (tr.)

lune":

Devant l'escarpement des rochers grandioses,
La nuit du Saguenay m'a révélé des choses
Que le langage humain ne redira jamais.6

Gill the painter can be seen at work in the following lines from Canto VI, "L'Aurore":

Mais déjà l'aube terne aux teintes indécises
Révélait des détails au flanc du grand rocher;
Je voyais peu à peu les formes s'ébaucher,
Et les contours saillir en lignes plus précises.

Bientôt le coloris de l'espace éthéré
Passa du gris à l'ambre et de l'ambre au bleu pâle;
Les flots prirent les tons chatoyants de l'opale;
L'Orient s'allumait à son foyer sacré.

Le gris matutinal en bas régnait encore,
Quand l'éblouissement glorieux de l'aurore
Embrasa le sommet du Cap Eternité
Qui tendait au salut du jour sa majesté.7

There is a masterful treatment of contour and colour here that is superior to anything of its kind in French Canadian literature and equal to the best France has to offer. The gradation of colouring as the rising sun touches the summit of the Cape reveals the hand of an artist as well as the sensitivity of a poet.

Canto VIII, "Le Cap Trinité," is the part of the book which demands for its author a place among the greatest poets Canada has produced. The objective approach of the preceding cantos is superseded by an intensely subjective interpretation

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6 Gill, op. cit., p. 39.

7 Ibid., p. 44.

of the scene. Here the painter-poet relinquishes his brush for his pen. The poet's sense of the Infinite, which has been making itself felt with progressive intensity, now reaches a height of poetic expression as soul-stirring as the sight of the towering rock itself. The address to Cape Trinity is quoted here in its entirety:

O Cap! en confiant au vertige des cieux
Notre globe éperdu dans la nuit séculaire,
Le Seigneur s'est penché sur ta page de pierre,
Digne de relater des faits prodigieux.

Il a mis sur ton front l'obscur secret des causes,
Les lois de la nature et ses frémissements,
Pendant qu'elle assignait leur forme aux éléments
Dans l'infini creuset de ses métamorphoses;

Et, scellant à jamais les arrêts du destin
Avec l'ardent burin de la foudre qui gronde,
Il a, dans ton granit, gravé le sort du monde,
En symboles trop grands pour le génie humain.

En signes trop profonds, pour que notre oeil pénètre
La simple vérité des terrestres secrets,
Pendant que nous osons forger des mots abstraits
Et sonder le mystère insondable de l'être.

La Nature nous parle et nous l'interrompons!
Aveugles aux rayons de la sainte lumière,
Sourds aux enseignements antiques de la terre,
Nous ne connaissons pas le sol où nous rampons.

Nous n'avons pas assez contemplé les aurores,
Nous n'avons pas assez frémi devant la nuit,
Mornes vivants dont l'âme est en proie au vain bruit
Des savantes erreurs et des longs mots sonores!

En vain la Vérité s'offre à notre compas
Et la Création ouvre pour nous son livre:
Avides des secrets radieux qu'il nous livre,
Nous les cherchons ailleurs et ne les trouvons pas.

Nous n'avons pas appris le langage des cimes:
Nous ne comprenons pas ce que clame leur voix,

Quand les cris de l'enfer et du ciel à la fois
Semblent venir à nous dans l'écho des abîmes.

Et l'ange qui régit l'or, le rose et le bleu,
Pour nos yeux sans regard n'écarte pas ses voiles,
Quand le roi des rochers et le roi des étoiles
Nous parlent à midi dans le style de Dieu.[8]

The descriptive stanzas which introduce this address establish the theme: the face of the rock with its hollows and prominences is a page upon which has been written the enigma of the universe. The first stanza, setting the almost biblical tone of the passage, presents the moment in the history of the world when the Deity inscribed upon this page of stone the secret of the beginning and end of all things, the laws of nature and human destiny.

The Cape is personified by the possessive pronoun and the word "front" (forehead). By this means the poet enters into a close personal communion with this formidable manifestation of nature.

The philosophical theme of the address is presented in the fifth and following stanzas. Man is confronted with the mystery of God in Nature. Nature speaks to him and he dares to interrupt. He is blind to the sacred light, deaf to the ancient teachings of the earth, for he knows not the ground on which he crawls. He has not seen the glory of the dawn; he has not trembled before the night. He is an insensible being, his soul prey to learned errors and long sonorous

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8 Ibid., pp. 57-59.

words. Truth stands before him and the book of Creation is open to his gaze, yet he seeks its secrets elsewhere and finds them not. He has not learned the language of the heights. When the king of the rock and the king of the stars speak to him with the tongue of God, the truth is veiled, for God has engraved here the destiny of the earth in symbols beyond the comprehension of mankind.

The theme of Canto IX is the immutability of Cape Eternity:

> L'immuable géant dressé sur l'infini,
> . . . . . .
> Sphynx des passés perdus, il pose à l'avenir
> Le problème infini du temps et de l'espace.
> Il contemple au zénith l'Eternel face à face,
> Et son terrible nom lui peut seul convenir.9

The poet tells of what the rock has witnessed from prehistoric times to the present:

> Et tout est disparu! navires, chevaliers,
> Et bûcherons joyeux, et martyrs, et sauvages,
> Mammouths géants, poissons ailés, hommes pervers
> Dont les iniquités perdirent l'univers,
> Ont passé tour à tour, emportés par les âges,
> Comme passent les flots à l'heure du reflux!
> Et le terrain de pierre a vu toutes ces choses,
> Et bien d'autres encor qui ne reviendront plus;
> Et rien n'a transformé ses lignes grandioses:
> Depuis les premiers jours, fixe dans son granit,
> L'immuable géant dressé sur l'infini,
> Sous le même soleil est demeuré le même!10

The magnificent tone of the preceding cantos is sustained.

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9 Ibid., pp. 65,69.

10 Ibid., p. 65.

The poet asks the rock what it will see in the future--what new wonders, what further progress, what other races of men. The canto ends with a clear statement of the poet's philosophy: even this rock will in time disappear, for everything passes, crumbles, dies. The world and the heavens are but vanity before the face of the Eternal Being.

Canto X, "Le Rêve et la Raison," is a comparison of the two promontories; they become symbols whose meaning is clearly defined in the following lines:

> Les deux caps éternels, par différentes voies,
> Vers les secrets divins élèvent la pensée.
> . . . . . .
> L'un, comme un escalier somptueux et royal,
> Offre ses trois degrés qu'une forêt touffue
> Recouvre d'un tapis velouté de sinople.
> . . . . . .
> Aussi la Trinité, par les degrés du rêve,
> Facilite au croyant l'ascension du ciel,
> Convie à la splendeur des extases divines
> L'âme qui, dans la foi naïve de l'enfance,
> Se contente d'aimer et ne cherche à comprendre.
> . . . . . .
> L'autre, surgi du noir, monte tout droit aux nues,
> Rappelant la raison du superbe penseur
> Qui cherche à prouver Dieu par la philosophie.
> Tous vos raisonnements, ô jongleurs de mots vides,
> Augmentent son secret insondable et terrible,
> Et l'éloignent encor de notre entendement![11]

The three steps on the face of Cape Trinity represent the gradual ascent of thought through reverie toward the divine secrets of life. Cape Eternity, which rises suddenly and directly from the black waters of the river to the sky, is

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11 Ibid., p. 73.

the symbol of human reason which climbs boldly upward only to fall back helplessly before the challenge of the unsolvable mysteries of Creation. The canto ends with a superb description of the sunset viewed from the height:

> Et le soleil mourant, avant de s'engloutir,
> Par delà le grand mur lointain des Laurentides,
> Déposa sur la cime un baiser lumineux;
> La pierre rutilait, couverte de topaze,
> Et les vieux pins royaux se dressaient en extase
> Dans l'éblouissement de ces divins adieux.[12]

One will search in vain for a poem on this subject by an English Canadian comparable in descriptive power and lyrical flight to Charles Gill's "Le Cap Eternité." There is a hint of the "loneliness and doom and dread surmise" of the scene in Wilfred Campbell's sonnet "Cape Eternity":

> About thy head where dawning wakes and dies,
> Sublimity, betwixt thine awful rifts,--
> 'Mid mists and gloom and shattered light, uplifts
> Hiding in height the measure of the skies.
> Here pallid Awe forever lifts her eyes,
> Through veiling haze across thy rugged clefts,
> Where far and faint the sombre sunlight sifts,
> 'Mid loneliness and doom and dread surmise.
>
> Here nature to this ancient silence froze,
> When from the deeps thy mighty shoulders rose,
> And hid the sun and moon and starry light;--
> Where based in shadow of thy sunless floods,
> And iron bastions, vast, forever broods,
> Winter, eternal stillness, death and night.[13]

Gill's awe and underlying pessimism is reflected here, but there is only a faint echo of his profound philosophy.

