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**Re-viewing the Cultural Landscape:**

**Representations of Land in  
Ralph Connor, Tom Thomson, the Group of Seven, and Emily Carr**

**By  
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**Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfilment of the Doctoral program for the Department of English.**

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**Abstract**

**The elaboration in recent cultural and art historical texts of Northrop Frye's assessment of Canadian literature (as articulated in his "Conclusion" to *A Literary History of Canada* and elsewhere) demonstrates that such concepts as "garrison mentality" and "where is here?" persist in the discourse of English-Canadian cultural studies. One result is the insistence upon regarding representations of land in early twentieth-century artistic endeavours as the manifestation of a colonial response and refusal to accommodate place. Another result is the perception that artists of the early twentieth century were attached to the imperial centre, situated outside the borders of the country, "over there."**

**The work of Ralph Connor, Tom Thomson, the Group of Seven, and Emily Carr demonstrates that Frye's and other critical assessments have been too prescriptive: even if these artists employed some European or Old World conventions, they insisted upon Canada's difference from the imperial centre and were proud of that difference. A re-examination of their work demonstrates how they employed land in the construction of national-identity and believed it to be a benevolent rather than hostile force, a source of a spiritual and transcendent experience that resulted in the conversion to Canadian-ness.**

## **Abbreviations**

### **i) Ralph Connor**

*Black Rock: A Tale of the Selkirks* (1898) - BR  
*Corporal Cameron of the North West Mounted Police: A Tale of the MacLeod* (1912) - CC  
*The Foreigner: A Tale of Saskatchewan* (1909) - TF  
*The Major* (1917) - TM  
*The Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail* (1914) - PSDT  
*Postscript to Adventure: Autobiography of Ralph Connor* (1938) - PA  
*The Rebel Loyalist* (1935) - RL  
*The Sky Pilot: A Tale of the Foothills* (1899) - SP  
*The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land* (1919) - SPN  
*Torches Through the Bush* (1935) - TTB

### **ii) Group of Seven**

A.Y. Jackson, *A Painter's Country: The Autobiography of A.Y. Jackson* (1976) - PC

### **iii) Emily Carr**

*The Book of Small* (1942) - BS  
*Growing Pains: An Autobiography* (1946) - GP  
*Klee Wyck* (1941) - KW  
*Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr* (1966) - HT

### **iv) Research and Archival Facilities**

National Archives of Canada, Ottawa - NAC  
National Gallery of Canada Archives, National Gallery of Canada Fonds, Ottawa - NG  
The McMichael Canadian Art Collection Archives, Kleinburg - MCAC  
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Edward P. Taylor Research Library and Archives - AGO  
Elizabeth Dafoe Library, University of Manitoba - EDL

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## **Foreword**

**Employing the works of Ralph Connor, Tom Thomson, the Group of Seven and Emily Carr, this study demonstrates that Northrop Frye's assertions in relation to English-Canadian artistic endeavours – and the elaboration of those assertions in recent English-Canadian cultural criticism – are too prescriptive and radically simplify a diverse body of work. Making specific reference to these artists, he argues that these endeavours are plagued by a yearning for the imperial centre, a sense of disorientation, and fear of the “wilderness,” which results in “garrison mentality.”**

**The first chapter provides a brief introduction to the critical work of both Frye and to the perpetuation of his ideas as it appears in the work of such contemporary adherents as Ian Angus, Margaret Atwood, William Closson James, and Gaile MacGregor and demonstrates that, conversely, some artists regarded the land as a spiritually-reforming entity rather than as a source of terror that was not regenerative, and used it thus in early twentieth-century English-Canadian cultural texts. In the context of the aesthetic category of the sublime, especially the manner in which it is adapted in Canada, landscape might be regarded as a way of resisting rather than adopting wholesale those conventions, techniques, and cultural forms that related to both writing and painting and that were imported from Europe. Tracing its historical and social usage in European history, this study shows how the underpinnings of the genre were not only material or economic, as many critics suggest, but also spiritual and religious. The spiritual dimensions of landscape, especially in nation-building discourse, are underscored by the fact that the nation-state evolved from the dynastic system: while the “contents” of the latter system altered, the structure remained intact, and, in the process, an ideal that invited an experience of transcendence**

continued to be upheld.

The second chapter examines the fiction of Ralph Connor and the manner in which his works might be seen as both informed by and resistant to imperial narratives. The structure of his novels, on the one hand, might resemble that of the traditional historical romance, but, on the other hand, their content and, specifically, the emphasis on the particularity of Canadian geography suggest that Connor was determined to construct a national literature and to demonstrate how land elicited a spiritual reaction that fostered a distinctly Canadian character and, more largely, a nation.

The third chapter examines how the canvases of Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven were thought to reflect their faith in Canadian land and nature – their canvases were “testimony” of that faith. These artists spent time in the outdoors in order to foster an indigenous (as distinct from imported) art and to respond directly to the spiritual influence nature was thought to possess. They believed that they would transfer that “influence” to their audience: two aspects of the notion of “witnessing” thus become relevant, since Group members not only believed they were seeing the greatness of Canada as manifested in the land, but also that their canvases would communicate with and convert their audience.

The final chapter considers both the paintings and writings of Emily Carr, initially regarded as a “disciple” of the Group, but then as an artist who surpassed their efforts. Carr believed that the Canadian West Coast contained a spiritual essence, which she endeavoured to capture in her canvases and which she believed fostered the quintessential Canadian temperament as distinct from someone who was English. Her consuming passion for Western forests is manifested in her writings and her paintings and proves that some English-Canadian artists did not regard land as hostile “wilderness.”

## **Chapter One: Finding Common Ground**

**The desire to represent a new kind of world is not only theological: it is a problem for art.  
- Glenn Willmott, Introduction to Bertram Brooker's *Think of the Earth*, xvii**

**If the pattern of English-Canadian cultural criticism is any indication, an examination of landscape as it is figured in the discourse of English-Canadian national identity and the fiction and visual arts of early twentieth-century English-Canada would be incomplete – cannot begin – without addressing the question Northrop Frye posed, “Where is here?,” especially in relation to colonizing forces. He first articulated this dilemma in his “Conclusion” to Carl Klinck’s *Literary History of Canada* (1965):**

**[The] foreshortening of Canadian history, if it really does have any relevance to Canadian culture, would account for many features of it: its fixation on its own past, its penchant for old-fashioned literary techniques, its preoccupation with the theme of strangled articulateness. It seems to me that Canadian sensibility has been profoundly disturbed, not so much by our famous problem of identity, important as that is, as by a series of paradoxes in what confronts that identity. It is less perplexed by the question “Who am I?” than by some such riddle as “Where is here?” (826)**

**This question, as Julia Kristeva considers in *Powers of Horror* (1982), is posed by the exile who becomes more preoccupied with a sense of self-orientation—or disorientation—in a specific**

context rather than with a sense of self-identity: "Instead of sounding himself as to his 'being,' he does so concerning his place" (8). Following the critical steps of E.K. Brown (1943), who complained that "most Canadians continue to be culturally colonial, that they set their great good place somewhere beyond their own borders" (18), Frye argued that English-Canadian cultural endeavours suffered as a result of such disorientation and were colonial in approach, that is, they hearkened back and were subservient to imperial Britain for artistic standards: the lack of familiarity with "here" was purportedly exacerbated by a clinging to the imperial centre "over there."<sup>1</sup>

Frye's interpretive lens is applied broadly in relation to the arts in general, and thus, in *The Bush Garden* (1971), he also delineates the painter Tom Thomson as affected by the hostility of the Canadian wilderness, so much so that he is apparently incapable of becoming "integrated" with his subject matter:

the incubus is there, in the twisted stumps and sprawling rocks, the strident colouring, the scarecrow evergreens. In several pictures one has the feeling of something not quite emerging which is all the more sinister for its concealment. The metamorphic stratum is too old: the mind cannot contemplate the azoic without turning it into the monstrous. But that is of minor importance. What is essential in Thomson is the imaginative instability, the emotional unrest and dissatisfaction one feels about a country which has not been lived in: the tension between the mind and a surrounding not integrated with it. ("Canadian and Colonial Painting" 200)

He argues that Thomson's paintings reflect his artistic inhibitions, his sense of restlessness and dislocation, his unfamiliarity with Canadian landscape, and his reluctance to come to terms with

it: this reading is odd when one considers the general objectives and high-flown patriotic rhetoric which both Thomson and the Group of Seven, his followers and champions, employed. Yet Matthew Teitelbaum, among other critics, concurs and claims that, for the Group and Thomson alike, the struggle was to achieve “triumph in the midst of a rugged and hostile nature” (74). Frye suggests more largely that English-Canadian artistic practice has been governed by preoccupation with the “hostile” wilderness and has resulted in, as he terms it, “garrison mentality” and a need to dominate the wilderness (1982, 49); he adds that such practice would have been better served if the question that had been posed was “Who am I?” rather than, as Frye seems to suggest, the more inferior, if not spurious, “Where is here?”

The pattern of English-Canadian cultural criticism for much of the late twentieth century indicates that this same question became almost a perennial concern. Among others, D.G. Jones (*Butterfly on Rock* [1970]), Gaile McGregor (*The Wacousta Syndrome* [1985]),<sup>2</sup> and Margaret Atwood (*Survival* [1972] and *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* [1995])<sup>3</sup> have engaged in such colonial finger-pointing by entertaining how the question and the concomitant belief in nature as “monstrous” reflect the intellectual and cultural preoccupations of English-Canadian artists.<sup>4</sup> When Canadian landscape and nature are seen as menace, then “garrison mentality” and “survival” become key in the rhetoric of English-Canadian identity and English-Canadian writing: for Frye, “a sense of meditative shock [is] produced by the intrusion of the natural world into the imagination,” a shock with which the artist must contend or against which he or she must defend him/herself (49). Similarly, McGregor asserts that the common characteristics of Canadian land as depicted in painting and writing include its “harsh and threatening aspects” and “the inevitability of man’s *defeat* by the land” (38, 60). As Helen Buss argues, “the elaboration of Frye’s garrison mentality has also

become, with McGregor's study, a big stick critics may wield to beat any writer whose reaction to the Canadian landscape is anything less than traumatic" (1990, 125).

The critical elaboration of Frye's notions regarding a hostile wilderness, bewildered artists, and second-rate art appears in recent English-Canadian cultural or art historical criticism, rather than in literary criticism, especially in relation to the artists being studied: Ralph Connor, Tom Thomson, the Group of Seven, and Emily Carr. In *Carr, O'Keeffe, Kahlo: Places of Their Own* (2000), Sharyn Rohlfen Udall consolidates Frye's notions, quotes him at length, and asserts that "[i]n Canada nature is formidable; the individual has always contended with its power as a determinant of his or her own place in the world" (43). She adds that "Canadian nature is more than overwhelming; it is monstrous, terrifying" (43). Similarly, Ian Angus in *A Border Within: National Identity, Cultural Plurality, and Wilderness* (1997) argues:

[T]his limitless outward rush into the wilderness does not really embrace the wilderness itself. Since the wilderness does not sustain humans in its present form, the outward rush has also meant a domination of the wilderness, a taming, a turning it back into "Europe," that is, civilization. What is new thus escapes articulation since the cultural means of expression itself draws experience back into inherited European forms. [. . .] Life at the frontier consists in escaping civilized constraints in the very moment that one recreates them. (128)

Angus, like Frye and Atwood, predicates his argument on the assumption that the wilderness is "other," that "we have been dominated by fear of the wilderness," that integration is impossible, and that conquering the landscape is thus rendered necessary (125).<sup>5</sup> Yet the "outward rush" does not necessarily translate into an act of domination as much as what Homi Bhabha would

refer to as negotiation.<sup>6</sup> Although the centre-periphery dynamic between civilization/city and “wilderness,” one variation of how landscape is perceived and represented, may have been inherited from European civilization and adopted in English-Canadian cultural forms, Canadian wilderness was sometimes regarded as a *civilizing force*, not as a *force to be civilized*.<sup>7</sup> Neither was the wilderness, as Heather Murray suggests, consistently seen as either “useless in its raw state” or “beautiful, and inspirational in that beauty” (78).<sup>8</sup> At times, it was a source of inspiration in its raw, intact state: as a result, the wilderness and civilization are not, as Angus observes, always in the kind of “antithetical relationship” in which the former “must be conquered and replaced by [the latter]” (132).

One can easily locate the origins of Angus’s ideas in the work of Frye, who sees nature as a source of “deep terror,” and who argues that “the human mind has nothing but human and moral values to cling to if it is to preserve its integrity or even its sanity, yet the vast unconsciousness of nature in front of it seems an unanswerable denial of those values” (1965, 830). As Frye describes it, the Canadian “environment [is] terrifyingly cold, empty and vast, where the obvious and immediate sense of nature is the late Romantic one, increasingly affected by Darwinism, of nature red in tooth and claw” (843). In *Locations of the Sacred: National Identity, Cultural Plurality, and Wilderness* (1998), William Closson James explains that, in North America, nature was perceived with horror not only because of such Darwinian notions, but also because of the Christian ideological inheritance of the Western world and the corresponding sense of “horror of the sacred in nature”: as a result, nature is “less impressive than oppressive” (James 64; Frye 1977, 29).

Such a response to the wilderness is not regarded as solitary in contributing to the formation of English-Canadian artistic endeavours. Frye, like James after him, argues that,

conversely, the value systems perpetuated by religious institutions were also pivotal: “The churches not only influenced the cultural climate but took an active part in the production of poetry and fiction, as the popularity of Ralph Connor reminds us” (1965, 832).<sup>9</sup> “Religion,” as Frye perceives it, was probably of the organized kind (James 2): a heavily Protestant, and, in Connor’s case, Presbyterian, mindset affected the function and shaping of artistic endeavours in English Canada. Natural imagery, as he also believes, was sacrificed for didacticism and poetic achievements were neglected for rhetorical arguments, which “with sharp cutting edges [. . .] help to clarify one’s view of the landscape” (832). Herein Frye, making explicit reference to the Group of Seven, envisioned a conflict, as manifested in both English-Canadian writing and painting, “between the poetic impulse to construct and the rhetorical impulse to assert” (834). Since, for Frye, the rhetorical impulse seemed to prevail, the growth of art prior to his writing of the “Conclusion” was thwarted. He notes that the result is a tendency in English-Canadian cultural forms toward “the nostalgia for a world of peace and protection, with a spontaneous response to the nature around it”: this tendency is part of a “pastoral myth, the vision of a social ideal” (1965, 840).

Whatever line of argument taken, these critics consistently concur in their view that landscape and nature as depicted in English-Canadian artistic endeavours was not a source of spiritual nourishment, but either morally confounding, that is, “the poet is [confronted with] a moral silence deeper than any physical silence,” or inhibiting, restrictive of any true sense of cultural growth (Frye 1965, 843).

Europeans encountered a place where they did not belong, where the technologies that had been developed to dominate nature came up against an ongoing vastness. Taming the wilderness was not only a necessity, but became a

moral project. [. . .] The absence of belonging, of origin, unleashed, a wildness, a madness, an intuition of the arbitrariness of all organization and goals. (Angus 126)

James concurs and suggests that this desire to “tame the wilderness” resulted in one of two responses, both of which are founded upon the principle of “othering”: “we recoil before, or attempt to conquer, an indifferent and hostile nature” or, since the natural world creates a “meditative shock,” “the individual makes an alliance with nature against society” (67).

Neither response involves full integration with nature and society; neither suggests how natural imagery was not sacrificed for didacticism, but a function of it; and neither suggests how land was seen as the source, not denial of, moral values.

Such critical assertions as Frye’s, or James’s, or Angus’s, or, specifically, McGregor’s fallacious argument that “there is plenty of evidence in the Canadian corpus to suggest that our national response to the environment *has* been almost completely negative” are inconsistent with some earlier views of nature and radically simplify the heterogeneity of English-Canadian artistic endeavours (10).<sup>10</sup> For some artists of the English-Canadian modern period, which typically involves belief in progress, technical innovation, and control over material nature, landscape was seen as a positive focus of attention, even when it was configured as “wilderness” rather than the city or industrial Canada: it was seen both as a unifying principle – and as such, it occupied a function that would normally be that of the state’s in the nation-state – and as a transcendent and morally uplifting rather than inhibiting force. If these configurations of landscape were being shaped by a religious impulse, although not necessarily by religious principles, it should be noted that the anticipated conversion was not to a specific religion with a particular ideological framework as much as it was to a national ideal, even as religious

impulses fed into that ideal.<sup>11</sup> For some artists, Canadian geography and the natural elements were seen as the source of the superiority of English-Canadian character (in contrast with both British and American character) that would in turn contribute to a superior nation.

An examination of the work of the writers and artists being studied – Ralph Connor, Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven, and Emily Carr – demonstrates that they were not interested in “taming” the wilderness, but that they perceived landscape in its intact state as containing a spiritual force and as contributing to the moral development of character. As the writings of Connor, the Group of Seven, and Carr demonstrate, Frye’s prescriptive description of landscape as either a source of terror and thus stifling or as part of a pastoral myth with its corresponding sense of nostalgia does not support how land was sometimes described as spiritually transformative in function and regarded as essential to the creation of a distinct, national character. Canadian topography, especially northern and sometimes western Canada, was not seen by the artists being studied in nostalgic terms, but as an expression of optimism in the kind of national character and identity that would be fostered by the uniqueness of geographical context. These early twentieth-century English-Canadian artists often conceived of the national landscape in a manner akin to a spiritual icon within a Christian religious framework: the visual image would be seen as a source of instruction, conversion, and eventually redemption. Landscape functioned as part of a national ideal, a transcendent entity in which the self was lost in a larger whole: such ideas also resonate with those of the Transcendentalists, who perceived God and nature as virtually interchangeable and whose notions influenced such artists as the Group of Seven and Carr.

Frye’s discomfort with the dominating and thus obtrusive religious ideology, which he believed stunted the growth of English-Canadian culture, is simplistic in part because that

ideology is not as pervasive or as uniform as it would seem: religious practices and beliefs extended from various Protestant sects (Methodism, Presbyterianism, Calvinism, and so forth) to Roman Catholicism, Theosophy, and the more complex beliefs of Emily Carr, which were an imbrication of Protestantism, Theosophy, and Native mysticism.<sup>12</sup> Arthur R. M. Lower argues in “Canadian Values and Canadian Writing” that Canadians developed their network of religious beliefs from “their formal public institutions and from the medley of beliefs, customs and convictions” of which Christian religious expression was most dominant (86). Even if Protestantism was the ruling religious and cultural force, “[t]he Protestant voice in Canadian fiction,” and, for that matter, the arts, “cannot be said to have been a voice for or on behalf of Protestantism,” or, at least, not unilaterally so (James 20). William Westfall develops this argument and asserts that “religion provides a structure of metaphors” and creates a “deeper pattern of the imagination” for this period, even if it does not provide a precise system of beliefs (22). For these reasons, James’s extension of Frye’s “imagery of religion” to “the religious imagination” is adopted in this study to mean the creative and visionary “link between the sacred and [ . . . ] art” (2-3).<sup>13</sup> Although James considers the term “spirituality,” which “denotes [ . . . ] an inner and personal faith or mode of being religious that lacks [ . . . ] a [formal] connection,” he dismisses it on the grounds that, in contemporary usage, it has “problematic overtones, suggesting not only inwardness and private faith, but something not entirely to be taken seriously, perhaps because of the implied association with New Age movements,” especially as it relates to and is frequently used in conjunction with landscape (4-5).

Yet Connor, Thomson and the Group of Seven, and Carr – the artists under discussion here – referred to their work as having “spiritual” merit or as a source of spirituality, a vague and slippery term which, notwithstanding the personal nuance each gave the term, when applied

broadly, suggests that their work was meant to be at some level elevating and ameliorative, if not didactic. More specifically, each artist uses and depicts landscape as the primary matrix for this sense of the spiritual, and, almost without exception, each artist relates this sense to English-Canadian national development and identity: whatever the religious or spiritual impulse that informed their work, these artists actively promoted the idea that, upon witnessing Canadian landscape which served as a common point of identification for the country's inhabitants, one would "convert" to their understanding of Canadian-ness. Lawren Harris, a member of the Group of Seven, is exemplary in this tendency, although not alone in his imaginings of the centrality of landscape, its function in the arts in relation to national development, and its quasi-religious function: at the turn of the century and well into the 1920s, many artists were using landscape, albeit not exclusively, in their respective media for didactic or spiritual purposes.<sup>14</sup> Harris wrote prolifically about how the arts, especially the visual, were integral to national and spiritual development, and believed that Canadian landscape was the source for this development and, as an inevitable corollary, for the arts:<sup>15</sup> although English-Canadian criticism has almost tirelessly examined this connection between the use of landscape and nation-building in, for example, the work of the Group of Seven (most recently in Charles Hill's expansive *Art for a Nation* [1995]), no sustained investigation exists which examines the national-spiritual dimensions of Canadian landscape in this period.<sup>16</sup>

In the early twentieth century, spirituality, even the notion of "religion," would have had different connotations, which both justify and explain its frequent usage: in this period, notions of the "spiritual" would have permitted a more open approach to different religious sources and, more broadly, referred to "higher moral qualities" or "a high degree of refinement of thought or feeling";<sup>17</sup> to values, which would have been seen in themselves, or would have

rendered a person – or an entity – transcendent; to “a dimension of reality beyond the ordinary ‘world-taken-for-granted’”; or to “that which is beyond all concepts.”<sup>18</sup> In the first editorial of the *Canadian Forum*, the editor commented upon how national identity was related to spirituality:

Too often our convictions are borrowed from London, Paris, or New York.

Real independence is not the product of tariffs and treaties. It is a spiritual thing.

No country has reached its full stature, which makes its goods at home, but not its faith and its philosophy.<sup>19</sup>

Frequently, English-Canadian artists and critics of this period speak of national and creative endeavours as “spiritual” or “religious,” as a register of faith in the nation, and as differentiated from, not as a complement to, economic or material pursuits.<sup>20</sup>

In “Toward Defining Spirituality,” Walter Principe traces the root and application of the word, and suggests that, at its origin, it stood in opposition to another way of life: a spiritual person is one “whose life is guided by the Spirit of God” whereas a “carnal” person is one “whose life is opposed to the working and guidance of the Spirit of God” (130). To appreciate its significance, one “must take account of the link between the objects of faith and the reactions aroused by these objects in the religious consciousness” (137). By the early twentieth century, the word “spiritual” could also have “an entitative-psychological sense,” or could be used – as it was by Annie Besant, a key figure in the Theosophical movement in North America – to “designate what was considered to be the superiority of Indian religion to the so-called Western ‘materialism’”; the manner in which the term was adopted suggests that it carried resonance outside of Protestantism (133). In early twentieth-century English Canada, the “spiritual” or “spirituality” would have meant that which deals with experience outside of and in

opposition to the material, corporeal world, but that experience is made in response to an object of faith: transcendence is thus integral to spiritual experience, articulated as something which is above and beyond individual concerns and the material world, and the object of faith was the land, as representative of the nation and its potential.<sup>21</sup>

Even those writers and painters, notably some members of the Group of Seven and, less consistently, Carr, who were not given over to a particular religious belief system, adopted “spirituality” to refer to the experience of depicting Canadian landscape, especially as it affected the realm of the spirit, the inner person, or to allude to an experience that transcended the corporeal. In postmodern critical approaches, as Principe suggests, the notion of transcendent values, that is, those values that would have been seen as universal or as existing outside of and apart from time, are seen as constructs of Western discourse. For the artists of that period, however, these values had overarching significance and affected how they conceived of their own role: the artist was purveyor of these values and his or her work a means of disseminating a form of spirituality that was related to and fed into the construction of national character.<sup>22</sup> Art, for Group member Arthur Lismer, was “very important to our health and sanity,” and was important in maintaining “the standards of living and the mental and spiritual health of our people.”<sup>23</sup> Harris, similarly, addressed the role of artists in relation to the First World War:

It is to its writers and artists that a nation looks for the emotional stimulus which gives purpose to labour and makes privation an experience to be sought rather than suffered. The Writers Broadcasters and Artists must speak the nation's mind and mood. They must crystallize opinion, sweep away confusion of thought and conflict of purpose by holding up and glorifying those things which are universally acknowledged to be true and so create unity of purpose,

emotional solidarity and a common understanding among our people.<sup>24</sup>

The elevated role and task of the artist is extended elsewhere by Harris who adds that the artist is a “seer,” who, in suffering, had found insight; who, “in a state of ecstasy, sees most clearly, most surely, most convincingly”; and who, “at his best, is in touch with ‘creative spirit,’ [Harris’s] synonym for the transcendent” (Larisey 53; 57; 59).<sup>25</sup> These artists were not always or necessarily grappling with issues of faith and belief as much as endeavouring to generate or create faith and belief in a national identity as it was shaped by geographical uniqueness.

Frye’s assessment is thus founded upon some disputable judgements about how English-Canadian literature and visual arts of the first third of the twentieth century, the focus of this study, have been formed, what were its major preoccupations, and why the literature is conceived by Frye as a largely second-rate body of work. As he famously observed about English-Canadian writing, if asked to evaluate it, he would conclude that the entire literary history of Canada would be only a “debunking project, leaving Canadian literature a poor naked *alouette* plucked of every feather of decency and dignity” (1965, 821). That undignified *alouette* would be regarded thus not only because of this prevalent sense of disorientation, but also, as he sees it, because of resulting depictions of the “hostile” wilderness in English-Canadian artistic endeavours. There are three facets of Frye’s argument that ought to be impugned, since some artistic endeavours in fact prove otherwise: first, the assumption that English-Canadian artists of the first third of the twentieth century were more fascinated by and preoccupied with the imperial centre than with Canada itself; second, that this fascination bred ideas about and (the inevitable corollary) depictions of a hostile rather than spiritually-informing Canadian wilderness; and third, that such depictions resulted in a second-rate body of artistic work.

More recently the question has been seen as either irrelevant or inappropriate in the discussion of the formation of English-Canadian national identity. Diana Brydon's "It's Time for a New Set of Questions" demonstrates the latter tendency, whereas David Staines's *Beyond the Provinces* (1995) exemplifies the former. Brydon's essay appears in a special issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing* that is devoted to examining various facets of Frye's riddle, as indicated by its subtitle, "Where is here now?" She dis-assembles the riddle, Frye's "clever red herring," and recasts it as what "the question has always been": "What are we doing here?" (2000, 14). Although her question may also be regarded merely as a witty inflection of Frye's riddle, "too often [the latter] has been seen as an injunction to focus on place and even identity, as if they were fixed" (14). Her question, she argues, "takes us further away from geographical fallacies, mating loons, and nostalgia for lost Edens and their governing great codes":

It reminds others [ . . . ] that their ancestors or they themselves came here as explorers, settlers, refugees, immigrants, or travellers, each positioning carrying its own burden of accountability. But in each instance, being here and knowing here as *a spiritually experienced spatial location* are primarily important for how they shape the ethics of acting here, in this place and time, and the implications of those activities for the future. (14, italics mine)

Although Frye's riddle is useful in that it suggested, at least, that identity is negotiated in relation to place, Brydon identifies a significant intellectual and artistic impulse that dismisses Frye's question and suggests that the assumption embedded therein is the denial of self-agency: one chooses to live in, visit, or explore Canada and, as part of that decision, comes to understand why one is there.<sup>26</sup> Coming to terms with place in this manner, as the artists under consideration believed and as Brydon suggests, is a spiritually engaging exercise, and that

exercise conditioned how they interpreted and occupied that space.<sup>27</sup>

If Brydon considers the question to be inappropriate, Staines believes it to be no longer a concern:

Early twentieth-century attempts to prove the question [where is here?] led to mid-century denials of its relevance. Now, at century's end, the palpable absence of the question underscores a belated movement of Canada's literary identity from a clinging to the seeming periphery to a confident claim that the centre, however indefinable, is none the less unmistakably here and nowhere and everywhere. (8)

Staines argues that, specifically, Connor and L.M. Montgomery described "Canadian scenes, [even as they] believed that whatever *here* was, Canada was not it" (8). The difficulty with this argument is that some writers, including and especially Connor, and painters of that period were not especially concerned with the question "Where is here?," as Frye suggests and imposes upon this body of literature and paintings, and as Staines seems to corroborate: not only is the question irrelevant now, it is also an inappropriate measure of and guide to some of the artistic concerns of the period under scrutiny. The writers and painters being considered knew where *here* was: they knew *here* was not *over there*.

For these artists, English-Canadian identity and the corresponding sense of "where-ness" at the turn of the century initially involved pride in a sense of what Canada was not, even as it involved a celebration of what they conceived of as their own country: it was not Britain and it was most certainly not the United States.<sup>28</sup> As Antony Easthope notes in *Englishness and National Culture* (1999), collective identity, or "group identity" is "defined over and against what differs from it": national unity, therefore, is "an effect [. . .] of the process of collective

identification with a common object which is accompanied by identification of individuals with each other" (15; 22). English-Canada may have been regarded as colonial in temperament, an idea that was conceived of as distasteful and was resisted by a number of writers, painters, and critical thinkers, and marginal in position; as such, the construction of identity was obliged to be made against an existing, imperial model even as that model was considered fallible. Many artists, rather than pandering to imperial tastes and notions, as Frye suggests, resisted either imported forms or subject matter (or both),<sup>29</sup> and strove to fashion their own; many artists of the time did not see Canada as inferior to the imperial centre.<sup>30</sup> These artists were interested in developing and celebrating what they chose and saw as the source of their distinctiveness, or, as Angus observes in *A Border Within*, in cultivating "something to preserve and develop" (106). If this tendency is part of a "geographical fallacy," to borrow Brydon's term or, as Scott Watson argues, a way to obliterate a fraught history,<sup>31</sup> that fallacy was a preoccupation for at least three decades in early twentieth-century English-Canadian artistic practice because, as John Moss notes in his memoir *Bellrock* (1983), it was once believed that "[g]eography alone is our common ancestor" (47).<sup>32</sup>

Such English-Canadian writers as Connor and Carr, and such English-Canadian painters as Thomson and the Group of Seven were not especially "disoriented" nor were they uncertain of where here was and of what it meant: they were preoccupied with giving definition to the "here" about which they were fiercely proud. Neither did they consistently perceive the "wilderness" as a hostile force with which they thought they were obliged to contend. They were passionate about English-Canada's difference from its "imperial" mother and from the United States, especially in terms of its geographical particularity, the moral and ethical behaviour that was conditioned by this particularity, and its distinctive cultural patterns (speech,

dress, and so forth). In other words, as they identified and articulated *where* they were (the ontological), they defined *who* they were (the metaphysical). Such artists thought that they were not displaced persons from another country, but citizens who were actively engaged in contesting imperial forms of dominance, who chose and esteemed this new place as superior to its imperial antecedents, and who wished to cultivate that newness.<sup>33</sup> Canada was seen as a geographical and imaginative space for the making of a country “greater, finer, and without the hideous inequalities, injustices and foolish distinctions of Britain” (Connor, *TM* 93).<sup>34</sup>

These early English-Canadian artists “articulate[d] [their] difference from Europe through a relation to the geography of the new land” and this is the result of the fact that “unlike most New World nations, English Canada has never had a revolution”: as Angus notes, “geography becomes important for identity where history has failed to provide it” (114). The foreshortening of history, which Frye suggests may be central to the formation of English-Canadian sensibility, is supplanted by an interest in the topographical and natural aspects of the country. Frye’s assertion, that “to feel ‘Canadian’ was to feel part of a no-man’s land with huge rivers, lakes, and islands that very few Canadians had ever seen,” is puzzling in relation to such artists as Carr, and more so when he adds that the “frontier was primarily what separated the Canadian, physically or mentally, from Great Britain, from the United States, and, even more important, from other Canadian communities” (1965, 827). The artists being considered were enthralled by Canada’s geographical spaciousness and regarded it as the primary source of a genuine and distinct national identity, not as a barrier from “the mother country.” Landscape, as it was depicted in both narrative and pictorial space, was “the medium for the propagandist transmission of national identity”; like such earlier American counterparts as Albert Bierstadt or Walt Whitman, these English-Canadian artists took up the challenge “of portraying

landscape with no markers of European civilization, no equivalent historical associations” (Andrews 158; 159).<sup>35</sup>

If, as Edward Said argues in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), “cultural forms like the novel [. . .] were immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes,” then English-Canadian cultural forms and their focus on landscape may be seen as equally important in the formation of an indigenous national identity:

Stories are [. . .] the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history. The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future – these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative. [. . .] The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them. (xii-xiii)

If the land represents or reflects a contestation of power between colonial and imperial entities, the purpose of landscape in early twentieth-century English-Canadian artistic endeavours becomes obvious: at that time, English-Canadian identity was still in its formative stages, and, thus, landscape was used by these artists to impede the predominance of imperial narratives or to supplant these narratives with their own.<sup>36</sup>

Many fictional endeavours and paintings from this period focussed on what they conceived as “realistic” or “true” depictions of Canadian landscape, which these artists perceived as the beginnings of an indigenous rather than a borrowed culture. Although “the concrete *terms* of landscape description differ from area to area in the country,” as W.H. New

notes, these various descriptions, both visual and verbal, emphasize the vastness and rugged aspect of the country and its perceived spiritual qualities; the proliferation of depictions of Canadian landscape consolidated particular notions of the country and served as prototypes, notwithstanding regional difference (1997, 130). In particular, New argues, “a *regional Ontario/Quebec landscape*” might be evoked as if “it were the semiotic equivalent of *nationhood*” (1997, 142). Artists of the period seemed to have few difficulties with seeing specific geographical locales as representative of the nation: critics regarded Carr as a nationalist painter on equal terms with the Group of Seven, in spite of both her own positioning as a West-Coast Canadian artist and the fact that the entire corpus of her Canadian work focussed exclusively on British Columbia.<sup>37</sup> Whatever the regional difference may have been, landscape, as depicted by Connor, Thomson, the Group of Seven, and Carr, uniformly adopted a certain approach to landscape: their work “carr[ies] *cultural* resonances or assumptions, and they generalize from particular details to a panoramic truth about a *characteristic* – even if metaphoric – ‘Canadian’ landscape” (New 1997, 144).<sup>38</sup> These artists valorized what these paintings and writings were seen to signify in relation to the nation – optimism, pride, spiritual superiority, and so forth.

As a term, “landscape” is complex. It is an aesthetic term, a geographical designation, a genre, a medium of exchange, and, more broadly, a modern phenomenon that is seen to function as part of imperialist discourse. It requires definition to appreciate what it means in the construction of English-Canadian national identity. Originally a “painter’s word,” it was “introduced from the Dutch in the sixteenth century to describe a pictorial representation of countryside, either as the subject itself of a picture, or as the by-work in a portrait, the background of scenery behind the main subject” (Barrell 1). In contemporary usage, landscape

is accepted within fields of study as an aesthetic or geographical term, and means a representation of the usually natural world as a “source of aesthetic enjoyment” or, on a social and geographical level, “the moulding of land by human labour into visibly distinct regions” (Cosgrove 1).

In addition to these two definitions, Denis E. Cosgrove adds a third in *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (1998) when he argues, in a manner that echoes John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* (1972), that “the landscape idea represents a way of seeing,” and that the way landscape is seen is conditioned by social, economic, and historical forces:

Landscape is a way of seeing that has its own history, but a history that can be understood only as part of a wider history of economy and society; that has its own assumptions and consequences, but assumptions and consequences whose origins and implications extend well beyond the use and perception of land; that has its own techniques of expression, but techniques which it shares with other areas of cultural practice. The landscape idea emerged as a dimension of European elite consciousness at an identifiable period in the evolution of European societies: [ . . . ] It expressed and supported a range of political, social and moral assumptions and became accepted as a significant aspect of taste.

That significance declined, again during a period of major social change, in the late nineteenth century. [ . . . ] It no longer carries the burden of social or moral significance attached to it during the time of its most active cultural evolution.

(1-2)

Although he argues cogently that landscape is a function and product of human perception, that its various forms of expression both suggest a cultural period and are observable in other

contemporary areas of cultural practice, and that its depiction was the expression of a variety of political, cultural or moral assumptions, his argument that landscape is no longer as socially significant as it once was is untenable. The idea of Canadian landscape remains a formidable cultural instrument in Canada because it has borne the weight of English-Canadian identity, of its cultural activity and investigation, and of nation-building itself. In addition, the emphasis on the ocular – “ways of seeing” – is appropriate given the links that may be made between images being disseminated in English-Canada and those of pre-literate society in which images were used as a form of communication and instruction: image-making, as the Group of Seven believed, is relevant to a society that is still developing its own cultural forms and icons.