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12 Ibid., p. 75.

13 Wilfred Campbell, Collected Poems, pp. 103-4.

Campbell's address to the Cape is stripped of all religious feeling and is devoid of any note of human frailty and ignorance before the everlasting power and unfathomable secrets of this manifestation of nature. The immensity of the theme of Le Cap Eternité contrasts sharply with the un-immense themes of Roberts' "Earth's Complines," "Recessional," or "Immanence." Yet Roberts, out of less grandiose material, constructed a philosophy no less profound and far more optimistic than that of Charles Gill.

Only a few French Canadian poets have been the object of unstinted admiration on the part of critics in France. Charles Gill is one of these, and, in addition, appears to be the only one of his generation whose use of the French language has been singled out for special praise. Jeanne Paul-Crouzet writes of him: "Let us not forget that Charles Gill was the first Canadian to make a deliberate choice of a river and a mountain of his own country as the subject for a lyric poem, and that he was capable of writing on this subject, in the purest language possible, lines of lofty poetic flight and profound philosophical import. . . . To groping humanity he has shown the way to the stars. If in this fragment he has not attained the degree of perfection for which he strove, at least he has more than once permitted us to catch a glimpse of the sublime."[14]

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14 Jeanne Paul-Crouzet, Poésie au Canada, p. 177. (tr.)

Emile Nelligan.[15] If Canadian literature can be said to have suffered a great disappointment in the unfinished dream of Charles Gill, the loss occasioned by the tragedy which brought a living death to Emile Nelligan is inestimable. Emile Nelligan was one of those poets whom fate chooses to mark with an utter and fatal indifference to the exigencies of daily living. Of all the highly sensitive and almost morbidly introspective young men of the Ecole littéraire, Nelligan was the one who sacrificed most on the altar of Beauty. Charles ab der Halden wrote of him: "One finds among his inevitable imitations of French poets and his technical lapses superb lines of rare poetic beauty such as would enhance the work of a master. One wonders if any Canadian before Nelligan ever created a truly poetic image. It is only by the brevity and inequality of his inspiration that Nelligan the youthful schoolboy is betrayed. But this youth, this child, possessed genius. This is the first time, it will be noted, that we have used the word 'genius' in speaking of a Canadian writer."[16]

Emile Nelligan was not a poet of nature. Nature gave

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15 Emile Nelligan (1879-1941). Did not complete classical studies. Admitted to Ecole littéraire in 1897. Career cut short by mental illness at nineteen. Poems edited and published by Louis Dantin in 1903 under title Emile Nelligan et son oeuvre. Died in 1941 at St. Jean de Dieu Hospital.

16 Charles ab der Halden, Nouvelles études de littérature canadienne, pp. 376-77. (tr.)

him nothing but his imagery. His gardens and parks are dream places, black and terrifying fantasies inspired by the nightmares of a Beaudelaire. His use of nature reflects the flight from reality which was going on in his tortured soul. The poem "Soir d'hiver" is characteristic of Nelligan's use of nature images to portray his mood. For the majority of Canadian poets, newly fallen snow is a symbol of comfort and protection; it brings sparkling brightness to their scenes and represents one of nature's happier aspects. For Nelligan it is something sinister: his hopes lie as cold and inert as the frozen ponds of February; pain and ennui envelope him as the snow enshrouds the land:

Ah! comme la neige a neigé!
Ma vitre est un jardin de givre.
Ah! comme la neige a neigé!
Qu'est-ce que le spasme de vivre
A la douleur que j'ai, que j'ai!

Tous les étangs gisent gelés,
Mon âme est noire: Où vis-je? où vais-je?
Tous mes espoirs gisent gelés:
Je suis la nouvelle Norwège
D'où les blonds ciels s'en sont allés.

Pleurez, oiseaux de février,
Au sinistre frisson des choses,
Pleurez, oiseaux de février,
Pleurez mes pleurs, pleurez mes roses,
Aux branches du genévrier.

Ah! comme la neige a neigé!
Ma vitre est un jardin de givre.
Ah! comme la neige a neigé!
Qu'est-ce que le spasme de vivre
A tout l'ennui que j'ai, que j'ai!...17

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17 Émile Nelligan et son oeuvre, Third Edition, pp. 44-45.

Almost every line of Nelligan's poetry is fraught with the soul-sickness he feels within him. Implicit in most of his poems is his certain premonition of the madness that was soon to shut out all light and happiness from his mind forever. The delineation of this soul-sickness through metaphors drawn from nature is exemplified in the following excerpts:

Et tristes, comme un bruit frissonnant de fleurs sèches
Eparses dans le vent vespéral du vallon,
Les notes sanglotaient sur votre violon . . .
(Violon d'adieu, p. 56.)

Des gels norvégiens métallisent les glèbes,
Que le froid des hivers nous réchauffe les coeurs!
(Hiver sentimental, p. 55.)

Le givre a ciselé de fins vases fantasques,
Bijoux d'orfèvrerie, orgueils de Cellini,
Aux vitres du boudoir dont l'embrouillamini
Désespère nos yeux de ses folles bourrasques.
(Five o'clock, p. 46.)

Ma pensée est couleur de lumières lointaines,
Du fond de quelque crypte aux vagues profondeurs;
Elle a l'éclat parfois des subtiles verdeurs
D'un golfe où le soleil abaisse ses antennes.

En un jardin sonore, au soupir des fontaines,
Elle a vécu dans les soirs doux, dans les odeurs;
Ma pensée est couleur de lumières lointaines,
Du fond de quelque crypte aux vagues profondeurs.
(Clair de lune intellectuel, p. 3.)

Un silence a plu dans les solitudes proches:
Des Sylphes ont cueilli le parfum mort des cloches.

Quelle mélancolie! Octobre, octobre en voie!
(Automne, p. 63.)

J'ai grandi dans le goût bizarre du tombeau,
Plein du dédain de l'homme et des bruits de la terre,
Tel un grand cygne noir qui s'éprend de mystère,
Et vit à la clarté du lunaire flambeau.
(Le Cercueil, p. 91.)

The minor-key harmonies and richly symbolic images of "Soirs d'automne" reflect Nelligan's unchanging mood of profound melancholy. Nature relieves his tortured passion; the flowers absorb his sorrow:

> Voici que la tulipe et voilà que les roses,
> Sous les gestes massifs des bronzes et des marbres,
> Dans le Parc où l'Amour folâtre sous les arbres,
> Chantent dans les longs soirs monotones et roses.
>
> Dans les soirs a chanté la gaîté des parterres
> Où dans un clair de lune en des poses obliques,
> Et de grands souffles vont, lourds et mélancoliques,
> Troubler le rêve blanc des oiseaux solitaires.
>
> Voici que la tulipe et voilà que les roses
> Et les lys cristallins, pourprés de crépuscule,
> Rayonnent tristement au soleil qui recule,
> Emportant la douleur des bêtes et des choses.
>
> Et mon amour meurtri, comme une chair qui saigne,
> Repose sa blessure et calme ses névroses.
> Et voici que les lys, la tulipe et les roses
> Pleurent les souvenirs où mon âme se baigne.[18]

The poet's self-indentification with the tulip and the rose is expressed clearly and simply. It is a direct statement of a mutually sympathetic understanding between the poet and nature not common in Nelligan's poems. One of his best and at the same time most frightening evocations of nature is the poem "Paysage fauve." Here is the real Nelligan with all his tortured fantasy. He turns Fréchette's "sombre nuit du nord" into a night of horror enveloping a landscape of trees which, twisted like the bodies of the damned beneath the lash,

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[18] Ibid., p. 81.

writhe amid white solitudes where wolf-pack eyes glint in brutish horror:

> Les arbres comme autant de vieillards rachitiques,
> Flanqués vers l'horizon sur les escarpements,
> Tordent de désespoir leurs torses fantastiques,
> Ainsi que les damnés sous le fouet des tourments.
>
> C'est l'Hiver; c'est la Mort; sur les neiges arctiques,
> Vers le bûcher qui flambe aux lointains campements,
> Les chasseurs vont frileux sous leurs lourds vêtements,
> Et galopent, fouettant leurs chevaux athlétiques.
>
> La bise hurle; il grêle; il fait nuit, tout est sombre;
> Et voici que soudain se dessine dans l'ombre
> Un farouche troupeau de grands loups affamés;
>
> Ils bondissent, essaims de fauves multitudes,
> Et la brutale horreur de leurs yeux enflammés,
> Allume de points d'or les blanches solitudes.19

Here, if anywhere in Canadian poetry, is the nature which Northrop Frye designates as the source of the cruelty and subconscious stampedings within the human mind. This sonnet alone is sufficient to establish Nelligan's vision of nature as unique in Canadian literature. Its evocation of terror has no parallel: the voices of other poets of the wilderness--Fréchette, Lampman, Scott--are gentle in comparison.

There is sufficient evidence in the pieces already quoted to show that Nelligan does not analyze a scene or an object. He suggests, rather than describes in detail. His colours, shapes, and sounds build up a suggestive imitation of reality with the studied vagueness that was the hall-mark

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19 Ibid., p. 120.

of the Symbolists.

Emile Nelligan is more typical of the Montreal School than Charles Gill. He is a romanticist in feeling, but his imaginative tendencies are in the direction of the cult of Symbolism, and his regard for artistic form, technical precision, and verbal music are distinctly Parnassian traits. Such a three-fold influence was bound to make his work appear to be that of a precocious and unstable young man, which he was. The depth of thought and the sustained inspiration which were lacking in this nineteen-year-old would surely have come in time, had tragedy not intervened. It is right and natural to regret that, as in the case of Charles Gill, the promise inherent in Nelligan's poetry remained unfulfilled. However, as Jeanne Paul-Crouzet has suggested, Nelligan might not have been Nelligan had he been able quietly to cultivate his muse in leisure moments like most of his Canadian confreres, free from the obsessions and nightmares of a feverish mind. "Who knows," writes Miss Paul-Crouzet, "whether this torment, these obsessions, these nightmares were not indispensable to the development of his poetic personality? Who can divine the secret relationships that may have existed between his writings and the slow capture of the vessel of his mind by what he called, in 'Le Vaisseau d'or,' the profane sailors: disgust, hatred, and madness. Here is a mystery of the soul that will remain unsolved. Let us cherish

the imperfect treasure left us by this inspired youth who was more conscious than all of us of his own powers and their limits and who defined himself so well in the lines:

> 'Je sens voler en moi les oiseaux du génie,
> Mais j'ai tendu si mal mon piège qu'ils ont pris
> Dans l'azur cérébral leurs vols blancs, bruns et gris,
> Et mon coeur brisé râle son agonie.'"[20]

Albert Ferland.[21] Le Canada chanté by Albert Ferland is the only book of French Canadian poetry which one may read and be reminded at the turning of every page of the School of Roberts. For every poem in this book, with the exception of the religious pieces in Part IV, "La Fête du Christ à Ville-Marie," a parallel can be found in the works of Lampman, Carman, and Roberts. Albert Ferland was the descriptive poet par excellence of the Ecole littéraire de Montréal, although the number of lines he wrote is exceedingly small in comparison with the output of any one of the three English poets mentioned.

Ferland was not, like Charles Gill, a philosopher upon

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20 Paul-Crouzet, op. cit., p. 138. (tr.)

21 Albert Ferland (1872-1943). Secretary and president of Ecole littéraire. Member of the Royal Society of Canada. Published works: Mélodies poétiques (1893), Femmes rêvées (1899), Les Horizons (1908), Le Terroir (1909), L'Ame des bois (1909), La Fête du Christ à Ville-Marie (1910). The last four books have been reprinted since under the general title Le Canada chanté (1910). Miscellaneous poems printed in Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada and in Les Soirées de l'Ecole littéraire de Montréal (1925).

the heights. He did not, like Nelligan, bare his soul to the world, nor was he, like Lozeau and Desaulniers, subjective almost to the exclusion of all other modes of expression. He communed with nature as did Pamphile Lemay, but out of this communion came a more carefully wrought poetry. Lemay was guilty of frequent lapses in form; Ferland was a perfectionist, a true Parnassian. There is a control in evidence in Ferland's work which sets it apart both from the rhetoric and disorderly exuberance of the Quebec School and from the unrestrained emotional outbursts and inherent pessimism of most of his colleagues in the Montreal group.

Being one of Nature's happier communicants, Ferland went into the woods to delight in what he saw and heard and felt, and he went there, like Archibald Lampman, especially to dream. In the following stanza are three words which carry the main theme of Ferland's nature verse: "rêve," "érables," and "adoré."

> Quand le tiède septembre aux semeurs de maïs
> Annonce le retour des automnes divines,
> Quand le feuillage clair du bouleau des collines
> Se mêle aux tons sanglants des érables rougis,
> O dis-moi si les bois dont la gloire s'achève,
> Pleins du charme automnal, n'ont pas bercé ton rêve,
> Si tu n'as pas, poète, adoré ton pays?22

His poems were born of the dreams nature gave him. The maple was his emblem and adoration of his native land was his

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22 Albert Ferland, Le Canada chanté, Book I, "La Terre canadienne," p. 28.

lifelong passion. He never ceased to call upon his fellow countrymen to enjoy with him the beauty of the vast Canadian scene:

> Le sais-tu, Canadien, qu'il est beau ton pays,
> Battu des mers, immense, et que le Nord regarde?
> En vain, à l'horizon ta fierté se hasarde
> A suivre et voir mourir au loin les monts bleuis.
> En vain, sous le ciel haut, de lacs et d'arbres pleines,
> S'enfoncent les forêts et se perdent les plaines,
> C'est toujours devant toi le sol de ton pays![23]

Though the poet speaks here of Canada's great forests, broad plains, and far horizons, his primary interest is in the more commonplace manifestations of external nature. To these he responds more readily than to the grandiose. He is the poet of the trees: they afford him his keenest pleasures and inspire his best lines. His love for the trees of his land is expressed in the poems "Aux arbres de chez nous," "Les Arbres morts," "Poésie des feuilles," "Les Pins qui chantent," and "Prière des bois du Nord." The last poem of this group is based on a passage from an ancient Indian prayer. It enumerates the trees of Canada in apt descriptive phrases, a few of which are quoted here:

> des sapins
> Immobiles rêveurs groupés dans la savanne,
> Arbres noirs, dont jamais le rameau ne se fane,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Des érables pourprés et des érables d'or,
> Dont les feuilles, mourant des morsures du nord,

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23 Ibid., p. 27.