Malcolm Andrews’s understanding of landscape in *Landscape and Western Art* (1999) is more useful because he argues how it consistently functions as an expression of society: like Cosgrove, Andrews argues that landscape “is already artifice before it has become the subject of a work of art. Even when we simply *look* we are already shaping and interpreting” (1). What we choose to look at and how we choose to “frame” that subject matter is part of the shaping and interpretive process: “We are selecting and editing, suppressing or subordinating some visual information in favour of promoting other features. We are constructing a hierarchical arrangement of the components within a simple view so that it becomes a complex mix of visual facts and imaginative construction. The process of marking off one particular tract of land as aesthetically superior to, or more interesting than, its neighbours is already converting that view into the terms of art” (3). In a similar vein, W.J.T. Mitchell asserts in *Landscape and Power* (1989) that “not only landscape painting, but landscape *perception* is ‘invented’ at some moment of history” (8). In *The Picturesque and the Sublime* (1998), Susan Glickman observes that one cannot escape learning to interpret landscape according to the pictorial conventions

learned in poetry and art (8). Even as landscape is used as an instrument of culture, its depiction continues to be modified and mediated by that culture.

A. Y. Jackson, a member of the Group of Seven must have had such conventions in mind when he bemoaned the unaesthetic aspects of particular geographical terrain or the seasonal changes that interfered with the suitable geographical locales for his work. In a letter dated October 11, 1932, he observed that the autumn in Cobalt “was not very exciting as there are only small trees and brush”;<sup>39</sup> of Ile d’Orleans, Québec, he wrote, “I still think this is the worst sketching ground in Québec”; and on March 7, 1924, he wrote of both the picturesque qualities – and lack thereof – of Bon Echo:

It is a day of faded sunlight, wishy washy and not a line that can be handled by the group of seven. Have been here three weeks already, not very strenuous weeks, somehow this country does not get me. It lacks the intimacy of the Georgian Bay and the *artistry* of Lake Superior: the big rock is impressive but not *staged to advantage*. [ . . . ] The lines leading up to it are not effective. The opposite shore is all covered with silly little poplars, and make a *ridiculous foreground*. It was a heroic country once upon a time. [ . . . ] The mighty pine stumps charred and rotten are all that is left of it. (italics mine)<sup>40</sup>

Jackson’s conscious search for a specific kind of topography – a definite sense of line, an intimate atmosphere, an arrangement of pictorial elements and light that would induce dramatic effects, an impressive foreground, a sense of the heroic – suggests that he had particular aesthetic conventions in mind, that he possessed a specific aesthetic agenda: the Canadian landscape he was seeking was affected by a way of seeing, one informed by particular values about what would constitute appropriate subject matter. In this instance, he was deliberately

avoiding a conventionally picturesque landscape, and seeking out one infused with a sense of the sublime.<sup>41</sup> As Andrews observes, “what the viewer has selected from the land, edited and modified in accordance with certain conventional ideas about what constitutes a ‘good view’” indicates that the process of turning land into art is a two-fold process: it involves the conversion of land (“raw material”) into landscape, that is, locating or imagining an aesthetically-perceived tract of land, and landscape into both visual and verbal art (4).<sup>42</sup> In cultural practice, landscape is thus involved as both means to an end and the end itself.

As Mitchell observes, landscape is a conflation of both natural and cultural worlds: “it is both a represented and presented space” (5), or, as John Barrell notes, “from first denoting only a picture of rural scenery, it comes to denote also a piece of scenery apprehended [and to denote] land ‘considered with regard to its natural configuration’” (2). Mitchell’s argument that landscape is not a genre, but a “medium of exchange between the human and the natural, the self and the other,” enlarges its scope from geographical designation to expression of cultural ideas and social values: it is “a social hieroglyph that conceals the actual basis of its value” because, like money, it is “good for nothing in itself, but expressive of a potentially limitless reserve of value” (5). He thus answers the question he raises earlier—“whether this invention has a spiritual or a material basis”—and argues, like Cosgrove, that it has a material basis (8).<sup>43</sup>

Consequently, Mitchell reads the rise and development of landscape as “a symptom of the rise and development of capitalism; the ‘harmony’ sought in landscape is read as a compensation for and screening off of the actual violence perpetrated there” (7). He also observes that landscape as art form tends to flourish, as it did in Canada, during economically prosperous times because of its underlying material impetus. He argues, as does Said, that, notwithstanding the particularities of landscape as it was depicted in various cultures and

nations, its function is almost consistently imperialist in basis:<sup>44</sup> it is “not only a matter of internal politics and national or class ideology but also an international, global phenomenon, intimately bound up with the discourses of imperialism” (9). Although its usage is not restricted to one culture, it is “in its ‘pure’ form, a western European and modern phenomenon,” that is, landscape operates as part of imperialist discourse in the creation of a particular way of seeing (7). Andrews regards landscape similarly, although not exactly so: “Landscape art [. . .] has from early on been implicated in nationalist, imperialist and socio-economic ideologies, and often most potently so when, superficially, least touched by suggestions of any political agenda.[. . .] landscape is a political text” (175). When the human presence is included, it is minimized or subordinated to the landscape for political purposes, which renders the landscape as foreground material. Such a tradition is aligned with the paintings of Constable, which “have been seen as ‘portable icons,’ constituting a wholly deliberate contribution to the construction of English national identity as fecund, domesticated and profoundly stable” (175).

So the work of these English-Canadian artists may be seen as a way of fostering optimism about the country’s future and pride in the land, and their work as “political texts” because of the nation-building impulse that these texts were seen to embody. These English-Canadian depictions of landscape in the early twentieth-century, therefore, may be seen as embodying two seemingly paradoxical tendencies, or as a hybrid formation. The first of these two tendencies correlates with Mitchell’s and Said’s argument that landscape serves as a function of imperialism. If imperialism is a “complex system of cultural, political, and economic expansion and domination,” then literary and artistic depictions of Canadian landscape by Connor, Thomson, the Group of Seven and Carr may be seen as fundamental in perpetuating an indigenous and unified sense of early twentieth-century English-Canadian national identity: in

Canada, the aesthetic renderings of the land functioned for many artists as a way of creating a centripetal marker of national identification at a moment when Canada was historically most prosperous and engaged in perpetuating that economic prosperity, and politically optimistic, even as the country was politically and culturally fragmented (9). In this respect, Mitchell argues that “landscape might be seen more profitably as something like the ‘dreamwork’ of imperialism, unfolding its own movement in time and space from a central point of origin and folding back on itself to disclose both utopian fantasies of the perfect imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance” (10). In spite of the economic impulse and the “unsuppressed resistance” which Mitchell identifies as embedded in landscape, these artists ostensibly claimed to be concerned with the cultural, moral, and spiritual unity of the country’s citizens. They saw their art as an alternative to and critique of materialism, not as the embodiment of material and economic potential.

In early twentieth-century English Canada, landscape sometimes operated as a form of resistance to imperial British desires. It served an anti-colonial function, since it was employed to express difference from European models of landscape and from Europe itself, even though English-Canadian aesthetic models were derived from and influenced by imported aesthetic traditions.<sup>45</sup> Canadian landscape is not merely a genre, as Mitchell suggests, but also a social phenomenon: it is a part of a cultural system of which national imaginings are largely a part, in which these imaginings are invested, and by which economic motives and inequalities are disguised. The pursuit of landscape in both word and image is thus an endeavour to be “free [. . .] of convention, masters of a unified, natural language,” even as its expression was unnatural, and in some ways conventional, and as it concealed internal (national) differences (13). English-Canadian depictions of landscape were not entirely economic, as Cosgrove and Mitchell

observe; although Mitchell describes the spiritual or material/economic impetus behind renderings of landscape as operating to their mutual exclusion, these two impulses may be seen to operate in conjunction with each other in English-Canadian artistic endeavours.

The origin of the genre suggests its spiritual and religious dimensions, in spite of Mitchell's assertion that landscape is a genre that embodies—and disguises—its economic motivations. An overview of its role as genre in Europe demonstrates how it came to shape and affect English-Canadian artistic conventions. During the Renaissance period, particularly in Italy, landscape painting and its literary equivalent, the pastoral, were conceived of as inferior genres in the hierarchy of subject matter in both writing and painting and were superseded by religious themes, historically-based subjects, and portraiture, because of its utilitarian function: "it was a poor relation, a dependant, a servant. [. . .] Landscape as mere record of place continued to be held in contempt by 'academy' orthodoxy over the next century and a half" (Andrews 91).<sup>46</sup> Landscapes were considered akin to maps. They not only provided information about places, they also bestowed a sense of the power of place "from which evolves a metaphorical vocabulary of possession: we may enjoy a 'commanding' view of territory [. . .] identifying its boundaries, distinguishing its physical undulations" (77): such critics as Mitchell locate their arguments about the imperial implications of landscape upon this historical facet of the genre. Yet land-based paintings and writings were disparaged because they were thought to be an insufficient or unfit vehicle for spiritual and moral instruction, the only exception being perhaps those landscapes used in the emblem tradition in which they were used to "express a set of political values, a political ideology" (Andrews 156).

By the eighteenth century, there was marked and increasing attention given to nature and to landscape as primary subject matter in both poetry and art. Depictions of land that were

esteemed were those that subordinated the “instrumental, informative role of landscape picturing” to either didactic or emotionally evocative forms, that is, the sublime (Andrews 91).<sup>47</sup> A faithful rendering of place was considered inferior to the depiction of a more “generalized, idealized representation of rural beauty” or to the representation of terrain that evoked the sublime (Andrews 103).<sup>48</sup> This shift in focus, part of a movement in opposition to the “scientific materialism” of the period, was manifested in the writings of John Denham and James Thomson, whose work exemplified how “the new religion of nature *was* religious. It was just as opposed to scientific materialism as was official dogma, but it found spiritual nourishment outside the doors of the Church” (Glickman 8).<sup>49</sup> Also, a new category emerges—apparently originating with Joseph Warton in his *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (1756)—in the evaluation of both the literary and visual arts: the picturesque, or that “which is suitable for pictorial representation.”<sup>50</sup> The picturesque, as a mediating category between the “sublime” and the “beautiful” with respect to landscape painting and writing, was further consolidated by the work of Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight who “legitimized [this] slippery aesthetic term to stand with the conventional [categories] of natural description” (9).

Edmund Burke, perhaps the most germinal writer in the critical evaluation and definition of the sublime and the beautiful, especially as it relates to landscape, explicates these two terms in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). Burke defines the sublime as that which elicits a sense of awe because it seeks to represent that which is immeasurable, vast, or indefinable, and the beautiful as that which is pleasing because it employs elements of harmony and balance. His theory revolves around the psychology of pain and pleasure, both of which alter the human’s typically

“indifferent” state of mind, and which some form of novelty activates: “whatever these powers are, or upon what principle soever they affect the mind, it is absolutely necessary that they should not be exerted in those things which a daily and vulgar use have brought into a stale unaffecting familiarity” (102).

Specifically, the sublime is usually related to that which threatens the “preservation of the individual,” such as the forces of nature: its sources include “whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror” (110). The arts “transfuse their passions from one breast to another,” but the objects of depiction, “which in the reality would shock” in correlative artistic representations, are a source of pleasure (117). Only those objects that in reality would elicit terror—and Burke suggests images that are associated with obscurity, ruggedness, confusion, incoherence, privation, disproportion, or that suggest boundlessness, vastness and so forth—but from which we are safely removed elicit the sublime. Andrews succinctly observes that the sublime is both “destabilizing and reassuring, the two feelings in dynamic tension” (135). Burke located one of the principal sources of the power of the arts in their ability to suggest and engender the experience of the sublime: “We may rely upon it that the power of the poem or picture is more owing to the nature of the thing itself than to the mere effect of imitation, or to a consideration of the skill of the imitator” (123). Still, the terror elicited is salutary: “the notion of some great power must be always precedent to our dread of it. [ . . . ] *It is this principle that true religion has*, and must have so large a mixture of salutary fear” (144-45, italics mine). Burke makes tentative connections between the function and tendencies of the spiritual realm and those of the aesthetic, connections which Connor, Carr, and the Group of Seven also make when speaking about their work.

Since the notion of the “beautiful” operates on opposing principles, that which is small, pleasing, light, smooth, proportionate, delicate, graceful, and so forth, Andrews notes that “the sublime is [ . . . ] a strongly gendered aesthetic through its rugged, primitive, patriarchal associations. Its antithesis, in Burke’s account, is a model of beauty that is recognized by the sense as having a fragile delicacy, an alluring smoothness of contour, and a submissiveness—all of which are exemplified in the female form and cultural expectations of what is ‘properly’ feminine” (133). Andrews further comments upon “the degree to which landscape is bound up with issues of property and territorial control, the masculine ‘command’ of a view. Women were credited with an aptitude for sensitive miniaturist portraits of cottages, village scenes, flowers, but were held to lack the intellectual virility to be able to organize a spacious, multifarious landscape” (157). This gendered perspective of landscape and of those who are qualified to render it artistically becomes relevant to artists in their depictions of Canadian landscape, especially when they compare such depictions with British versions: Canada is seen as stronger, virile, more capable of producing morally superior citizens than its feminine and weaker counterpart, Britain. In *Paradox of Meaning* (1999), John Moss argues that English-Canadian depictions of landscape and those who render it also form a pattern according to gender:

· The male accounts are about the conquest of geography over landscape. [ . . . ]

The women write to share their experience of the wilderness; the men, to be admired for surviving theirs. The men write to achieve meaning; the women as witness. [ . . . ]

[ . . . ] If the form of the male story is essentially linear and leads through time, ultimately, to transcendence, the female story is spacial (sic) and leads to

grace. If man yearns towards meaning, woman's desire, expressed in narrative through what sometimes appears to be structural anarchy, is to be free. (197)

Apparently, women in Canada were sometimes less likely to participate in rendering and engaging with Canadian landscape, perhaps given its masculine attributes.<sup>51</sup>

In the visual arts, Carr was largely an exception to this practice. Annis Pratt observes, however, that the affinity female protagonists share with nature is the result of their marginality from civilization: in other words, society, rather than nature, is the “the engulfing monster which threatens to enclose them in restrictive roles (unlike Frye’s male hero who fears being engulfed by nature).”<sup>52</sup> Joanne Sloane argues that Frye’s description of the paradigmatic relationship to the land was directed toward men: although “we understand that only the most intrepid and virile of men had what it took to conquer this forbidding terrain,” Carr was exceptional in that “she [did not] seek out male compatriots [aside from her guides] as companions for her trips. She was determined to enter the forest alone” (“Excerpts” 89).<sup>53</sup> Murray concurs and suggests that traditionally the land was regarded as “‘she’ or ‘other’ (virgin, bride, mother) to be tamed, mastered, raped, fertilized, or destroyed by a solitary male hero who has escaped from a civilization seen as emasculating and, again, feminine” (77).

In these critical assessments, the artist is consistently seen as “escaping” or separating him or herself from civilization, even if the artist approaches and apprehends the wilderness differently. Yet the land/wilderness as described by the artists being studied—regardless of gender—is a hybrid formation in that it is regarded as alternately feminine (redemptive, spiritual) *and* masculine (sublime), both as an entity that is spatial *and* that leads to transcendence, and not to “subtle transformation,” as Moss argues (198). Carr, therefore, at times would regard the land as a version of “Mother Nature” (spiritual, nurturing) and a space in which she could

communicate with God (“transcendence”).<sup>54</sup> “Conquest” was of lesser importance, whereas “witnessing” was of primary importance: Connor (to a lesser degree), Thomson, the Group of Seven, and Carr experienced an affinity with the natural world which they wanted to capture and communicate. If landscape was primarily, although not exclusively, depicted by male artists as virile, rugged, and masculine in English-Canadian artistic forms, the response expected involved spiritual engagement, transcendence (“escape from ourselves into a more meaningful and authentic reality” [Moss 198]), transformation (a conversion in relation to national identity), and faith in the nation.

Such ambivalence is likely related to the fact that such depictions relied not only upon notions of the sublime, but also the picturesque: previously a “methodological description” rather than a category, the latter included elements of both the sublime and the beautiful.<sup>55</sup> Since the former defied representation—how could one depict that which was immeasurable?—the picturesque was a transitional category which allowed for the capturing of that which was purportedly beyond capture.<sup>56</sup> In the eighteenth century, the picturesque had become a category which codified, rendered familiar, domesticated—and distanced—the land being depicted. Nature and land were homogenized: they were improved, beautified, rearranged to conform to such conventions, both artistic and literary (14). If the picturesque meant the appropriation of the natural world to create aesthetic commodities, the sublime continued to represent that which challenged the familiar, the conventional, and, at times, the picturesque.<sup>57</sup> Eighteenth-century challenges to conventional depictions of landscape in both word and image were thus related to the sublime: whereas the picturesque was a way of capturing and framing a “transcendent” landscape, and subjecting it to regularized artistic principles, the sublime suggested what could not be held captive, and challenged the picturesque. As Burke suggested,

novelty and innovation comprised part of the new experience, that is, of the sublime, and that new experience inevitably affected “an old language, whether verbal or visual, which has neither the resources nor the flexibility to stretch the new” (Andrews 136).

By the nineteenth century, the genre of landscape was being revitalized and valorized by the Impressionists who “rejoice[d] in everything that the modern metropolis [was] not”—boundless, uncrowded space, and rounded forms, which were represented by feathery brushstrokes and a light atmosphere (Andrews 18).<sup>58</sup> It was also seen as a counterbalance to the city, as the etymology of landscape would suggest: *landschaft* comes from the German to refer to “the land immediately adjacent to a town and understood as belonging to the town” and suggests how “conceptually ‘landscape’ has, from the start, been ineradicably implicated in urban and political life, in property and commercial relations” (Andrews 156).<sup>59</sup> Landscape was a political and geographical entity because it was “understood as being part of the territorial domain of the city,” even as it offered a retreat or refuge from and a spiritual counterbalance to the city (29). A great critical leap is not required to comprehend how Canada was conceived of as an entity very much like the *landschaft* and thus how the biases long associated with the countryside were also extended to and associated with Canada: such artists as Connor, the Group of Seven, and Carr constructed it as desirable because they perceived it as simple, peaceful, unpolluted, free of vice and care, especially in contrast with imperial Britain. The ideas of such English-Canadian writers as Connor were informed by the concept that “distance from the corruption of the city was supposed to encourage the cultivation of wisdom, moderation, and other seemly virtues,” a concept that has its origins in Virgil, Horace, and Martial (Glickman 4). Canada, the site of such virtue, is generally esteemed as a source of such virtue, especially in opposition to metropolitan space, or to the imperial centre: here, in the role

of Canadian wilderness as an entity designed to form a retreat from the city, one may see how imperialist and economic notions work, even as the wilderness simultaneously provides a spiritual, morally superior alternative.

As early as the Romantic period, depictions of landscape often omitted signs of property divisions because the land was regarded as an ideal that “transcend[ed] human interference, which repairs division and unifies segregated territory,” as that which was an emblem of moral and spiritual potential: precisely the kind of landscape that would have been valued during the Renaissance period because of its didactic function (Andrews 157). Although Glickman (quoting David B. Morris) distinguishes between the eighteenth-century and Romantic sublime by suggesting that the former was “fundamentally affective and pictorial” and the latter was “fundamentally hermeneutic and visionary,” the essential impulse of the sublime remains unchanged: that which challenges the conventional and the familiar to elicit a sense of spiritual transcendence, a salutary terror (17). Even before the Romantic period, eighteenth-century writer John Dennis was arguing that the “highest calling of poetry” was related to the mediating function of language, its “attempts to name and contain the sublime”: “it is a religious calling.”<sup>60</sup> The nature of the sublime was such that its expression required not only a break with conventional forms but also the pursuit of that which is “transcendent” in order to create the mandatory sense of novelty and defamiliarization. English-Canadian artists were trying to render new and unfamiliar forms to represent Canadian landscape and to express difference from the imperial centre, even as they endeavoured to celebrate that difference.<sup>61</sup>

English-Canadian artists were influenced by the European discourse of aesthetics revolving around landscape, especially by this notion of nature as a transcendent entity; they could not have worked without influence, without borrowing from imported forms, especially

since many painters—including most members of the Group of Seven and Carr—were trained abroad or, as in the case of writers, were exposed to imported literary forms. Yet Glickman argues how the picturesque and the sublime were uniquely interpreted in, specifically, Canadian poetry:<sup>62</sup>

[I]n Canada, the sublime has had a particular status as an aesthetic category which allows the poem to escape classification and disable controversy. The sublime has allowed poets to steer a course between the imperial and the provincial and, later, the native and the cosmopolitan, by validating that which is at once radically individual and absolutely conventional. The sublime is apolitical and eccentric; the picturesque is minutely local and conservative. The co-operation of the sublime aesthetic with the picturesque method has encouraged writers to keep on writing through all these years of critics telling them what they ought or ought not to do, and provided a space for serious play, for meditation. (153)

Although she naively defines the sublime as an apolitical entity, she correctly observes that the mediation of both the picturesque and the sublime in English-Canadian poetry, what could easily be extended to include fiction and painting, has allowed writers to create new material from older forms. Simultaneously, such play with these forms allows for an expression of difference, a refusal to adhere to European forms to create something new, even as they borrow elements from the original framework. Harris argued that the Group of Seven felt compelled to articulate an inherently national vision, to “replace this ‘foreign-begotten technique,’ by a way of painting dictated by Canada itself, to concentrate all their energy on making a Canadian statement in art in Canadian terms”<sup>63</sup>: in other words, as Angus observes,

not only to represent Canada uniquely through content, but to represent Canada in a unique style, in “Canadian terms” (50).

The rhetoric and practice of the sublime as employed by these English-Canadian artists are thus incongruous with Frye’s description of the “garrison mentality” that was purportedly deeply ingrained in the Canadian psyche and developed in response to a natural world that gives the “impression of its primeval lawlessness and moral nihilism” (1971, 146); nor was the experience of the sublime, as Frye and other critics observe, a negative or alienating experience. In fact, as Glickman observes, the “terror” that one may feel and that is necessary to the experience of the sublime is salutary:

There has been a consensus that our poets demonstrate “terror” in their encounters with the wilderness, but little awareness of the *prestige* of terror as an aesthetic category during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On the contrary, terror has been dismissed as a negative response, and associated with colonial timidity, or post-colonial neurosis, as though it were expressive of a uniquely local pathology.

Moreover, critics unfamiliar with the sublime theory may not recognize that fear of the unknown may be transitional, and the first stage in an imaginative ascent. In such cases fear contributes greatly to one’s spiritual and emotional development and may be seen as an ontological imperative. (45)

Such temporary ontological dislocation, which Frye condemned because it contributed to the stifling of English-Canadian artistic endeavours, is an integral part of the experience of the sublime: the human mind is subdued and overpowered by the “recognition of the vastness surrounding it” (Glickman 139). The experience of the sublime, then, has been uncritically

conflated with a part of the anxiety and sense of inferiority connected with colonial-mindedness. Yet, in the early twentieth century, it was this experience in which all Canadians were asked to partake and by which they would be made “Canadian”: Canada’s “wild magnificence”—that is, uncultivated land, or what Jonathan Bordo has defined as “wilderness”<sup>64</sup>—was a source of inspiration and was given “parity with civilization in the expression of national character” (Glickman 49). English-Canadian depictions of a sublime landscape operated as a part of a larger national discourse that would create like-minded citizens.

The role of landscape and its function in the construction of national identity in English Canada can be fully appreciated, therefore, only in the context of how the cultural system referred to as the nation-state operates; it is a phenomenon which, as Benedict Anderson argues, emerged only within the past three centuries and which was once organized according to spiritual principles. Anderson’s germinal text *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991) traces the rise of the nation and argues that it is imagined as both limited, that is, as separate and distinct from other nations, and sovereign, an entity that was borne out of the decline of the hierarchical dynastic realm:

The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. [ . . . ]

It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. [ . . . ]

Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. (7)

He identifies how religious-based imaginings and impulses are similar to those that are nationalist-based, notwithstanding the fact that he counterbalances such an argument with the assertion that “it would be short-sighted [ . . . ] to think of the imagined communities of nations as simply growing out of and replacing religious communities and dynastic realms” (22). Yet the fact remains that when a nation is being imagined, as it was in early twentieth-century English Canada, a sense of national devotion and national identity is being fostered that bears resemblance to religious devotion and identification. National fervour develops, as Michel Despland observes, “to replace a lost sense of belonging” (542).

As a result, cultural and artistic activity is seen as providing spiritual iconography and orientation and, more largely, contributing to a developing a sense of national unity. The Romantic movement gave rise to the notion that art might be conceived of as a substitute for religion. That English-Canadian artists and writers were seeking indigenous aesthetic expression by interpreting Canadian landscape as transcendent suggests that such Romantic notions were part of their ideological inheritance, even as they were drifting from this inheritance: that is, the work of such artists as the Group of Seven, even the literary work of Connor and Carr, relates to the nineteenth-century Romantic tradition of regarding landscape as a kind of spiritual entity, and to “a belief in the spiritual meaning of nature” (Shadbolt 1974, 62).

By the modern period, T.S. Eliot could suggest in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948) that cultural and religious activity, although not identical impulses, were developed simultaneously: culture develops in relation to religion, he argues, and the “culture of a people” may be considered “an *incarnation* of its religion” (33).<sup>65</sup> With the decline of religious belief and “the parallel loss of sites of religious meaning, art became a ‘refuge for religious emotion,’” that is, art supplied a new object for this yearning: as “patterns of religious certainty had faded, the yearning for transcendent truth and order remained” (S. Walker 112). In Canada, Carr could thus observe that “there is no true art without religion. The artist himself may not think he is religious but if he is sincere his sincerity in itself is religion. If something other than the material did not speak to him, and if he did not have faith in that something and also in himself, he would not try to express it.”<sup>66</sup> Later, in a talk she delivered at an exhibition in December 14, 1932, she suggested that the gallery might be considered a place for “the spirit of art to grow in.”<sup>67</sup>

By the time of the Massey Commission, its underlying ideology fostered by the modern period in Canada, “nationality” was being defined in relation to the “intangible” and spiritual facets of landscape:

The intangible qualities of our sprawling mass of territory also have their consequences. Canada’s scatter regions are dominated by the mysterious expanses of the Canadian Shield, with the still more mysterious Arctic beyond, pressing down and hemming in the areas of civilized life. No person could be unaffected by the stark beauty of our hinterland. It has moved the artist as well as the prospector. Through the painters and poets who have interpreted their country with force and originality, Canadians have a quiet pride [ . . . ]. (11)

**A strong national identity was seen to be constructed by fostering a definite and unified sense of culture that revolved around landscape: art, especially as it revolved around landscape, was seen to provide English Canadians with a sense of national identity and, simultaneously, a sense of transcendence and a corresponding set of convictions.**

**Canada as nation may thus be seen to absorb remnants of the dynastic system, which precedes it; that is, the vocabulary and structure of religious experience are borrowed without strict adherence to religious institutions or beliefs. Notwithstanding the emphasis on the “horizontal” relationship between the nation’s citizens, a hierarchy, with the nation at the apex, an ideal for which its citizens would willingly sacrifice their lives, exists and is perpetuated.<sup>68</sup> Also, although this system of national imaginings has imperial foundations, the same system is used to resist Empire, and, as such, Empire becomes “other,” not the “wilderness,” to borrow Frye’s conception. The “wilderness” is identified as a part of the new nation being envisioned. In this manner, Anderson’s proposed formulation for the nation and its relationship to religious imaginings has merit for the study at hand:**

**I am not claiming that the appearance of nationalism towards the end of the eighteenth century was “produced” by the erosion of religious certainties [. . .] nor am I suggesting that somehow nationalism historically “supercedes” religion. What I am proposing is that nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems (the religious community and the dynastic realms) that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being. (11-12)**

**Even if the cultural system has been altered, or revolves around different principles (notions of time, print capitalism, visual versus print media, and so forth), it remains a system (an imagined**

community) within which a group of people are contained.

The difference resides in the principles of legitimacy that determine the nature of the cultural system: nations are theoretically “boundary-oriented and horizontal” rather than centripetal and hierarchical, and, as such, involve agreement, if not in language and culture, then in some shared system or desire for a particular system (15). The “horizontal” principle of organization that underpins nations, however, does not negate the fact that the nation itself remains a transcendent ideal—in other words, the hierarchy of the dynastic system has been translated so that the ideal to which one aspires is not God, but the nation. Thus, those involved within the cultural system agree to struggle for similar principles, for political solidarity to create a “meaningful communit[y]” (Jowett 16); or, as Angus argues, nations remark upon their own purportedly inherent differences from other nations, especially when these differences are “seen as something worth preserving” (22). From such an agreement about what is considered worth preserving and what demarcates a nation from another comes a sense of identity, and, as such, suggests how identity is relational: a group defines itself by a general consensus about what it is not, as much as what it is. Such an agreement necessarily entails forgetting or dismissing *internal* conflict or difference: “tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses” (Renan 892). It is an “imagined community,” a discursive formation, a “wider, lived experience in a relation between social structures and subjectivity” (Easthope 8); inasmuch as it is desired, as it was in Canada, it is seen as a positive value, an ideal or transcendent state toward which one strives.<sup>69</sup> The decline of kingship and the concomitant decline of sacred languages are thus replaced by this new cultural system, which is also seen as an ideal but which creates citizens, not subjects (Anderson 22).

As Angus notes, this cultural system, which may be referred to as the nation, is not to be conflated with nationalism, the state, or the geographical territory designated to and under the operation of the state:

A state may be divided by the secessionist claims of a “nation” within it. At this point the definition of the nation and national identity tends to pass over into the issue of nationalism, which has been defined by Hobsbawm as ‘the body of citizens whose collective sovereignty constituted them a state which was their political expression.’ This view includes the notion often held by nationalists that the nation is, or should be, the primary and overriding form of identification and social identity. [. . .]

[. . .] However, national identity, certainly in distinction from nationalism in its exclusivist forms, coexists with other forms of social identity, such as region, class, and gender, to name only a few. The tendency to conflate national identity with nationalism tends to occlude this important point. (13-14)

The components of national identity, he adds, include the *institution of a nation*, “a formation of the means of communication such that an inside is distinguished from an outside and communication within the inside is intensified”;<sup>70</sup> the *national actor*, “the historic bloc who identifies with the national-popular will”; and the *rhetoric of national identity*, the “selection and propagation of the specific symbolic markers that define the content of a given national identity” (20). In Canada, the institution would include the administrative framework, which includes the two official languages, French and English; the national actor, those political parties or figures that represent the “national-popular will”; and the rhetoric, the historical foundation of the country (the British North American Act of 1867, even in light of the

contestation of its importance to French Canada) and the iconography developed, especially in relation to landscape, and perpetuated in association with national identity.<sup>71</sup>

Notwithstanding the endeavours of Connor, Thomson, the Group of Seven and Carr to create an art and corresponding iconography that would transform the country's inhabitants into citizens and then reflect and accommodate their interests, English-Canadian national identity – indeed, national identity more generally – was created and perpetuated in ways that did not necessarily accommodate all those who considered themselves part of a particular cultural system: the national-popular will is not homogenous or uniform, and thus actual inequalities and exploitation do occur.<sup>72</sup> National unity has not been an “effect,” to borrow Easthope's term, because the process of collective identification with a common object is inconsistent, and the identification of individuals with each other is sometimes dislocated. Angus notes that national identity becomes problematic when it “is *naturalized*, or assumed as fundamental so that its constitution is regarded as unproblematic and therefore left uninvestigated” and when it thus “can be used as a site from which to launch barbs at all other identities as *constructed* within the system of social power” (17). The construction of English-Canadian identity has been particularly problematic, since the tendency both historically and theoretically in English-Canadian literary, historical, and other forms of criticism had been to refer to itself as representative of all Canadian citizens:<sup>73</sup> as such, it elides “the key question of its relation to others and especially the history of violence whereby the Canadian state, as all other states, was constructed” (Angus 112). In other words, even in light of the efforts of Connor, Thomson, the Group of Seven, and Carr to generate images that would create collective identification and faith in the country's potential, these efforts sometimes disguised, often unconsciously, inequities and imbalances embedded in the material or structural

framework of the nation.

First Nations peoples are only one part of this elision; French-Canadians are another part;<sup>74</sup> immigrant groups are yet another. First Nations peoples were constructed as part of “uncivilized” societies that, on the one hand, required the “civilizing” British military-administrative system or “were subjected to genocide, slavery, and/or removal or confinement,” and, on the other, were valorized in their “original and unspoiled” state because they were regarded as part of the untouched land and its spiritual and moral superiority (Bordo 1992, 98). If Natives were depicted, they were frequently seen as part of culture that was disappearing and that could be readily accommodated into a newer cultural framework. Contemporary criticism, however, almost uniformly condemns artists of the period for whatever approach they took: critics take issue with depictions of Natives and Native iconography because of the inherent dangers of assimilation or appropriation and the evidence of colonial domination and also take issue when artists of that period did not make reference to aboriginal presence because such an artistic decision is seen as effectively contributing to the erasure of that presence.

In early twentieth-century English-Canada, the interest in landscape, which became part of the rhetoric of national identity, was sometimes seen as a means of circumventing these problems: topographical images, on the one hand, may have erased traces of aboriginal presence, but, on the other hand, provided artists with something which all the country’s inhabitants could identify and which was regarded as a means of cohesion or unity. In *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures* (1989), Terry Goldie notes, however, that the process of rendering incoming settlers as citizens, or the “impossible necessity of becoming indigenous,” what Goldie calls “indigenization,” results from the need of incoming settlers to feel “native,” especially when

they “recognized an Other as having greater roots in that place” (13-14). Since the Other is as much an obstacle as agent in facilitating the process, the settler must either appropriate the indigene, or “go native,” or dominate (16).<sup>75</sup> Sometimes the “indigene’s closeness to nature is used to justify an emphasis on the indigene as the land”; at other times, as in the case of the Group of Seven, Natives are almost entirely absent or unrepresented (19). For the Group, the employment of landscape side-stepped or deferred making such a decision and referring to this cultural dilemma, since it was seen as the locus for the conversion to English-Canadian national identity and as a way of indirectly circumventing the conflicts embedded in contemporary historical events. The Group believed as did Carr that “going native” would follow, as Goldie suggests, “by long habitation in various parts of the country,” from which settlers would “come to love [the land] with an abiding affection, each its home land.”<sup>76</sup> Harris regarded landscape in this manner and argued that the function of art itself was to create “higher values” which would rise above such biases and exclusions:

The arts cultivate the life of the spirit directly. They do this above the restrictions of any class, creed, dogma, sect or ideology. They thus leave us free to experience the informing spirit of life each one in his own way. [ . . . ]

[ . . . ] Art and spirit are in danger of becoming bond servants to ideologies. They are forbidden to fulfill their natural role as the bootstraps by which humanity helps to lift itself.<sup>77</sup>

If art “cultivates the life of the spirit,” landscape was seen as the medium which informs that life, which transmits spiritual, national experience. Harris and other artists of the time believed in the potential of Canada; they also believed that English-Canadian identity was to be forged out of something other than its past, which was both limited and fraught with conflict (Angus

7).

In addition, the status of English Canada was shifting from subject of Britain (religious, dynastic system) to nation (a separate entity that contains citizens who experience a “deep, horizontal comradeship”). As a result of the First World War, with Canada’s growing sense of independence and its aftermath of the conscription crisis of 1917, and as a result of a large influx of immigrants, an influx which began in 1896 and was virtually unparalleled until then in Canada, English-Canadian politicians, writers, and artists were striving for further unity and for independence politically and economically from Britain. There were those in English Canada who increasingly desired “a more influential and less subordinate place within the Empire and grew ever more determined to remove the last vestiges, psychological as well as legal, of colonialism and dependence” (Berger 1970, 5).<sup>78</sup> The construction of the nation entailed borrowing, to some extent, the hierarchical framework (“self-sacrifice and service” for the sake of the Empire), and the idealist and dehistoricizing practices of the previous cultural system, that is, a commitment to an ideal that purportedly transcended temporal issues.<sup>79</sup>

Out of such ideology arose perhaps the most tenacious of all notions, the Canadian northern ideal. As early as 1896, Robert Grant Haliburton in “The Men of the North and their Place in History” articulates such ideas. In this lecture, he delineates how the spirit of Canada’s people would determine national wealth by “a healthy, hardy, virtuous, dominant race”: the “men of the north” who had been affected by the northern climate, one which “ha[s] the effect of moulding races” (1-2). Haliburton, as Carl Berger notes in *The Sense of Power* (1970), lamented that the “British North American union had been accomplished in the prosaic manner more usual in the formation of joint-stock companies than in the founding of new nations,” but proposed that the distinctive character of Canada arose from its nordicity. Canada “is a

Northern country inhabited by the descendants of Northern races”: “Equating the adjective northern with toughness, strength, and hardihood, he argued that the diverse nationalities within Canada all shared a northern ancestry, and that the climate tended to instil and maintain the strenuous attributes of the Nordic races. Because of this racial heritage and their stern environment, Canadians were destined to assume in the new world the dominant role and to preserve their vigour and cherish their institutions of liberty” (Berger 1970, 53).