Se parent pour l'adieu de teintes innombrables,

. . . . . .

Bouleaux sveltes, bouleaux tremblant aux moindres brises,
D'une grêle blancheur éclairant les ruisseaux,

. . . . . .

Le pin vêtu de nuit, conquérant des falaises,
Les saules tourmentés, les ifs et les mélèzes,
Le tremble au vert léger, le frêne au bois pliant,[24]

The mood of quiet adoration expressed in "Les Pins qui chantent" is characteristic of Ferland's personal approach to nature. The emotional restraint, concise form, and onomatopoetic qualities of this poem are noteworthy:

Passant, les pins! Le mont s'emplit de leur nuit verte.
Ici, nombreux et forts, les a groupés l'amour.
Vois. De leurs bras obscurs ils déchirent le jour.
La majesté des pins à ton âme est offerte.

. . . . . .

Contemple. Devant toi, par leur taille célèbres,
Sont les pins solennels et sombres de chez nous,
Les grands pins ténébreux dont nous sommes jaloux,
Prompts à faire rêver qui marche en leurs ténèbres.

Déjà, sur les pins noirs,
Le flot mélodieux de l'air fraîchi circule.
Ces bruits!...les entends-tu, passant du crépuscule?
C'est le chant que les pins prolongent dans les soirs.[25]

Like Lampman, Ferland frequents the solitary places; they are the source of his inspiration:

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24 Ibid., pp. 10-11.

25 Ibid., Book II, pp. 17-18.

Toi, mon âme, viens-t'en rêver parmi les monts!26

The critic Antoine-Joseph Jobin writes of him: ". . . one of the most eloquent of the voices which sing the beauty of our homeland. . . . he finds his poetry in the lonely places, the vast, solitary forests, for he has a horror of the artificialities of our city life."27 This love of the peaceful solitude nature alone can give him is expressed by the poet in reverent tones in "Au Dieu des solitudes":

Seigneur, je viens prier dans la terre sauvage,

. . . . . .

Je m'accuse devant les pins aux branches hautes.

. . . . . .

Gloire à Toi! Dieu vivant, dans la terre sauvage,
Où, loin des bruits humains, solennels et puissants,
Fidèles à garder la nuit dans leur branchage,
T'adorent les pins noirs depuis des milliers d'ans,
Gloire à Toi! Dieu vivant, dans la terre sauvage!28

Echoes of Lampman's strong indictment of city life are found in "Fierté." Ferland does not, however, sound the rallying cry of the naturalists for a general back-to-the-land movement. He searches only for the quiet places where he can be alone with nature and with his dreams:

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26 Ibid., Book III, "Fierté," p. 2.

27 Antoine-Joseph Jobin, Visages littéraires du Canada français, p. 100. (tr.)

28 Ferland, op. cit., Book II, p. 9.

Toi, mon âme, viens-t'en rêver parmi les monts!
A d'autres la mensonge et la gloire des villes!

. . . . . .

Viens-t'en! Allons ailleurs semer notre chanson,
Sortons du bruit, sortons de la foule méchante!
Mon âme, entrons chez nous, soyons où l'arbre chante,
Où le jour apparaît, puissant, à l'horizon.29

Ferland's scope was restricted. The Canadian winter, not often ignored by Canadian poets, seldom appears in his work. He makes no attempt to celebrate the full round of the seasons, a common theme for most nature poets. His forests seem to be devoid of animal life. Flowers receive scant attention from him for he is consistently the poet of the maples and birches. There is, however, at least one unusual note in the piece entitled "Les Ouaouarons" where the piping of the frogs evokes memories of the poet's boyhood:

Quand l'arbre enténébré dans les lacs semble choir,
Grenouilles que la mort des soleils fait poètes,
Vos chants, tels des adieux à la fuite du Soir,
Surgissent, solennels, au bord des eaux muettes.

. . . . . .

Comme un troupeau de boeufs, vers la chute du jour,
Emplit de beuglements le calme des prairies,
Vous avez, quand vient l'heure où l'âme aplus d'amour,
Peuplé de chants profonds mes jeunes rêveries.

Qu'ils sont lointains les soirs pensifs de mes douze ans,
Ces soirs dont la grandeur ont fait mon âme austère,
Ces soirs où vous chantiez, ouaouarons mugissants,
La douce majesté de la grise lumière!30

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29 Ibid., Book III, pp. 2,9.

30 Ibid., pp. 7-8.

The music of these stanzas is effective, especially in the onomatopoeia of "beuglements" and "ouaouarons mugissants." It should be noted, however, that this poem can be compared with Lampman's "The Frogs" only in respect to its recurring emphasis on dreams. There is little save dreamy recollections of past pleasures in Ferland's poem. Lampman draws from the same theme far more profound thoughts on the relationships between Nature and Man:

> Quaint uncouth dreamers, voices high and strange;
> . . . . . .
> Often to me who heard you in your day,
> With close rapt ears, it could not choose but seem
> That earth, our mother, searching in what way
> Men's hearts might know her spirit's inmost dream,
> Ever at rest beneath life's change and stir,
> Made you her soul, and bade you pipe for her.
> . . . . . .
>
> And slowly as we heard you, day by day,
> The stillness of enchanted reveries
> Bound brain and spirit and half-closed eyes,
> In some divine sweet wonder-dream astray;31

What Archibald MacMechan has written on Lampman's "The Frogs" could hardly be said of Ferland's "Les Ouaouarons": "He (Lampman) recognizes the quaintness, the melody and the eerie suggestion of the mysterious chorus, where the ordinary person is only conscious of ludicrous incongruity. It is no common talent which can transmute something like a national joke into pure poetry."32

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31 Archibald Lampman, Lyrics of Earth, p. 113.

32 Archibald MacMechan, Headwaters of Canadian Literature, p. 114.

It is not Ferland's choice of subject matter or his style but his unassailable optimism that sets him apart from his friends of the Montreal School. He has no neuroses to indulge, no sociological axe to grind, no philosophical ambitions. He is content to heed the call of his favorite poet, Alfred de Vigny, and walk through the fields, a flower in his hand, contemplating the beautiful scenery and sketching it with clear vision and a light touch. The title of his major work, Le Canada chanté, is perhaps misleading in that the book is not so much an exhaustive study of the poet's native land as it is a collection of picturesque sketches that are pleasing but devoid of localizing colour and line. Yet Ferland is the one poet of the Montreal School who consistently made an attempt to avoid the distracting influences from France and to be really Canadian in his portrayal of external nature. He follows the sound advice he himself gave to a fellow poet, Lionel Léveillé, in the preface to Léveillé's book Chemins de l'âme: "Celebrate your 'Laurentie.' The soul in you comes from her. Find again in your Canadian heart sincere and vibrant words to sing her beauty. Be faithful to her. Render her the homage of your noblest thoughts and your name shall be spoken with praise in our Canadian land."[33]

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33 Lionel Léveillé, Chemins de l'âme, p. 8. (tr.)

Albert Lozeau.34

Mon coeur est comme un grand paradis de délices
. . . . . .
Car la nature a mis en moi l'essentiel
Des plaisirs que je puis goûter et que j'envie:
C'est en moi que je sens mon bonheur et mon ciel.35

Albert Lozeau, the author of these lines, was the most remarkable figure in French Canadian poetry at the beginning of the present century. He was the French Lampman, with one great difference: he did not come into close personal contact with external nature. Nature had to come to him for he was an invalid most of his life, bedridden for nine years at the age when the majority of writers gain their formative education and experience. Nature came to him through his dreams:

Je prends ma part des pleurs et du rire des cieux,
Et, des matins bruyants aux soirs silencieux,
Je vis de ce que le jour m'abandonne de rêve;
. . . . . .
Car le rêve après lui nous laisse un souvenir
Que ne peuvent jamais entièrement ternir
Les longs ennuis du jour et les regrets de l'heure.36

In the introduction to this thesis it is suggested, perhaps a trifle facetiously, that nature in French Canadian poetry was a "fence-corner" nature. Albert Lozeau's poetry

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34 Albert Lozeau (1878-1924). Became bedridden at age of fourteen; partial recovery in 1901. Admitted to Ecole littéraire in 1903. Published works: L'Ame solitaire (1907), Le Miroir des Jours (1912), Lauriers et Feuilles d'érable (1916). Collected works published in 1926 in three volumes: L'Ame solitaire, Le Miroir des Jours, Les Images du pays.