The North was also seen as a source of spiritual and moral superiority, and of its uniqueness, especially in relation to its corrupt “southern” neighbours.<sup>80</sup> This idea was pervasive at the time.<sup>81</sup> Such notions were advocated less by Connor and Carr, who were more fascinated by the West, and most passionately by members of the Group, particularly Harris, who argued that “our whole country was cleansed by the pristine and replenishing air which sweeps out of that great hinterland. [ . . . ] It was the discovery of this great Northern area, a field of art which inspired these painters [ . . . ] this land was different in its air, moods, and spirit from Europe and the old country”:<sup>82</sup>

We in Canada are in different circumstances than the people in the United States. Our population is sparse, the psychic atmosphere comparatively clean, whereas the States fill up and the masses crowd a heavy psychic blanket over nearly all the land. We are in the fringe of the great North and its living whiteness, its loneliness and replenishment, its resignations and release, its call and answer—its cleansing rhythms. It seems that the top of the continent is a source of spiritual flow that will ever shed clarity into the growing race of America, and we Canadians being closest to this source seem destined to produce an art somewhat different from our Southern fellows—an art more

spacious [ . . . ] perhaps of a more certain conviction of eternal values.<sup>83</sup>

Harris's conviction in the nation's potential was counterbalanced by his sense that artists before the Group "did not know their own country" and, more specifically, "did not know its spirit as a transforming power" (10). He believed that the North provided a spiritually-elevating alternative, a centripetal force, one sufficiently strong to counterbalance the centrifugal tensions at work in Canada.<sup>84</sup> His ideas had an impact upon Carr who, in a speech delivered in 1930 to the Canadian Women's Art Club, declared that "our art is founded on a long and growing love and understanding of the North, in an ever clearer experience of oneness with the informing spirit of the whole land and a strange brooding sense of Mother Nature fostering a new race and a new age" (7).

For some artists, however, to advocate Canadian distinctiveness meant implicitly being descended from a particular racial heritage.<sup>85</sup> Lismer was non-specific in the advocacy of a Canadian national identity in response to the land that was comprised of various racial strands: "When Canada is a real home for its people," he argued, "it will be because the mixed racial elements who form our population will, by long habitation in various parts of the country, come to love it with an abiding affection, each its own home land."<sup>86</sup> Still others were persuaded that a sense of national identity would be forged as those of various racial extractions would be assimilated. Connor expresses this point of view in his preface to *The Foreigner* (1909):

In Western Canada there is to be seen to-day that most fascinating of all human phenomena, the making of a nation. Out of breeds diverse in traditions, in ideals, in speech, and in manner of life, Saxon and Slav, Teuton, Celt and Gaul, one people is being made. The blood strains of great races will mingle in the blood of a race greater than the greatest of them all.

**It would be our wisdom to grip these peoples to us with living hooks of justice and charity till all lines of national cleavage disappear, and in the Entity of our Canadian national life, and the Unity of our world-wide Empire, we fuse into a people whose strength will endure the slow shock of time for the honour of our name, for the good of mankind, and for the glory of Almighty God. (5)**

The use of “our,” “us,” and “we” is revealing: the mingling and eventual fusion of races does not negate or diminish the fact that it was one particular race which would “grip these peoples” to a particular ideology and result in the disappearance of difference. If such writers as Connor regarded landscape as a centripetal, unifying force, and if such rhetorical invocations were meant to carry noble overtones, both landscape and the corresponding rhetoric also glossed over many hostilities and simplified differences that were in the process of being negotiated. As Berger notes, “The racial, sectional and class antagonism intensified by the war, combined with the distrust of foreigners which wartime propaganda magnified, impelled some Canadians into a renewed questioning of the unselective immigration policy and led others into a black pessimism concerning racial degeneracy” (1970, 151).<sup>47</sup>

Politically, the emphasis on nordicity was important in order to answer to an increasing need for and convey a sense of independence; Canada’s hostile counterpart south of the border also fostered this need. Whereas attachment to Britain helped to sustain the impression of an unassailable Empire, the fact remained that “[t]he new Dominion was weak and thinly populated, internally divided by sectional, racial, and cultural conflicts [ . . . ] and at the very moment that British support was most necessary, Canadians could no longer assume that it would be automatically given” (Berger 1970, 61). In light of such anxieties, it is understandable that English-Canadian national identity was eagerly being fostered, not only to resist the threat

of American domination, but also to counterbalance dwindling imperial attachment. The difficulty was how to develop a unifying sense of identity that would help to dispel such notions, for, even as the attachment to Britain was being eroded, other factors interfered with its construction: “the diversity of peoples within Canada, the importation of old world quarrels, and the ‘asperities of race, creed, or interest’” (62).<sup>88</sup>

If national (inner) conflict contributed to this search for an identity that could be shared, international (external) conflict as manifested in the First World War heightened this search:

The First World War was the first time that Europeans, and European colonials, could no longer blame the conflict on benighted savages from other places. They had to face the fact that it was the civilized nations of Europe who had originated the mass destruction. It could no longer be viewed as a conflict between civilization and savagery, and so the question became for that generation: What is civilization, and what is the source of its current failure? (Angus 53)

The idea of Canada was fostered as an alternative to European “civilization”: the Canadian nation was seen as a kind of haven, what Connor described as a morally superior place. Although Angus argues that the “rhetoric of salvation” was not deeply entrenched within English Canada because, unlike the United States, it was not a “New World society” that had been “born in a revolution” and that articulated its difference on the basis of a radical temporal break, there was a persuasive and deepening sense that, by virtue of one’s exposure to Canadian soil, one would be converted into a more refined, virtuous human being (142). As Angus notes, English-Canadian identity was forged over time and differentiated itself from Europe through geographical particularity, and especially in relation to that particularity (114).

Depictions of Canadian land in word and image were conceived as a way of expressing an experience that could be shared by all, that would act as a means of deflecting the imperialist tendencies of European culture, and thus of creating an identity that was “free” from imperial associations.

Landscape was an idea, a way of seeing that for these artists was worth preserving and extending because it was regarded as a positive influence in the development of character: that character was developed through a spiritually-informed experience and in the act of witnessing the Canadian landscape. The nordicity of Canadians was thus emphasized as a way of distinguishing itself from its Southern neighbour at the same time as it was a way of including immigrants who might not seem to correspond to the national character being developed. Peter Slater argues that “when we look for traces of transcendence and saving power in Canadian experience, we must look more to the land than to our divisive history” (1985, 94): however unpopular that idea may now be in postcolonial criticism, some literature and paintings of the period reflected this notion, perhaps most popularly in the work of the Group of Seven. More than just an “interesting locale to paint,” the North, “with its clear and sharp outlines which could never be apprehended with the techniques of old world art [. . .] was a mirror of the national character” (Berger 1970, 133). In other words, the North was seen to have the power to affect the psyche of its inhabitants, to effect an alteration of character inasmuch as it was a symbol of Canada’s potential: “the concept became a vehicle for expressing their faith in themselves and the distinctiveness of their character” (Berger 1970, 133). The early twentieth century in English Canada is remarkable for the consolidation of English-Canadian identity and its corresponding sense of independence, especially as it was based upon geographical context and associated with various configurations of landscape. The early twentieth-century fiction

and paintings being studied suggest that, at one time, there seemed to exist for some artists a very clear sense of what represented Canada and its inhabitants.

Almost all the artists under consideration with the exception of Thomson wrote prolifically about the interest in the creation of a national art. In particular, Carr wrote an autobiography, *Growing Pains* (1946), that engaged the aesthetic, spiritual, and political concerns that informed her work. Like Carr, Connor and Jackson wrote autobiographies which addressed the positioning of their work in relation to their artistic impulses and contemporary socio-political concerns: they wrote self-consciously about their aspirations, how they saw their work fit into a larger national agenda, and their respective private lives only as it related to a much larger public life. These autobiographies indicate the understanding or perception of a sense of purpose in relation to the development of nation-building. So Harris wrote in a letter dated September 23, 1947: "I do not think the personal or family part of the story is of any importance—what is important is a biography in terms of art activity—so I think family history, marriages, and children should be kept to a minimum."<sup>89</sup> The conscious sense of political purpose and the consistent aesthetic employment of landscape account, in part, for the inclusion of these artists in this study.

Since the artists under consideration and the two forms of cultural production, painting and fiction, were also included in Frye's initial assessment, and since all but Connor and Thomson both painted and wrote prolifically (the former was devoted exclusively to writing, the latter to painting), both forms of production will be considered. In his "Conclusion," Frye considered English-Canadian painters and writers simultaneously: specifically, Thomson and Carr, "whose focus is so often farthest back in the picture" (828), and Connor, whose work is a reminder that "the churches not only influenced the cultural climate but took an active part in

the production of poetry and fiction” (832). Carr herself treated both writing and painting, what she referred to as her “double approach for thoughts regarding what you were after,” as equal forms of expression, which allowed for greater facility of expression:<sup>90</sup> “It seems to me it helps to write things and thoughts down. It makes the unworthy ones look more shamefaced and helps to place the better ones for sure in our minds. [. . .] I wish I could express what I feel about [our pine trees] because trying to find equivalents for things in words helps me find equivalents in painting.”<sup>91</sup> She also believed that the media she employed to articulate her “thoughts” could be used interchangeably: “There’s words enough, paint and brushes enough, and thoughts enough. The whole difficulty seems to be getting the thoughts clear enough, making them stand still long enough be fitted with words and paint.”<sup>92</sup> The focus will not be on the media she employed but on “finding out just exactly *what* [she] had to say”: “I felt that more difficult than finding our way through the medium was [. . .] getting it perfectly clear in our minds. If that was crystal clear then I think the medium would wrap it round.”<sup>93</sup>

Cultural studies allows for the treatment of all cultural objects as embodying or “encod[ing] the tensions, complexities and nuances within colonial cultures” (Loomba 70): this study concentrates on painting and fiction to demonstrate, if not the cross-fertilization of particular ideas in relation to representations of landscape, at least consistencies in the treatment and application of those ideas. Since history does not merely provide a context for the study of texts—visual or literary—but is an essential component of textual meaning, the works being studied here might be seen as fundamental to the creation of history and culture. These artistic endeavours may thus be seen as part of larger cultural, intellectual, and political processes that “work together in the formation, perpetuation and dismantling of colonialism” (Loomba 54).<sup>94</sup> The work of Connor, Thomson, the Group of Seven and Carr is positioned

within a larger cultural and political context, in which landscape is regarded as encapsulating nuances of meaning, but which, for these artists, is associated with the development of an indigenous, unified identity that was held against an imperial model, and that is closely allied with the discursive formations related to national unity and the sublime: their work demonstrates some degree of consistency in relation to the historical, social, and aesthetic conditions of the time. As Ania Loomba argues, it is helpful to consider postcolonialism as “the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism” rather than as a literal, temporal “after colonialism” because it permits one to “incorporate the history of anti-colonial resistance with contemporary resistances to imperialism and to dominant Western culture” (12). The understanding of postcolonialism as such also permits one to understand how the works of the artists under study might contain “traces” of imperial adherence in the form of expressed ideas, conventions, or artistic forms and developments.

While the ideological underpinnings and consistencies in the treatment and representation of landscape were motivating factors in bringing these works together, the critical assessment will alter slightly to accommodate the differing nature of the art objects being studied. Neither the two artistic forms nor their respective distinctive natures will be collapsed. Specifically, the element of time is relevant to narrative, and, therefore, to Connor’s novels and some of Carr’s literary work, because it affects the shaping of character in relation to land, whereas it is unessential for the spatial or visual arts, as in the canvases of Tom Thomson, Group members, and Carr.<sup>95</sup> The manner in which the land is figured in the texts of these artists and how they employ it to contribute to and create a sense of English-Canadian identity, however, is the consistent focus of this study.

Connor’s novels, though generally regarded as “popular” and less “aesthetic,” are

significant because they demonstrate that his treatment of landscape permeated various levels of culture. Various described as “local colour” novels, or semi-religious, romantic narratives which conveyed a message of “muscular Christianity,”<sup>96</sup> his work also is important because it embodies the ideological transition from imperial adherence to independent nation as envisaged through the land. He himself believed that Canadian national identity was in its infancy prior to his period, but more mature in his own: “at the time of Confederation, twenty years ago, Canada was just struggling into self-consciousness as a Dominion, as a constituent of the Empire. We were still very young” (*PA* 77). His depictions of landscape reveal his own ideological ambivalence: for characters of past generations, the land is something to be conquered. They are described as the “virile race of men and women, the first pioneers who turned the wild wilderness into civilization” (150). For those characters contemporary to his period, the land is a catalyst for the transformation of character: the land is seen as redemptive, sacred, and a means of creating the uniqueness of English-Canadian character, one that nonetheless continues to have definite racial implications. Landscape as it relates to national identity and to character is the focus of the chapter. Representations of land will be scrutinized as a function of narrative, that is, how land creates a distinctly Canadian character and national identity within the framework of Connor’s novels.

Thomson and the Group of Seven consistently treat Canadian landscape as if it contained spiritually-redemptive properties that are essential to contributing to the development of Canadian character. Thomson, however, infrequently wrote: the archival material is very sparse indeed. The emphasis of the investigation will be on the Group’s work and their perception of the aesthetic function of land: that is, the focus will be on what they were depicting rather than *how* they were doing so or the methods employed. Articles, letters,

lectures, and notebooks are included in evaluating what they wished to accomplish, especially since they believed that one ought to consider the artistic intention behind artistic practice. As Lismer argued, “I thoroughly believe that it is essential that one should have some understanding of the intentions of the artists in the production of a work of art” and that there must be a “conscious endeavour to get at the meaning and intentions of the artist.”<sup>97</sup> This study does not suggest that these artists have “a better understanding of their works’ meaning,” but that their understanding of their work needs to be considered (Langer 144).

Carr’s work, which spans approximately the first four decades of the twentieth century, is also included because, while younger artists were exploring the function of art in response to the Depression and the chaotic social climate it induced, Carr strove to encapsulate both visually and verbally her vision of British Columbia landscape. As early as the memorial exhibit held in 1945 by the Art Gallery of Toronto, her “role as formal innovator and solitary modern genius” in relation to Western landscape was emphasized (Moray 1998, 43). Subsequent curatorial and art historical assessments of Carr have paid homage to her work, as the manifestation of the “desire to find a distinctive Canadian identity rooted in the land and its history, and the desire for a display of beneficence towards a native population at this time being safely neutralized by the imposition of European economic and educational institutions” (Moray 49). Such homage in conjunction with Carr’s rise to international prominence contradicts and undermines Frye’s assessment of English-Canadian cultural production as “a poor naked *alouette*” and demonstrates that cultural production that is celebrated here, “within the border,” is also being celebrated over there, outside of it.

## ENDNOTES

1. See also Northrop Frye's *The Bush Garden*, iii. One might well add, too, "Where is there?," since the sense of the imperial centre may have been Britain, but English-Canadians also looked to the United States and to Europe in general for artistic practices and new artistic paradigms.

2. In *Worrying the Nation* (1998), Jonathan Kertzer notes that he also sees these writers as exemplifying permutations of the Frygian riddle: "[literature] diagnoses an infection in the Canadian psyche and recommends a cure through an advance from dejection to courage (Jones), a sequence of victim positions (Atwood), or a growing talent for compromise (McGregor)" (121).

3. Atwood accepts Frye's question and the notion of nature as monstrous when she considers "why [the story of the Franklin expedition] of the nineteenth century had such resonance. [. . .] Why is being lost in the frozen North—and going crazy there—still alive and kicking as a Canadian theme, even though most Canadians now live in cities?" (3). John Moss also argues that "in the Western world the concept of wilderness has traditionally been negative" (1999, 198).

4. Other critics include Stanley Fogel who argues in *A Tale of Two Countries: Contemporary Fiction in English Canada and the United States* (1984) that "here" is "rarely named in the pages of contemporary Canadian writers; it cannot be named" (19). Frye's critical assessment seems to have been more pervasive and influential than that of Gordon Roper, Rupert Schieder and S. Ross Beharriell, who in *Literary History of Canada*, argue that nature is, in fact, "beneficent, and often inspiring" (292). Some such writers as Sinclair Ross did perceive Canadian landscape as either "hostile" or "indifferent." In *As for Me and My House*, Mrs. Bentley believes that "we think a force or presence into [the land]—even a hostile presence, for we dare not admit an indifferent wilderness, where we may have no meaning at all" (131). David Stouck, clearly marking out a different critical strain from Frye, observes that this "observation seemed to strike a new note, in Canadian fiction at least" (13).

5. William Closson James adds that such a notion of the wilderness—as fostered by Protestant ideology—was complicated by the presence of immigrants with their own religious beliefs, stories, and histories, which meant that "there is no national origin that can give unity to a people and define its destiny" (126). Bhabha argues that "the postcolonial perspective forces us to rethink the profound limitations of consensual and collusive 'liberal' sense of community. It insists—through the migrant metaphor—that cultural and political identity is constructed through a process of otherness" (1990, 16).

6. See Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994).

7. Heather Murray consolidates such notions when she argues in "Women in the Wilderness" that "the nature/culture model initially was received as part of a colonial intellectual inheritance, and that it gained reinforcement from American ideas of the frontier" (80).

8. In "Women in the Wilderness," Murray argues that there is a continuum, rather than a "city/wilderness" binary: this scale involves the city at one end of the spectrum, a "pseudo-wilderness" (what she defines as a "motivating and mediating middle ground which often substitutes for the wilderness itself" and which thus may not only operate as a space of mediation, but also of redemption) between, and then the wilderness proper (76). The artists being studied

employ wilderness scenes in their respective work, so Murray's scale, which may be appropriate for other authors, is not entirely applicable here: some of Connor's novels are the exception. In *Corporal Cameron*, he describes the transition from the farm fields, with the "signs of coming harvest [. . .] luxuriantly visible," to the edges of such properties that were "overgrown with weeds" and which "represented the transition stage between forest and harvest field," to the forests themselves with their "dark cool masses of maple, birch, and elm" (174). Generally, however, Connor distinguishes between farm and forest and suggests that forest or wilderness contained spiritual properties.

9. Angus's assumptions about the role of religion in the stimulation (and hindrance) of English-Canadian culture are inherited from and hence correlate with Frye's own notions.

10. Frank Davey in *Reading Canadians Reading* notes that such assumptions are predicated upon the notion that "culture [. . .] is a monolithic construct" (12): in other words, these critics make assertions that are far too broad to encompass the range and diversity of English-Canadian literature.

11. Charles Hill examines some of the different religious and spiritual movements that fed into early twentieth-century English-Canadian culture and how they were similar in approach: "Each of these three mystical approaches—Christianity, transcendentalism, and theosophy and the fourth dimension—was based on a set of very similar tenets. Where they differed was in emphasis or in one particular aspect of a particular belief. Each was predicated on the centrality of intuition as an inclusive but not exclusive tool, and on an individual, emotive approach to divinity. This divinity was immanent, indwelling, permanently pervading the universe. Central to each approach was the belief that science and the spirit—that the entire world—could and would be harmonized, and that a new whole world would result. This viewpoint was the metaphysics of integration" (1975, xvi). He adds that transcendentalism and Theosophy also emphasized nature and were both involved in the promotion of nation-building (1975, 164).

12. He notes, however, in "Lawren Harris: An Introduction," that the Group felt "a commitment to painting as a way of life, or perhaps better, as a sacramental activity expressing a faith, and so analogous to the practising of a religion. This is a Romantic view, following the tradition that begins in English poetry with Wordsworth" (208). Frye's views about religion and its effect upon English-Canadian literature are perhaps an echo of those maintained earlier by such critics as Douglas Bush who, in response to a reader of his original column, "A Plea for Original Sin" (*Canadian Forum*), argues that "morality and art in Canada are hand in glove, when they ought to be strangers"; and by such critics as A.J.M. Smith who, in "Wanted—Canadian Criticism," asserts that English-Canadian literature was being limited and contained by religious or moral motivations.

13. James, however, replaces "religion," which is fraught in contemporary vocabulary with associations of "a formal faith community with specific traditions and history," with the term "sacred": "whatever is of foundational value in a given society, its point of reference for bringing order out of chaos" (5). The term to be used here in place of religion (except when religion is meant broadly) is "spiritual" or "spirituality."

14. Harris is not alone, however, in making such assertions. Lismer argues that the artist “trusts and believes and his stature grows as his sentiments broaden into an expansive gesture of willingness to receive all that life can bring. And there are artists, poets and rebels who continue to give, to receive, and to believe that through their adoration and praise and belief that somewhere behind the facts and the scientific documentary evidence there is real life stirring that no expert can prove, that no theory can reveal or substantiate. [ . . . ] This is ART—it reveals by all these abstract things that Art and LIFE *are*—that God *is*” (AGO, Marjorie Lismer Bridges Collection, Letter to Staff for Children’s Art Centre, ts., 6 October 1938).

15. Peter Larisey observes that Harris began to commit considerable effort to such ideas during the early 1920s when he published *Contrasts: A Book of Verse* (1922), a “collection of transcendentalist reflections on life” (42). Other articles that focussed on such notions include “Art is the Distillate of Life” (c. 1925), “Revelation of Art in Canada” (1926), and “Creative Art and Canada” (1928). This interest in the mystical and spiritual facets of life became more focussed when he joined the Toronto Theosophical Society on March 19, 1924. His interest in Theosophy guided him toward his abstract phase during the 1930s, outside the scope and interest of this study (46). Whatever form of painting he adopted, however, Harris was consistently motivated by the desire to “express the deepest realities of the spiritual in his painting” (50).

16. Robert Linsley mentions in “Landscape and Literature in the Art of British Columbia” that “the contemplation of nature as an empty space filled with the presence of silence, and with the slow, peaceful movement of growing things, is easily spiritualised, and forms the perfect complement to the violence of unrestrained commercial exploitation” (196).

17. *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

18. James 34; James, quoting Bruce Campbell, 42.

19. Editorial, *Canadian Forum* 1 (October 1920): 3.

20. Connor described “religion” as “a synonym for all that is virile, honorable and withal tender and gentle in true men and women”—especially those in Canada—and his novels as containing a “religious motif” for his Canadian audience (*PA* 150).

21. Connor argues that he is concerned with “the business of making good citizens” (*TF* 274).

22. As James’s reference to Saskatchewan author Sharon Butala makes clear, some perceive the writer as “a kind of shaman or priest facilitating a connection with the sacred” (6). There is a clear historical precedent for imagining both the artist as a spiritual figure—or as witness to what Jonathan Bordo refers to as “an unpicturable condition” (2000, 227).

23. AGO, Arthur Lismer Fonds, “Letters to African Teachers of Bechuanaland,” c.1936, Section 9, 2.

24. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, “The Writers’, Broadcasters’, and Artists’ War Council,” vol. 2, file 5. Harris also seemed to see art as an alternative to contemporary religious

institutions: "He spoke fearlessly about the churches and their smugness, and of mothers offering their sons as sacrifices, and the hideous propaganda of politics and commerce exploiting war with greed and money for their gods while we stupidly, indolently, sit blindfolded, swallowing the dope ladled out to us instead of thinking for ourselves" ("Trip to Chicago," 18 November 1933, *HT* 712).

25. Larisey investigated Harris's poetry and argues that the "underlying structure of the book (*Contrasts*) is transcendental; that is, it sees reality as divided into two levels": "The first of these levels is the materialistic life of those who live unconscious of, or actively suppressing the life of the spirit. The second is the spiritual or transcendental level that consoles individuals and encourages spiritual vision and growth. [. . .] The twenty-six poems of the final sections 'Definitions' and 'Spiritual,' together with the last three poems of 'People,' form the higher or transcendental level of the book" (53-54). It might also be noted that Harris's conception of the artist as "seer" has Romantic antecedents.

26. See Frank Davey's *Surviving the Paraphrase* (1983) in which he suggests that the writer, too, is "in some small way free, that the writer chooses among influences and traditions rather than being passively formed by them, and that this process of election is more important to an understanding of literature than the influence or tradition itself" (6).

27. She concludes that "the *desire* for authenticity is certainly part of dominant Canadian literary traditions and is perhaps both celebrated and lamented in Frye's question, but that desire never needed fulfilment to serve its nation-forming function" (17).

28. Antony Easthope mentions Freudian ideas in relation to the development of collective identity; he writes that "Freud begins by noting that collective identity (including national identity) is precisely that, a group identity defined over and against what differs from it" (15).

29. As Bhabha suggests, parody of dominant forms is not necessarily an act of homage. Ania Loomba adds that "colonial authority is rendered 'hybrid' and 'ambivalent' by this process of replication, thus opening up spaces for the colonised to subvert the master-discourse": "it is the *failure* of colonial authority to reproduce itself that allows for anti-colonial subversion" (89; 91).

30. Many artists thought thus also because Canada was regarded as part of the Empire.

31. Watson notes that if Frye argued that "Canada with its empty spaces, its largely unknown, lakes, rivers, islands [. . .] has had this particular problem of an obliterated environment throughout most of its history," he would counter such an argument by "reversing the terms: the Canadian problem is an obliterated history throughout most of its environment" (104).

32. In "'A New Soil and A Sharp Sun': The Landscape of a Modern Canadian Poetry," Sandra Djwa draws the same conclusion: "the enormous age of the land was transmuted into a substitution for an historical past" (10). James notes that "Moss might have meant 'landscape' here because recently he opposes the terms landscape and geography, the latter defined as 'the imposition of knowledge on experience in a specified landscape'" (69).

33. Ironically, these same artists are now regarded as colonizers of the Native peoples: different forms of imperialist activity may co-exist. Loomba argues that it is useful to consider postcoloniality “not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism. Such a position [. . .] allows us to incorporate the history of anti-colonial resistance with contemporary resistances to imperialism and to dominant Western culture” (12). Any references to postcoloniality throughout the dissertation are employed with this sense of the word.

34. Whether or not this pride was the result of envy, a sense of difference was pervasive and persuasive. Envy breeds moral superiority: since “we have never been at the top,” Angus proclaims, “we do not have to take responsibility for the way things are,” and thus we can be smug about being “naturally better than Americans” (119).

35. That renderings contain historical and social biases is the subject of a number of other such critical investigations as that by Watson or Loomba.

36. These same narratives also disguise the tensions and inequalities that were pervasive in the construction of a uniform national identity: such an argument is taking up by Bordo in “Picture and Witness at the Site of the Wilderness,” where he critically investigates “the wilderness” as “a paradigmatic site for the symbolic staging of Benedict Anderson’s imagined community of the nation-state” (225) and the implied witness who apprehends and depicts, but remains absent from, the wilderness: “The specular witness performs a rather special and dual role. It exalts a picture that testifies to an unpicturable condition—the wilderness sublime—while simultaneously legitimating, as a landscape picture, terrain violently seized, dispossessed of its indigenous inhabitants, and reconstituted as territory” (225).

37. Lismer notes that some Canadians from central Canada could be disdainful of Western art, but suggested that “this is pretty much akin to the English point of view that the overseas Dominion are yet struggling with tree chopping and railroad building. [. . .] to worry about art”: he was advocating a national art, rather than art from central Canada (AGO, Arthur Lismer Fonds, “Art in Canada,” ts., section 11). Harris still recognized that there were differences in renderings of Canadian landscape from one place to another: “We find that here in Canada, not only does our painting differ in character from that of other countries, even from that of the great country to the south of us, but that it differs somewhat in different parts of the country” (NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, untitled essay, vol. 6, file 28, 2).

38. Barry Lord addresses this question two decades earlier when he asserts that “the fact that this art depicted primarily a certain region of northern Ontario is not in itself a limitation: the French are known for the Barbizon school, the U.S. for the Hudson River School, and so on. A particular region may very well be selected by the artists of a national school as their subject, depending on the interests of the patron class. The national character of this painting of our northland lies in its break with the imperial traditions about Canada, not in accounting for the entire range of the country. In patronizing an art of the northland, the national bourgeoisie provided the decisive backing necessary to help achieve one major step forward in the struggle for an art of the Canadian people” (1974, 116).

39. This letter was addressed to Norah Thomson DePencier. In another letter to “Jean,” dated November 2, 1959, he wrote that he found October detestable because “the leaves dried up and dropped off and not much to sketch” (MCAC, A.Y. Jackson Papers).

40. This letter was addressed to Miss Thomson. Both letters are from the NAC, A.Y. Jackson Fonds, MG 30 D 259.

41. This perspective was consistent with other members of the Group. Varley explained to Lismer what he appreciated about Canadian landscape: “[the West] is full of variety. Georgian Bay, Lake Superior, then Lake Superior on a bigger scale [ . . . ] and then chunks of mountains, freakish stuff. [ . . . Niagara] has a heave of water lifting through it that has the weight and grandeur of slow motion” (MCAC, Letter to Arthur Lismer, c. Feb. 1928). Jackson’s letter indicates that he appreciated the land before the arrival of agriculture—that is, untouched landscape was worth painting.

42. See also E.H. Gombrich’s study *Art and Illusion* (1960) in which he argues that the “innocent” eye does not exist, and that perception is conditioned by expectation; or Deborah Keahey’s *Making it Home: Place in Canadian Prairie Literature* (1998) in which she suggests that the assumption that the “land itself is assumed to be a preexistent reality that we have immediate access to, unmediated by language or the structures of human perception” has been overturned by postmodern studies (5).

43. Angus argues that the notion of the sublime contributed to the exploitation of Canadian wilderness: “The environmental ethic that was embodied in industrial development was of a wilderness which was so vast that it was not necessary to think about the exhaustion of resources, of a practice of extraction in a commercial framework (i.e., for sale and not for direct use), and a correlated sense of awe at the vastness that made staple extraction possible—a concept of wilderness as sublime, rather than nature as beautiful, since the sublime refers to an experience that overflows the capacity to capture it in a concept” (131).

44. Mitchell’s definition of imperialism will serve the purpose of this study: “Imperialism is clearly not a simple, single, or homogenous phenomenon but the name of a complex system of cultural, political, and economic expansion and domination that varies with the specificity of places, peoples, and historical moments. It is not a ‘one-way’ phenomenon but a complicated process of exchange, mutual transformation, and ambivalence” (9).

45. In Canada, that search was ambivalent: artists were concerned with finding a means of expression that was freed from European models, and that was as closely allied with Canadian wilderness as possible, yet they also understood the utter impossibility of that task.

46. Andrews writes that “the close affinities between painting and poetry in the hierarchizing of subject matter meant that landscape in painting was associated with the pastoral in poetry, both inferior genres (though superior to topographical views) but both granted a kind of restorative power and a glimpse of the ideal beauties of the natural world” (92).

47. Depictions of landscape that were valued corresponded to and hearkened back to classical (Horatian) ideas about the function of the arts: to teach and delight.

48. Mitchell's argument—that landscape is a function of imperial power and discourse—gains credence in light of the fact that the cultural system, the nation, and the corresponding expansion of that system runs in tandem with the rise and popularity of landscape as a cultural and aesthetic object. “Nature worship” and the corresponding appreciation of landscape were also fostered by the aristocracy with whom “the Grand Tour” of Europe was popular at the end of the seventeenth century: “The English aristocracy discovered not only European landscape but also European painting” (Glickman 8).

49. The overlap of painting and writing is suggested in the notion of the prospect, “a long view of an outdoor scene [that] clearly divided into foreground, middle ground and distance [which] was the most popular form of landscape illustration in seventeenth-century England” (Glickman 24). What is “‘seen’ often includes a vision of the country’s future. In this manner space becomes time, and looing *out* becomes looking *ahead*” (33). Eighteenth-century poets, learning from painters, began to employ painterly techniques: “the poet is represented as seeing a ‘prospect,’ and describes it from foreground to middle ground to distance in an orderly progression of images, often held together by a road or a river. [. . .] Words like *here* and *there*, *above*, *beyond*, *right* and *left*, serve to place and orient the viewer” (9).

50. As quoted in Glickman 9.

51. See Maria Tippett's *By A Lady: Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women*. (Toronto: Penguin, 1992).

52. Rimstead is paraphrasing Pratt's argument (37). Pratt observes that women treat the natural world as an asocial or “green-world lover,” an alternative to human lovers or partners. Rimstead suggests that Carr regards the natural world in this manner and cites a chapter of her autobiography that bears the title of the name of a suitor, but that contrasts British forests with the expansiveness of Canadian forests. She concludes that the natural world is the “green-world lover” about which Pratt hypothesizes: “Carr's decision to remain celibate was founded not only in her choice to devote herself to her art, but also in her preference for the frank sensuality which she could experience through nature eroticism” (38). She adds that “if she invested her forest scenes with so much eroticism, it may have been because she, like other female artists within a masculinist tradition, had never been allowed or trained to express desire for the male body” (38).

53. Nancy-Lou Patterson suggests that critics are inclined to adopt “phrases like ‘robust new language’ of her work, and ‘iron will’ of her personality, [which] might give the impression of some masculine feminist, determined to shoulder a place into the world of men” (np). Although many critics adopt Carr as representative of feminist concerns, other critics also tend to remark upon her “masculine” qualities: the ambivalence of such responses is more broadly characteristic of critical approaches to Carr and her work.

54. Gerta Moray argues that “Carr's writings show that she consistently personified the landscape and her imagination. [. . .] The landscape is ‘mother Nature,’ with whom she seeks physical and

emotional closeness. It is also a site in which 'God speaks to her'"("Excerpts" 99).

55. Djwa draws a similar conclusion in "'A New Soil and a Sharp Sun': The Landscape of a Modern Canadian Poetry": "Initially the new poetry, like the art of the Group of Seven, was to reject the 'picturesque' in favour of the 'rugged': it often took the middle way of a realistic depiction of the native landscape employing imported techniques" (7).

56. Andrews adds that, although landscape continued to hold social meaning, that meaning could not be the same as it would have been for those who were part of a feudal system and thus for whom the land was valued less for aesthetic reasons than for directly economic ones; instead, it "becomes itself a form of capital—a commodity with little or nothing of the personal value and 'social meaning' for those for whom it was home" (20-21). The difficulty, as such critics as Glickman, Cosgrove, and Andrews observe, was that after the decline of the feudal system and the corresponding tenure of land, most artists and writers were "outsiders" to the land: the inevitable result was that "the very apparatus [provided by the picturesque] which enabled the viewer to enter the landscape without owning it intervened *between* the viewer and the landscape, imposing conventional ways of seeing and prescribing conventional objects to be seen" (Glickman 12).

57. Andrews writes that "[t]he experience of the Sublime is, almost by definition, one that subverts order, coherence, a structured organization" (132). He adds that "[it] is pictorially unframeable, and it cannot be framed in words. The Sublime is that which we cannot appropriate, if only because we cannot discern any boundaries. If anything, it appropriates us. The vocabulary associated with the experience is one of surrender to a superior power—the very reverse of the Picturesque. In the act of surrender we acknowledge the feebleness of our powers of articulate expression and representation" (142-43).

58. Andrews notes that the appeal of landscape has been linked to studies in which genetic factors were considered: "Much of the research tends to support the proposition that 'modern humans retain a partly genetic predisposition to like or visually prefer natural settings having savannah-like or park-like properties, such as spatial openness, scattered trees or small groupings of trees, and relatively uniform grassy ground surfaces.' Primitive humans are believed to have exchanged predominantly forested habitats for the more open savannahs, where prey and predators could be more easily sighted: hence, according to the hypothesis, the partly genetic preference today for this kind of landscape as favouring ancient survival instincts" (19).

59. See Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973).

60. As quoted by Glickman 40.

61. According to Andrews, in the early modern period, landscape – especially in the form of the sublime – "found patronage and a more open market for images that represented and reinforced the values associated with these prejudices" (151). Depictions of landscape were sometimes a form of nostalgia for a world that had been lost as a result of an increase of technological advancement and urbanization – its popularity strengthened "the myth of a natural order from which modern humanity had strayed" (151). That sense of nostalgia, however, disguised the

economic and political links between country and city (between Canada and Britain), since the city depended on the country for its sustenance, even as it “stimulated the economy of the country” (151). Landscapes, sublime, beautiful or picturesque, “constitute a gesture of defiance to what is felt to be an oppressive, expansionist civilization, and are therefore infused with political meaning” (156).