35 Albert Lozeau, Le Miroir des jours, p. 210.

36 Albert Lozeau, L'Ame solitaire, p. xi.

constitutes a window-pane nature--and here no derogatory connotation is intended--which brings to Canadian literature something entirely new. An exile in his own room, Lozeau could see little of the outside world, yet this world was constantly in his thoughts and its beauties were revealed to him through reading and reverie. He did not know his country,

> Beau pays canadien, vieille terre française,
> Je voudrais te chanter, je ne te connais pas,

but, paradoxically, his country's literature gained thereby. In Lozeau the "vieille terre française" of his literary predecessors is replaced by a new land, the boundless land of the imagination. His work strikes a new note--a personal note that is more expressive of the poet's own self than the work of any of the members of the Quebec School or of his own contemporaries.

Lozeau's work is epitomized in the lines which preface his first book, L'Ame solitaire:

> En regardant le ciel, en poursuivant mon rêve,
> Qui vient, fuit et revient comme un flot sur la grève,
> En voyant un oiseau rayer l'horizon bleu,
> Une saison passer en nous disant adieu,
> J'écris mes vers, avec pour compagne, à la brune,
> Ma lampe, qui me fait de petits clairs de lune,
> Ou le matin, l'esprit reposé du sommeil,
> Lorsque par ma croisée entre un peu de soleil,
> J'écoute aller le temps de sa marche éternelle,
> Et je le suis comme un oiseau blessé d'une aile.
> Je songe à mon amie et je chante, tout bas,
> Sachant ainsi qu'Arvers, qu'on ne comprendrait pas...37

37 Ibid., p. ix.

Here in suggestive outlines can be seen the poet's whole personality and method. He watches the sky, catches the flash of a bird on the wing, senses the passing of the seasons, pursues his dream, turns his attention to little things--"petits clairs de lune," "un peu de soleil"--listens to the eternal march of time, and thinks of his beloved. There are many significant phrases in these few lines. For Canadian nature poetry the most significant is "lorsque par ma croisée entre un peu de soleil." For French Canadian poetry in general the words "je songe à mon amie" are of even greater import, for they herald something completely new, the poetry of love. A tabulation of the subject matter of French Canadian poetry of the nineteenth century would lead one to the rather startling conclusion that the tender passion was either unknown to, or at least ignored by the poets before Lozeau, but, since Lozeau's first love must remain outside the province of this study, only his second love, nature, is to be considered.

Lozeau's originality as a poet of nature lies in the narrowness of his scope rather than in its breadth. This limitation is represented by the word "croisée" in the lines just cited. As surely as Charles G. D. Roberts is characterized by "Tantramar" or Bliss Carman by "April," Albert Lozeau is characterized by "ma croisée" (my window). His bedroom window was the means whereby he maintained contact with the

things he loved. It appears throughout his work in lines such as:

> Par ma vitre embrasée où meurt le soleil rouge
> . . . . . .
> Je regards flamber sous l'azur fulgurant
> Un arbre dont la tête à demi-chauve bouge.
>
> Le crépuscule gris par ma vitre regarde.
>
> Les vitres ont des perles d'eau
> Rondes et pleines de lumières
> Qui fondent lentement derrière
> La mousseline des rideaux.

In spite of his limited view, however, Lozeau saw more, sensed more, and was inspired to write a greater volume of truly poetic lines on nature than any other poet of the Ecole littéraire de Montréal. This feat was accomplished through the depth of his feeling for the fundamentally beautiful in nature and through the power of his imagination. One cannot fail to recognize this depth and this power in the sonnet "Dans les bois":

> Je voudrais, dans les bois que l'automne dépouille
> Et par les tout petits sentiers capricieux,
> En un jour où l'azur unit la terre aux cieux,
> Marcher sur le tapis d'or flexible et de rouille.
> Je voudrais respirer la fleur que l'aube mouille,
> Dont le parfum se meurt, arome précieux;
> Une dernière fois, réjouir mes deux yeux
> Au flot clair de la source avant qu'il ne se brouille.
> Je voudrais m'en aller tout seul dans les forêts,
> Sous les arbres aux nids tristes d'adieux secrets,
> Dont les feuilles toujours tombent comme des larmes;
> Et là, jusqu'au délice et l'extase, goûter
> Dans la paix murmurante et profonde, les charmes
> De la mort magnifique et lente de l'été...[38]

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38 Lozeau, Le Miroir des jours, p. 65.

Lozeau is an artist with a light suggestive touch:

J'adore la nuance et le fin coloris.

He has a keen ear for music and an unerring sense of beauty. Even through the medium of his dreams he sees the beauty to be exploited in the colours, lights, shadows, and forms of the external world. He is the poet of "le petit tableau." His method is sketched in "Dédicace":

Avec des mots couleur du temps,
J'ai tâché de peindre les heures
Dans leurs tons les plus éclatants
Comme en leurs nuances mineures.

Voici des prés verts, un clocher,
Des fleurs, un pont, un grand lac même,
Un arbre sur l'onde penché,
Et voici de la neige blême.

Un chemin court entre les bois,
Une rivière luit et passe.
L'averse pleure sur les toits,
Puis, le soleil rit dans l'espace.

C'est un peu de ciel, un peu d'eau,
C'est un rayon qui se propage:
J'ai voulu qu'un petit tableau
Charmât les yeux de page en page.

Modestes croquis rehaussés
D'or, de bleu, de vert et de rose,
Qu'on vous offre les yeux baissés...
En vérité, c'est peu de chose.39

This is a modest prologue to a group of descriptive poems, as true as it is sincere. Though these poems do make up a charming "petit tableau" they cannot be dismissed as "a little thing" in the sum total of French Canadian poetry.

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39 Albert Lozeau, Les Images du pays, pp. 161-62.

Through the minutest of details that catch his eye as he watches at his window, Lozeau is able to share the intimate vibrations of the outside world. By examining these details and the impressions they make on him in the peace of his forced exile, he attempts to express the beauty which he feels rather than sees in nature. One of the best examples of this expression can be found in "Effets de neige et de givre":

> Par ces longs soirs d'hiver où, fatigués de livres,
> Les yeux suivent l'effet sur la vitre des givres
> Dessinant d'un pinceau lent et mystérieux,
> Sous l'inspiration des grands vents furieux,
> Des jardins, des forêts blanches et toujours calmes,
> De fantastiques fleurs et de bizarres palmes;
> Ces soirs-là, comparant l'ombre qui rôde en lui
> A la blanche splendeur des choses de la nuit,
> Le poète, isolé du monde, dans sa chambre,
> Rêve à la grande paix des tombes de Décembre,
> Et du linceul d'hermine amoncelé sans bruit,
> Qui, sous le ciel empli de clair de lune, luit.40

Here the frost, with its slow, mysterious brush, traces pictures of gardens, white forests, fantastic flowers, and weird shapes of palm trees. The white splendour of the night brings to the poet melancholy dreams of the dead December world beneath its shroud of snow. Commenting on this poem, Jeanne Paul-Crouzet has written: "Here is the real Lozeau . . . the sage through suffering. . . . He could give no better definition nor paint a more exact portrait of himself."41 The

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40 Lozeau, L'Ame solitaire, p. 118.

41 Jeanne Paul-Crouzet, Poésie au Canada, p. 148. (tr.)

frost-etched windowpane motif reappears in many effective lines such as the following:

> Les papillons de neige au coeur des fleurs de givre.
>
> Je te salue, ô Reine immaculée et fine.
> Tu t'es vue à ma vitre, et ma vitre en hommage
> A retenu captif ton radieux visage!

This window-frost aspect of nature seems generally to have been overlooked by the English poets of the period. The only pieces on this theme comparable with Lozeau's are found in Roberts' "The Frosted Pane," Lampman's "Winter," and D. C. Scott's "Frost Magic." Roberts' metaphor is intriguing but his lines have a rather grim connotation foreign to Lozeau's melancholy reverie:

> One night came Winter noiselessly, and leaned
> Against my window-pane.
> In the deep stillness of his heart convened
> The ghosts of all his slain.
>
> Leaves, and ephemera, and stars of earth,
> And fugitives of grass,--
> White spirits loosed from bonds of mortal birth,
> He drew them on the glass.[42]

Lampman has the closest parallel to Lozeau's presentation:

> And when night comes, his spirits with chill feet,
> Winged with white mirth and noiseless mockery,
> Across men's pallid windows peer and fleet,
> And smiling silverly
> Draw with mute fingers on the frosted glass
> Quaint fairy shapes of icèd witcheries,
> Pale flowers and glinting ferns and frigid trees
> And meads of mystic grass,
> Graven in many an austere phantasy.[43]

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42 Charles G. D. Roberts, Poems, p. 39.

43 Archibald Lampman, Lyrics of Earth, p. 97.

D. C. Scott's lines on the subject have a charm which captures the magic beauty of the frost in a poetic interpretation more satisfying than the others:

> Now, in the moonrise, from a wintry sky,
> The frost has come to charm with elfin might
> This quiet room; to draw with symbols bright
> Faces and forms of fairest charactery
> Upon the casement;
> . . . . . .
> With eerie power he piles his atomies,
> Incrusted gems, star-glances overborne
> With lids of sleep pulled from the moth's bright eyes,
> And forests of frail ferns, blanched and forlorn,
> Where Oberon of unimagined size
> Might in the silver silence wind his horn.[44]

If the French Canadian goes to Albert Ferland for his poetry of the trees, he will turn to Albert Lozeau for his poetry of the sky:

> Epris de beauté devant la nature,
> Vers le firmament je tourne les yeux;
> L'espace infini, la lumière pure
> Emeuvent le coeur d'un rythme joyeux.
>
> Et cette splendeur qui charme et console
> Par l'homme n'est pas regardée en vain:
> Le meilleur de lui dans l'azur s'envole
> Sur les ailes d'or d'un rêve divin![45]

The sky was closer to Lozeau than any other aspect of nature. Although nature as a whole reached the poet's page diffused or coloured by his dream, the sky did not. It was there just beyond his window at every hour in every season. Its reality

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44 Duncan Campbell Scott, Poems, p. 227.

45 Lozeau, Les Images du pays, "Sous le ciel," p. 181.

was the one thing he could grasp:

> Pas un nuage. Rien que les étoiles vagues,
> Aux feux atténués et doux de vieilles bagues.
> . . . . . .
> Les yeux ont leur musique et, dans le ciel profond,
> Ce sont les astres d'or et d'argent qui la font.
>
> J'écoutai très longtemps chanter le ciel splendide,
> Et puis, je m'endormis l'âme émue et candide...46

The communion of the poet's soul with the sky as he saw it from his window is revealed in almost all his poems. In the prologue to L'Ame solitaire cited earlier, the sky stands first, taking precedence even over his dream. His constant longing for the freedom of the open sky reaches its highest expression in "Nocturnes," where it is the substance of a personal tribute to the sky as the generous giver of the dreams that keep the heart alive:

> La nuit mystérieuse éveille en nous des rêves,
> De beaux rêves rêvés le long des jaunes grêves,
> Qui s'élèvent aux clairs de lune familiers
> Comme des papillons nocturnes par milliers.
>
> Mais le ciel nous les rend, le grand ciel magnanime,
> Car il sait que le coeur souvent le plus sublime
> Doit à quelque vieux rêve obstinément rêvé
> Sa force, et qu'il mourrait s'il en était privé.47

and in "L'Envolée," where it becomes the very life of the poet's soul:

> Dans ce ciel printanier, mon âme, ouvre tes ailes:
> La lumière est si douce et l'espace est si bleu!
> Sous le soleil, la neige éclate en étincelles,

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46 Lozeau, L'Ame solitaire, "La Musique des yeux," p. 59.

47 Ibid., p. 55.

Et l'eau vive est en feu!

Et mon âme est allée au ciel; mais, ô misère,
Elle en est revenue, et languit ici-bas!...
L'azur est à présent pour elle nécessaire:
Il lui faudrait monter et ne descendre pas![48]

Lozeau celebrates all the Canadian seasons. In each he finds stimuli for his dreams and, through their medium, inspiration for his poems. Part II of L'Ame solitaire, entitled "La Chanson des mois," is a collection of his best pieces on the passing seasons. A list of the thirty-five titles in this group would present a striking parallel to similar groupings in the works of Lampman and Carman. Although Lozeau could not walk with Lampman through the harvest fields or hike over the New England hills with Carman, his imagination made him one of their company. His response to the spring season is not as exuberant as Carman's. It is the response of the passive dreamer, for, no matter how much he may share the feeling Carman expresses in "The Pensioners,"

Until her April train goes by,
And then because we are the kin
Of every hill flower on the hill
We must arise and walk therein.

Because her heart as our own heart,
Knowing the same wild upward stir,
Beats joyward by eternal laws,
We must arise and go with her;[49]

he can be one of the gay company only in his dreams. He is

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48 Lozeau, Les Images du pays, p. 169.

49 Bliss Carman, Poems, p. 8.

Spring's solitary pensioner:

> Aux mois fleuris, Avril, tu prépares la terre,
> Et ta venue est douce au coeur du solitaire.
> Tu prolonges les soirs de rêve . . .50

But even from his window he can delight in the coming of the leaves:

> Aux jours du renouveau mon âme se recueille,
> Et je chante, inspiré par la douceur de l'air,
> La gloire des premières feuilles.51

and the flowers:

> Fleurs des champs, fleurs des bois, riches fleurs des jardins,
> Splendide floraison: velours, tulles, satins;
> Humbles fleurs qui croissez au bord des grandes routes,
> Fleurs indigentes qui bientôt vous fânez toutes;
> . . . . . .
> C'est la saison! Ne nous laissez pas dans la peine:
> Sans couleurs, sans parfums, qu'est l'existence humaine?52

Lozeau would find a more congenial companion in Lampman than in Carman, for late autumn is his favorite time of year. The autumn scene reflects his inherent melancholy mood. Lozeau's best lines are to be found in his many poems on the various aspects of this season, for he is actually happiest when contemplating the sombre tones of the autumn sky and landscape:

> J'ai vainement lutté contre ton charme, Automne:
> A ton impérieux attrait je m'abandonne.
> J'ai cru que je n'avais qu'à te fermer mon coeur

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50 Lozeau, Le Miroir des jours, "Avril," p. 11.

51 Ibid., "Les Feuilles," p. 15.

52 Ibid., "Aux fleurs," p. 20.

Pour me soustraire aux doux péril de la langueur,
Mais ta beauté sereine à jamais me possède,
Et pareil à la feuille au vent puissant, je cède...
. . . . . .
Je ne repousse plus, je subis et j'appelle
Ton influence étrange, ô Saison la plus belle.53

The poet's autumn pieces provide many examples of his ability to match tone, subject, and mood, as in "Heure d'automne":

Interminablement, en file monotone,
Passent par le ciel froid les nuages d'automne.
. . . . . .
Comme ce lourd nuage, une heure lente passe,
Une heure qui se traîne et dont le coeur est las,
Sombre, dolente et morne, et qui ne finit pas.54

and in "Effet d'automne":

L'heure est grise. Le vent, chargé de feuilles mortes,
Entre par la fenêtre et fait battre la porte.