62. Glickman also notes that one of the few exceptions to this understanding of how the sublime operates in English-Canadian literature is Dennis Lee’s assertion: “Canadian literature has long included an experience with the land – to which the appropriate response is awe and terror. It is a very different thing from alienation” (45).

63. “Theosophy and Art,” *The Canadian Theosophist* 14.6 (August 5, 1933): 161.

64. Bordo, however, has added that although the wilderness, “the substance of that condition that holds within itself the wild” (2000, 227), also necessarily posits a “specular witness”: “the specular witness performs a rather special and dual role. It exalts a picture that testifies to an unpicturable condition – the wilderness sublime – while legitimating, as a landscape picture, terrain violently seized, dispossessed of its indigenous inhabitants, and reconstituted as territory” (225). He raises questions as to why an uninhabited landscape, rather than an inhabited one, was regarded as quintessentially Canadian.

65. Stephanie Kirkwood Walker adds that “his struggle toward definition reflected the instability of the idea of culture following the war and a growing awareness that it was a timely concept whose interpretation might heal the wounded world and direct the energies of peace-time. In an era of increasing social pressures and a strengthening of the effects of industrialization, especially the growth of cities and secularism, culture offered apparent alternatives for body, mind and spirit” (63). Walker also notes that the Massey Commission report noticeably omitted the word “culture” almost consistently, expect to provide one brief, Arnoldian-like definition: “*Culture* is that part of education which enriches the mind and refines the taste” (63).

66. “The Elephant,” 16 July 1933, *HT* 683.

67. BCARS, Inglis Collection, “People’s Speech,” and “People’s Gallery Plan is Under Construction,” as quoted in D. Walker 24.

68. The fact that the nation is seen as both an organic entity and an ideal is reflected in a comment made in one of Connor’s novels: “Nations are just like people. They see things solely from their own point of view” (*TM* 103).

69. That desire is a reflection of what Angus calls, quoting Antonio Gramsci, “the national-popular collective will”: “the national-popular brings together the ‘elementary passions of the people’ with intellectuals who share these passions and give them form and leadership in order to propose ‘intellectual and moral reform’” (17). Easthope also notes that the critique of national imagining as “inauthentic” is as deceptive as suggesting that small communities or face-to-face contact are “free from interference by signs, language, writing”: “But, alas, it is the case for every speaking subject that immediacy, spontaneity and direct presence are necessarily deflected and

betrayed by the universalizing, classificatory force of language. Alienation of this kind is inescapable in every human culture there has ever been. Any theoretical opposition which would contrast some notion of authentic identity with the inauthenticity (sic) of national identity has to be rejected” (10).

70. Easthope notes that “national cultures are material in that they are produced through institutions, practices and traditions which historians and sociologists can describe. But national cultures are also reproduced through narratives and discourses” (12).

71. Easthope adds that in addition to institutions and well-known practices, and to the “more evident objects of national identification” such as national flags, “what at a less conscious level incites identification with nation is a particular and distinct discursive formation”: “identification with a form of discourse [ . . . ] is in fact immensely strong since it is cognate with those primordial movements, constitutive for the species, in which the subject strives to win a place for itself within language and so become a speaking subject” (18-19).

72. Easthope thus notes that “there is a widely held belief that nation is a form of ideology, that is, a way of thinking designed to promote the interests of a particular social group” and that “national unity is a hegemonic deception perpetuated by the ruling class in order to mask its own power,” although it would be misleading and reductive to “understand the nation-state *exclusively* in terms of class power exercised through the state” (7-8).

73. In the introduction to *Who is This We?*, Eleanor M. Godway and Geraldine Finn argue that “community” may be understood as a *catachresis* (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s term for a word that has no adequate referent) because “the effects of community are often more divisive, more exclusive, and more oppressive, than the absence of community it originally intended to remedy or remove” (1). To some extent, similarity must be the guiding principle in the construction of community, as the root word, *common*, suggests. Simultaneously, however, “the Same exists only by displacing the difference within it to “others” marked as inferior through the burden of difference they are forced to carry so that the Same can continue to hallucinate its sameness, purity and privilege to itself” (24). If community involves exclusion and constraint as much as it suggests inclusion, particularly in reference to the English-Canadian national community of the period being studied, who is being excluded must also be considered.

74. In *Our Own Country Canada*, Dennis Reid examines how the period following Confederation was one largely “based on the English language, and in part on British political and institutional models. [ . . . ] The immigrants who accomplished this believed that they were establishing the Canadian nation. They did so while remaining largely in ignorance of those other cultural values – based on the French language and the Catholic religion – that had already existed in Canada for some two centuries” (2).

75. As quoted in Gerta Moray 1993, 27.

76. AGO, Marjorie Lismer Bridges Collection, Arthur Lismer, “Art in Canada,” c. 1932, 2.

77. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "The Fallacy that Art is Separate from Life," vol. 5, file 21, 4-6.

78. As Berger notes, imperialist sentiment in Canada has been characterized, on the one hand, by economic motives – "the depression in Canada and the threat of unrestricted reciprocity enhanced the appeal of imperial federation in general and activated the campaign for imperial preferential trade as an antidote to continental free trade" (1970, 7) – and, on the other, by its purported antithetical opposition to English-Canadian nation-building: "The conflict between imperialism and nationalism added up to a struggle between the past and the future, the desire to remain a colony and the wish to be a free nation" (9). Berger's contribution to the argument is that English-Canadian imperialism is a facet of the upsurge in Canadian national fervour – "a type of awareness of nationality which rested upon a certain understanding of history, the national character, and the national mission" (9).

79. Like Anderson, Berger identifies a kind of religious or spiritual impulse that ran parallel to the impulse to construct a distinct English-Canadian national identity. He cites people like George Grant whose "views on social and political questions" were dominated by "his fervent belief in the inseparability of the spiritual and the temporal and the insistence that religion must penetrate every nook and cranny of national existence" (1970, 28). Grant believed, as did Connor, that "[j]ust as the union of the churches was the precondition of Christianization of the social order, so too the unity of the Empire was necessary to maintain a political power making for righteousness on earth. Both Christianity and imperialism called men to self-sacrifice and service; both required the allegiance to ideals and the denigration of the material and the flesh" (32).

80. Berger writes that "the adjective 'northern' came to symbolize energy, strength, self-reliance, health, and purity, and its opposite, 'southern,' was equated with decay and effeminacy, even libertinism and disease. A lengthy catalogue of desirable national attributes resulting from the climate was compiled. No other weather was so conducive to maintaining health and stimulating robustness" (1970, 129).

81. See Daniel Francis's chapter "Great White Hope: The Myth of the North," in *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History* (1998), in which he argues that "it doesn't matter that most of us never travel there, that those of us who know nothing about the North far outnumber those who do. There is a 'a north of the mind' which exists independently of the geographic North and has always provided an identifiable marker for Canadianness" (153).

82. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "Art and Society in Canada," vol. 5, file 3, 8-9.

83. As quoted in Jeremy Adamson, *Lawren S. Harris: Urban Scenes and Wilderness Landscapes, 1906-1930* (Toronto: AGO, 1978), 138-139.

84. Paul H. Walton, among other critics, suggests that the Group's artistic strategies in relation to their depictions of the North, in fact, were meant to make "the North seem less threatening and its resources more capable of being processed" and were meant to express "a special pride of ownership that was specifically Canadian" (176). His argument, however, does not consider the

**Group's essays and public addresses in which they articulated their artistic aims.**

**85. Immigration into Canada, which increased rapidly after the mid-1890s well into the First World War, complicated the matter. If previous policies had encouraged immigration specifically from the British Isles, those put into effect by Clifford Sifton encouraged an "ever growing number of 'foreigners'" (Berger 1970,147).**

**86. AGO, Arthur Lismer Fonds, "Art in Canada," c. 1932, section 11.**

**87. The kind of rhetoric employed was deceptive; in the late nineteenth century, Charles Mair argued that "there is such a thing at last as a purely national feeling in Canada. There is a young and vigorous race coming to the front, entirely in earnest, and which is no longer English, Scotch or Irish, but thoroughly and distinctively Canadian" (Berger 1970, 58). Complications were bound to arise given various religious backgrounds. Those of French and Irish origin may have been "correct" in terms of their lineage, unlike those of Mediterranean descent who were less likely to have been accommodated by a definition of national character that emphasized nordicity; however, the French and Irish were also seen as opposed to the national character being advocated on the grounds of differing religious belief systems. Here, the dominating Protestant ethic, which Frye condemns, may be seen at work.**

**88. One may appreciate why the keen interest in historical literature and more broadly in Canadian culture that was popular before the turn of the century began to decline:**

**In literary taste the decades after the mid-1880s witnessed an upsurge in the popularity of the historical romance, and in painting, though there were of course counter-currents, the same retrospective spirit appeared. [. . .] The relationship between the recovery of the past and the emergence of an image of that past which expressed all the elements of the loyalist tradition was not completely fortuitous. Because it emphasized the hereditary forces in national development, the loyalist tradition was itself a potent stimulus to the growing interest in history. [. . .] History was the chief vehicle in which the loyalist tradition was expressed and that tradition depended for its credibility upon the assumption that the past contained principles to which the present must adhere if the continuity of national life was to be preserved. (Berger 89-90)**

**The heightening tensions between French and English Canadians, the increase in immigration from other than nordic countries, and the resistance to imperialist ties were rendering historical depictions of the nation an inadequate source of national identity or unity: "Urged on by the desire, natural to all nationalists, to conceive of a single people sharing common characteristics, some imperialists managed to accommodate the French Canadians into their composite image of the Canadian character far more easily than they were able to accept the strange immigrants from central, eastern, and southern Europe" (Berger 1970,128). If such depictions, literary, visual and otherwise, failed to suggest any continuity of national life, another source of common identification for an imagined national community needed to be found.**

**Davey notes that it was "central Canada which [had] the most to gain from a centralized, coherent nation, since it is the populous and economically powerful centre which would dominate and define such a nation" (1988, 266-267). Inasmuch as this vision of Canada seemed to**

accommodate French Canadians, French Canadians themselves believed that the construction of national identity and its emphasis on imperialist ties was a threat to their culture, especially because such emphasis insisted on “the same language, [and] identical traditions” (Berger 1970, 134). French Canadians were regarded as “an unprogressive people” and as “children of the soil,’ [even after] 1901 when forty per cent of the population of Quebec lived in cities” (141); even though they were perceived as a “necessary counterpoise to Saxon character,” it was ultimately believed that “the French Canadians were destined to become an ever smaller minority within the Dominion” (145).

89. Catalogue 65, AGO.

90. “Rejected” *GP*, 444.

91. “Simcoe Street, 1930-33,” 23 and 26 Nov. 1930, *HT* 668-69.

92. “Goodbye to Lizzie,” 22 October 1936. *HT*, 844.

93. “Beckley Street,” 10 May 1936, *HT* 826.

94. Loomba adds that “the cultural, discursive or representational aspects of colonialism need not be thought of at all as functioning at a remove from its economic, political or even military aspects” (99).

95. In “Method in the Study of Literature and its Relation to the Other Fine Arts,” G. Giovannini distinguishes between an artistic and a literary object by suggesting that the latter “unfolds in time in a precise manner by a sequence of beginning, middle, and end; it is apprehended in terms of this sequence, which governs the structure of the part as well as the whole and permits verification of change and progression of meaning and rhythmical structure as data of a temporal form” (192).

96. Mary Vipond described his books as possessing “elements in common with the so-called ‘rough and touch’ school”: “the mixture of clean physical sport with a reaffirmation of traditional middle class and moral attitudes, the message that redemption and regeneration may be found on the frontier and close to nature, and the sharp contrast between hero and villain with few of the grey shades of real life” (1979, 106).

97. AGO, Arthur Lismer Fonds, “The Appreciation of Pictures,” section 9, lined notebook (lecture delivered at Unitarian Church Jarvis St., Canada), c. 1913.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Witnessing Canadian Landscape in the Novels of Ralph Connor**

Ralph Connor, also known as the Reverend Charles William Gordon, was a Presbyterian minister who initially took up the pen to address religious and moral concerns in early twentieth-century Canada. He acknowledged that he stumbled upon his life-time career as novelist by sheer accident: although such a claim may be dismissed as a form of modesty,<sup>1</sup> or a way of accounting for literary and stylistic deficiencies (more than plausible in Connor's case), there is sufficient evidence to substantiate Connor's assertion that his career as writer was fortuitous, the bi-product of his ardent religious pursuits and related frustration with the lack of financial support for and possible termination of mission work in Western Canada. Such frustration is manifested in the outbursts of his literary analogue in *The Prospector: A Tale of the Crow's Nest Pass* (1904), the minister who argues with "heart hot from disappointment and voice strident with intensity of emotion" before a body of students about the need for "faith in their Western Empire" and for young male volunteers to do work there (55); he makes an appeal, which resonates with both religious and national zeal, "For your Church, for your fellowmen, for Canada" (56).

When Connor, as the representative of the Western Home Mission Committee, met with Reverend J.A. MacDonald, his college friend and editor of the *Westminster Magazine*, he

fulminated over the financial situation that hampered the “expansion work” of Presbyterian missions in Western Canada. Impugning MacDonald with adhering to a Christianity that was rooted more in talk than in action, and the “sanctimonious *Westminister*” with being an impractical “historic mausoleum for ancient creeds, beautiful rituals, [and] saintly preachers,” he was surprised, as anyone else would not be, to find himself thrust into writing something not as historic or ritualistic, and thus entangled with the magazine. MacDonald responded by asking him to write for the *Westminister* “a story out of your own experience – put it in the form of a yarn” (PA 147). The experience to which MacDonald was referring was Connor’s work in Anthracite, Banff where he had “oversight of lumber camps in the neighbourhood and the railway points,” in the “foothill country” through which he travelled by “a stunning bronco colt” (117; 118), and at Canmore, where a church was built to accommodate and encourage the religious beliefs of the miners and railway men (130). Although Connor purportedly “cursed [MacDonald] in [his] heart” for assigning such an arduous task and deliberated for some time, he re-wrote “in ten days” an initial excerpt into “a story in three chapters” (PA 147).<sup>2</sup> Even then, he claimed in his autobiography, *Postscript to Adventure* (1938), that “I had no more thought of a book in my mind than I have now of flying to the North Pole”:

My sole purpose was to awaken my church in Eastern Canada to the splendor of the mighty religious adventure being attempted by the missionary pioneers in the Canada beyond the Great Lakes by writing a brief sketch of the things which as clerk of the biggest presbytery in the world I had come to know by personal experience. (148).

Nevertheless, the three chapters were the beginnings of *Black Rock: A Tale of the Selkirks* (1898), the first of twenty-three books of fiction,<sup>3</sup> and the commencement of a writing career

that generated millions of dollars and spanned approximately forty years.<sup>4</sup>

Connor claimed that no one was more surprised at the reception of his books than he himself was, since he “had not the slightest ambition to be a writer” and had “made little effort after polished literary style” (150-1). With much less modesty, he declared that “*Black Rock* is an example of that rare thing in writing, a successful novel with a purpose” (148). For Connor, it seems, the primary purpose of writing should be both didactic and religious. A polished literary style is apparently secondary.<sup>5</sup> He thus partly attributed the popularity of his novels to the didactic tone and inherent religious framework, which insisted upon a resolution with spiritual dimensions or which, within the last two pages, brought together at a whirlwind pace a morally-laudable hero and heroine: “it was this religious motif that startled that vast host of religious folk who up to this time had regarded novel-reading as a doubtful indulgence for Christian people” (150). He regarded his work as a response to novels that were or might have been conceived of as morally suspect, and simultaneously as fulfilment of the purpose of literature: that is, not only to delight, but especially to teach.

Connor’s assessment of his audience is just, for his novels were received and appreciated for the reasons he cites.<sup>6</sup> In *A Purer Taste* (1989), a critical examination of nineteenth-century Canadian readers and reading patterns, Carole Gerson observes that the “prevailing view was that the purpose of literature was to instruct: morally by presenting examples of proper conduct and pedagogically by providing useful information” (30). Such a view also necessarily suggests that fiction, “the imaginative world,” could be potentially subversive and was thus regarded with suspicion, a typical response for a reading audience that, to some extent, was comprised of Protestant readers: “To be judged acceptable, fiction at best had to promise to improve the real world and at worst promise to do no harm” (24). Connor

patently understood the dangers inherent to writing fiction, as he sought to provide an alternative, a corrective or instructive kind of literature. As a result, “often placing their Connor novels next to their Bibles on the bookshelves, readers everywhere responded positively to the author’s modernized faith. By making Christ real, he invigorated tired hearts and souls, stiffened the resolve to help others, and strengthened Christian faith and living for so many people” (Karr 89). Insofar as he was successful, he also appealed to another popular notion at the time: whatever was produced in other countries, some Canadian literature was esteemed for and generally typified by how it both reflected superior Canadian morality and, as such, was also a national and patriotic endeavour.<sup>7</sup>

Such a perception also explains the taste for and popularity of the national romance (Gerson 152). This particular genre was “far from challenging [. . .] society”; instead, writers who employed this genre “shared and stabilized its values”:

[These writers] regarded their proper place as the mainstream, not the forefront (or underground) of artistic and social thought. Hence the primary significance of their work is to be found in its reflection of prevailing cultural attitudes. [. . .] Against the constant threat of American cultural domination, Victorian Canada’s continual reaffirmation that its national literature should be patriotic and ameliorative, based on the models of Shakespeare and Scott, reflected the conviction of a colonial society that in cultural affairs, nationhood would be achieved only by transplanting the most admirable traditions of the Old World to the New. (Gerson 154)

Gerson adds that the national romance was a genre that yoked together realistic depiction about the New World with a narrative structure that was nothing more than a popular romance

imported from the Old World: Connor's employment of this genre was thus ambivalent, on the one hand, conforming to an Old World cultural form in terms of structure, but, on the other hand, adding new features and adapting aspects of that form. Gerson notes, particularly in relation to John Richardson's writing, that this genre reflected a kind of uneasiness, which more aptly may be regarded as a "transitional stage" in Canadian postcolonial writing.<sup>8</sup>

The national romance is perhaps the best way of categorizing Connor's fiction, given not only his religious and moral temperament and ideas (literature as ameliorative), but also his fervent patriotism, which is manifested in his insistence upon using Canadian, especially Western, landscape as background, the source of national narrative, and the ground for indigenous character development.<sup>9</sup> Since, as Benedict Anderson argues, such nationalist imaginings are not apart from the fervour generated by religious imaginings, some explanation is provided as to why Connor was engaged with these two seemingly different preoccupations: both are ideological systems to which one feels a sense of belonging and both provide spiritual orientation and a moral framework from which a character may develop. An inevitable corollary to this connection is that Connor would also be, as he was, concerned with the development of the ideal English-Canadian citizen, who would become a part of an ideal national community, such as one Connor envisioned and strove to create in his literary ventures. Most importantly, for Connor, it is Canadian topography which is the source of national attachment, spiritual transcendence, and a moral sensibility that distinguished Canada from Britain. Connor thus found that his initial religious interests were only and simultaneously matched by an interest in questions of national character, culture, and stature:<sup>10</sup> that is, he began to use literature for a "patriotic purpose" (Berger 50). What Carl Berger in *The Sense of Power* (1970) has asserted of author Charles Mair could be applied to Connor: he conceived of

literature as “both [. . . a] sign of the development of a national consciousness and [a] source of its nourishment” (50). Such patriotism might also account for why George Doran, his publisher and friend, emphasized “the author’s birth in the Canadian forest and his Thoreau-like love of the wilderness” when marketing his books (Karr 80).<sup>11</sup>

Gerson argues that “overtly nationalistic fiction” became more popular after Confederation “due to the political need to create for Canada an identity distinguishable from that of the United States” (18). Yet Connor’s sense of “national literature” was not used only “against the threat of American cultural domination,” although he advocated a “northern” identity as a way of asserting Canadian superiority over the corrupt neighbours to the South. In *Corporal Cameron of the North West Mounted Police: A Tale of the MacLeod Trail* (1912), the Corporal looks to the North and describes how a “line of clear light,” which was “still visible,” serves as orientation for the protagonist (314). By 1928, Connor begins to write narratives which seem to respond more explicitly to such domination from the South, so that while the United States is a place in which one finds “neither justice nor mercy,” Canada is a country “up North [. . .] where men have forgotten what it means to give their souls and bodies to the making of money” (RL 181; TWP 198), and in which “[w]e’re all just folks getting to our homes” (RL 324). In *The Sky Pilot in No Man’s Land* (1919), Richard Dunbar’s dramatic gesture toward the North and West of Canada and his equally persuasive remark to his American friend, Paula Howland, that “the future is with us,” a declaration that resonates with Sir Wilfred Laurier’s famously optimistic assertion, is reinforced when he observes that Canada has those “things essential to national greatness”: “Not these things that you can see, these material things [. . .] but in such things as educational standards, in administration of justice, in the customs of a liberty loving people, in religious privileges, in everything that goes to make

character and *morale*, Canada has already laid the foundations of a great nation” (21).

Connor’s employment of such patriotic narratives is predicated on Canada’s geographical uniqueness and as a way of distinguishing the nation from imperial Britain: the East-West (horizontal) axis shifts to a North-South (vertical) axis depending upon where the cultural threat resides.

Yet Connor also believed in the autonomy and particularity of English-Canadian identity and its culture,<sup>12</sup> and that its development was not necessarily fashioned as the result of insecurity about its status in relation to both Britain and the United States. If one considers Connor’s deep national and religious convictions, one realizes that both the colloquial (native, postcolonial) and the romantic (cosmopolitan, Old World) are not, for Connor, an uneasy admixture as much as they are part of a larger interest in creating a national, native identity, and that both correspond to the desire to devise an indigenous, if not postcolonial, narrative.<sup>13</sup> Although Gerson observes that such writers as Connor approach the writing of a national literature based on the models of Shakespeare and Scott, and that this approach reflects “a conservative colonial culture,” one must consider available working forms or genres (74). In *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, who define postcolonialism as “culture affected by the imperial process,” consider how writers of early postcolonial texts “are prevented from fully exploring their anti-imperial potential” because the “available discourse and the material conditions of production for literature in these early post-colonial societies restrain this possibility” (6): imperialism limits the kind of narratives that are accepted for publication and distribution.

Although Connor’s first work was published in Canada<sup>14</sup> – remarkably not in the imperial centre itself, where Canadian books ordinarily would have found publishers – he

adopts a popular British literary genre to write about Canada itself; yet it would be simplistic to assert that his narratives slavishly imitate the form and are merely a transplanting of literary tradition from Britain to Canada.<sup>15</sup> He endeavours to re-write the form, adopting what he perceives as fundamental to English-Canadian identity: its geographical setting, which gives rise to different social standards, and even a Canadian language and manner of expression.<sup>16</sup> If language, and not only genre, is the “medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ become established,” then Connor may be recognized as a writer who endeavours to use “english,” to borrow Ashcroft’s term, to resist that structure: that is, he frequently employs the “slang” of the country as an acceptable facet of a more conventional form of narration and also a different context in the effort to perpetuate an iconography with which he associates Canada (7). He actively participates in the development of a discursive practice that he associates with nation-building and that focuses on the experience of place, even as the practice and the language being used to describe that place are under revision. In other words, he seems to be resisting cultural subservience as much as pandering to the dominant imperial centre, and bolstering what he sees as an already existing, vigorous sense of English-Canadian identity, which is separate from that centre.

In “Ralph Connor and the Canadian Identity,” J. Lee Thompson and John H. Thompson argue that, despite such patent national fervour, Connor venerates the British Empire and pays it due respect:

Although he insisted upon the uniqueness of Canada’s collective personality, Connor never failed to acknowledge that his newborn Canadian owed much to British parentage. Connor’s Canadians frequently express their admiration for

the Empire. [ . . . ] But the loyalty of Connor's Canada is that of a grown son to his revered parent, founded on filial piety but tempered with a strong sense of independence. (161)

For these critics, his writings manifest homage toward the Empire, since he apparently visualized the Empire as the source or "parent" of English-Canadian identity. Claudia Hill, whose informative study "The Double Paradox: Canadian Imperialism in the Novels of Ralph Connor and Sara Jeannette Duncan" examines Connor's imperial-national ties, argues that "the young Dominion was envisioned as a home for the world's displaced and freedom-seeking citizens and as the cradle of a new race. [ . . . ] The country was autonomous, yet tied to Britain by bonds of race, religion and history far deeper than any economic or political ties of Empire" (2). If Connor pays homage toward the Empire, as he does, he also insists upon an identity that is separate from Britain – these are not displaced citizens of a new race, but, as Diana Brydon observes, citizens who choose a new place and wish to cultivate that newness.<sup>17</sup> Canada, Connor believed, was not only another "Empire in the making, another Britain," it was a geographical and imaginative space for the making of a country "greater, finer, and without the hideous inequalities, injustices and foolish class distinctions" of its imperial counterpart (*TM* 94). Although he felt that respect ought to be paid to Britain, he also recognized the importance of national and political autonomy. Even as he adhered to notions of "international responsibility," he "held firmly to the idea that every nation has the inherent right to hold and to realize its ideal of national development" (*PA* 323).

Thus, when Britain declared its participation in the First World War, Connor, in conversation with Herbert Asquith, argues that "while it was true that when Britain was at war Canada was also at war, it still remained for the Parliament of Canada to determine what

action, if any, Canada should take and when. In other words, though technically Canada is at war when Britain declares war, still the Canadian Parliament alone gives the word to march” (PA 196). He never fully works out the implications or complexities of such a tension—hence Hill’s title “double paradox,” which would have been better served by the term “ambivalence” – but his assertion demonstrates little anxiety about how Canada fit into the larger scheme of responsibility and national autonomy. Berger argues that Canadian supporters sometimes “believed imperial unity compatible with Canadian nationality” (3). Even if Connor may have believed both sentiments to be compatible, as he sometimes seems to suggest, it is clear that, when he was obliged to decide between the two, he was far more devoted to Canada and to advocating the superiority of its citizens in spite of his apparent enchantment with Britain. Larry Gwynne, the protagonist of *The Major*, apparently voices Connor’s position in relation to Britain when he declares that, “[f]or his part, while he rejoiced in the greatness of the British Empire he believed that Canada’s first duty was to herself, to the developing here of a strong and sturdy national spirit. Canada for Canadians, Canada first” (152).

Connor regarded his fiction as the beginnings of a genuine English-Canadian self-consciousness and an accurate reflection of Canadian life, especially because his novels were derived from his direct contact and familiarity with Canadian landscape.<sup>18</sup> In his autobiography *Postscript to Adventure*, produced at the end of his life and as a summation of his literary and political life, he wrote:

*Black Rock* and *Sky Pilot* [his first two novels] give an authentic picture of life in the great and wonderful new country in Western Canada, rich in color and alive with movement [. . . and of] the pioneers who turned the wild wilderness into civilization. Then, the pictures were from personal experience. I knew the

country. I had ridden the ranges. I had pushed through the mountain passes. I had swum my bronco across its rivers. (*Postscript* 150)<sup>19</sup>

Later, in addressing the success of his most popular novel, *The Man From Glengarry: A Tale of the Ottawa* (1901), and the Glengarry novels that followed, Connor argued that national topography had as “much to do with the making” of the novel as did the religious impulse: that is, if his novels “grew out of Glengarry soil, out of Glengarry humanity” (152), that growth was aided, as he claimed, by his own potent sense of how to give a “perfect photographic reproduction of the whole countryside” (153). One result of such an intermingling of interests – the geographical with the spiritual – may have been, as Gerson suggests, a “simplistic setting for a sanitized version of Canadian experience” and a “land which corresponded more accurately to the map than to the experiences of its ordinary inhabitants” (50). Yet the employment of and pride in Canada as setting are unusual and distinguish Connor from many of his literary predecessors, such as Susanna Moodie, whose work was marked by “an undercurrent of diffidence regarding the validity of Canada as a location for fiction” or by “contempt for Canadian geography” (Gerson 16; 49). He was exceedingly proud of the “land of vast and mighty spaces,” valorized the terrain as a more than suitable setting for Canadian fiction, believed that it effected a transformation of character to Canadian-ness, and thus infrequently eschewed its employment in his novels (CC 334).<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, his critical reception indicates that it was such an ability to delineate Canadian landscape – particularly regional landscape – and the action therein that is considered Connor’s most valuable contribution to English-Canadian writing. Critical attention generally determines whether or not one qualifies for literary stardom: he has been appraised as a second-rate writer, along with such contemporaries as Robert Stead and Arthur Stringer, valued for this facet of

his writing, even when condemned for such other literary shortcomings as his heavy-handed sense of didacticism. The fact that the two novels that remain in print—*The Man from Glengarry* and *Glengarry School Days* (1902) – relate to the local-colour tradition, rather than the variety of other subjects about which he wrote, labour unions and strikes, the First World War, and the Canadian North West Mounted Police as examples, further corroborates the notion that Connor’s sense of geographical place is most highly esteemed. Just after he died, Watson Kirkconnell remarked in *The Canadian Thinker* that Canada’s “best known (if not her greatest) author” was a valuable writer not because of his sense of craftsmanship or style, but because of his “unmistakable interest in his exploitation of new resources in setting and background”: he was a “portrayer of the Canadian scene” (7-8). Most other critics have followed suit: F.W. Watt in “Western Myth: The World of Ralph Connor” describes how “Ralph Connor burst [onto the literary scene] with his portrait of the raw, turbulent, crude life of a Rocky mountain mining camp, *Black Rock, A Tale of the Selkirks*” (27); M.G. Parks argues that Connor’s merit as a writer resides in his “sketches of backwoods life” (583); George Woodcock describes Connor’s proclivity “now and again [. . .] to give us a sharp vignette of life in action: a sugaring-off party, a wake among Highland emigrants, a revival meeting in the backwoods” (84); and S. Ross Beharriell observes that “the more promising literary material” relates to the Canadian West and that Connor’s success resides in, among other things, his “use of detailed local setting” (ix; x).<sup>21</sup>

Although critics almost consistently remark upon this facet of his writing, what has failed to draw attention is how his use of landscape is specifically related to his nation-building agenda, how landscape yokes together his national and spiritual interests, and how significant it is to his construction of national character; indeed, the critical tendency to separate his spiritual

interests or the didactic elements of his novels from his patriotic interests, that is, depictions of the landscape, is misled, since landscape fosters those spiritual, moral, and national qualities that Connor would have deemed indivisible. To become Canadian meant being spiritually affected and then transformed by the land into Canadian-ness. W.H. New's critical evaluation of Connor is closest to this assessment of his work when he suggests that his "Presbyterian romances [. . .] fed the same set of social desires: for naturalness and cultural distinctiveness" (1997, 101). On the whole, inasmuch as critics endeavour to separate his spiritual and moral interests from his sense of how national identity is constructed, for Connor these concerns are intertwined: simultaneously, he seems interested in forging a national identity that is indigenous, that is connected to the particularities of the land, and that may be irrefutably distinguished from that of imperial Britain and from the United States.

A cursory examination of some of the subtitles of his novels demonstrates the way in which his narratives were rooted in place and also Connor's fascination with "writing the land," that is, writing narratives that depicted the diversity of Canadian topography, its influence on human development, and the product, a uniquely Canadian character, in the same way that the Group of Seven were concerned with painting it: *Black Rock: A Tale of the Selkirks* (1898), *The Sky Pilot: A Tale of the Foothills* (1899), *The Man from Glengarry: A Tale of the Ottawa* (1901); *The Prospector: A Tale of the Crow's Nest Pass* (1904); *The Doctor: A Tale of the Rockies* (1906); *The Foreigner: A Tale of Saskatchewan* (1909); *Corporal Cameron of the North West Mounted Police: A Tale of the MacLeod Trail* (1912), *To Him that Hath: A Novel of the West of Today* (1921); *The Gaspards of Pine Croft: A Romance of the Windermere* (1923), *The Runner: A Romance of the Niagaras* (1929), and *The Rock and the River: A Romance of Quebec* (1931). These titles suggest a number of possibilities: how, for Connor, a

narrative rooted in geography may give rise to a type of character; how he conceived of a person as representative or emblematic of place; or how persons may become inextricably intertwined with place and thus take on its inherent properties and characteristics. The last of these seems plausible given the way that geography affects Connor's characters and that these characters come to be identified with the land. Ultimately, he seems to be envisioning the forging of nationality and national character, always a morally superior one, through landscape, even if not exclusively so, because, among other reasons, it purportedly cuts across all ethnic ties (as such it is modern in concept), and develops a unifying sense of identity.<sup>22</sup> That Connor believes that he is inclusive in his vision in spite of the range of critics who correctly argue otherwise suggests how he thought Canadian landscape ought to function: Connor believed that, regardless of cultural, ethnic, or racial background, Canadian character and identity – both a national and spiritual entity – were rooted in and developed from the Canadian soil.<sup>23</sup> Narrative, then, is consistently about the land as it is about character. For Connor, “the land [. . .] represented a test of heroism, faith, will, individuality, and endurance” (New 1997, 104).

The manner in which Connor fashions Canadian landscape is the most common, if not essential, way of differentiating English-Canadian identity (and the nation) from British national-identity (and Britain). Frequently, for Connor, the cultivated garden is a sign of British cultural influence, or, within Canada, of British ancestry, a sign of a civilized if not a delicate lifestyle. In *The Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail* (1914), a soldier is known to be British because of the “neatness” of his garden. In *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land*, Dunbar, the “sky pilot” who travels across England by train and examines its landscape as he gazes out the window, concludes that, especially for a Western Canadian, the differences between Canada and England in relation to the features of their respective geographies are remarkable:

During the long, sunny spring day, their dinky little train whisked them briskly through the *sweet* and *restful* beauty of the English southern counties. To these men, however, from the *wide sunbaked, windswept* plains of western Canada, the English landscape suggested a *dainty* picture, done in *soft* greys and greens, with here and there a vivid splash of colour, where the rich red soil broke through the green. But its *tiny* fields set off with hedges, and lines of trees, its *little, clean-swept* villages, with their *picturesque* church spires, its parks with deer that actually stood still to look at you, its splendid manor houses, and, at rare intervals, its turreted castles, gave these men, fresh from the *raw, unmeasured and unmade west*, a sense of unreality. (143, italics mine)

Edward Said's understanding of how one forges one's sense of history and how it is applied to "geographical and cultural entities" is relevant here: not only that "men make their own history," but also geography, and that "what they can know is what they have made" (1978, 5). Connor here is both making use of and perpetuating a geographical paradigm, which suggests how value-laden landscape is: the West of Canada as it contrasts with the East, even Eastern Canada, which the "civilizing," "luxurious," and generally less favourable facets of British culture has contaminated, indicates what characteristics Connor generally associates with Canada, usually western and sometimes northern, and what he associates with Britain. Canadian landscape, as Connor describes it, functions as both a geographical entity and an ideal: it is both a tangible reality and emblematic of the country's vast potential.

The delicacy, visually-pleasing and regularity of British landscape – "so beautifully finished, and so neatly adorned" (SPN 144) – are contrasted with the unfinished, unmeasurable, harsh and untidy aspects of Canadian landscape. The paradigm is even more particular: within

Canada, Western Canada is held up as superior to its Eastern counterpart, a part of the country that the “civilizing” and morally inferior Britain has infected.<sup>24</sup> If Connor is preoccupied with the untouched wilderness, it is not hostile, nor does it result in either “garrison mentality” or the need to dominate the wilderness: it is the wilderness that civilizes, not the urban centre, just as it is the wilderness that attracts and even improves the nature of those who are already considered to be morally superior.<sup>25</sup> In *Black Rock*, the miners are described as “too truly Western to imagine that any inducements the East could offer could compensate for [the] loss of the West. It was only fitting that the West should have the best [men]” (229-30). The East is concerned with vice, external appearances, and prosperity; the West with virtue, moral interiority, practicality, and the potential of both humanity and the country. In *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land*, Dunbar gestures symbolically “toward the west and the north” and asserts that “Canada has already laid the foundations of a great nation” (21). Unlike the American west, “Canada has never had within her borders what is known as a ‘wild and wicked West’” (CC 308). In the “North land” presides “Justice” so that people “lived together as members of one great family, bound to one another by bonds of mutual help and friendly fellowship” (RL 322). If Connor describes Canadian landscape as beautiful, it is neither a dainty nor a soft beauty, but rough-hewn: when “Nature had her own way,” the landscape elicits a spiritual reaction, one close in proximity to that which the sublime elicits (CC 174).<sup>26</sup>

Whatever Connor knew or understood about the beautiful, picturesque, and sublime, it is clear that when he depicts landscape, he meant its power, ruggedness and vastness to impress, and not stifle, his readers, like his characters: it is “calculated to release all that was poetic in the soul” (TTB 80). In *Black Rock*, Connor describes the view of the land before his protagonist in terms that suggest the sublime, a view that also evokes a sense of comfort rather

than fear:

The moon rode high over the peaks of the mountains, flooding the narrow valley with mellow light. Under her magic the rugged peaks softened their harsh lines and seemed to lean lovingly toward us. The dark pine masses stood silent as in breathless adoration; the dazzling snow lay like a garment over all the open spaces in soft waving folds. [. . .] How homelike and safe seemed the valley with its mountain-sides, its sentinel trees and arching roof of jewelled sky! Even the night seemed kindly, and friendly the stars; and the lone cry of the wolf from the deep forest seemed like the voice of a comrade. (139-140)

Notwithstanding the facets of the sublime mentioned here – the “rugged peaks” with their “harsh lines” and “dark pine masses,” as examples – the protagonist feels protected by the land, not ostracized by or fearful of it. Connor does not adhere entirely to the Burkean notion of the sublime which posits that one will feel pain and terror, and which thus invokes a sense of self-preservation. Generally, however, the reaction of Connor’s characters – solemnity, awe, reverence, admiration – are part of the response to the sublime that, on the one hand, may “persuade us of divine presence by impressing upon us both our own vulnerability and the unknowable power of the world,” but, on the other hand, may provide a sense of solace and familiarity, even if the sublime evoked an experience that may have been described as unfamiliar (39).<sup>27</sup> Connor’s characters, as witnesses to the land, almost invariably describe that experience as charged with religious or spiritual overtones. The association between God and nature that the rhetoric and experience of the sublime invokes is thus relevant. Rather than an alienating experience, however, the sublime is integrative, transitional; the result is “a new sense of connectedness [that . . .] comes about not in spite of but *because of* the ungraspability of the

natural world” (Glickman 153).

When characters must articulate that experience, however, rather than seek a verbal equivalent for that “which transgresses ordinary linguistic form,” they are sometimes rendered speechless or are unable to articulate their response to Canadian landscape. The initial witnessing of the land almost invariably involves the absence of speech.<sup>28</sup> As if to emphasize, not only to appreciate, the spiritual dimension of the Rockies, over which “the blue arch of sky spanned. [. . .] like the dome of a vast cathedral,” Moira, one of the heroines of *The Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail*, instructs Dr. Martin to refrain from speaking, since “this is not for words, but for worship” (129). Repeatedly, Connor emphasizes how landscape affects one’s “soul” – it “release[s] all that [is] poetic” – and elicits a spiritual experience that temporarily transcends linguistic expression (*TTB* 80). Helen and Isabel Murray, the two children who accompany Jane Brown to view the landscape outside of her native village in *The Major*, respond in like manner: “when they came to the dark pines, solemn and silent except when the wind moved in their tasselled tops with mysterious, mournful whispering, the children hushed their voices and walked softly upon the grass” (320). Their reaction is authentic, rather than ritualized: they realize that they are witnessing and experiencing something that is beyond both ordinary experience and the confines of language. Helen, whose “little soul [was] exquisitely sensitive to the mystic, fragrant silences and glooms that haunted the pine grove,” thus remarks that “[i]t is like being church” (320).

Again, in *The Prospector*, in the presence of “those silent, mighty, ancient ranges with their hoary faces and snowy heads” the minister feels impelled to “[repeat] to himself in a low tone the words of the ancient Psalm” (108). In *The Gaspards of Pine Croft*, “the wild, wide, lonely beauty of the landscape reached his soul and quieted” Paul Gaspard’s father (35).

Finally, in *Michael McGrath, Postmaster* (1900), the anonymous narrator reclines upon a river bank and gives himself “up to the gracious influences that stole in upon me from the trees”:<sup>29</sup>

The Sabbath feeling began to grow upon me, as the pines behind and the river in front sang to each other soft, crooning songs. As I lay and listened to the solemn music of the great, swaying pines and the soft, full melody of the big river, my heart went back to my boyhood days when I used to see the people gather in the woods for ‘Communion.’ There was the same soothing quiet over all, the same soft, crooning music and, over all, the same sense of Presence. (16-17)

The landscape here acts as a reminder of the narrator’s “boyhood days” and thus functions as an object of nostalgia. In *Between Europe and America: The Canadian Tradition in Fiction* (1988) T.D. MacLulich also argues that Connor “looks back with nostalgia on a simpler rural world, and tries to insist on the continued vitality of the old moral standards in the more complex urban Canada of the early twentieth century” (81). Yet the land elicits feelings to which he lays claim in the present moment and which are not restricted to the association with a past memory or to that period from which the memory arises. Viewing the land, even in the present, remains equivalent to what one experiences on the “Sabbath”: it is meant to be a spiritually-elevating experience. The “influence” of the land and, in this instance, that of the trees evoke a comparable religious transformation.

Appropriately, Canadian landscape and specific aspects of Western geography are frequently described as religious icons in which one must have faith: rather than an object of nostalgia, the land reflects the country’s greatness and is a sign of promise. Before a crowd of young men in an Ontario college, the minister in *The Prospector* works to persuade them of the West’s potential and need for their participation

Fresh from the new and wonderful land lying west of the Great Lakes, with its spell upon him, its miseries, its infamies, its loneliness aching in his heart, but with the starlight of its promise burning in his eyes, he came to tell the men of the Colleges of their duty, their privilege, their opportunity waiting in the West. For the most part his was a voice crying in the wilderness. Not yet had Canadians come to their faith in their Western Empire. (55)

The reference to “Empire,” on the one hand, suggests Connor’s lingering attachment to Britain; on the other hand, he entirely advocates the cause of Canada and its development as a nation. The biblical reverberations here are most appropriate, not only because of the religious dimensions associated with landscape: “the voice” of the New Testament, John the Baptist, was “crying in the wilderness” to indicate the forthcoming arrival of Christ, just as the minister here is persuasive about the potential for national development. Connor thus suggests that Canadians would come to believe in the West as followers came to believe in Christ. Just as the New Testament involves the reorientation of Old Testament ideology, moreover, Canada would come to be seen as reorienting British ideas and as offering a way of living and thinking that would be distinct from Britain. In addition, “wilderness” suggests unregulated, untouched, and unlimited space, and, specifically in Connor’s view, of Canada’s potential.

In *The Prospector*, Connor seems to reinforce the transcendent experience Canadian landscape evokes by describing it not only as if it structurally resembled a cathedral, but also as if the experience one expected to attain therein were similar:

As they entered the valley instinctively they lowered their voices and spoke in reverent tones, as if they had been ushered into an assemblage of ancient and silent sages. On every side the stately pines led away in long vistas that

suggested the aisles of some noble cathedral. There was no sign of life anywhere, no motion of leaf or bough, no sound to break the solemn stillness. The clatter of a hoof over a stone broke on the ear with startling discordance. The wide reaches of yellow carpet of pine needles, golden and with black bars of shadow, the long drawn aisles of tall pines, bearing aloft like stately pillars the high, arched roof of green, the lower limbs sticking out from the trunks bony and bare but for the pendant streamers of grey moss, all bathed in the diffused radiance of the yellow afternoon light, suggested some weird and mighty fame of a people long dead, whose spirits, haunting these solemn spaces, still kept over their temple a silent and awful watch. (249-250)

The reaction elicited here is akin to the sublime: the first response of these characters – the “lowering of voices” – suggests their sense of awe, although not terror. The forest itself is described as if it resembled architecturally an ancient temple or “cathedral,” from the trees that resemble “stately pillars” to the “long vistas” that Connor identifies as similar to cathedral aisles and, as such, as providing similar spiritual orientation. The references to the “silent sages” or the “people long dead” and of “mighty fame” who seem to preside over this forest interior also affirm the spiritual nature of the forest.

Specifically, Connor creates, makes use of, and reverts to particular images or geographical features of Canadian landscape and uses them as markers to identify Canada from Britain.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the most popular of these features is the pine tree, which Connor delineates at various junctures in his novels and which is often modified by adjectives that suggest spiritual introspection, awe, and, not inconsistently, comfort.<sup>31</sup> In *The Gaspards of Pine Croft*, Paul Gaspard’s father finds spiritual replenishment and comfort “under the pines [ . . . ] which had

become to him a holy place, a very temple of God, where he was wont to hold his secret communions with his own spirit and with the world unseen” (85); in *Black Rock*, the pines are described as “mighty”; in *Michael McGrath* as “noble” (93); in *The Prospector* as “sentinels” (108); and in *Corporal Cameron of the North West Mounted Police* as “a solid mass of green reaching from the ground a hundred feet high without a break in it except where the trail enters” (99). The pine tree becomes emblematic of how Connor more largely conceives of the land: he alternately remarks upon its impenetrability, its protective role, or, more frequently, its transcendent and “virtuous” qualities. These qualities Connor also associates with the formation of an indigenous, and morally superior, character.

If the pine trees reflect those qualities that Connor associates with Canada, and, by extension, with the uniqueness of English-Canadian character, the frequent references to the Rocky mountains and prairies, sometimes in conjunction, are also seen as a source of the sublime and of Canadian narrative, and also determine or shape character. In *Black Rock*, the mountains, described “in all the glory of their varying robes of blues and purples,” are seen to transport spiritually the protagonist and his companions: the mountains “stood calmly, solemnly about us, uplifting our souls into regions of rest” (247). In *The Prospector*, the mountains equally “stir” Shock MacGregor:

[He] raised his voice in a shout, again, and, expanding his lungs to the full, once again. How small his voice seemed, how puny his strength, how brief his life.

[. . .] Awed by their solemn silence, and by the thought of their ancient, eternal, unchanging endurance, he repeated to himself in a low tone the words of the ancient Psalm:

“Lord, Thou has been our dwelling-place [. . .]”

**How exalting are the mountains and how humbling! How lonely and comforting! How awesome and how kindly! How relentless and how sympathetic! Reflecting every mood of man, they add somewhat to his nobler stature and diminish his somewhat ignobler self. To all true appeal they give back answer, but to the heart regarding iniquity, like God, they make no response. [ . . . ]**

**Then and there in Shock's heart there sprang up a kindly feeling for the mountains that through all his varying experiences never left him. They were always there, steadfastly watchful by day like the eye of God, and at night while he slept keeping unslumbering guard like Jehovah himself. (108-109)**

**A Christian frame of reference is imposed upon the land, which is invested with spiritual values and qualities. The land's function as spiritual icon is strengthened as the mountains here not only evoke MacGregor's recitation of a biblical Psalm, but are also likened to God in their provision of a context and respite from everyday strife ("a holy place"), their possession of virtuous qualities ("kindly" and "sympathetic"), their constancy, and their protective nature (like "they eye of God").<sup>32</sup> Notwithstanding the manner in which Shock experiences his own diminishing sense of self-importance, a function of the sublime, he also feels that his contact with the mountains fosters his "nobler" side.**

**So the "Foothills," the space which joins "the prairies to the mountains" as described in *The Sky Pilot*, are regarded as important in relation to how they shape or affect character and provide both spiritual context and orientation:**

**They extend for about a hundred miles only. [ . . . ] The natural features of the country combine with the beauties of prairie and of mountain scenery. There are**

valleys so wide that the farther side melts into the horizon, and uplands so vast as to suggest the unbroken prairie. [. . .] A country it is whose sunlit hills and shaded valleys reflect themselves in the lives of its people; for nowhere are the contrasts of light and shade more vividly seen than in the homes of the ranchmen of the Albertas. (11-12)

The particularities of landscape determine not only the kind of people who will reside there, but also the kind of people they will become. In *The Doctor*, sixteen years of residence in the country have shaped Margaret Robertson: that experience has “round[ed] that supple form into its firm lines of grace, and [tinted] those moulded cheeks with the dainty bloom that seemed a reflection [from] the thistle heads” (15). Both character and narrative emerge from and are shaped, physically, spiritually, morally, by the land: Connor creates both context and community. Even when “peoples of the old lands” come to Canada, only those who are “found the most enterprising, the most daring” find that there, in the West, they are “freed from the restraints of custom and surrounding” and “shed all that was superficial in their make-up [. . .to stand] forth in the naked simplicity of their native manhood” (SP 26). Connor means this to be a reciprocal relationship, for as the men make the West, the West makes the man: as they discover the West, the West also “discovered and revealed the man in them” (SP 26).<sup>33</sup>

Shock MacGregor thus comes to discover that the response to landscape is not necessarily temporary and does not only elicit a sense of awe. Canadian geography acts as a catalyst in the alteration of one’s frame of mind and conditions one to live there:

[Shock] began to feel that he must readjust not only his whole system of theology, but even his moral standards, and he began to wonder how the few sermons and addresses he had garnered from his ministry in the city wards

would do for Ike and his people. He was making the discovery that climate changes the complexion, not only of men, but of habits of thought and action.

As Shock was finding his way to new adjustments and new standards he was incidentally finding his way into a new feeling of brotherhood as well. The lines of cleavage which had hitherto determined his interests and affinities were being obliterated. The fictitious and accidental were fading out under this new atmosphere, and the great lines of sheer humanity were coming to stand out with startling clearness. Up to this time creed and class had largely determined both his interest and his responsibility, but now, apart from class and creed, men became interesting, and for men he began to feel responsibility. (*TP* 192)

Connor suggests here that physical transformation – the alteration of complexion – is only one aspect of how the land has an impact upon and transforms its inhabitants into English-Canadians: one's spiritual, intellectual, and moral orientation are also profoundly affected. MacGregor learns to approach others without regard for "class and creed": new patterns of behaviour are thus evoked. If habit of thought and action alter under such climactic conditions and geography, these alterations, Connor suggests, are for the better.

Since MacGregor is, perhaps unsurprisingly, initially from Scotland and conditioned to believe in the class-system that existed there, he is surprised to learn that Canadians do not encourage such hierarchical distinctions. Connor suggests that English-Canadian character, and then a national community, are forged by contact with the land and that community is predicated on notions of equality: those who are part of the community are engaged in a horizontally-oriented relationship, rather than a hierarchical one. The elimination of the "fool system" of Britain where those of the upper classes have "things done for [them] ever since

[they are] first bathed” is, in Canada, replaced by another:

“Servant, Moira?” said Allan in a shocked tone. “Wipe out the thought. There is no such thing as servant west of the Great Lakes in this country. A man may help me with my work for a consideration, but he is no servant of mine as you understand the term, for he considers himself just as good as I am and he may be considerably better. [. . .] We are all the same socially and stand to help each other.” (*PSDT* 166)

For Connor, class systems based on economic or social distinction is – or ought to be – eliminated in Canada: “They were evidently of all classes and ranks originally, but now, and in this country of real measurements, they ranked simply according to the ‘man’ in them” (*BR* 104). English-Canadians are apparently on equal footing so that even employers commune, and work with and as long as employees (*CC* 98). The physical, moral, and spiritual responsiveness to the land, instead, determines greatness of character and becomes a determining factor of that greatness, notably, and primarily for men rather than women: only the fittest will survive in a country marked by the absence of both custom and tradition, and in which responsiveness to the elements determines greatness of character. As a result, for Connor, social stratification disappears under the pressures of geographical specificity and, instead, communal, horizontally-focussed attachments are fostered. MacGregor thus learns and takes greater interest in a wider range of persons and, as a result, develops what Connor also perceives as central to English-Canadian identity and to a superior moral system: the belief that humans ought to relate to each other on equal terms.

As there are topographical elements distinct to Canada, so there is a particular type of individual who survives, responds to, and succeeds in the land. This type of individual is

characterized by his lack of sense of superiority – even if Connor describes such a person as morally superior—the ability to adapt, resilience, and strength of character. Although landscape forms character, it is not by virtue of its “wild” and hostile features that those who immigrate to Canada find themselves unable to adapt. Connor suggests in *Corporal Cameron* that “survival of the fittest” is not a function of one’s relationship to the wilderness as much as of the absence of established community:

If failure arises from unfitness, his chances in Canada are infinitely less than in Scotland. [ . . . ] In [Scotland] there are heaps of chaps that simply can’t fall down because of the supports that surround them, supports of custom, tradition, not to speak of their countless friends, sisters, cousins, and aunts; if they’re anyways half decent they’re kept a going; whereas if they are in a new country and with few friends, they must stand alone or fall. Here [in Scotland] the crowd support them; there [in Canada] the crowd, eager to get on, shove them aside or trample them down. (90-91)

Those who are unable to survive in Canada are not overcome by the unforgiving aspects of landscape, but by the lack of an established community. Instead, Connor suggests that Canadian landscape civilizes, it creates indigenism and fosters English-Canadian identity. From that evolving sense of indigenous identity a national community is fostered.

How certain characters regard the landscape and invest it with meaning is equally important: more often than not, there is one character, usually the protagonist, who operates as the moral centre of the work, a minister or a preacher like MacGregor, and who directs the gaze of another character – and that of the reader – to the spiritual potential of the landscape. In *The Sky Pilot*, when the minister, who is “so made as to be extremely sensitive to his

surroundings” and who “took on [its] color quickly,” visits the canyon, it “[does] its work with him” (56): “His face was strong and calm as the hills on a summer morning” (164). With its effects still upon him, he “looked in upon Gwen,” the female protagonist who is prevented from visiting because of an accident which causes the paralysis of her legs, and “spread out the sunlit, round-topped hills before her, till I could feel their very breezes in my face”:

[A]s The Pilot talked, before she knew it, Gwen was out again upon her beloved hills, breathing their fresh, sunny air, filling her heart with their multitudinous delights, till her eyes grew bright and the lines of fretting smoothed out of her face and she forgot her pain. Then, before she could remember, he had her down into the canyon, feasting her heart with its airs and sights and sounds. (165)

When he delineates the canyon at another juncture, the effect is, as it is in the previous instance, restorative: she experiences “the first light and peace [. . .] by his marvellous pictures of the flowers and ferns and trees and of the wonderful mysteries of that wonderful canyon” since her accident (236). Lady Charlotte – whose name indicates her origin from the Old World, but who moves to Canada and carries her “secret burden” into the New – shares the same experience when she visits Gwen’s canyon:

We stood some moments silently gazing into this tangle of interlacing boughs and shimmering leaves, all glowing in yellow light, then Lady Charlotte broke the silence in tones soft and reverent as if she stood in a great cathedral. [. . .] As we began to climb up into the open, I glanced at my companion’s face. The canyon had done its work with her as with all who loved it. The touch of pride that was the habit of her face was gone, and in its place rested the earnest wonder of a little while, while in her eyes lay the canyon’s tender glow. (246)

Her transformation is predicated upon her love for and attachment to the scenery before her; she begins to reflect its power, literally “in her eyes,” and its capacity to transform others because she demonstrates faith in it. Gwen, claiming to see the “canyon” in her, thus immediately recognizes its effect upon her. Canadian landscape, for Connor, has healing and restorative properties, a notion upon which he draws repeatedly.

In *The Gay Crusader* (1936), to find relief from their pressing business concerns related to the amalgamation of Dymont Iron Works with “a number of ironworking mills and foundries in this district,” Hal Dymont, his sister, Victoria, and the Reverend George Morrison travel “along a grassy road that wound [ . . . ] to an end at the water’s edge, now motionless, a mirror of the glory of its framework of verdure and forest” (45; 155-156).<sup>34</sup> They decide upon visiting the lake because they believe that there they may “refresh [their] souls with a bath of beauty” (155):

The Blue Lake – none would ever ask why. For there in the radiance of a westering sun it lay shining translucently blue. [ . . . ] About it hills, rocky and wooded to the water’s edge, birches and evergreen, spruce, balsam and pine, but on this September day maple in all the colours in which maples burn. [ . . . ]

In complete silence they sat, their eyes upon the mirrored glory before them that forbade speech and almost thought. It was enough to gaze and dream and with the soul drink in all that tender, quiet beauty which the Blue Lake had somehow drawn to its bosom.

“Waters of healing!” at length murmured Morrison, his rugged deep-lined face smoothed into peace. [ . . . ] (156-57)

The Blue Lake experience operates as a catalyst for George Morrison in his efforts to resolve

an industrial dispute: he subsequently drafts and presents a list of proposed changes and accommodations for workers who might be displaced by the amalgamation of ironworking mills. The effect of his speech is powerful: Morrison's audience listens with rapt attention and believes that "from some Pisgah height their eyes were resting upon a land of promise entrancing but still remote" (170). Pisgah is the mountain to which Moses of the Old Testament was brought and granted "a view of the Promised Land." George Landow defines a "Pisgah sight" as "a coming together, a confrontation of human and divine, temporal and eternal," and "stands simultaneously as the culmination, reward, and punishment for the acts of that life" (616). Like a Pisgah sight from which one derives a vision of future promise, this view of Canadian landscape transforms those who willingly partake in admiring its qualities, and who allow it to effect a transformation of their person: what they see alters them and they subsequently learn to dismiss what is apparently superficial and external, even as they transmit that experience to others. Connor also suggests that these characters are provided with a sense of promise regarding the future of their company and their place within the nation, even if that promise is still "remote."

*The Man from Glengarry* is perhaps most purposeful in demonstrating how authentic English-Canadian character is developed from its association with the land because it is most frequently engaged not only critically, but also in terms of readership: it is one of only two of all his novels to be reprinted not only of the trilogy that includes *Black Rock* (1898) and *The Sky Pilot* (1899) and that together sold over five million copies, but also of his entire body of writing. The novel repeatedly emphasizes how character, and then more largely national identity, is shaped its by connection to and struggle with Canadian geography. Although Connor borrows and adapts the British sense of justice, he attempts to forge, especially in *The*

*Man from Glengarry*, an English-Canadian identity that evolves from the land and that, consequently, is entirely independent of Britain (PA 150). He translates the hierarchical British system, which privileges class and wealth, so that close identification with the land determines the superiority of English-Canadian character. Specifically, Ranald Macdonald, the protagonist, is the prototype for the ideal Canadian, whose sense of spiritual and physical fortitude is developed by and in Glengarry landscape, and whose aspirations come to fruition in conjunction with national aspirations because of his work in British Columbia. For Connor, the West not only geographically represents the culmination of Macdonald's career, but is also a site for the maturation of a national identity which is decidedly apart from that of Britain.

Macdonald is part of a newer generation of "Canadians" who find their identity in association with the land, whereas the two generations prior to his own were engaged with "conquering" and "dominating" the wilderness, the paradigm that Frye identifies as vintage Canadian and that involves fear of the wilderness and the unwillingness to come to terms with it. Initially, *The Man from Glengarry* seems to conform to this paradigm:

The sons born to them and reared in the heart of the pine forests grew up to witness that heroic struggle with stern nature and to take their part in it. And mighty men they were. Their life bred in them hardiness of frame, alertness of sense, readiness of resource, endurance, superb self-reliance, a courage that grew with peril, and withal a certain wildness which at times deepened into ferocity. By their fathers the forest was dreaded and hated, but the sons, with rifles in hand, trod its pathless stretches without fear, and with their broad-axes they took toll of their ancient foe. (15)

If Connor had focussed exclusively upon this earlier generation of what he terms "pioneers,"

the key response to the wilderness – dread and hatred – would have produced a different kind of character. In fact, Connor seems to suggest that there are two temporal periods which *The Man from Glengarry* straddles, the first related to the country as part of Empire and the second to a country more certain of its own bearings: in the former period, wilderness is regarded as obstacle, in the latter, as source of English-Canadian national identity and character development. Although Connor establishes the Glengarry forests as a mythological and cultural construct, an ideal from which distinguished men of the present have descended, that landscape shapes a specific kind of person into the quintessential Canadian character. Although the “solid forests of Glengarry have vanished” as have the men who have conquered them, the “sons of these Glengarry men” who are engaged in grandiose national undertakings exhibit the same characteristics as their forefathers (7). Significantly, these *same* men later become involved directly in the logging industry, and indirectly in the advancement of Canada’s economic independence: “For wherever there was lumbering to be done, sooner or later there Glengarry men were to be found, and Ranald had found them in the British Columbia forests” (415). Connor underscores the fact that exceptional men not only have been shaped by the climatic and topographic conditions, but also have built an exceptional country.

Macdonald is of the generation of those born to the “sons” who had been “reared in the heart of the pine forests,” and who wander “pathless stretches without fear,” even if, in this particular instance, technology (the possession of rifles and broad-axes) breeds that fearlessness. He relates to the land, which, in turn, shapes and ennobles him. This association, Connor suggests, determines his inimitable character – he is “the man” from “Glengarry” – which is asserted as he gradually develops toward manhood and by virtue of comparison with others around him, especially with those who are of British descent or who uphold British

ideals of lineage and wealth. Originally from Glengarry, a region of Ontario which was known for its strong adherence to Christian values and faith, Ranald is profoundly influenced by the religious ideology perpetuated there. His worth is also reflected in his sensitivity toward both Mrs. Murray, the moral centre of the novel, and her religious instruction which teaches him, among other things, “Paul’s injunction to Timothy, urging him to fidelity and courage as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (88). She, too, is responsive to the wilderness, as is demonstrated when, with her son, Hughie, she compares the spiritual reaction it elicits to that of organized religion:

Into the forest in the west the sun was descending in gorgeous robes of glory.

The treetops caught the yellow light, and gleamed like the golden spires of some great and fabled city.

“Oh, mamma, see that big pine top! Doesn’t it look like windows?” cried Hughie, pointing to one of the lofty pine crests through which the sky quivered like molten gold.

“And the streets of the city are pure gold,” said the mother, softly. (46)

“Streets of pure gold” is an allusion to the book of Revelation in the Bible. By transposing a Christian frame of reference onto the wilderness, Mrs. Murray conveys how the landscape was seen to have redemptive qualities: those who appreciate the religious dimensions of the land are rewarded with a vision of its transcendent, spiritually-elevating potential and influence.

Macdonald’s own physical and spiritual growth can be traced in relation to the land. Revealingly, after having spent a winter in the shanties labouring with his father’s clan, he is considered unparalleled in physical endurance and moral fibre: “He is like his father in the courage of him. There is no kind of water he will not face, and no man on the river would put

fear on him. And the strength of him! His arms are like steel” (279). He inspires respect and admiration not only because of such incontestable physical prowess but also because of his genuine regard and compassion for others. By the time he arrives in Quebec, he is quickly seen as “a friend of the weak and helpless, and the champion of women, not only of those whose sheltered lives had kept them fair and pure, but of those others as well, sad-eyed and soul-stained, the cruel sport of lustful men. For his open scorn of their callous lust some hated him, but all with true men’s hearts loved him” (360-61). Even when Ranald has not lived in Glengarry for many years, other characters, such as Merrill, continue to refer to him as “Glengarry,” using the place name interchangeably with his own name (470).

As Connor establishes Ranald’s character as an ideal, formed by his sensitivity to and relationship with the land, he simultaneously juxtaposes British characters and ideas to set this ideal in high relief. A pivotal exchange occurs between Harry St. Clair – a self-proclaimed Canadian but who also feels deeply attached to Britain – and Lieutenant De Lacy, who, although a member of “one of the oldest English families of Quebec,” chooses to identify himself with Britain (283). During this exchange, Harry suggests that Macdonald may experience uneasiness in their presence because he is “not quite one of us” and because De Lacy’s “mother doesn’t know him” (324). Such exclusiveness is manifested in the membership process for the *Albert*, a club located “in the capital city of upper Canada” to which only those who are of “the best families” and who “moved in the highest circles” belong, including both Harry and De Lacy (359). The committee that ranks applications to the *Albert* exemplifies British notions of hierarchy, based on one’s parentage or one’s fortune, usually in conjunction with one another:

[The committee] had a very real appreciation of the rights and privileges of

their order, and they cherished for all who assayed to enter the most lofty ideal. Not wealth alone could purchase entrance within those sacred precincts unless, indeed, it were of sufficient magnitude and distributed with judicious and unvulgar generosity. A tinge of blue in the common red blood of humanity commanded the most favourable consideration, but when there was neither cerulean tinge of blood nor gilding of station the candidate for membership in the *Albert* was deemed unutterable in his presumption, and rejection absolute and final was inevitable. (359)

Connor's language and tone seem to imply that the pride invested in such a "lofty ideal" is reprehensible; the "precincts" themselves do not merit their sacredness. Interestingly, the *Albert* is located in Eastern Canada, where some British notions and practices have taken root. The fact that the club makes an astounding concession for Ranald suggests not that he succumbs to what Connor believes to be unmitigated snobbery, but that his incomparability – like Canada's – secures the admiration of all, regardless of the system of evaluation.<sup>35</sup> If English-Canadians do not measure up to such social standards, they are deemed superior because of their sense of integrity and honest hard work, which arises from their intimate relationship with the land. For Connor, English-Canadians are not evaluated according to social status, but according to place, which determines personal ethos: where they come from and how they have developed in relationship to where they come from is decidedly more important than ancestry. Ranald is appraised as a fine Canadian specimen because in part he was "once from Glengarry" and then later "from the West" (468). He suggests that Ranald's ways – reflecting his commitment to spiritual affairs and learned partly from his labour in the outdoors – are finer than the ways of those from the city and than British notions of aristocratic superiority.

Macdonald's growing attachment to Maimie St. Clair is thus understood to be misplaced.<sup>36</sup> Maimie is depicted as the stereotypical belle who is preoccupied with the world of social conquest. Her failure to adapt to and appreciate the Glengarry forests in conjunction with the pleasure she derives from material things suggest not only that she is an inappropriate match for Macdonald because she is not "[s]pirited, radiant, resourceful, devoted" as are Mrs. Murray and Kate Raymond, but also that she embodies what would be considered an accomplished woman in Britain (Daniells 49). Macdonald's relationship with her could thus be argued to be emblematic of what Connor would consider Canada's own misplaced attachment to Britain: his eventual rejection of Maimie and his redirected attention toward Kate suggest that he has chosen, by extension, Canada over Britain. When Macdonald, as representative of Canada, breaks all ties with Maimie, as representative of Britain, he also becomes most involved in the advancement of national independence and its political autonomy.<sup>37</sup> Connor posits that Canada would achieve its greatest potential only when it secured independence from Britain and began to cultivate its own policies and traditions, as they arose from the environment and surrounding landscape.<sup>38</sup> The realization of that ideal in Canada, as reflected in the literary strategies employed in the novel, involved positioning the Empire as other, not Canada itself; only then could the English-Canadian subject differentiate itself, argue that that difference emerged from the particularity of Canadian geography, and direct attention toward the nourishment of a sense of national identity.

Still, the superiority of the Canadian character that Connor sees being developed from the land *is not* uniform, although critics generally treat it as such. Although Anderson argues that national imaginings and the "actual reality" may not be analogous, one being an ideal, the other an impoverished version of the ideal, what one finds in Connor's novels is a conflation of

the two: *both* the imaginative rendering and the reality are exclusive, both his literary representation and his political involvement suggest that the national character Connor has in mind is an Anglo-Saxon Protestant, who is conditioned by a religious system of belief.<sup>39</sup> As Terrence Craig observes,

This divine system itself was seen as leading the proto-societies of the Canadian West towards the goal of the great nation Gordon was convinced Canada was destined to become – an idyllic Christian nation capable of social and individual perfection. This new Eden, populated by Caucasian supermen and -women brought to near perfection under the beneficent leadership of the Christian church, had no place for ethnic minorities unwilling to convert. Indians and Métis must assimilate. (101)

Connor's depiction of Native persons suggests that however they may seem to represent "the wild unconquered spirit of [a] once proud race," they have been entirely suppressed and form merely background narrative material: they play a role akin to the landscape of previous generations that, at one time, required conquest. Although land is depicted as a spiritually-transforming agency in Connor's literary world, its power does not extend to those Native in origin. Nor does it extend to those who are French-Canadian. Despite Berger's assertion that, at least, French Canadians were generally "accommodate[d . . .] into [the] composite image of the Canadian character far more easily than [were . . .] the strange immigrants from central, eastern, and southern Europe," Connor is even unable to accommodate French-Canadians in his imagined construction of the nation (Berger 128). It is ultimately an English Protestant's contact with the Canadian soil that produces a fine specimen of the Canadian citizen, whereas other characters, such as Natives, are described as either inferior or, in the case of French-

Canadians, as deplorably misled, insufferably arrogant, and less refined in both thinking and manners.

Craig argues that the presence of the Indian and Métis serve “only for local colour and support staff,” as in *The Runner*, in which “the Indians remain subservient to white heroes, and their efforts are minimized except when they contribute to the heroism of their white leaders or employers”:

In the same way as his white characters make practical use of such Native characters, [he] exploits this subordinate, stereotypical layer of characterization to support plot resolutions aimed at his greater social goal. In making such use of Native stereotypes, [he] follows prevailing white-supremacist racial theories instead of leading his readers in a more liberal and more modern tradition. [ . . . ]

That he should be a man caught within his times, giving authority to conventions instead of challenging them, is a criticism that can be applied to the romantic form of his novels as well as the content as it concerns Native peoples. (101)

In *The Patrol of the Sundance Trail*, Connor describes how the “vast majority of the Canadian people knew nothing of the tempestuous gatherings of French half-breed settlers in little hamlets upon the northern plains along the Saskatchewan” (10).

That Connor lends authority to particular stereotypes regarding ethnic or racial groups outside of those of British descent is reinforced by his employment of the East-West paradigm: aside from Native peoples, those who are inferior in terms of character are associated with the East. In *The Foreigner*, he suggests that the conflict between two characters is emblematic of “the East meeting the West,” and specifically of “the Slav facing the Anglo-Saxon”: “Between their points of view stretched generations of moral development” (24).<sup>40</sup> The lines of difference

are as clear geographically as they are culturally: “respectable Winnipeg” – the Anglo-Saxon community which lives and can afford to live in “snow-covered roofs and smoking chimneys,” and “homes where reigned love and peace and virtue” is contrasted with “the foreign colony” where “sordid drunken dance and song and [ . . . ] sanguinary fighting” prevails (87). To reinforce this distinction, Connor explains that Western Canada was exposed to “danger [ . . . ] from the presence of these semibarbarous peoples from Central and Southern Europe” (108). Degrees of exposure to the land and the related alterations in character, for Connor, make “foreigners” more acceptable; thus the character Simon in the same novel is rapidly transformed “into Canadian citizenship” as he learns the English language and adopts the dominant religion (158). Brown, a spokesperson for the moral vision of *The Foreigner* – the title itself is resonant – and very much involved in the “business of making good citizens” (275), argues that since immigrants will “run your country anyhow [ . . . ] you had better fit them for the job. You have got to make them Canadian” (256).<sup>41</sup> Connor approved of directing European immigrants toward hard labour, not toward national development or participation, unless they were fitted with “Canadian ideas of living,” a thinly disguised way of arguing for modified British “standards” of living, thinking, and behaviour.

In *The Man from Glengarry*, the conflict between Ranald Macdonald and Louis LeNoir, the boastful, vicious logger who fatally wounds Ranald’s father, suggests how Connor regards a particular type of character as affected and shaped by the land and, more specifically, where he locates French-Canadians in his own nationalist imaginings. Although LeNoir and Ranald’s father are both loggers and work closely with the land, only those of British descent are seen as the true bearers of Canadian national identity. For this reason, the opening dedication is made to the men of Glengarry – Ranald himself is *the* “Man from Glengarry” – for

their contribution to building “the Empire of the Canadian West” (5):

The men [who] are worth remembering [. . .] carried the marks of their blood in their fierce passions, their courage, their loyalty; and of the forest in their patience, their resourcefulness, their self-reliance. But deeper than all, the mark that reached down to their hearts’ core was that of their faith, for in them dwelt the fear of God [. . .]

[. . .] For not wealth, not enterprise, not energy, can build a nation into sure greatness, but men, and only men with the fear of God in their hearts, and with no other. (7)

There is a particular type of man who is involved in the building of the nation: one who has the “right blood,” whom the forest has affected and “branded,” and who carries “the fear of God in [his] heart.” These are the Glengarry men who are of Anglo-Saxon Protestant, and preferably, Scottish Presbyterian, background.<sup>42</sup>

It is noteworthy that it is this kind of man, hardy, alert, resourceful, self-reliant – as is the case in the opening chapter of *The Man from Glengarry* – whose suppression of other “Canadians” (who evidently have not developed the same sense of character despite their equal exposure to the land) is seen as necessary. Two logging teams, one a mix of French and Irish Catholics, another of English-Scottish descent, are pitted against one another as a result of, ostensibly, a logging dispute. Louis LeNoir – and his name reverberates with meaning, “Louis” perhaps a reference to Louis Riel himself<sup>43</sup> and “LeNoir” translated as “the black one” – has proclaimed himself the incontestable “boss on de reever,” a prized position and “the topmost pinnacle of a lumberman’s ambition,” but is obliged to make an exception for Macdonald, his “only unconquered rival” (12). As a result, he is put on the defensive when he hears that the

Macdonald gang wanted the river opened for the transportation of their logs.<sup>44</sup> The result of the growing dispute in this opening chapter is a full-fledged brawl between the two gangs which culminates in Macdonald Dubh's fatal injury at the hands of LeNoir and in which Ranald responds with an avowal of revenge.<sup>45</sup> It has the makings of a revenge tragedy – but this is the story of Canada, the writer is Ralph Connor, and the hero, Ranald, is, as Lennox observes, an emblem of the Canadian nation and all its potential.