Le crépuscule vient, brun dans le gris des heures.
La lampe se reflète aux vitres des demeures.

Et parfois on entend les doux bruits misérables
Que dans leur chute, font les feuilles des érables . . .55

"Dans la montagne" is the choicest of Lozeau's pieces on autumn. Here the glory of the Canadian autumn can be seen through the eyes of the poet. The joys of a peaceful contemplation of one of Canadian nature's most beautiful phases are expressed in words that bring the reader close to the poet's heart:

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53 Ibid., "Apologie à l'automne," p. 85.

54 Lozeau, Les Images du pays, p. 245.

55 Lozeau, Le Miroir des jours, p. 68.

La montagne, en octobre, est somptueuse et douce.
Un désir d'air sylvestre et de beauté m'y pousse.
J'adore la nuance et le fin coloris.
L'arbre m'est un plaisir constant: je l'ai compris.
L'ambre luit, l'incarnat magnifique flamboie,
Toutes les teintes font comme un grand feu de joie!
Quand un souffle furtif passe dans le soleil,
Ah! le frémissement de l'arbre est sans pareil!
Rien n'est plus merveilleux, rien n'est plus beau sur
terre
Qu'un érable d'automne en un champ, solitaire!
Et la mélancolie auguste de nos bois
Qui par leurs arbres chers, pleurent tous à la fois!...
Si vous voulez qu'un jour votre âme se recueille,
Allez vous promener aux chemins où la feuille
Tombe, comme un oiseau sans ailes, sous vos pas.
Regardez, c'est divin! Ne vous arrêtez pas.
Et songez, en errant longtemps à l'aventure,
Comme est diverse et belle et simple la Nature.[56]

No one but a true lover of nature could have written of the autumn with such depth of feeling. No one but a true Canadian could have said:

Rien n'est plus merveilleux, rien n'est plus beau sur
terre
Qu'un érable d'automne en un champ, solitaire!

Gonzalve Desaulniers.[57] Gonzalve Desaulniers was one of the founders of the Ecole littéraire de Montréal. A successful and highly respected judge, he is one of the best representatives of that rather small group of French Canadian professional men who have also been cultivated men of letters. One of the most active as well as erudite members of the Ecole

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56 Ibid., p. 76.

57 Gonzalve Desaulniers (1863-1934). Lawyer and judge. Became member of Ecole littéraire in 1898, president in 1910. Poems published in 1930 under title Les Bois qui chantent.

littéraire, he often led the group in study and discussion. He was elected president of the organization in 1910, and it was he who as late as 1933 brought together the scattered remnants of the group for informal meetings at his home. Desaulniers evinced no desire to rush into print; he was sixty-seven when he published his book of poems, Les Bois qui chantent. The long period of preparation for this publication was well spent, for Les Bois qui chantent attests one of Desaulniers' major qualities: he was a writer of technically flawless verse.

Desaulniers differs from Charles Gill in that he was neither a philosopher nor a painter. Nor was he a maker of new and startling poetic images like Emile Nelligan. He belongs rather to the company of Ferland and Lozeau, but he was superior to them for he combined their best qualities as interpreters of nature.

The title of Les Bois qui chantent is well chosen: Desaulniers is first and last a musician. The verbal harmonies of this book make him the outstanding lyric poet of his generation. In Charles Gill's word paintings the sense of sight is all-important; with Desaulniers hearing predominates. Harmony of sound rather than novelty of image or style was Desaulniers' principal aim. The harmonies nature brings to him are both objective and subjective. He understands the silences of the woods and interprets the unspoken language of

nature:

> Je vais au bois parmi mes compagnes, les branches.
> Les arbres sont de vieux amis et j'ai pour eux
> L'amour qu'ont les enfants pour l'aïeule aux mains
> blanches,
> Qui les endort avec des mots mystérieux.
>
> Je les connais, je sais leurs noms et leurs usages.
> Ils sont doux au rêveur comme ils le sont aux nids
> Quand l'ombre de leurs troncs patinés par les âges
> Rappelle les oiseaux que l'hiver a bannis.
>
> Je leur parle et ma voix humaine les enchante.
> Ils me répondent par des sons que je comprends
> Car le vent qui parfois dans leurs ramures chante
> N'est que l'écho profond de leurs coeurs délirants.[58]

In "Le Silence des bois" the poet expresses a fervent piety that brings him very close to God in nature:

> Le silence des bois m'attire, je voudrais
> Sans regret ni désir, sans joie et sans pensée,
> Simplement, comme une ombre à jamais effacée,
> Me résorber dans ce silence des forêts;
>
> Mêler mon âme éparse à l'âme de la sève,
> N'être plus qu'un reflet qui nage sur les eaux,
> Murmurer comme font la branche et les roseaux
> Ou comme fait le vent qui rôde sur la grève;
>
> Dans l'orme, le bouleau, la source et le ravin,
> Recevoir la caresse immense de la vie,
> Et rejoindre, animant la matière asservie,
> Le principe éternel dans l'atome divin.[59]

The theme of this poem parallels exactly the theme of man's kinship with nature which appears so often in Carman's spring songs and especially in "Resurgam," where he says:

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58 Gonzalve Desaulniers, Les Bois qui chantent, "Sous les branches," p. 188.

59 Ibid., p. 127.

Every follower of beauty
Finds in the spring solitude
Sanctuary and persuasion
Where the mysteries still brood.

. . . . . .

Seeing how each new fulfilment
Issues at the call of need
From infinitudes of purpose
In the core of soul and seed,
Who shall set the bounds of puissance
Or the formulas of creed?

. . . . . .

Therefore, give thy spring renascence,--

. . . . . .

So shalt thou, absorbed in beauty,
Even in this mortal clime
Share the life that is eternal,[60]

Desaulniers' theme is also an echo of Roberts' "O Solitary of the Austere Sky":

> O Solitary of the austere sky,
> . . . . . .
> How small am I in thine august regard!
> Invisible,--and yet I know my worth!
> When comes the hour to break this prisoning shard,
> And reunite with Him that breathed me forth,
> Then shall this atom of the Eternal Soul
> Encompass thee in its benign control![61]

Desaulniers is sensitive not only to the silences of the forest but also to its voices. He has a keen ear for the sounds of nature and a notable skill in their reproduction. In all his nature pieces there is a greater emphasis on sound

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60 Bliss Carman, Poems, pp. 221,223.

61 Charles G. D. Roberts, Poems, p. 69.

than on colour or form. Outstanding examples of the poet's predilection for sound and harmony appear in the following excerpts:

> Je fais un lit de mousse aux sources paresseuses
> Qui coulent des sommets, limpides et frileuses,
> Et dont les gazouillis, au milieu des ormeaux,
> Ont la grâce des sons et la saveur des mots.
> . . . . . .
> Je sens autour de moi que la forêt frissonne
> Sous l'averse des feux stellaires; je frémis
> D'entendre par moment dans les bois rendormis,
> Où rien ne vole, où rien ne bouge, où rien ne rôde,
> Le hurlement des grands carnassiers en maraude.
> (Lettre de la montagne, p. 27.)

> Les ailes s'agitaient partout sous les feuillées,
> Prélude vague encor des concerts infinis
> Qui montent le matin des sources et des nids.
> (Le Pardon des bois, p. 103.)

> Je lui dis: "Descendons sur la grève, le vent,
> Dont le golfe apaisé s'effarouche souvent,
> Ce soir nous vient du large avec des voix plus douces
> Que les chuchotements des ruisseaux sur les mousses."
> . . . . . .
> J'entendis que chantaient tout près de moi les vagues:
> Chacune me jetait en déferlant son mot
> Dans ce colloque étroit de la terre et du flot.
> Oh! qui pourra jamais en traits ineffaçables,
> Sur la page mouvante et fragile des sables
> Fixer les rimes d'or du poème éternel
> Que dit le vent, qu'écrit la mer, que fait le ciel!
> (Les Voix du golfe, pp. 137 ff.)