How Connor chooses to resolve this conflict between LeNoir and Ranald is resonant. In Ottawa, when Ranald meets LeNoir for the second time, the former has undergone a spiritual transformation as the result of his responsiveness to both his outdoor labour and Christian ideology: he has learned how to forgive his father's assailant as both his literal and divine father forgive, even though "LeNoir has done [him] a great wrong" (281). When LeNoir is in dire straits because he is surrounded by a Gatineau gang who mean "to bring the Ottawa champion to the dust," Ranald comes to his rescue (297). Notably, LeNoir's attackers are other French-Canadians from Gatineau; LeNoir himself, originally from New Brunswick, is considered to be part of the Ottawa gang: French-Canadians are obviously broken into factions and need to be delivered from themselves.<sup>46</sup> LeNoir himself is overcome by Ranald's generosity of spirit. His attempts to articulate as much to Ranald later is rendered difficult not only by his lack of mastery of the English language:

"I cannot spik your languige. I cannot tell." He stopped short, and the tears came streaming down his face. "I cannot tell," he repeated, his breast heaving with mighty sobs. "I would be glad to die – to mak' over – to not mak' – I cannot say de word – what I do to your fadder. I would give my life." (303)

After such repentance, Ranald's uncle and Ranald explain how their forgiveness is ordained by

the “grace of God” (304).<sup>47</sup> LeNoir is so moved, he offers his subservience, almost effectively converts to Protestantism, and relinquishes his stature as “de boss on de reever” because he has been forgiven and taught how to forgive.<sup>48</sup> The cracks in Connor’s imagined “deep, horizontal comradeship,” as it is purportedly fostered by Canadian landscape, become more visible as his sense of the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant is upheld over all other religious and ethnic backgrounds.

Whatever the distinctions Connor might make between one “type” of a Canadian and another and however these distinctions might be formed in relation to Canadian landscape, he still remains a writer who was not precisely “culturally colonial” because his sense of that “great good place” was located directly within Canadian borders, not elsewhere (Brown 14). Nor did his protagonists suffer from what Frye posited was endemic to early twentieth-century Canadian writing and to responses to the wilderness: disorientation and fear. Instead, Connor resented pandering to Britain for standards in cultural taste and behaviour and believed that Canadian uniqueness arose from the particularities of the land. He declared that Canada was “a Nation among the nations, standing upon her own feet, speaking with own [sic] voice, making her own bargains, determining her own destiny.”<sup>49</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

1. Connor was not always so modest about his achievements. To W.G. Wilson, he wrote that he was sending a copy of one of his books for his daughter about whom he was glad to learn that she had “such sound taste in Literature.” When another fan, Billy Shannon, enquired about how to become such an accomplished novelist, he responded that he ought to “read the best English books. [ . . . ] Shakespeare you cannot read too often. Don’t waste time with magazines and sentimental novels.” Such comments indicate that he considered himself to be not only an accomplished novelist, but also a novelist writing something superior to the sentimental novel (EDL, Dept. of Archives and Special Collections, Ralph Connor Fonds, ms 56, Letter to W.G. Wilson, 22 Jan. 1932 and Letter to Billy Shannon, 28 June 1926, vol. 49, file 5).

2. This may be part of Connor's tendency to self-mythologize. In another instance, he claimed that the Prime Minister of Britain had sent a letter in which he suggested that he had enjoyed reading one of his novels; in fact, the archival records show that Connor sent the Prime Minister a copy of his novel, and the letter was an official acknowledgement of receipt.

3. The number of books of fiction here includes the short story collections, *The Pilot at Swan Creek and Other Stories* (1905) and *The Friendly Four and Other Stories* (1926); yet some of these stories from the former seemed to have been published individually prior to the appearance of *The Pilot at Swan Creek* by the publishing companies, Revell and Westminster. I have discovered copies of *Gwen's Canyon* (1898), *Beyond the Marshes* (1898), and *Michael McGrath, Postmaster* (1900), a version of which appears as "Ould Michael" in *The Pilot at Swan Creek*. The number of individual books of fiction, if one includes these stories as separate entities, is twenty-six.

4. In addition to astounding accomplishments, Connor notes that the first edition of *Black Rock* was published in Canada—in itself, an unusual feat—and that that first edition "reached the hitherto unapproached figure of 5,000 copies" (PA 149).

5. In *Authors and Audiences: Popular Fiction in the Early Twentieth-Century* (2000), Clarence Karr considers Connor's didactic impulse to be "subtle" in comparison to "the browbeating temperance tracts of the day" and as demarcated from writing "with a purpose": "Connor's best novels were books with a purpose. Critics routinely scorn such fiction, but he was careful to avoid being didactic" (84; 92). He proceeds to quote Connor, who argued that he did not know of "any great novel which is not throbbing with purpose" (92). Connor's novels, however, do have strong didactic overtones, which correspond to the "purpose" that he had in mind.

6. The following are two exemplary letters that suggest this perception of Connor prevailed: Gordon A. Sisco, Secretary of the United Church of Canada, wrote on November 3, 1937, after hearing of Connor's death, that, "as a preacher of the gospel on the prairies and in the mountains he came to know and appreciate the life of Western Canada. His early association with settlers and lumbermen gave him such an understanding of men that out of that knowledge came a strong, virile type of religion. This not only enabled him to write novels which set forth the role of religion in building up a new national life but fitted him to minister overseas as Chaplain of the Canadian forces" (EDL, Dept. of Archives and Special Collections, Ralph Connor Fonds, ms 56, vol. 4, file 6); also after Connor's death, on November 2, 1937, Walter T. Hart, assessing Connor's importance to Canadian life, wrote that "his name was a house-hold word, known even to children of tender years, almost babes in arms. He spoke to us from the pulpit and in the public assembly and his written word will preserve for future generations the romance and the glamour of Canadian Western life, in which he had so conspicuous and successful a part. It is doubtful if there lives today a better known man than he, whether one speaks of him as Reverend Charles W. Gordon or 'Ralph Connor.' His books are sermons clothed in human flesh, full of the red blood of human experiences and centred in localities both real and accessible. He did more than others to bring to the notice of the world the garden sections of this great land and persuade sturdy men and women to found their homes and bring up their children in a new land of opportunity. He knew that it was a land that flowed with milk and honey, that the giants could be overcome and its

possession entered into with confidence” (EDL, Dept. of Archives and Special Collections, Ralph Connor Fonds, ms 56, vol. 4, file 8).

7. This explains the reaction of many writers in *Canadian Forum* who protested against Canadian prudery and morality. Most notable is Douglas Bush’s essay “A Plea for Original Sin,” in which he argues that Canadian literature will be developed once Canadians learn “to sin gladly” (589).

8. Gerson’s description of this literary hybrid—realistic, detailed descriptions coupled with Old World narrative forms—is reminiscent of what A.J.M. Smith has argued are distinct and separate tendencies in writing: the native, that is, realistic depictions and indigenous material, and the cosmopolitan, that is, imported techniques, tradition.

9. Karr notes: “Although raised in eastern Canada, he lived most of his adult life on the prairies and considered himself a westerner. Nevertheless, his intellectual centre of reference would remain tied to his eastern Canadian and Scottish roots and training” (12).

10. Connor’s concerns are reminiscent of that which perturbed his contemporary, Sara Jeannette Duncan, who, as Gerson notes, was irritated by “indiscriminate literary nationalism” (13).

11. Such patriotism also elicited A.J.M. Smith’s contempt, when, in “Wanted—Canadian Criticism,” he wrote: “If you write, apparently, of the far north and of the wild west and the picturesque east, seasoning well with allusions to the Canada goose, fir trees, maple leaves, snowshoes, northern lights, etc., the public grasp the fact that you are a Canadian poet, whose works are to be bought from the same patriotic motive that prompts the purchaser of Eddy’s matches or a Massey-Harris farm implement, and read along with Ralph Connor and Eaton’s catalogue” (April 1928).

12. In his assessment of how Canadian landscape shapes Canadian national identity, Connor never explicitly identifies that it is primarily the Anglo-Saxon character that is affected and that it is primarily an Anglo-Saxon phenomenon, although he implies as much in his novels. In fact, he more specifically means a Presbyterian or Protestant Scottish-Canadian, although he often deliberately blurs the distinction between those of English and Scottish origin. For the remainder of this chapter, “English-Canadian identity” will be employed because, as this study demonstrates, Connor seemed to have a limited sense of how Canadian identity will be forged.

13. It may be argued that Connor was not sufficiently sophisticated as a writer to have considered developing a new genre for the purposes of a new country: he came to writing, as he claims, by accident, and was more concerned with content than form.

14. In “Best Sellers in English Canada, 1899-1918: An Overview,” Mary Vipond notes that, in terms of historical fiction, “Canadians [ . . . ] read a great deal of American and British history in fictionalized form, and only a little—indeed, practically none—of their own” (102). If that pattern seems to be consistent for virtually all other forms, Connor serves as an exception to the pattern.

15. Specifically, Connor deeply respects the British system of justice and regards its establishment in Canada as beneficial (see, as an example, *Corporal Cameron* 333).

16. Homi Bhabha argues that “mimicry”—that is, the imitation of a cultural form, that “*is almost the same but not quite*”—disrupts the “authority” of “colonial discourse” (88). Connor’s employment of the national romance may be regarded in this capacity.

17. In *The Major*, Hector Ross argues that, despite having been born in the “Old Country,” he deliberately chooses Canada over Britain: “there’s something awfully fine in Canada’s splendid independence” (142). He adds that, although there are “heart bonds” that hold Canada to the Empire, “Laurier is right in sticking out for autonomy” (143).

18. Vipond notes that this kind of popular fiction appealed to members of the middle class: “religious, idealistic, filled with good intentions and thus able ultimately to triumph over both dilemma and adversity, the characters were guides and models for readers searching for hope and happiness in their own lives” (110).

19. Connor is borrowing Old World material to create a New World experience: he thus argues that the material for *The Man from Glengarry* (1901) is also inspired by Scotland, “its glens and lochs and purple heather hills, its weird ghosts stories, its pibrochs and its Calvinistic theology” (153).

20. Connor could thus be described as a writer who straddles the colonial and postcolonial worlds (see Bhabha). As a writer who celebrated the Canadian scene, he may be seen as a postcolonial writer, even as his writing also manifested colonial tendencies—such as his interest in British justice, his depiction of Native persons as either savage or exotic figures, and the exclusion of other racial and ethnic figures from his conception of the ideal (English-)Canadian. His “preference for the unthreatening entertainment of popular romance” may also be described as colonial (Gerson 16).

21. The one critical exception seems to be Laurence Ricou’s assessment: “Landscape is seldom significant in Connor’s highly didactic novels, and descriptions of it are characterized by shallow, romantic ecstasy” (15). He adds, however, that “[p]rairie writers in the early part of this century were beginning to sense the need, which Connor anticipated, of interpreting their own time and place with less slavish adherence to a vocabulary and a formula created to fit circumstances far removed in time and space. They were not to become experimental in a technical sense, but they did begin to look more closely at their own environment for subject matter and setting” (15).

22. Connor, at times, seems to believe that a sense of ethnicity—or difference—would be absorbed by an all-encompassing sense of Canadian identity, but it becomes evident that that sense of identity is entirely English-Canadian.

23. Although human presence is paramount, as might be expected of this genre, Connor’s characters are always deeply affected by the land in which they reside.

24. Connor’s notions are informed by the concept, as cited in the first chapter, that “distance from the corruption of the city was supposed to encourage the cultivation of wisdom, moderation, and other seemingly virtues”(Glickman 4). Generally, Connor regarded Canada as the site of virtue in opposition to a metropolitan space, Britain.

25. Again, the wilderness as employed here refers to the period contemporary with Connor's. In the period preceding his, he referred to wilderness as being conquered by settlers: see the reference in his autobiography to "the pioneers" who "turned the wilderness into civilization" (150).

26. In the same novel, *Corporal Cameron*, Nature is described as having its own way in the "remnant of the forest primeval at the horizon" (174). That the wilderness is pushed to the border and described as "remnant" is unusual for Connor, although it also demonstrates his occasional ambivalence toward Canadian landscape and, correspondingly, toward Canada as an independent nation.

27. Glickman argues that, since John Dennis, "the rhetorical sublime has mostly been seen as the decorous expression of that sublimity inherent in nature; experiences incommensurate with ordinary understanding find their proper expression in a poetry which transgresses ordinary linguistic form. [ . . . ] Language therefore serves a mediating function: it attempts to name and contain the sublime, to make sense of it" (40).

28. Regular speech patterns and rhythms, however, are also sufficiently affected so that British characters frequently feel compelled to comment upon these differences.

29. A version of this story appears as "Ould Michael" in *The Pilot at Swan Creek and Other Stories*.

30. I do not agree with Ricou's belief that Connor differentiates between the "flat prairie and the deep, jagged canyons," the former purportedly reflecting the aridity of spiritual life, the latter as the flourishing thereof (15). He used various kinds of landscape and its elements as vehicles for developing English-Canadian national identity.

31. In one instance, Connor describes the "mighty pine" as "the lonely representative of a vanished race, standing clear above the humbler trees" (BR 279). This reference is the only one which appears to use the pine as symbol of what was then considered to be the "disappearing" Native race.

32. Later, MacGregor also comments upon the "expanse of sky and earth" and, as a result, how insignificant seemed "the huddling bunch of dejected buildings" (165).

33. The gender bias in Connor's work is obvious. Female characters are typically concerned about the well-being of the protagonists or heroes of the work or with domestic and spiritual affairs, whereas male characters are typically concerned with the development of the nation. In *The Foreigner*, Margaret, a minor character, facilitates her father's "transformation into Canadian citizenship" (158). In *The Doctor*, as another example, Margaret, the moral centre of the book, demands of another female character: "Can't you read God's meaning in your woman's body and in your woman's heart?" (206). Connor believed that God had ordained women as child-bearers who were to put the needs of their male counterparts and their children before their own. Ben, also in *The Doctor*, regards Margaret "as something sacred, and to serve her and to guard her became a religion" (279). The fact that male characters serve and guard the land and the nation as

they do women is a relevant connection: the land, for Connor, is a feminine entity that requires the guardianship of men. See Sherrill Grace's essay, "Gendering Northern Narrative," which encapsulates succinctly how the centuries-old preoccupation with land and territory as a female entity works itself out, particularly when applied to the Canadian North / Arctic. Borrowing from Carolyn Merchant who "traces the gendering of mother earth back to the Greeks" and who "locates the modern politics of that gendering [ . . . ] within a capitalist, mechanistic, scientific framework," Grace observes that interpretations of the North fall within such a tradition: "human agency (and with it power, freedom, individuality) has been constructed in northern narratives, and elsewhere, as exclusively male, aggressively heterosexual, and masculinist" (166). She explains that the emergent binary—"the masculine as essentially active, feminine as essentially passive, masculine as distinct from and independent of nature, feminine as synonymous with nature"—demonstrates how "white, southern Canadians have constructed and gendered their own representations of the North" (164). One can see how the land in Connor's works has been depicted as a female entity, a domestic space insofar as it is described as "home" for male characters, or a space in which male characters are in the process of charting out the dimensions of their home. Connor, however, does not often speak of the land as an entity that needs to be conquered as much as that which transforms character both male and female.

34. This amalgamation suggests how Connor conceived of Canada as independent entity, in political, economic, and cultural terms, that could negotiate with rather than feel threatened by the United States.

35. One cannot disregard the fact that this concession is made also at the persuasions of Lieutenant De Lacy, who is initially described as an ostentatious fop and whose concern for external appearances and etiquette contrasts with Ranald's honesty and rugged virility (east contrasts with west): his efforts on behalf of Ranald are what redeem him. To further the disparity between these two, Connor makes it clear that De Lacy has forfeited the indigenous "wholesomeness" of a true Canadian not only because his "blood was unquestionably blue" but also because of his desire to identify himself with Britain (283). The Lieutenant's estimation of Britain's superiority over Canada is evident as he adopts speech patterns, "an air of *blasé* indifference a little overdone," and "an accent which he had brought back with him from Oxford, and which he was anxious not to lose. Indeed, the bare thought of the possibility of his dropping into the flat, semi-nasal of his native land filled the lieutenant with unspeakable horror" (228). Connor implies that both the importation of British ideas and De Lacy's pretentious desire to be British rather than Canadian are contemptible.

36. This peerless young Canadian is *not* British, as is evident in his relations with Miss Frances and Maimie St. Clair. Ranald's integrity and loyalty are contrasted with the ignorance, superficiality and frivolity of these women: such a contrast consolidates the dichotomy in the novel between the Old World (Britain) and the New World (pristine Canada). Miss Frances, who comes over from England to help raise her niece Maimie according to British aristocratic standards, is a materialistic woman who "thanked heaven that she had had the advantages of an English education and up-bringing" (93): "Miss Frances St. Clair was a woman of the world, proud of her family-tree, whose root disappeared in the depths of past centuries, and devoted to the pursuit and cultivation of those graces and manners that are supposed to distinguish people of

birth and breeding from the common sort. Indeed, from common men and things she shrank almost with horror" (92-93). The pivotal word in the passage is "supposed": people such as Macdonald may possess "graces" and "manners" without possessing "birth and breeding." Like Miss Frances and De Lacy who are equally mortified by the provincial nature—and inferiority—of Canadians, Maimie finds Ranald objectionable because "he has no culture, and manners, and that sort of thing" (310). Connor argues that pride in such trivialities generally holds little weight in Canada where one is measured according to one's devotion to *real* trees, not family trees: that is, one's understanding and appreciation of nature, the outdoors and the land itself are highly esteemed. Maimie is thus invited to visit Glengarry and to learn about nature from Mrs. Murray, a role model who had relinquished willingly a "life of intellectual and artistic pursuits" for a "home in the forest" and had deprived herself of all "luxuries" as a result (47). Her prime objective is to broaden what she conceives to be Maimie's narrow education: "She has never been outside of the city, and I want her to learn all she can of the country and the woods. It is positively painful to see the ignorance of these city children in regard to all living things—beasts and birds and plants. Why, many of them couldn't tell a beech from a basswood" (81). Maimie's ineptness and ignorance of life in the country are made evident at the "sugaring-off" when she stands too close to an open fire, and, despite Macdonald's warnings, sets her dress ablaze (116); when she misunderstands the innocence of the game of forfeits (110); and when she deems the old church to be "positively hideous" because she is unable to discern its "sacred character" from "its weather-beaten clapboard exterior, spotted with black knots" (121). Her incompetence in the country and in spiritual affairs suggests she will never fulfil Connor's notions of what makes an ideal Canadian: she is far too entrenched in British ideas and practices. He makes his point clear when he asserts that "there were many things about her too deep for Maimie's understanding" (120).

37. It is not coincidental that shortly after "Sir John A. MacDonald's famous telegram to the British Columbia government, promising that the Canadian Pacific Railway should be begun that fall," Macdonald realizes that, if his affections for Maimie have completely dwindled, his interest in Kate has increased tenfold (468). Like Britain, whose power over Canada wanes in the twentieth century, Maimie "los[es] all power over him" (460). Connor argues earlier in the book that Kate is more desirable than Maimie—and a more ideal partner—because she is representative of the honest, forthright English-Canadian woman: "For while Kate had not the beauty of form and face and the fascination of manner that turned men's heads and made Maimie the envy of all her set, there was in her a wholesomeness, a fearless sincerity, a noble dignity, and that indescribable charm of a true heart that made men trust her and love her as only good women are loved" (429). According to Connor's value-system, Kate is quintessentially English-Canadian, which her virtuous character reflects: her "straight, honourable and withal tender and gentle" nature are related to her sense of spirituality and esteemed more highly than physical appearance (*PA* 150). For this reason, when Ranald rids himself of any further association with Maimie, whom he learns to see as "shallow, and heartless," he appreciates Kate's worth and recognizes that she has "grown to be much to him" (457; 452). Appropriately, she is not only regarded with much respect because of her integrity, but also because "she had in many ways helped him in his work": "The thought of her and her approval had brought him inspiration and strength in many an hour of weakness and loneliness. She had been so loyal and true from the very first" (452). If one draws the parallel between Macdonald and Canada further, it could be argued that the final relationship—significantly where the novel also concludes—suggests how the country may find

strength in its own resources, rather than outside of itself.

38. His autobiography suggests his political involvement in the efforts to secure complete independence from Britain. In a personal interview with Mr. Asquith, he asserts that if Britain and Canada were involved in a war against another country, "it still remained for the Parliament of Canada to determine what action, if any, Canada should take and when" (196).

39. More specifically, this character is Scottish in origin. Daniel Cole is currently researching this facet of Connor's work and how Connor deliberately blurs the distinction between those of Scottish and those of English origin.

40. Connor clearly changes his point of view in later novels: in *The Major*, Barry Duff argues that those referred to as "foreigners" are improperly addressed, since, "whatever their origin, whether Ruthenian, Swede, French, German, or whatever their race might be, here they were simply Canadians with all the rights of Canadian citizenship assured to them. [. . .] But here in Canada, we were all Canadians" (152).

41. In this instance, Brown asserts that the two most potent institutions in the job of "making Canadians" are the school and the church. Landscape is an effective instrument—but only for those who are regarded as part of mainstream English-Canadian citizenship. Dick Harrison suggests that specifically in *Corporal Cameron*, "the whole system of order" and the "whole code of values" is "created elsewhere": The Corporal's "strength lies in his total acceptance of an authority emanating from a remote centre of empire" (79). His analysis of this book is just, although Connor is typically inconsistent in developing this notion. *The Man from Glengarry*, for example, both upholds and resists Britain's authority.

42. "It was the East meeting the West, the Slav facing the Anglo-Saxon. Between their points of view stretched generations of moral development. It was not a question of absolute moral character so much as a question of moral standards" (*TF* 24).

43. Louis Riel is referred to in *The Patrol of the Sundance Trail* in which he is described as a "traitor": "they know he is a liar and a coward. He leads brave men astray and then runs away and leaves them to suffer" (205-06).

44. Rather than make way for this gang, Murphy, the lumber camp foreman, and LeNoir invite them to the tavern:

The tavern was full of Murphy's gang, a motley crew, mostly French-Canadians and Irish, just out of the woods and ready for any devilment that promised excitement. [. . .]

[. . .] For the Glengarry men, who handled only square timber, despised the Murphy gang as sawlog-men; "log-rollers" or "mushrats" they called them, and hated them as Irish "Papishes" and French "Crapeaux," while between Dan Murphy and Macdonald Dubh there was an ancient personal grudge. (14; 19)

Connor leaves no doubt that the fight that ensues—referred to as "the great fight of the Nation"—has been at the provocation of the LeNoir-Murphy gang (241). The scene almost seems to be a re-enactment of Canada's struggle of religious and cultural differences; at the very least, it

typifies the religious disputes that began in the nineteenth century and continued well into the twentieth century. After receiving such injurious comments, it is with little surprise that Murphy responds indignantly, “You wud think now it wuz yirsilf that owned the river. An’ bedad it’s the thought of yir mind, it is. An’ it’s not the river only, but the whole creation ye and yir brother think is yours” (24). The passage reverberates with a directness and criticism that Connor evidently did not intend.

45. Macdonald curses and says, “‘Will you hear me, LeNoir? The day will come when I will do to you what you have done to my father, and if my father will die, then by the life of God (a common oath among the shanty-men) I will have your life for it.’ His voice had an unearthly shrillness in it, and LeNoir shrank back” (38).

46. That Protestantism consists of various factions, unlike Catholicism, ought to be noted.

47. From the “*English Bible*,” Macdonald and his uncle narrate the “story of the unforgiving debtor, explaining it in grave and simple speech” (305, italics mine). Evidently, Connor was writing in English—but the fact that he makes a distinction about what Bible Ranald and his uncle are reading from is intriguing. Connor seems to suggest that LeNoir might not have possessed his own or, worse, owned a French Bible and, as a victim of clerical corruption, would have been instructed that it was not necessary to read it.

48. Such a hierarchical relationship is also evident on a much smaller scale in *The Foreigner*: while French Canadians find “a congenial home across the Red River in old St. Boniface,” his “English-speaking fellow-citizen, careless of the limits of nationality, ranged whither his fancy called him” (13).

49. EDL, Dept. of Archives and Special Collections, Ralph Connor Fonds, ms 56, “The New Canada and its Needs,” c. 1919, vol. 30, file 2, 1-2.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven: Art Before Nation**

**It is largely through the basic interplay between our vast land and the response it inspires in our heart and mind that we shape our individuality as a nation-people.**  
– Lawren Harris<sup>1</sup>

The Group of Seven, popularly esteemed for their contribution to Canadian art and, more generally, to English-Canadian cultural iconography, formed in May 1920, when members held the first of eight exhibitions: these were held over a period of eleven years between 1920 and 1931, although members of the Group had been painting and exhibiting together for at least seven years prior to their official formation.<sup>2</sup> The Group, best described as a movement rather than a formal and exclusive organization, was founded by J.E.H. MacDonald, Lawren Harris, Alexander Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, Frank Carmichael, Fred H. Varley, and Frank H. Johnston.<sup>3</sup> Two years later,<sup>4</sup> Johnston resigned, and, in 1926, A.J. Casson replaced him. Tom Thomson was considered a seminal figure in terms of innovation, influence, and participation in the development of a Canadian school of art, but his death in 1917 foreshortened a burgeoning career, as it also precluded the possibility of his inclusion in the Group of Seven. His heightened importance in the world of English-Canadian art after his death, however, is signalled in the ways in which the Group delineated him. Although those who were to become members of the Group actively and widely disseminated the ideas that underpinned their canvases before his death, such activity was intensified shortly thereafter: these ideas reveal the impetus behind their work and suggest how they perceived an indigenous art was to be fashioned.

The Group's self-assigned title<sup>5</sup> suggests a definite number as much as a defined purpose; the former, however, was scarcely true even at its inception, since other artists, including women, were almost invariably invited to participate in their exhibitions. Jackson claimed that, as part of the original 1920 exhibit, canvases were included from "three invited contributors, R.S. Hewton, Robert Pilot, and Albert Robinson, all of Montreal" (Jackson 1976, 64; Reid 1982, 11).<sup>6</sup> He also noted that by the late 1920s "the work of invited contributors outnumbered that of the members" (Jackson 1976, 136);<sup>7</sup> nevertheless, two other "official" members were added in 1931 and 1932, Edwin Holgate (from Montreal) and L.L. Fitzgerald (from Winnipeg), to expand the Group's national representation or, at least, to cultivate the sense that they were closer to representing the country in its entirety.<sup>8</sup>

The Group argued that the main impetus behind their association, notwithstanding fluctuating membership and individual stylistic differences was to depict a Canadian subject in an "authentic" rather than borrowed visual vocabulary, to cultivate an indigenous art tradition that would break with European painting traditions, and, by so doing, to foster a national community:<sup>9</sup> in short, to create "an artistic language that would reflect Canada's distinct identity and signal its separateness from the former colonial power" (Whitelaw 123). To achieve these objectives and as a reflection of their aesthetic concerns, they endeavoured to capture the wide range of Canadian geographical terrain, as manifested in their frequent trips to various parts of the country, including the Arctic, Newfoundland, and British Columbia.<sup>10</sup> Although members employed various genres – portraits, urban scenes, and landscape<sup>11</sup> – and experimented with a number of styles, including abstraction, their common goal was to create a "national" art movement, which depictions of landscape primarily, although not exclusively, inspired.<sup>12</sup>

The most authoritative critical study on the subject to date, Charles Hill's *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation* (1995), is suggestively titled because it indicates that Hill concurs with notions that Group members perpetuated: that their canvases are worthy of their place in a national context, worthy of their identification with a national aesthetic. Like Hill, many art historians identify in isolation either the Group's extraordinary contribution to how Canada is identified by its geographical uniqueness, or the mystical or spiritual influences upon, and as claimed by, the Group of Seven. Few critics have explicated, and then only in passing, how the Group believed their canvases would operate in relation to the development of an indigenous Canadian imagination and national culture and how they conceived of "art expression" as a function "of a nation's ideals."<sup>13</sup> No sustained investigation exists that examines how their spiritual or religious proclivities worked in conjunction with their nation-building interests during the canvases produced in the 1920s, and how the land, a purveyor of benevolent forces rather than the bearer of an incubus, shaped and affected its artists in a spiritual capacity, and indirectly its inhabitants, to create or, more appropriately, to "convert" them into Canadians.

Group members may not have adhered to a particular religious belief system in its entirety, although theosophical principles fascinated them to greater or lesser degrees; yet they consistently adopted notions of "spirituality," that which transcended the corporeal, to refer to the experience of depicting Canadian landscape and frequently noted the religious and spiritual origins of art. Lismer persuasively advocated such notions: "who shall say that art is not devotional, nor truly religious when it has a sincere aim to develop [. . .] love for the forms and colour of our homeland. For truly we are made conscious of our surroundings by the artist's presentation of it."<sup>14</sup> On another occasion, Lismer noted that contemporary artists served the interests of the nation just as artists of previous generations had served the interests of religion:

Painting first arose as the handmaiden of religion. The artists served a church that preached and dictated to the people by means of pictures. Painting was a sacred craft, and the lives of the painters [ . . . ] were devoted exclusively to the production of scriptural subjects. [ . . . Modern artists] lack the fire of sympathy and emotion that is kindled by the spark of divinity within themselves. [ . . . ] There *are* great artists of our day who have all these qualities, who are painting pictures which reach great heights of inspiration. But they are few.<sup>15</sup>

The Group believed in and advocated the “sacred” antecedents and facets of painting; they thought that it behooved contemporary artists to render subjects worthy of that heritage. For Lismer, members of the Group were the exception in Canada in successfully reaching “great heights of inspiration” because they were able to yoke together technical ability with their spiritual proclivities and political interests. Their articulation of what constituted Canadian-ness may be thus reconstructed in terms of religious analogy.

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub’s work in relation to “testimony” may be seen as especially applicable here: they theorize “testimony” and “witnessing,” in terms that may be related to the construction of a nation for which it was difficult to construct a coherent narrative because of the lack of a common history.<sup>16</sup> Since testimonies are “not monologues,” a listener – or viewer – is rendered necessary: the land which Group members depicted became the source of “narrative,” one which may “take effect only when one can articulate and *transmit* the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself” (69). The “witnessing” of the land, that is, the act of recording and disseminating the subject to fellow Canadians, a form of “testifying” to its uniqueness, thus contributes to what the Group believed would become part of a national narrative.

Although Hill explicitly identifies two streams of scholarship that have evolved from and revolve around the Group of Seven, neither fully corresponds to this co-mingling of spiritual and political tendencies and influences. According to Hill, the first and less voluminous stream questions the Group's "mythologizing of the wilderness, [their] evasion of and co-optation by northern development" (1995, 15). Such opposition begins even before the Group's inception: the most voluble and acerbic critic, Hector Charlesworth,<sup>17</sup> deplores what he conceives to be the fulfilment of his premonition, that the success of these painters would be the result of imperial approbation.<sup>18</sup> He laments the fact that their decision "to present in exaggerated terms the crudest and most sinister aspects of the Canadian wilds would be accepted by the British critics as the most exclusive authentic interpreters of the Canadian landscape."<sup>19</sup> In "Landscapes in Motion," Robert Linsley interprets the Group's paintings not only as a form of mythologizing of the wilderness, but as an expression of "anti-modernism [. . .] the expression of a deep anxiety, widespread in Canadian culture about racial and ethnic mixing":

The work of the Group could never have stood successfully as representative of a Canadian spirit or sensibility if it did not in important ways conform to a prevailing ethos, and there is no doubt that a racist anti-semitism of the Gobineau-Chamberlain variety was widespread in Canada before World War II.

(86)<sup>20</sup>

Of all Group members, Harris is cited as most xenophobic: "Theosophy enabled Harris to reground his apolitical utopianism in a landscape painting that was meant to symbolize Canadian nationhood in spiritual terms, but actually expressed a profound conservatism and hostility toward social change" (82). Linsley suggests that his paintings may thus be seen as the

articulation of “an anti-immigrant position within a discussion of dirt and cleanliness that opens up his very controlled technique to a social reading” (86). Scott Watson concurs and concludes that such ideology is the consequence of the Group members’ British origins and that “their nationalism was enfolded in the colonial project”: he notes that “[t]hey did not imagine an independent country, but pride of place within the Empire” (1994, 96).

In a similar interpretive trajectory, Jonathan Bordo contends in “Jack Pine–Wilderness sublime or the erasure of the aboriginal presence from the landscape” that their tendency to mythologize and their interest in uninhabited landscapes effectively marginalizes or erases aboriginal presence and contributes to the “cultural genocide of the aboriginal population.”<sup>21</sup> In “Picture, Witness, and Wilderness,” he extends this argument to suggest that uninhabited landscapes legitimate the “violently seized [terrain], dispossessed of its indigenous inhabitants, and reconstituted as territory” (227). Bordo’s conclusions are made in response to such scholarship as that by Russell Harper, who suggests that the Group of Seven were merely interested in creating “a vision of unpeopled pre-Cambrian shield landscape with trees, lakes, rivers and rocks” or an “unpeopled northland” (15). Finally, in *Industrial Algoma and the Myth of the Wilderness: Algoma Landscape and the Emergence of the Group of Seven, 1918-1920*, Allan J. Fletcher remarks upon how the idyllic canvases of the Group during this period obscure the immense industrial advancement which took its form in the logging, mining, and smelting industries, and in the railway, and which had already arrived in such areas as Algonquin Park and Algoma, which the Group frequented: “a generalized, idealized and essentially dehumanized vision of Algoma,” he observes, “forestalls consideration of Algoma as a limited and vulnerable physical environment” (46). He regards their canvases as “doctored” for a particular audience at the turn of the century.<sup>22</sup> To contextualize their work within such an

interpretive grid is, on the one hand, a dismissal of the manifold articles and discussions in which Group members articulated their objectives and defined their encounter with Canadian landscape on their own aesthetic terms; it is, on the other hand, a radical simplification not only of their paintings, but also of the nature of the genre – the landscape painting tradition – within which they were working.<sup>23</sup>

Hill argues that the second stream of scholarship, the most prolific, is concerned with the national importance of the Group of Seven, their extraordinary contribution to how English Canada is identified by and associated with its geographical uniqueness, especially with the North; art historians of this critical persuasion argue that landscape operates as a common denominator or a unifying force for all the country's inhabitants, neither as a means of erasing aboriginal presence nor as a means of obscuring the country's material progress. Although some studies in this vein of scholarship contest the relative importance of the Group, or suggest that initial critical resistance to their work was negligible and excessively exaggerated by Group members to generate propaganda and attention, most studies accept the importance of their contribution to English-Canadian national identity and "the powerful influence their art and history have had on our perception of Canada" (16).<sup>24</sup>

Karoline Georges suggests that their endeavours were made in response to, and not as a cloak for, a "period of rapid demographic and industrial expansion": "it was through the study and representation of this unhoped-for natural wealth that the Group of Seven proclaimed its nationalism, all the while seeking to rid itself of the colonialist attitude of self-deprecation that condemned every creative endeavour on the part of Canadians to producing pale copies of European art. The idea, then, was to create a typically Canadian form of modern art, one imbued with positive political aspirations" (34). In *Canadian Art in the Twentieth Century*

(1999), Joan Murray disputes the “avant garde” aspect of the Group’s work (as members themselves believed of their own paintings), and even assesses their work as moderately conservative, yet she maintains, like Georges, that their canvases reflect “a love of the country’s natural environment, especially Canada’s northland” and “the intellectual and psychological climate of the early decades of the twentieth century in Canada” (30).

Murray is also one of the few critics to mention that the landscape they recorded was envisioned as sacred, “the material for a collective myth. The myth would in turn fuel Canadian society’s spiritual and political engagement with nature” (1999, 23). The emphasis on the land for such spiritual and political endeavours “would have struck [Group members] as inspired, for in nature they saw evidence of God, just as did the nineteenth-century Romantic poets” (41). Ann Davis is another exception: she observes that “it was a short jump from veneration of nature to seeing nature as the symbol and salvation of nation” (163). Christopher Jackson notes that Harris’s “religious conviction led him to propose that each nation’s art must have its source in the national soul” (19). Hill, who locates his own work in the second of his conceptualized bipartite scheme, also refers briefly to this connection in an earlier text, *Canadian Painting in the Thirties*, where he argues that, for the Group of Seven, “art was synonymous with religion, the highest expression of a society; its rôle was to raise the spiritual awareness of the community” (1975, 15).<sup>25</sup>

It is worth examining this connection, however, since Group members repeatedly emphasized that their canvases contained these two impulses, the national and the spiritual, which operated simultaneously in the interpretation and reflection of the particularities of Canadian topography and as a way of fostering national unity. About the latter, Lismer claimed that “art is not only the common denominator of harmonious life – it binds us together in a

mutual experience of understanding each other.”<sup>26</sup> The Group as a whole believed that one of “Art’s” primary functions was to provide a context – an imaginative home, an imagined national community – and imaginative bearings for a country that was still developing a sense of itself.<sup>27</sup> They claimed that “an Art must grow and flower in the land before the country will be a real home for its people”:<sup>28</sup> “[We] essayed to paint this country in accord with the dictates of its own character and spirit, which was then an idea foreign to the Canadian people” (Harris 1950, n.pag.). Art was a metaphorical tool with which they worked the Canadian soil, itself a metonym for “environment, social, physical, human, spiritual”: “the arts of man are ways and means of digging oneself in the world of reality and meaning.”<sup>29</sup>

Although Carmichael claimed that a nation’s greatness was determined by its cultural and artistic production, other Group members extended the parameters of that argument:<sup>30</sup> the Group understood their canvases to be not only “for a nation,” to borrow the phrasing from the subtitle of Hill’s catalogue, but, more precisely, “before a nation” both temporally and spatially. They believed that a national art must be inspired directly by the soil of the country, was conceived before a national identity was fully formed (the temporal) and therefore was instrumental in that formation. Lismer argued that “art expression is more truly a national function than politics or industrialization.”<sup>31</sup> Art was also developed to provide an imaginative context, even as it grew from the Canadian soil, from which that national character would develop (the spatial). A country was not a nation until it could envisage itself as such; they believed that Canada had not yet had success in conceiving itself imaginatively. After it had been cleared, settled, and organized into settlements, Canada was still “living in the shadow of the colonial attitude” and its artists needed to form it “into the semblance of a nation.”<sup>32</sup>

Group members were thus drawn together to challenge and reject collectively the

presiding (colonial) approaches to painting, that is, academic and imported methods, because they felt these methods could not sustain, represent, or convey the spirit of Canada. European artists and some early English-Canadian artists had derided “wilderness” as unworthy painting material. Such artistic proclivities give weight to Frye’s claim that early English-Canadian cultural endeavours were colonial in orientation – for other artists.<sup>33</sup> The Group, however, was not interested in “over there,” they were preoccupied with defining “here” on their own terms: since they believed that the “wholesale importation” of European art into Canada led to the false expression of the nation, to spiritual deficiency, and, specifically, to derivative painting, they concluded that “Canada could never be adequately expressed on canvas by a rigid traditional style” (Jackson 1976, 95).<sup>34</sup> In particular, Harris and Lismer,<sup>35</sup> considered forerunners of the Group of Seven, followed closely by MacDonald, Jackson, Carmichael, and Varley, were outspoken in articulating the necessity of constructing an indigenous art tradition that would break with imperial antecedents. Jackson thought that painters prior to the Group “responded by painting pictures of the Canadian scene which closely resembled importations from Europe, and they were commended for painting like Corot or Constable or Millet. Until the beginning of this century there was little effort to draw inspiration from our country” (1948, 6). Most art critics also describe the English-Canadian art establishment prior to the appearance of the Group of Seven in a similar manner. Peter Mellen notes that “landscape painting in Canada [was] closely tied to European prototypes” and, therefore, artists at this time were under “pressure to produce good academic work” within the European tradition (1970, 3).

Robert Percival observes that “in the case of the Group of Seven, the claim was to have broken away from all the European movements, which the Group considered had been influencing Canadian artists up to that time” (24).<sup>36</sup> In a letter to D.C. Scott, however,

Carmichael suggests that the Group differentiated between being “influenced” by and subscribing entirely to foreign standards and techniques. “I see no reason why,” he wrote, “we should impose outside ideals upon our efforts. That would be admitting an incapacity to shape our own ideals”:

Traditions grow, they are not formed in a day and it is only through an unswerving attachment to an ideal, that grows out of a continual and intuitive contact with our own life and surroundings, that an artist can hope to contribute towards that which in time will become the traditions of his country.<sup>37</sup>

Independence of thought, method, and overarching ideal are pivotal to Carmichael’s argument and to the Group of Seven’s manner of operating. The Group thus endeavoured to avoid traditional painting venues because they found that these venues were limiting and imposed artistic conventions from abroad upon national cultural production: they were determined to exhibit the resultant work separately, not in conjunction with extant societies that employed a traditional process of selection and that obliged conformity to certain aesthetic principles.<sup>38</sup>

Harris also expressed frustration with the fact that modern painting, both Canadian and that from abroad, was entirely neglected: “there were, at this time, no exhibitions of modern painting in Canada. No exhibitions came from Europe, save occasional shows of third-rate old masters and various kinds of dealers’ wares, and nothing at all came from the United States” (Harris / Murray 1984, 27-28). Their endeavours to exhibit their work separately were controversial at the time, since the Group was vehemently opposed to the well-established Royal Canadian Academy<sup>39</sup> and the Ontario Society of Artists,<sup>40</sup> organizations that were governed by those who adhered to such traditional, European methods as the Barbizon style of painting and conservative attitudes. Although the National Art Gallery of Canada particularly

encouraged their work, much to the increasing consternation of members of the Academy who “ostensibly protest[ed] the Gallery’s incessant promotion of the Group of Seven and its ilk,” there was little support elsewhere across the country (Reid 1982, 11).<sup>41</sup>

However innovational they may have been in advocating new organizations and forums for painting exhibitions in Canada, the Group of Seven, notwithstanding claims about the uniqueness of their responsiveness to Canadian landscape, did not create a new style out of a vacuum, nor was their work the first of its kind. Their success, as Harper notes in “Art in the New Dominion,” was unprecedented in Canada because of their unity of focus and commitment to fostering an indigenous art.<sup>42</sup> Harris himself makes such claims and suggests that their efforts were “the first unified creative effort in art expression of the country.”<sup>43</sup> Even if prior to the Group’s formation a “sense of growth, of the potentialities in nationhood, of how wild and picturesque mountains and sea coasts could exhilarate visitors [ . . . ] finally came to the artists and gripped their artistic imagination” (193);<sup>44</sup> even if such interest manifested itself in such work as Lucius O’Brien’s *Picturesque Canada* (1882), a project that engaged artists to paint “views in all parts of the country,” a much broader geographical range than ever before attempted, that were subsequently transformed into woodcuts (194); even if artists were experimenting with imported ideas from the United States, England and Germany, there was neither any striking divergence from imported styles, nor a coherent movement (193; 197).<sup>45</sup>

There is substantial evidence of endeavours, albeit clumsy, to create and convey an “authentic” sense of national identity using landscape as its vehicle prior to the work of the Group of Seven, as Dennis Reid discusses in *Our Own Country Canada*: the title of his book is itself an allusion to Reverend William H. Withrow’s book of the same title published in 1889, which reverberates with the “exact note of jingoistic nationalism [ . . . ] typical of the period of

Canada's artistic history" (Reid 2). Indeed, William Cornelius Van Horne's impulse to promote the Canadian Pacific Railway through the use of images – to “capture” in paint the Rocky Mountains – would have been typical of this period:<sup>46</sup> the “ambition to appropriate and enlarge” the country was tied to an impulse to build and enrich the nation first economically and then culturally (4). Although the paintings and artwork that resulted from this programme “represented the first significant instance of a widespread acceptance in Canada of the myth of the land as the basis of a national art,” the first cohesive and national movement in English-Canadian painting, one that not only made reference to the geographical distinctiveness of the country but also suggested that the essence of the nation was founded in the nordic aspects of Canada, has been almost incontestably attributed among English-Canadian art historians to the Group of Seven (6).<sup>47</sup>

The Group was neither the first nor the last in English-Canadian art history to consider a painting style and subject matter that would adequately reflect the nation and create an indigenous, national art movement.<sup>48</sup> As Thoreau MacDonald, the son of J.E.H. MacDonald, observed, “a truly Canadian movement in art did not start with the Group of Seven. A national feeling in that line began long before, mainly in the Toronto Art Students' League (1886-1904),” which had actively promoted outdoor sketching, life classes, and an interest in depicting Canadian scenes (1).<sup>49</sup> Even then, artists who formed this League had “some idea that a Canadian fence, seen through clear Canadian air, was as worthy a subject as a foggy Dutch canal or misty English hedgerow” (Thoreau 1). David Thomson designed the block print, *The New North*, which demonstrated an interest in the Canadian environment, especially its nordic aspects. Jackson confirms this interest when he asserts in *A Painter's Country*, his autobiography, that he perceived the artists of the League to be the first “who believed that art

in this country should be rooted in our soil” (27).

Yet no other group, league, or society had such unity of vision or purpose, or actively promoted a spiritual engagement with the land that also had national implications; as a result, no other group or league has shared such simultaneous longevity and popularity in the English-Canadian art scene. The Beaver Hall Group, a Montreal-based collective which included both Jackson and Holgate and emphasized portraiture and still life, was formed in 1920 – the same year as the Group of Seven – and disbanded in 1922, likely because it “never achieved the unity of expression and aims that the Group of Seven did” (Mellen 12). The Mahlstick Club, which was formed in 1899, also promoted life drawing and outdoor sketching, but it disbanded only four years later. The Canadian Art Club, which preceded the Group of Seven by thirteen years, and revolved around the painter Edmund Morris, included such reputable artists as Homer Watson, Horatio Walker, William Brymner, James William Morrice, and Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Côté. Like the Group of Seven, the Club was attracted to the idea not only of exhibiting in Canada, but also of producing work that was “Canadian in spirit, something that shall be strong and vital and big, like our Northwest land.”<sup>50</sup> The Canadian Art Club was “the first group in Canada that joined together as a catalyst for artistic change and to present new developments in art to the Canadian public” and wished to reflect Canadian life and interests with greater authenticity (Murray 1999, 14). In 1913, with the death of Morris, who drowned in the St. Lawrence and who provides an eerie precursor to Tom Thomson and his relationship with the Group of Seven, the Club’s momentum was substantially weakened.<sup>51</sup>

The Group’s success in comparison to such other associations was likely the result of their unwavering and unilateral commitment to an environmentally-determined, spiritually-informed, and politically-oriented aesthetic agenda, which was also influenced by the work of

early twentieth-century Scandinavian artists. In January 1913, at Buffalo's Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Harris and MacDonald were exposed for the first time to their work, which also "focussed on the stimulus provided by the local environment" and was seen as pivotal to the Group's development.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, many paintings, especially those of Swedish painter Gustav Fjaestad, are seen as a strong influence, especially upon the work of Harris; his style was subsequently altered in terms of formal design and composition, rather than in colour, with which Harris seems to be much bolder (C. Jackson 70; Nasgaard 169). *Maligne Lake, Jasper Park* (1924) serves as an example of a painting which is apparently "based on a 1909 painting by Swiss artist Ferdinand Hodler, *Lake Thun*, which Harris saw in Buffalo in 1913" (C. Jackson 33).<sup>53</sup>

From the exhibit, Harris and MacDonald received support for the idea that painting Canadian landscape in a modern style was more than a viable and potent form of aesthetic expression:

This turned out to be one of the most exciting and rewarding experiences either of us had. Here was a large number of paintings which corroborated our idea. Here were paintings of northern lands created in the spirit of those lands and through the hearts and minds of those who knew and loved them. Here was an art bold, vigorous and uncompromising, embodying direct, first-hand experience of the great North. As a result of that experience our enthusiasm increased, and our conviction was reinforced.<sup>54</sup>

That exhibit confirmed their interest in the North and had profound repercussions upon their stylistic approach and visual vocabulary.<sup>55</sup> MacDonald declared that, in particular, Fjaestad's canvases "seemed to us true souvenirs of that mystic North round which we all revolved" and

that “there was that poetic feeling of the Northern light” in them.<sup>56</sup> The Group became preoccupied with pictorial structure, boldly simplified forms, surface design (impastoed surfaces), and vibrant colours: “design became flatter and more decorative with a strong linear emphasis” (Murray 1999, 14). Yet it was not only the paintings of this exhibit which encouraged such ideas, but also the corresponding catalogue, which the Swedish-American art critic Christian Brinton introduced and in which he “proposed a nationalistic interpretation of modern Scandinavian art, and tied this nationalism of the ordinary people firmly to the land” (Davis 66). Nasgaard cogently argues that the work of the Scandinavians seemed to have similar objectives to those of the Group: that an indigenous art might be formed only when artists were in close contact with the North and experienced an affinity with it. He notes: “for both the Scandinavians and the Canadians these characteristics constituted the natural elemental forces to be discovered only in the northern wilderness, which, as MacDonald also understood, was a landscape distinct from the cultivated south and therefore requiring different means to represent it” (160). Motivated by such an exhibit, by the philosophical ruminations about a land-based, transcendental national ideal, and by the iconography of the Scandinavian artists which confirmed their own pursuits and ideas, MacDonald and Harris returned to Canada to paint with renewed vigour as they adapted to their own canvases what they had learned.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, they were profoundly affected by the American regionalist movement and the American transcendentalists, notably writers Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson and their conception that “man could only rise above his physical self by contemplating nature”.<sup>58</sup> “It was through nature that man reached a higher and more spiritual end, and ultimately achieved Oneness” (Mellen 140).<sup>59</sup> Whitman advocated the notion of the divinity of self and of nature, and of the centrality of the artist in conveying such divinity. Such

ideas also resonate with those of Theosophy, the philosophical movement which relied heavily upon Eastern mysticism and which gained popularity in the early twentieth century, especially after the devastations of the First World War when conventional Western religious thought was seen to have failed and was thus rejected. Theosophy, that is “a system of belief in the attainment of knowledge of God by mystical intuition or occult revelation,” stressed “anti-materialism and a fuller spirituality,” was seen as a viable alternative to and replacement for more traditional North American forms of religious thinking, and became an influential and pervasive way of thinking among artists and intellectuals (Murray 1984, 21/C. Jackson 8). A broadly-sweeping movement, it comfortably straddled a number of religious components and philosophies, which also made it “amenable to a variety of interpretations” (C. Jackson 30).<sup>60</sup>

Harris was committed to Theosophy more than other members. He became a member of the International Theosophical Society at the end of the First World War and, in 1923, he joined the Toronto branch (Reid 1985, 12). Like Carmichael and Lismer, he endeavoured to apply some of its tenets not only to the manner in which he lived his life, but also as a foundation to his art: “he adopted its symbols and metaphors and used them to convey the Canadian landscape and its forms as material expressions of a higher spiritual reality. [. . .] the Canadian landscape became his metaphor for spiritual reality” (C. Jackson 8). The success of such efforts is most evident in some of the critical responses to his work. One reviewer wrote:

I felt as if the Canadian soul were unveiling to me something secret and high and beautiful which I had never guessed – strength and self-reliance and depth and a mysticism I had not suspected. I saw as I had never seen before the part the wilderness was to play in the moulding of the Canadian spirit.<sup>61</sup>

Although no Group member immediately pursued these ideas in a comprehensive and rigorous

manner, such philosophies informed their own pursuit of the spiritual in nature and, consequently, in art. Since for Harris the spiritual facet of art was of primary importance, painting became “an exacting search for hidden meaning and, ultimately, truth” (Fletcher 57); in part, his belief that “art was the beginning of a knowledge of God” and, correspondingly, his heightened interest in Theosophy conditioned these notions (Murray 1985, 21).<sup>62</sup>

That the Group of Seven “formed” in May 1920 when they exhibited together for the first time under their newly adopted name is a climax to their ideas about developing a “truly Canadian art,” rather than developing art in Canada, to borrow Hill’s distinction, ideas that were in the process of being shaped and refined several years in advance of their formation. To begin with the 1920 exhibition is to preclude the enormous work and energy expended years before they were recognized, and the manner in which Thomson contributed to the shaping of such ideas. Jackson was wont to observe that “even before the war, we had attempted to interpret Canada and to express, in paint, the spirit of our country” (*PC* 63).<sup>63</sup> In fact, they were already being informally referred to and recognized as the “Algonquin School” of painters because of how closely they were associated, the frequency with which they initially painted in Algonquin Park as the result of Thomson’s persuasions, and what they shared ideologically.

The core of these ideas involved the development of iconic natural imagery depicted in modern techniques; outdoor sketching; the corresponding notion of the “amateur” or “pioneer” artist, who sought adventure in the outdoors, considered material wealth a disadvantage, was trained directly by nature, and was thus regarded as superior to the artist trained in Europe; and an emphasis on the spiritual and redemptive dimensions of landscape, especially what they conceived as the North. In relation to icons of Canadian nature, Percival observes that “they believed they would be able to establish a legitimate Canadian identity based on the natural

culture of the country. In other words, what they hoped for was recognition of their work as distinct as that between a Japanese painting and a French painting – a visual symbol recognizable among all other movements as totally and irrefutably Canadian” (24). In rejecting imported methods, and replacing them with one that would be recognized as distinctly Canadian, the Group was concerned with establishing – as Percival suggests – visual symbols that evolved and took on national importance, or, to borrow Ian Angus’s definition for national symbols from *A Border Within*, to create patterns, a unique arrangement of internal elements, even if the elements might be found elsewhere. Like Connor, the Group thus produced a hybrid form of art: they may have thus been “comfortably anti-modern” in their decision to employ landscape as subject matter, but they were fiercely proud of Canadian geographical difference and saw it as a way of demarcating their endeavours from those that were imported. Simultaneously, they were modern in the techniques employed to depict Canadian topography.<sup>64</sup>

The Group of Seven was fascinated by “here.” They endeavoured to produce “pictured symbols” that evolved from the landscape, with which the inhabitants of Canada would learn to identify, to which they would pay homage, and from which they would learn to recognize the essence of Canadian-ness.<sup>65</sup> Since Group members believed that “the environment of the artist in Canada was different from that of the artist in England and Europe” (Harris 1950, n.pag.), and, specifically, that Canadian light “changes little compared with the sudden moodiness of an English day, or the sodden mistiness of a Scotch moorland,”<sup>66</sup> the symbols, Jackson noted, had to be culled from the “rich field for landscape motifs in the north country,”<sup>67</sup> and in response to the particular quality of light in Canada, which by comparison “changes little” and “is more enduring.”<sup>68</sup> He concluded that, as a result, “old academic standards of literalism” are an

inappropriate means of conveying the Canadian “scene and the mood”: instead, the Group employed new techniques, and developed an emergent form of expression to reflect “the tangle of bush, the pattern of a hillside of early birch and purple distance – the silence of winter – the twisted pine and the fall riot of colour.”<sup>69</sup> In correspondence with Varley, Lismer described in greater detail some of the primary differences he perceived between Canadian and British land-based images: “Canada is a linear land, we like spikes and serrations, undivided things and separated hues and forms. England is an ‘ensemble’ country – people, trees, flowers all set together and going for community massing to impress the spectator. Even the colours roll up differently.”<sup>70</sup> As a result, the Group could not solicit approval from, as E.K Brown suggests, “somewhere beyond their own borders.” As Lismer asserted, they could not set “their aesthetic watches by such a ‘norm’” as that established by England because Canada was, geographically, inherently different: the images they employed, therefore, would also be different.

Definable Canadian symbols or icons were already being identified in the years preceding the Group’s first official exhibition. The artist, C.W. Jeffreys, enumerated such icons as he reviewed an early exhibition of MacDonald’s work on display at the Arts and Letters Club. He described that work as “native” in terms of both style and content:

Mr. MacDonald’s art is native – as native as the rocks, or the snow, or the pine trees, or the lumber drives that are so largely his themes. In themselves, of course, Canadian themes do not make art, Canadian, or other; but neither do Canadian themes expressed through European formulas or through European temperaments. In these sketches there is a refreshing absence of Europe, or anything else, save Canada and J.E.H. MacDonald and what they have to say; and so deep and compelling has been the native inspiration, that it has, to a very

great extent, found through him, a method of expression in paint as native and original as itself. (12)

Jeffreys concluded that MacDonald's paintings are indigenous or are compellingly "native" in "inspiration" because he has depicted these symbols using a method that differed markedly from the Dutch importations that were flourishing at the time. Significantly, Jackson referred to the Group's employment of the images in their respective work as "symbols of faith in nature": "lonely pines before a lake; hills encircling water studied through a screen of trees; trees and bushes in the foreground" (1948, 31). Such faith in the particularity of Canadian topography, Harris added, would give rise to a special communion with nature: "Canada was a country that demanded to be painted with complete devotion before it yielded its austere and remote secrets" (1950, 8-9). These images were meant to be identified as part of the Canadian landscape (as indigenous), even as they were seen to resonate with further meaning (as transcendent).

If the Group of Seven endeavoured to produce "pictured symbols" that evolved from the landscape, that were imbued and resonated with spiritual power, and with which Canadians would learn to identify, they regarded Thomson and his work as pivotal in the provision of these indigenous (and iconic) images of Canada. Lismer, in reference to Thomson's "The Jack Pine," described that work as "a Canadian symbol of striking beauty of design. [. . .] It is a symbol of the tree. One does not think of it as an example of an actual tree to be found by visiting the spot; it is an archetype of trees or a created tree with the jack pine as the 'motif.'"71 Group members likewise conceived of their work as containing and then exuding spiritual resonance; their devotion to the land engendered transcendent delineations of Canadian landscape, which were conceived of as the beginning of an indigenous visual art tradition. In

short, “the Canadian spirit in art thinks of *Canada* before all things.”<sup>72</sup> For the Group, the artist in direct contact with the land would be able to locate these spiritual resonances, since the Canadian spirit was manifested in the expression of the variety and vastness of its topography. Harris thus concluded that while “every object in material thought will be destroyed,” these spiritual and land-based renderings would be “eternal.”<sup>73</sup>

Thomson’s association with those who were to become members of the Group is of central importance not only because he produced such visual symbols, but also because of how he himself was apprehended: one may not only adumbrate the major tenets – the entwining of religious or spiritual and national ideals – underlying the Group of Seven’s approach to painting, but also trace how they believed a national art is engendered, how it is constituted by the manner in which Group members described Thomson and their relationship with him. In *Educational Record of the Province of Québec*, Lismer wrote effusively about Thomson’s role as Canadian artist:

The term Canadian painter never fitted any artist in Canada as well as it does Tom Thomson. [. . .] He was literally born of the soil; the background of lake and bush was his training school and his pioneering ancestors, his mentors and from whom he inherited his curiosity about the nature, the light, seasons, growth, rhythms, and colour of his environment. He has nothing to do with Europe and there is not a trace of inherited style or influence from abroad. He attended no art schools and no teacher of art can claim him as a student.<sup>74</sup>

Thomson was regarded as fully integrated with rather than disconnected from, and gifted in the interpretation of nature. He played a vital role, “a sort of spiritual father,” not only in relation to the formation of the Group and of an indigenous art tradition, but also in terms of what he

would come to represent for the Group, how he himself became symbolic of what they believed (McLeish 62).<sup>75</sup>

If, in life, Thomson projected an image of himself “as a woodsman-artist” and was successful in appealing to the Canadian imagination’s need for a “hero [ . . . ] a Paul Bunyan of the painting world,” then it was consolidated after his death (Murray 1999, 7). Thomson’s death, especially when he was coming into his own as an artist, may have deepened the prevalent sense of despondency, the result of the devastations of the First World War, among Group members; the ideas of the Group, however, were more clearly defined after and in response to his death. In a large 1920 show of his work at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the same year and place the Group formed and held their first exhibition, an anonymously written catalogue suggested how Thomson was being configured in their imagination:<sup>76</sup> “Alone by his camp fire, the moon a silvery green pathway on the waters, the stars peeping through the solemn pines, he communed with the Spirit of the North.”<sup>77</sup> Thomson was cast in romantic terms: the artist removed from civilization and isolated in nature, but uniquely affected by the North.<sup>78</sup> Upon hearing of Thomson’s death, Jackson expressed a deep sense of loss for someone who was more than a colleague and friend:

Without Tom the north country seems a desolation of brush and rocks. He was the guide, the interpreter, and we the guests partaking of his hospitality so generously given. [ . . . ] my debt to him is almost that of a new world, the north country, and a true artist’s vision. Because as an artist he was rarely gifted.<sup>79</sup>

Harris, Jackson, Varley, Carmichael, and MacDonald believed Thomson and his oil sketches facilitated their “introduction” to Algonquin Park: they became enamoured of his depictions of “the bare Precambrian rock, the wide skies, lonely lakes and rivers, the sinuous dark pines, and

the autumn colouring of the maples” (Harper 263). They subsequently frequented this locale and employed it in their landscape paintings.

Arthur Lismer, as another example, cited Thomson as “inspiring” as Algonquin Park:

The Canadian North had found its interpreter – one who knew the North and explored its secrets and revealed its dramatic and varied beauty.

There was never a land more suited to a painter than the northern bush country of Northern Ontario. Thomson *is* Algonquin Park and Algonquin Park is Tom’s spiritual home. His art was born here. [. . .] It had been waiting for thousands of years for its interpreter. [. . .] It was waiting for Thomson.<sup>80</sup>

Lismer suggested that Thomson’s pursuit of his career as artist in Northern Ontario fulfilled a sense of destiny. The interchangeability of Thomson with a specific geographic locale is revealing: as Group members valorized Thomson because he was adept in formulating a unique painterly approach to the land, they also began to regard him as representative of that place and of nordicity. Group members thus began to comment upon Thomson’s life in relation to their painting objectives: as Murray observes, “fighting for his art was a way of fighting for their own ideals” (1999, 92).

Thomson was born in Leith, Ontario, what the Group conceived of as “northern,” and lived almost his entire life within Canada, aside from a brief work period in Seattle. These facts – along with his deep interest in the outdoors, his intuitive relationship with the wilderness, his apparent lack of training,<sup>81</sup> and his anti-commercial tendencies – were cited as evidence of Thomson’s own indigenoussness, his authenticity as a Canadian, and his development of “a new, entirely Canadian manner [of painting] from his experience of the Canadian North” that was differentiated from European forms of painting (Fenton 11). The Canadian-born artist was

regarded as essentially “more” Canadian, as Frederick Housser argues, employing the rhetoric popular at the time:<sup>82</sup> since “science recognizes that environment affects individuals and contributes toward the creation of racial characteristics,” those Canadian by birth were regarded as quintessentially Canadian in temperament rather than those who had lived in Canada for a lesser period of time (27).<sup>83</sup> If people were “transplanted” from other countries into Canada, their “roots had not yet commenced to draw spiritual nourishment from the new land”<sup>84</sup>; the “informing spirit” of the land affected its inhabitants, and gave rise to particular themes, motifs, and an interplay between the “character, moods and spirit of the country and the working momentum and devotion it evoked.”<sup>85</sup> Thomson, then, was incontestably Canadian by virtue not only of his own birth on native soil but also, as Lismer suggested, that “of several generations” before him: he was seen as “the real type of Canadian.”<sup>86</sup>

If there were degrees or gradations of Canadian-ness according to the length of time one spent in Canada, Housser made concessions in *A Canadian Art Movement: The Story of the Group of Seven* (1926) for Group members born outside of Canada or who seemed to have spent less time than Thomson in the outdoors.<sup>87</sup> Although MacDonald may have been born in Durham, England, he was, as Housser argued, Canadian by virtue of the fact that “his father was Canadian by birth, so that the son’s line of tradition is here; indeed his forbears were real pioneers” (27); Lismer, whose “English parentage is incidental,” was thus “native by adoption” (31); nature “got a chance at [Jackson] young” (51); and Harris’s family “had lived in this country for generations” (34). Such an emphasis suggests that Terry Goldie’s notion of indigenization has some merit: the artist must be seen to be as “indigenous” as his subject matter and that, in order to be sensitive to the land, the artist must be exposed to its influence for a substantial amount of time, that is, “the tang of the north [must colour] souls as it colours

the leaves in autumn” (49).

Harris reiterated such notions when he suggested that there are degrees of indigenoussness, that those who settled “among us and [became] part of our cultural life” are more qualified to contribute to Canadian culture, and that those who are qualified have made “invaluable contributions to our culture, to the enhancement and variety of our life and its expression is invaluable”: “This is the root and branch of our growth but quite another another [sic] matter from importing individuals to do for us what we should do for ourselves, what we can do, or create in terms of our environment, life and character better than any one brought in from outside.”<sup>88</sup> While Harris acknowledged that most English-Canadian artists received training from abroad and thus owed “a good deal” to the “revolutionary discoveries of the Impressionist painters of European France,” he objected to the notion that bringing French painters into Canada would have “produced paintings as Canadian as those of the Group of Seven.”<sup>89</sup>

If Canadian-ness were a quality acquired by exposure to the land, then it followed that the artist was more responsible for spending time in, learning from and being sensitive to the environment, and capturing its “essence” – the manner in which Thomson and his artistic practice in Algonquin Park was regarded. Although his first trip in 1911 to the Mississagi Forest Reserve resulted in a sketches that, according to members of the Group, had captured a northern vision, in 1912 he made his first painting trip to Algonquin with H.B. Jackson, a Grip colleague (Murray 1999, 43). After that, he made annual sketching trips, and, remarkably, if not mythically, in one year painted “a series of sixty-two sketches which depicted the daily unfolding of spring” (Silcox 58).<sup>90</sup> Group members emphasized painting in the outdoors and especially in what they conceived as the North rather than within the studio, a practice

Thomson encouraged. This practice was not only the inheritance of the Impressionists, who were interested in capturing the effects of refracted light on canvas, it was also a way of absorbing the powerful influence the Group thought the landscape would have had upon the development of the Canadian psyche. Increased exposure to the land was one means of developing their “own method” and permitting their style of art to be affected by the spiritual influence that land was seen to possess. Harris argued thus when, in his essay “Grants for Artists,” he suggested that “subtle as it may be, the effect of the environment of his own country seeps into whatever he creates and the chance of producing works with a Canadian flavour is thus greater.”<sup>91</sup>

In all their assertions regarding Thomson, Group members suggested the importance of the effect of the land on their art: their art was the spiritual or religious expression of a developing nation. Lismer argued that the repercussions of the modern era had vitiated the potential impact of art, and, as a result, art had forfeited its power to convey higher truths:

In days long past when art was not such a separated department of life – when religion and art were one – it was easy to find an audience for the artist. [ . . . ] Art in those days had great public audiences who understood the oldest language in the world – the pictured symbol – and that when one knelt in adoration, beauty and holiness were united. [ . . . ]

The reason we are interested in art is because [ . . . ] it is the only language that all nations and peoples *use* and understand. [ . . . ]

All this is preliminary to the suggestion that if we really want to know what a nation is thinking – how it forms opinions and translates them into action – we must look at works of their artists. [ . . . ] The national character of art is

important because in it we see how each is trying to work out a pattern of its destiny and progress – that each nation must use the forms and techniques suited to its national temperament.<sup>92</sup>

Since, for the Group, art and religion, in its broadest sense, had come to be seen as separate realms in the modern period, artists were to strive to reunite those realms because, if the former provided a communal language as engendered by the land, yet communicable internationally, the latter provided a sense of direction and vision: together, art and religion would foster a national identity and community that was entirely separate from if not superior to its imperial antecedents. Lister believed that artists were invested with a spiritual responsibility, were to regard themselves as “high priests” of art, and were to strive to infuse artistic endeavours with such higher truths: art was to be recuperated to its elevated state prior to the modern period, and thus to facilitate the process of consolidating a national imagination and community.

The purpose of such trips to such uncultivated areas of Canada as Algonquin Park, Algoma, and other remote regions across Canada was to be in direct contact with the Canadian landscape and its spiritual essence. In “The Story of the Group of Seven,” Harris thus claimed:<sup>93</sup>

On all of our camping and sketching trips we learned to explore each region for those particular areas where form and character and spirit reached its summation. We became increasingly conscious of the fact that the spirit of the land must be discovered through its own character if there is to be any real life in its art. We came to know that it is only through the deep and vital experience of its total environment that a people identified itself with its land.

This way of working the creative spirit in our own day and place is, of

course, the same which has created all the great works of the past. It is the means by which a people finds its soul, and it creates the condition in which the soul may unfold. So it was that the creative life and work of the Group of Seven resulted from a love of the land. From the cities, towns, and countrysides to the far reaches of the northern ice-fields, it was an ever clearer and deeply moving experience of oneness with the spirit of the whole land. It was this spirit which dictated, guided, and instructed us how the land should be painted. (1984, 30-31)<sup>94</sup>

If the Group believed in the power of art, they also believed its “real life,” its sustaining power, was located in Canadian geography; that life and that spirit, however, could only “be galvanized into activity by the power of creative endeavour in our own day, and in our own country, by our own creative individuals in the arts” (30). Even though they returned from their outdoor excursions with sketches from which larger canvases were constructed, the canvases were regarded as the distillation of the spiritual essence of the land, a harmonization of “emotional, intellectual, and physical responses to the landscape” (C. Jackson 24). They believed unique artistic production to be the expression of a national spirit.<sup>95</sup> “Art” grew out of the landscape, and, as it captured the particularities of the country, fostered the country into a nation.<sup>96</sup>

Since contact with the land was valorized, Thomson’s primarily untrained, rough-hewn manner of painting Canadian landscape corresponded to how the Group of Seven conceived Canadian art was formed and to what they considered to be its primary purpose. They advocated the notion that an indigenous art, which was pivotal in the formation and perpetuation of a national identity, was formed not only by being in direct contact with land, but also by abandoning or forgetting one’s training from abroad, if one had acquired such

training, as Thomson had not:

[A] new country will seek to found its art on the pattern of the older countries until it has acquired a conscious, courageous attitude and desires from thenceforward to walk alone, attributing to other ages and other lands all the power and beauty of their art, appreciating the sustenance given, but like all independent, self-willed people, desiring to feel the strength of their own limbs and of their consciousness.

[ . . . ] National characteristics inevitably appear in all that is native to the country, racy of the soil from which it sprung."<sup>97</sup>

A superior form of training was received directly from the land itself, even if temporary “sustenance” was provided from abroad. They believed that indigenous art was cultivated by an artist’s – and then the country’s inhabitants’ – exposure to Canadian soil literally (geographical) and metaphorically (cultural). Lack of training – and particularly Thomson’s – was notably upheld as a worthy attribute especially because art instruction was often pursued in Europe; even if received within Canada, many Canadian art instructors themselves would have acquired training abroad. Instead, for Group members, such training was perceived as a way of encumbering artists with academic rules and a vantage point that in general was also European. Thomson was esteemed “as ever a source of wonder,” as Lismer wrote, because he painted “without any training, without any worries as to ‘how’ it should be done.”<sup>98</sup> The ideal artist was an untrained painter, a kind of “amateur” who was in love with Canadian landscape, who was unengaged with and untouched (or “uncontaminated”) by traditional schools of art or methods of approaching the landscape. In short, the Group revered Thomson as the quintessential example of the Canadian artist and as central to “the imaginative life of the country” because

“his master was Nature” (Housser 118; 124).

Thomson was also seen as sensitive and amenable to nature’s influence. Lismer believed Thomson’s superior sense of artistry arose from his “awareness and significance of things, [his] uncanny sensitivity which carried over into his painting and sketching. [ . . . ] Thomson was a sort of Whitman – a more rugged Thoreau, if you will, but he did the same things – sought the wilderness, never seeking to tame it, only to draw from it its quiet magic of tangle and season, its changing rhythms and its quiet or vigorous moods.”<sup>99</sup> MacDonald argued that Thomson “worked from the inside *feeling*, and [ . . . ] let that govern him even sometimes when he produced something that he didn’t think he had intended.”<sup>100</sup> In one instance, he is described not only as sensitive to the land, but also as enveloped in its spirit: “To him the North was a spirit which, entering into him, possessed him and permeated all his work.”<sup>101</sup> Such notions indicate how the role of the artist was pivotal. Since transcriptions of landscape depended heavily upon the intuition of the artist, the artist was characterized by his or her responsiveness to the land and to spiritual matters, and by a sense of vision “of both the people and [ . . . ] art.”<sup>102</sup> Hence, members of the Group subscribed to the Romantic notion that the artist was more attuned to the influence of the land (if not a more exalted person because of such sensitivity), and possessed of extraordinary imaginative abilities and keen perception that enabled him or her to grasp at “higher matters” as manifested in landscape. The authentic artists recorded such influences because of a careless disregard for convention:

The group of seven has therefore always believed in an art inspired by the country, and that the one way in which a people will find its own individual expression in art is for its artists to stand on their own feet, and by direct experience of the country itself, and its inexhaustible variety of new and untried

themes, to produce works in terms of its own time and place.<sup>103</sup>

Aside from emphasizing the importance of the immediacy of artistic response to the land, Harris also argued that only the artist with his or her specialized temperament would be able to adapt borrowed techniques and to experiment with new ones in response to the Canadian environment. Jackson observes for Harris “art was almost a mission,” a most apropos description given the manner in which he regarded art as invested with spiritual values, and the artist with special qualities to capture the particularities of the land: he “believed that a country that ignored the arts left no record of itself worth preserving. He deplored our neglect of the artist in Canada and believed that we, a young vigorous people, who had pioneered in so many ways, should put the same spirit of adventure into our cultivation of the arts. [ . . . ] He believed that art in Canada should assume a more aggressive role, and he had exalted ideas about the place of the artist in the community” (*PC* 29).