"Paysage" is perhaps the best example of Desaulniers' descriptive style:

> C'est une fin d'après-midi, septembre dore
> Le rideau du sapin et le fût du bouleau,
> Et l'air, glorifiant l'érable qu'il mordore,
> Fait la défeuillaison qui glisse au fil de l'eau.
>
> Dans l'entonnoir créé par les formes hautaines
> Des monts dont le versant ruisselle de clartés

Le lac s'immobilise et les boeufs dans les plaines
Regardent le couchant de leurs yeux attristés.

Une douceur partout sur les coteaux circule:
L'écho prolonge au loin la plainte des oiseaux,
Et la forêt qui s'offre aux feux du crépuscule
Se couvre des vapeurs qui montent des roseaux.62

In the soft, sweet music of these lines, the minimum of picturesque detail, and the emphasis on light and sound rather than contour and colour, lies the essence of the poet's descriptive art. Desaulniers' vague, impressionistic style is far removed from the Hugoesque epic strain and grandiose imagery of Crémazie and Fréchette, the first French Canadian romanticists. With Desaulniers romanticism ends its gamut; he exploits the one remaining vein, that of Lamartine. He is in many respects the Canadian Lamartine, his best pieces being reminiscent of Les Méditations. Like Lamartine he is above all a physical communicant of external nature, one who finds in the subtle intimacies that exist between natural phenomena and the state of his soul his strongest inspiration to lyric flight.

Desaulniers frequently underlines the kinship he feels with nature:

C'est l'heure où mon esprit se raccroche à la terre;
Où la nature n'offre à l'homme aucun mystère;
. . . . . .
Ce que l'âme a de grave en elle et de profond
A l'âme qui jaillit des choses correspond.
Moments délicieux et qui font que l'on prie

62 Desaulniers, op. cit., pp. 133-34.

Avec la piété des fleurs dans la prairie.
Viens, mon ami, goûter ces moments merveilleux
. . . . . .
Tu sentiras en toi l'évanouissement
Des soucis et des deuils descendre infiniment.63

But this is a purely physical communion; he does not search for the deeper meanings of things and sensations. The last two lines of "Le Silence des bois,"

Et rejoindre, animant la matière asservie,
Le principe éternel dans l'atome divin.

carry the only hint of cosmic philosophy in his work. The absence of any profound philosophy is the one lacuna which keeps Desaulniers from being completely akin to Lampman, Carman, and Roberts.

Desaulniers descends directly from Pamphile Lemay and Nérée Beauchemin, who made the first tentative approach to a subjective interpretation of nature. Lemay and Beauchemin set out to discover the secret and marvellous relationships that exist between external nature and the soul of the artist. Desaulniers completed this voyage of discovery and left an enduring record of what he found. Desaulniers does not stand and gaze upon nature in simple adoration as did Albert Ferland. Nor is his reaction like Lozeau's, a continuous dream evocation. He is all feeling. As he contemplates a scene he feels himself in the centre of things and is able to translate this feeling into poetry. Nowhere is this

63 Ibid., "Lettre de la montagne," pp. 28-29.

essentially romantic interpretation of nature more in evidence than in the poem "Vita et Mors," where the poet dwells on the main theme of Lamartinian lyricism: the eternal sense of life and death. Here is Desaulniers at his best:

> Ce matin un brouillard plus léger s'insinue
> Qui, montant de la mer, voile à peine la nue,
> Et je descends, dans une hâte d'y courir,
> Sur la grève où le flot lentement vient mourir.
> Les dernières lueurs de l'aube se dispersent.
> Pendant qu'à tournoyer de grands oiseaux s'exercent
> En poussant vers le ciel moins rouge un cri perçant
> Qui vient rompre le rythme étrange du jusant;
> Pendant qu'à l'horizon où git la nuit sereine,
> Par une déchirure énorme et souveraine
> L'astre du jour éclate et vient teindre d'or pur
> Dans ce décor mouvant le rideau de l'azur.
>
> Je laisse ma pensée errer, libre et ravie,
> Et je goûte le sens éternel de la vie.
>
> Ce soir la brise tiède expire. La forêt
> Tressaille mollement et repose; on dirait
> Que lasse de jaser avec le vent qui passe
> Elle entend son manteau de feuilles dans l'espace
> Pour mieux dormir et mieux étouffer tous les bruits
> Qu'avivent les matins et qu'éteignent les nuits.
> Et pendant qu'adossée à la montagne sombre
> Elle se diminue encore dans cette ombre,
> Effaçant peu à peu les ultimes reflets
> Que le jour disparu retient sur les sommets;
> Pendant que de partout le silence dilue
> Les choses autour d'elle où plus rien ne remue,
>
> Un frisson me secoue, aigu comme un remords,
> Et j'éprouve le sens éternel de la mort.[64]

64 Ibid., pp. 39-40.

CONCLUSION

The poets who followed the School of Roberts began to fill in gaps which were becoming more and more apparent in English Canadian poetry. The trend was away from the untroubled contemplation of the Canadian landscape toward a more intense and often troubled preoccupation with Canadian life. The poets of the 'Nineties, in the words of E. J. Pratt, "went after Nature in dead earnest until by the time they had finished with her there wasn't a recess or a ligament of her anatomy left unexplored."[1] It remained for the poets of the next generation to "go after" more vital facets of the human part of the Canadian scene. Pratt himself has been a leader in this movement. "Pratt has rejuvenated our poetry; a Canadian Masefield has enriched its vocabulary. He has reformed it by turning it away from wilted, sentimental flower-gardens, by overcoming its soft femininity, by restoring its pulse with tonic realism and inebriating fun. If a newer generation of poets, reared in a tempest, render homage to Pratt while refusing Lampman and Pickthall, it is because of his heroic imagination and his grip on life."[2]

Similarly, in the French camp there was a fresh call

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1 E. J. Pratt, "Canadian Poetry--Past and Present," University of Toronto Quarterly, 8:5, October, 1938.

2 W. E. Collin, The White Savannahs, p. 144.

to arms, but the ensuing attack was headed in the opposite direction. The call was to pick up the challenge of the critics who were demanding that more attention be given to the beauties of Canadian nature and less to traditional racial and religious themes. A new group of regionalist poets, L'Ecole du Terroir, led by Blanche Lamontagne and Robert Choquette, rallied to this call. As with the English poets there was also a trend, begun by Albert Lozeau and led by Paul Morin and René Chopin, toward psychological expression and the poetry of the heart.

In retrospect, the main trends of Canadian nature poetry of the nineteenth century present a strange coincidence: the two bodies of poetic expression, English and French, appear not as separate entities but as two faces of one and the same coin. During the last two decades of the century a national consciousness was making itself felt through English Canadian nature poetry. This national consciousness was a by-product of an artistically adequate painting of the Canadian landscape in terms of emotional experience. Conversely, in the French Canadian poetry of the same period, what there was of natural description and interpretation--artistically inadequate in comparison--was the by-product of the creation and preservation, through literature, of a national consciousness.

In a comparative study involving different languages

it is easier to define parallels and contrasts in content and trend than to assess artistic values. The success of a bilingual comparison is to a great extent in direct proportion to the degree of the reader's familiarity with the languages used. Translation is of little help. In a slavish translation much of the artistic worth of the original is lost; a truly artistic translation becomes more the expression of a similarly gifted and inspired writer than the expression of the author. For these reasons, then, the success of a work such as this must depend more on its historical than on its critical values. Consequently, the main purpose of this thesis has been to inform rather than to persuade.

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