The artist was more adequately equipped to operate as an agent of or a spiritual figure in the fostering of national character as shaped by land:

Indeed no man can roam or inhabit the Canadian North without it affecting him, and the artist because of his constant habit of awareness and his discipline in expression, is perhaps more understanding of its moods and spirit than others are. He is thus better equipped to interpret it to others, and then, when he has become one with the spirit, to create living works in their own right [ . . . ] to make a harmonious home for the imaginative and spiritual meanings it has evoked in him. Thus the North will give him a different outlook from men in other lands.<sup>104</sup>

Harris – and Group members – relied upon the workings of religious ideology to perpetuate the

notion that the artist and the arts were of fundamental importance to the nation's formation and its culture: these workings were no less important in function to national development than any other centripetal icon and any other centrifugal force in the dissemination of religious belief. What demarcated this school of painting from others, Harris believed, was that they recognized "their own country as a paintable land" whereas other painters and art critics "did not know its spirit as a transforming power, nor did they then think of the arts as a living, creative force in the life of a people. Since that time the paintings of the Group have been accepted as the beginning of a creative tradition in art engendered by the country itself."<sup>105</sup> Thomson embodied such notions. Rather than operating by principles instilled by extensive training, as Group members were fond of declaring, he allowed his intuition to guide his artistic practice: "Art is not so much a form of technique," Lismer declared, "as it is a form of intuition."<sup>106</sup>

Thomson, however, was not entirely untrained. In 1906, he took evening classes at the Central Ontario School of Art and Design.<sup>107</sup> And his fascination with and intense scrutiny of the natural world may have been cultivated by the naturalist Dr. William Brodie, his grandmother's cousin, with whom Thomson may have spent a great deal of time (Murray 1999, 5). Such contact with him provided Thomson with "the rudiments of a naturalist's training"; as a result, he "learned how to combine keen and enthusiastic observation of nature with a sense of reverence for its mystery" (7). Murray also suggests that his reading, which included Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* – a meditation on "life and civilization, nature and history" – Rudyard Kipling's *Barrack Room Ballads* (1905) and *The Light That Failed* (1903),<sup>108</sup> and Ruskin's *The Elements of Drawing* (1857) in which he discusses how successful art operated as "revelation of man's relation to nature and to God," likely shaped Thomson's conception about what ought to function as the focus of his paintings and how they would be

rendered successful (Murray 2).<sup>109</sup> Thomson was exposed, moreover, to various art techniques because of his association with almost all Group members through Grip Limited Studios,<sup>110</sup> (a commercial art firm), The Arts & Letters Club (a renowned Toronto-based cultural institution which had been established “to bring together musicians, writers, architects, and artists with a minority membership of non-professionals” and where MacDonald first met Harris), and the Studio Building, which Harris had had constructed with the help of Dr. James MacCallum for the purposes of encouraging Canadian artists and, more largely, Canadian art (Hill 1995, 45).<sup>111</sup>

By comparison, Jackson regarded his own and other Group members’ artistic endeavours as contaminated by their more extensive training in Europe, where the landscape “was mellowed by time and human association” (Silcox 97). Almost all Group members had been trained abroad. As Lismer argued, they believed that even though they had been trained abroad, they still might learn what would constitute indigenous art from Thomson himself:

To *those* of us who had had art training, who approached a new work with pre-conceived ideas of how to paint it – with misgivings about lighting, colour and drawing – he was ever a source of wonder that he, without any training, without any worries as to “how” it should be done – did produce finely conceived works of art that have no connection with styles or schools, with the “academic” or the modern. He was a painter of Canada – not Canada seen through the eyes of older countries, but Canada of the bush and rapids.<sup>112</sup>

Group members saw Thomson, as a native-trained artist, as better prepared to depict Canadian landscape with greater accuracy and authenticity; hence, “Thomson’s way of painting the country provided a *modus operandi*” (Murray 1984, 9).

MacDonald was thus also unapologetically upheld as one who had “little art training”

because if the “modern European schools have been largely influenced by Cezanne,” then the modern Canadian “so-called school was inspired as the result of a direct contact with Nature herself,” a difference in which Group members relished (Housser 27; 24). The importance of this quality is reiterated frequently to emphasize that the movement was Canadian, not European or imperial: they believed they were inverting colonial artistic standards, whereby one who had been trained abroad was seen as a superior artist.<sup>113</sup> If members of the Group aspired to paint as if they were untrained or as if European forms of expression had not influenced them, they also believed that “we had to come to terms with the country we lived in”:

We saw no possibility of doing so through the style of the English landscape painters, which was the accepted style of that time. We had to find our own method. [. . .] The group at Grip Engraving knew that Canada existed beyond the pseudo-English scenes that were held up as the last word in Canadian landscape painting. And Tom Thomson opened up that other Canada to us. (as quoted in Johnstone 46-7)

Since all members of the Group had been trained abroad for varying degrees of time, the struggle revolved around impugning or “remembering to forget” one’s academic training and emulating Thomson by responding to the landscape in an unfettered manner, that is, to be as “untouched” as the landscape itself (Hunter 18).

The Group emphasized regularly planned trips to “the North” – Northern Ontario, primarily – and then across Canada also because of a persistent belief in a “northern ideal”: the first of these began in 1912 with Thomson’s first trip to Algonquin Park,<sup>114</sup> from which he painted *A Northern Lake* (Kelly 12; Silcox 55).<sup>115</sup> As a result, outdoor sketching trips proliferated, and by 1914, Thomson and members of the future Group were making strides

toward forming a new school of art in Canada, one which demonstrated “the first real fruits of this faith in the inspirational qualities of the Canadian North” (Reid 1970, 12).<sup>116</sup> These excursions are often described in terms that reverberate with the rhetoric of the sublime.<sup>117</sup> Varley, in a letter to Dr. MacCallum, described his first experience in Algonquin as almost overwhelming: “The Country is a revelation to me – and completely bowled me over at first.”<sup>118</sup> Later, when he moved to British Columbia, he again delineated his experience in terms of the sublime: “British Columbia is heaven. It trembles within me and pains with its wonder as when as a child I first awakened to the song of the earth at home.”<sup>119</sup> The expression of Canadian indigenusness entailed employing both the visual and verbal rhetoric of the sublime, especially since such imagined conceptions of Canadian landscape were diametrically opposed to those of Europe, and particularly, England, a tendency that is reminiscent of Connor’s literary depictions of landscape. Lismer suggested that to paint Canada involved an abandonment of the picturesque, notwithstanding the search for a geographical locale that would be subject to or appeal to certain artistic impulses:

It is generally assumed, of course, that a painter is moved by picturesqueness; that is, that he is fond of painting sunsets and scenery. [ . . . ] He is supposed to be thrilled by classical trees and formal romantic scenery and it is thought he must paint entertaining pictures to please people who have no concrete idea of the purpose of art except that it shall soothe their leisured hours. [ . . . ]

[ . . . Yet ] it was the stark realism of some aspect of the north country in its austerity and severe aloofness that appalled by its searching and objective reality. To those accustomed to be pleased by a pictorial representation these pictures could not be art, nor the work of artists. But consider what was

happening. Commonplace picturesqueness disappears in the north country and is replaced by epical and powerfully moving shapes. Conventional paintings, easy atmospheric effects, tepid and non-committal attack, has, perforce, to be discarded. [ . . . ]

[ . . . ] The changes of season, topographical contours, native trees, and majestic forms of rock and mountain are moulds for the form of a nation and if we cannot be moved by strange, primitive fears and religious impulses that stirred the earliest inhabitants of these vast areas then the artist is entering into his true vocation when he depicts and presents them in the form of paintings and literature.<sup>120</sup>

Lisner overturned artistic expectations when he suggested that the artist was obliged to demonstrate that “the change of season, topographical contours, native trees, and majestic forms of rock and mountain” are as powerful agents as are elements of the picturesque. He believed that the artist *must* seek to capture that which also moved the “earliest inhabitants,” that is, the “primitive fears” and “religious impulses” that Frye condemned. Lisner impugned the notion that the painter must subscribe to beautiful and picturesque approaches and suggested that such approaches are inappropriate for Canadian landscape, which “has not the traditional pastoral quality of the other countries”: “It is rugged and stern over large areas. [ . . . ] Its seasons are not the gentle, passive gliding of one into the other; they are distinctive and extreme in contrast. [ . . . ] It is the setting of our development, firing the imagination, establishing our boundaries. It is the home land, stirring the soul to aspiration.”<sup>121</sup> Whereas artists prior to the Group “contented themselves with the re-iteration of pastoral subjects,” those aspects of the country that the Group regarded as representative, “its elements of design

and spaciousness,” were “not included in the category of things that a painter might present as subject matter.”<sup>122</sup>

Lismer also challenged conventional methods of interpretation. Harris affirmed this notion when he attacked the artists employed by the railroad to depict Western Canada and its “Rocky mountain resorts” because they failed to capture the spirit of Canada in their “softly coloured pictures which prettified the mountains out of all recognition”: “You could not more feel the power of a great mountain in one of these perfumed pictures than you could experience the greatness of a Beethoven symphony in a cheap song.”<sup>123</sup> Canadian artists who were exposed to the particularities of the North and who experienced “the strange brooding lovely presence of mother nature fostering a new race” ought to have felt obliged, according to Group members, to adapt painting techniques to suit the environment: the result would be the production of a “purer creative work,” a “new expression” which “enables the soul to live in the grand way of certain wondrous moments in the north.”<sup>124</sup>

Jackson claimed that the decision to paint the North was most appropriate in the expression of Canada’s difference from Europe because the Group found in its unique properties a source with which to challenge dominant European art forms, the pastoral and the picturesque. These forms were inadequate for the rugged, sublime aspects of the North: “The reason I am going to paint in the far north [ . . . ] is because I think the ordinary pastoral painting, as practised now, is a dead letter. New art forms are necessary if the artist would develop. I think I will find new art values in the far north.”<sup>125</sup> However relative the term might have been, for the Group the North was both a geographically distinct place, that is, those areas that were outside of urban centres and that were largely uncultivated, and, perhaps most importantly, an imaginative construct that served as a vehicle to convey a sense of what was

beyond the sensuous realm of experience and to express the “fundamental elements of nature that could reflect a higher existence” (C. Jackson 18).

The North was also sought because it was regarded as the matrix for spiritually reforming qualities.<sup>126</sup> So Harris declared, in rhetoric that is patterned after that of Robert Grant Haliburton in “The Men of the North” written approximately fifty years earlier, that it was “a source of spiritual flow – and the north can create through us a clarity, a white sanity, a right sense of values – a discrimination, and a willingness to live cleanly”.<sup>127</sup>

Our creative life has its source in the north – out of the north for us as a people comes corroboration of spiritual values and conviction of attentive freedom from petty sophistications. [ . . . ]

The source of the beginnings of our art then is not in the museum, not in the art gallery, not in the store house of European art – but in the north. In long acquaintance with her forms, the rhythms of her hills, valleys, rivers, lakes, and rocks, the wood of her sparse habitations, the austerity of her life, the clear grace of her light, the power and uplifting clarity of her skies and the grandeur and beauty of her pervading presence. This love of the north is in essence a spiritual love, elicits a spiritual seeing and necessarily creates and will create somewhat new expressions in art.<sup>128</sup>

Although such a declaration has been attacked for its purportedly latent racial and gender-based inflections, there is no explicit declaration, aside from this particular assertion, of such biases.

In fact, Harris seemed more interested in establishing a deliberate opposition between institutions (Europe) and the outdoors or nature (Canada). This binary allowed him to celebrate Canada as “purer” than its European counterparts because Canadians purportedly “did not

identify with the material achievements of their culture but rather with the purer metaphor of the wilderness, as unpolluted psychic landscape” (C. Jackson 25). For the Group, the North provided a salubrious alternative and resonated with particular importance when “Canadians [were] sickened by the war in Europe and its homicidal madness; more than before, the north seemed the soul of their country” (Murray 1999, 93).

If the North was seen as a source of and a way of representing the nation’s difference from Europe, it was employed to emphasize its difference from the United States.<sup>129</sup> Specifically, Harris argued that its “living whiteness, its loneliness and replenishment, its resignations and release, its call and answer – its cleansing rhythms” provided what he regarded as “a source of spiritual flow that will ever shed clarity into the growing race of America”; as a result, Harris believed that “Canadians being closest to this source seem destined to produce an art somewhat different from our Southern fellows.”<sup>130</sup> Ultimately, the North was not regarded as morally confounding, harsh, or menacing; rather, Group members saw their canvases as mediating between nature and society. The artists themselves, then, made an alliance with nature *and* with society, and saw the land as a manner of creating a common bond between societal members.

Generally, Canadian landscape was preferable as subject matter because Harris saw landscape as embodying an “inexpressibly beautiful and benevolent spiritual force” (Blanchard 172). The land was ideologically configured as a spiritual entity, an informing spirit, to which the Group of Seven, as sensitive and intuitive artists, were exposed; which they endeavoured to capture on their canvases; and which they believed gave rise to individual national expression. With such notions in mind, Lismer declared that “we are [ . . . ] developing the national resources to establish the idea of Canada as a home land.”<sup>131</sup> Their canvases, which they

claimed were shaped by exposure to the uniqueness of Canadian topography, their critical essays, letters, and public presentations not only were worthy of and generated national attention, they also contributed to the evaluative instruments devised and used to determine whether or not a work of art was quintessentially Canadian.

In one lecture, Harris argued, in terms that appropriately reverberate with Christ's injunction to his parents when questioned about His actions, that "we are about the business of becoming a nation and must create our background for ourselves."<sup>132</sup> He continued:

In coming to a new land such as this as our forefathers did, they first made a home for the body. [ . . . ] but before we the later generation could be at home, really at home in the new land, actually one with the spirit of the land and its life, we had to begin making our own attitude. [ . . . ]

The task of our creative nature was and still is to create a home for the soul.<sup>133</sup>

Although "national consciousness" was enriched by the frequency with which the country was embodied in "song, word and picture," art was the veritable medium to capture the essence or spirit of a nation, since "the picture is the modern idiom."<sup>134</sup> Harris thus insisted that Canada must be "painted in her own spirit": "art expression [ . . . ] should embody the moods and character and spirit of the country" (1984, 26).

Such notions had further implications for what they determined the functions or properties of art ought to be, especially in relation to the incursions made by the First World War. If the War was seen as temporarily impeding the development of an indigenous art in Canada, it was also used to define how art was to function in Canada. Harris, referring to the centrality of art's purpose during the First World War, insisted that the arts were instrumental

to a nation's sense of vision, to the development of national character.<sup>135</sup>

War is primarily a business of destruction whereas the arts are primarily concerned with construction, so in a time of total war the artists would seem an anomaly. Yet without writers, musicians and artists functioning among us we would surely lose the perspective necessary to see beyond war to a sane and possible new order, a true democracy. [ . . . ]

The great tradition of art is and always has been that it is the spiritual spokesperson of humanity at its finest moments [spiritual is stricken out]. [ . . . ]

If [the arts] are one of the greatest agents we have to revivify the mind and heart, to instil new courage and restore imbalanced minds as they have in England—then the state should foster the arts in war even more than in peace.<sup>136</sup>

Harris thought, in a fashion that is strikingly Arnoldian, that the arts, and its primary subject matter, the land, functioned in relation to nation-building in a manner similar to Christian religious principles and belief: it was meant to elevate the mind, reveal the potential and divine purpose of the nation and its inhabitants, and create better and like-minded persons. That Harris believed the “spiritual presence in a work of art is just as definite as the presence of a soul in a human body” suggests the role he conceived for the Group’s canvases.<sup>137</sup> He also suggests that “Art does not follow nor slavishly obey – it leads, and is as great in its sustaining power as the Christian religion itself to lead mankind towards a world of reality inside himself.”<sup>138</sup> The Group believed in the redemptive possibilities not only of the landscape, but also of art itself: “We might say that war, because it heightens our awareness, makes us more conscious of our need of the arts. [ . . . ] In the arts is a power which can unify and inspire a people, which can help create the necessary spiritual background to give meaning to our daily affairs.”<sup>139</sup> Perhaps this

was an assertion of optimism, the intensified feeling of nationhood, after Canada's successful participation in the First World War; perhaps, too, such an assertion was an implicit comment on the need to integrate a nation that such tensions as the conscription crisis of 1917 had caused.

In either case, the function of land as it was depicted in their canvases remains consistent: it contains the potential to redeem and convert its audience to Canadian-ness, even as it conveys a national identity, a transcendent ideal. As such, the Group conceived of their artistic endeavours as both anti-commercial and spiritual in inclination, a counterbalance to, or remedy for the materialist pursuits of the day. Such critics as Denis E. Cosgrove may argue that landscape has a material basis and reflects capitalist interests, but the Group of Seven believed that their aesthetic endeavours were not a supplement to but a critique of capitalism. Lismer especially was often wont to comment upon the materialist tendencies of Canadians and claimed it was antithetical to the purposes of art:

I heard one of those budding economists [ . . . ] vehemently affirm that the world could not get along with the business of decent living until all the economic troubles besetting the world were finally settled. Then we can get on with art and literature and building and education and all the other things that await attention. That is the sad part of present day life; we are led to believe that all our evils are economic ones, and can be settled by only experts in finance and politics, and tariffs and embargos.<sup>140</sup>

He had difficulty reconciling what he perceived to be the spiritual purity latent in Canadian landscape with the materialist inclinations that seemed to be prominent in urban centres and in response to the potential of the land itself. Moved by some of Thomson's early sketches,

Lismer apparently responded, “If the country’s half as stirring as Tom’s sketches seem to indicate, in Heaven’s name why are so many Canadians always talking about their stomachs, their money, etc.? Where’s the romantic spirit, the philosophic spirit?”<sup>141</sup>

The “great engineering feats, the huge bridges, the giant railways traversing thousands of miles of plain and mountain range of a country vaster than the whole European country” left Lismer, like other Group members, largely unimpressed; instead, he was concerned with the “spiritual nature of the country, as it was revealed by its literature, its music, its painting and sculpture” (35). When the National Gallery invited him to give a series of lectures in Western Canada in 1932, he advocated the higher purposes of art, and suggested that it was purposeful in combatting “the icy grip of acquisitiveness” (McLeish 107). Accordingly, Lismer argued that it was just as great an evil to neglect art, which was more purposeful, and to assume that national or political difficulties could be resolved financially.

Depictions of landscape were not only meant to be held up in contrast to such materialism, they were meant to foster equal relations between all citizens of Canada.<sup>142</sup> Group members believed in “the necessity of engaging a large segment of the population in an active relationship with a living art of their own making”: that engagement, they believed, was not meant to be exclusive or hierarchical (Reid 1970, 11). Lismer claimed that art should be accessible to everyone, that it “is the normal and rightful heritage of every individual”: “the popular belief that there is no place for Art in the life of the masses should be given active opposition by those of us who experience pleasure and benefit from a participation in its different phases.”<sup>143</sup> Harris valorized such egalitarian impulses and saw them rooted in both the land and the creative impulse itself: “Activity in the arts [as] part of a collective, creative life is one sure way of healing the cleavages which exist between races, sects and ideologies, classes

and localities, because it awakens the creative centre in us. That is, any definite creative effort draws forth something within an individual which begins to bridge the gap between himself as an individual and the spirit in mankind.”<sup>144</sup>

They wanted their canvases to be displayed “before” their audience, presented in order to foster recognition of, pride in, and identification with the country’s magnitude and uniqueness. If their canvases were instructive about spiritual life or spiritual values, it is because “they embody the life of the spirit as living, harmonious experience.”<sup>145</sup> Lismer argued that part of the Group’s campaign was not only to differentiate their work from that of Europe, but to make Canadians see Canada as it was, not as they believed it to be. As an illustration, he referred to a Japanese artist, Hokusai, and explained how he painted “a sleeping boar so often until a great prince hunter recognized it *as a sleeping* and not a *dead* animal.”<sup>146</sup> If artists and the country’s inhabitants prior to the Group had been looking at Canada, they were interpreting it in terms of “clichés and mannerisms (in the tradition) of English charm and conventional Dutch pastoral serenity,” but they “hardly *saw* the winter and the far places of the North.”<sup>147</sup> The repeated attempts of the Group to use their canvases as a statement of faith in the country, like Hokusai who repeatedly painted a sleeping boar, would help Canadians recognize and appreciate Canada for its inherent beauty and worth. By incorporating such indigenous icons,<sup>148</sup> and from such “witnessing,” that is, both their perception of and communication of their vision, they believed a national community would be created.

Although Bordo argues uninhabited landscapes posit a “specular witness” that is “an obstacle to the fulfilling of an apocalyptic intention, the utter dissolution of human presence,” the Group’s intentions were far from apocalyptic: their intentions were communal (229). The ocular facet of the argument – not merely because they employed a visual medium – is pivotal

to understanding the ideology that underlies the Group's work. Almost all members believed that it was necessary to capture and depict in their canvases the land's "spiritual" essence, which was benevolent rather than hostile, and which would facilitate the viewer's recognition of and faith in the greatness of the nation, of "here" rather than "over there." The transforming power of the land would thus "convert" its viewers – landscape was conceived by Group members as a "transmuting agency"<sup>149</sup> – as would recognition of an idea about their membership in a unique, and morally superior country, of their "Canadian-ness" (Harris 1950, 8).

If the Group was uncertain about the effectiveness of the transforming power of the land – and hence of their canvases – one tangible result of their efforts is the impact made upon Emily Carr, who, as Nasgaard claims, is "perhaps their most important progeny": "The members of the Group not only impressed her with the visionary grandeur of their work and the boldness with which they handled their subjects," as he observes, but they also reinvigorated her artistic efforts, the output of which was remarkable after having visited with them and having viewed their canvases (197). Group members, and especially Harris, may not have passed on the legacy of regarding Canadian landscape as the source of an indigenous, national aesthetic, since she had already been exploring such notions prior to meeting them; they rekindled that belief, however, which was pivotal to the re-initiation of Carr's artistic career.<sup>150</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

1. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "Canadian Art," vol. 5, file 3, 9.
2. The other exhibits were held in the years 1921, 1922, 1925, 1926, 1928, 1930, and 1931.
3. Johnston is infrequently mentioned in the essays and lectures of other Group members, since his association was short-lived.

4. A. Y. Jackson claims that Johnston resigned from the Group for economic reasons, although Peter Mellen correctly notes that Johnston was the single artist who received most praise in their early association, who also earned money, and who received attention in both the media and in independent exhibitions (138).

5. Murray suggests that their self-assigned title may have been an echo of the American Group, The Eight, or the Ashcan School, with which Lismer would have been familiar because he had worked in Halifax, the home of Ernest Lawson, a member of The Eight. Harris was also an admirer of the work of Lawson (Murray 1984, 12). However imitative they may have been in coining their name, the Group of Seven had radically divergent artistic aims: the Ashcan School artists were primarily interested in American urban centres and the glorification of material success. Harris may also have suggested the title in recollection of the "Vereinigung der XI," (Union of XI) or "Gruppe der XI," an avant-garde group to which he had been exposed during his studies in Berlin and which protested the conservatism of the Berliner Hochschule, an art school that had closed down an exhibit of the work of Edvard Munch (see Larisey 10).

6. Dennis Reid argues that this practice began with the 1926 show.

7. Indeed, in the final 1931 Group of Seven exhibit, twenty-four artists, aside from the eight members of the Group, had their paintings on display.

8. By this time, the Group considered disbanding, and did so shortly thereafter because of divergent geographical, economic, artistic, and employment-related demands. Jackson adds that the Group's dissolution was a result of the fact that "the original impetus that had spurred the formation of the Group was gone, and the members themselves were scattered and engaged in many activities" (136). The Group's expansion for the sake of "national representation" was never explicitly stated but a function of their interests – to paint and represent all of Canada.

9. Harper notes that "the taste of the Canadian public as the nineteenth century neared its end was generally undiscerning and spiritless. Montreal was overrun with expensive, muddy brown paintings, many of them imported from Holland, which the affluent bought avidly" and which many English-Canadian artists imitated (225).

10. Most members of the Group favoured Ontario and Quebec, although Jackson explored most extensively, travelling from Quebec to Great Bear Lake, Yellowknife, the Rockies, to the Barren Lands in the Northwest Territories (Murray 1984, 16). Jackson did not paint the Prairies until five years after the dissolution of the Group (Mellen 182).

11. Harris demonstrated the most artistic diversity, beginning his career in 1910 in Canada with painting houses and back streets, specifically, the "Ward," a poor section of Toronto. His canvases ranged from picturesque depictions to satiric studies to protests against "such dismal poverty in a land so beautiful as ours"; although he continued to paint houses until 1926, he simultaneously painted "decorative landscapes" from about 1914 to 1921, and then turned to monumental canvases that focussed on Arctic icebergs, the Rocky Mountains, and other expansive landscapes; in 1937, he began his abstract phase (Jackson, "Lawren Harris" 1948, 8; 29). According to Harper, what almost consistently linked all of Harris's "movements" was the

fact that he painted his subject matter as part of or as it was drawn from the Canadian scene ("The Development" 13).

12. Varley is recognized as being equally interested in portraiture, whereas all other members concentrated primarily upon landscape. Also, Harris began painting urban settings; as the Group formed, he increasingly focussed upon landscape. Later, Harris was the only member to experiment with abstract art. With respect to fidelity to depicting Canadian landscape, Lismer wrote, "it is therefore a national and ultimate development in the progress of painting that Canadian artists should essay to present, not the moods and mistiness of other lands, but the more strident quality of colour [and] the sharp keen clarity of atmosphere" (AGO, Arthur Lismer Fonds, "Canadian Art from 1910," ts., section 11, 2).

13. AGO, Frederick Varley Fonds, Ontario College of Art Report, 26 May 1924, 3.

14. AGO, Marjorie Lismer Bridges Collection, "Canadian Art from 1910," ts., 2. Elsewhere Lismer noted that "Art has a human and diplomatic mission. It aids in the promotion of international goodwill, world-mindedness and a knowledge of racial character and culture" (AGO, Arthur Lismer Fonds, "Art and Understanding," lecture, ts., section 11, 1).

15. AGO, Arthur Lismer Fonds, "The Appreciation of Pictures," lecture given in Canada at Unitarian Church Jarvis St., c. 1913, section 9, 2, 4-5.

16. It should be noted, however, that Felman's and Laub's work on testimony relates primarily to trauma, hence the subtitle, "Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History."

17. Critics opposed to the Group include: S. Morgan Powell of the *Montreal Star*, H.F. Gadsby of the *Toronto Star* (see "The Hot Mush School" in which he writes that the Group was "giving Canada bad advertising abroad with their sketches of barren marshlands"[1]), and Hector Charlesworth of *Saturday Night* (who wrote in "The Group System in Art" that their paintings were "a veritable riot in primary colours" and were "gruesome"[3]).

18. Curiously, English-Canadian critics primarily lambasted the work of the Group for not conforming to European notions of design and subject matter.

19. As quoted in Johnstone, 48. Such scholarship also includes the criticism of Robert Stacey, who asserts in "The Myth—and Truth—of the True North" that this mythologizing, which is part of a new nation's "haste to become old," persuasively demonstrates how "young nations tell lies themselves that turn into necessary truths" (37).

20. He adds that Theosophy contributed to the resistance to racial and ethnic mixing: it "functioned in a time of widespread class struggle to channel utopian and millenarian impulses into an apolitical spirituality and [. . .] it further functioned in Canada to displace anxiety about social change and miscegenation through a nationalist reading of landscape imagery" (81).

21. As quoted in Hill 1995, 3. Lismer would not have regarded it in this fashion. In "A Note on Canadian Art," he discusses how he appreciates the "wealth of design and richness of decoration

of the Indians of the West Coast of Canada” and, while he believed that these aspects of Native art had “little influence” on contemporary painting, he also believed that “it will undoubtedly play in the future a larger part in the stimulation of racial influence. There is no doubt that the work of the Indians, whilst symbolic and ceremonial to the last degree, yet derives its origins in the form of design and colour [ . . . ] born of the environment, mountain, bush and lake, rapids and typical seasons” (NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, *A Short History of Painting*, Toronto, Andrew Bros, 1926, vol. 1, file 15, 2).

22. He does concede, however, that “a good deal of concrete information concerning chronology, weather, seasonal variations, precise situations and place names has been included to create a semblance of scientific objectivity in keeping with the ‘explorer’ role being cultivated. Not only were figures of this type popular and newsworthy, but this was just the sort of characterization which had been fashioned for Thomson who was already, and would remain, the prototype for Canadian wilderness painters” (58). Also, see analysis of Thomson below. Watson concurs with Fletcher’s analysis and suggests that the Group was “determined to give a picture of the wilderness as a territory that was just opening up”: as a result, “there were to be no pictures of mines, railways, or even the boxcar they rode in” (102). Although one might entertain how the Group’s endeavours to paint the wilderness were “an assertion of namelessness and ownerlessness” and a means of “extend[ing] a psychic or spiritual ownership to unvisualized unnamed regions,” it seems highly unlikely that the Group—or any serious artist—would engage in such a surreptitious project, one that implies that all of their claims to the contrary were an extensive cover for such motives (Watson 104).

23. In “Book on Canadian Art for the Young,” Lismer suggests that various streams of art may be broken down into “a simple classification into various types—Racial, Historical, Narrative or story telling, Decorative and Modern, Landscape, Portraiture” (AGO, Arthur Lismer Fonds, 6).

24. In the introduction to *Retrospective Exhibition of Painting by Members of the Group of Seven* (1936), Eric Brown, who became Director of the National Gallery shortly after the Group’s inception, and who was a strong advocate of their work, argued that “their development coincided with the growth of nationalist aspirations among Canadians, and their art reflects the spirit of the period” (7). In this vein of thought, Thoreau MacDonald, J.E.H. MacDonald’s son, asserted that, more than merely reflecting such aspirations, “they helped awake countless Canadians to the grandeur and beauty of their country, and did a national service by presenting those qualities abroad. They had a great influence on Canadian painting, and there are few artists in Canada who haven’t felt and benefited by that influence” (13-14). Rather than receiving poor critical reception, the Group did, at times, receive positive attention: see Margaret F. R. Davidson’s article in which she discusses how *The Canadian Forum* had “aided the Group through both its coverage and its criticism” (13).

25. He argues that the purpose of the catalogue is “to lay a new groundwork for debate” by correcting such mistaken assumptions, as he does, that plague the scholarship as the generalizing of the Group’s ideology and stylistic approach, and the consequential elision of their differences and individuality (1995, 16). Prior to Hill, Nancy Tousley makes mention of the number of critics who insist upon, specifically, F.H. Varley’s substantial difference from other members of the

Group; Chris Varley unequivocally differentiates Varley from the others, arguing that his “membership in the Group of Seven has tended to mask his individuality and independence” (11, as quoted in Tousley).

Hill also overturns the assumption that the Group of Seven conceived of their work as a complete break from European painting traditions. He then demonstrates how the movement was not meant to be exclusive; indeed, it was formed in retaliation of existing exclusive practices and restrictive artistic expectations; that they deliberately omitted other artists and women from the project is grossly mis-representative. Helen Buss asserts that, “despite what was to eventually be [Carr’s] equal public acclaim, the Group of Seven did not become a co-educational Group of Eight to accommodate a female vision” (162). Joan Murray argues, rather excessively, how “the Group did not count a woman among its magic seven, nor did it add one among the three members it included later. It was essentially a grown-up boy’s club. The boyish atmosphere extended to the kind of paintings the Group produced. They are full of a boy’s-story search for a site, in a manner less like Monet’s constant quest for motif than like the Hardy boys’ adventures. To this male preserve women were not admitted until 1933, when the Group expanded to include nearly thirty members” (1984, 7). It is true, however, that the Arts and Letters Club, to which most members of the Group belonged, excluded women (Lord 1974, 120). Still, other artists and women were included to exhibit with the Group of Seven, if they were not one of the “seven” named in the initial formation.

Finally, Hill analyses the understated nature of the critical attacks made on the Group at the time of their formation. With respect to the latter assumption, Hill demonstrates with extraordinary detail that in light of the “opposition to their work [which was . . .] more bitter than has been recently admitted,” and of “their support [which] was more tenuous,” the Group showed a tremendous resolve, which partially accounted for the success of their endeavours (1995, 16). The influence of the Group of Seven is evident in the effect they had upon other cultural forms at the time. Christopher Jackson notes the manner in which they affected a number of directors and playwrights in the 1920s and 1930s: as an example, he cites Herman Voaden, “one of Canada’s most innovative directors and playwrights of that era, [who] clearly wished to do in the theatres what the Group had done in painting” (58). Harris was also friends with Roy Mitchell, the “first director of Hart House Theatre”; the friendship was mutually influential, since Mitchell was also the person who first introduced Harris to Eastern thought and philosophy (“The Development” 20). For an analysis of their effect upon poetry contemporary with their work, see Sandra Djwa’s article “A New Soil and a Sharp Sun’: The Landscape of a Modern Canadian Poetry” (*Modernist Studies: Literature & Culture*, 1920-1940 2.2 [1976]: 3-17).

26. AGO, Arthur Lismer Fonds, “Further Adventures in Canadian Painting” – no. 6. Five Minute Broadcast by Arthur Lismer, c. 1946, ts., 3.

27. Lismer expounds at length in “The Meaning of Art” how Art ought to function in daily life: “It is not merely culture—and performance, these are only half truths. It is neither moral nor utilitarian. It is a way of life—or rather a way of thinking about life—a pathway, a becoming. It is creative thinking and doing in a social sense, it is leisure and education for it. It is consciousness of environment and understanding of the significance of the beauty and character of things in nature and in the human mind.[ . . .] It is prayer and devotion enriching the spirit of man, shining through all the distress of life like a golden beacon” (75).

28. NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, Group of Seven catalogue, c. 1920, vol. 1, file 5. Such a notion also corresponds to how the Group conceived of the development of the nation as organic and thus Romantic, even as they believed that they could break from imperial antecedents, a modern impulse. So Lismer claimed that “all art is growth—the expression of continuously forming buds and blossoms of spiritual meaning.[ . . . ] In our forests the more quickly growing trees, birch & poplar, grow with graceful forms and pleasing colour—with rank undergrowth protecting and shading the more slowly maturing and sturdier growth of spruce and pine—trees that take many years to bring to forms of beauty. The art of a nation is like this. The enticing forms of the growth common to all countries satisfies and serves for a time, but below it slowly coming into consciousness is the real and native sustenance. Canadian art is unfolding—like a bud—or the nature of a child” (NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, “Projected Book History,” ts., vol. 2, file 6).

29. AGO, Marjorie Lismer Bridges Collection, “Old Arts on New Soil,” broadcast, 27 February 1953, 1-2.

30. NAC, Franklin Carmichael Fonds, MG 30 D 293, “Notes on Art,” vol. 5, file 14.

31. NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, Projected Book, titled *Education Through Art* (1924-1926), ts., vol. 2, file 6, 8.

32. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, “Art and Society in Canada,” vol. 5, file 3, 2-3.

33. The Group was responding to the general opinion that “the Canadian country side was considered [ . . . ] to be unpaintable”: the adherents of that opinion argued that “the harsh lighting, the crude colours, and the rugged landscape were not worthy of an artist’s attention. Winter scenes were not depicted on Canadian publicity posters because they might discourage immigration” (Mellen 5).

34. Harris wrote that “the source of our art then is not in the achievements of other artists in other days and lands, although it has learned a great deal from these. Our art is founded on a long and growing love and understanding of the North in an ever clearer experience of oneness with the informing spirit of the whole land and a strange brooding sense of Mother Nature fostering a new race and a new age” (1985, 185).

35. Harris was the “driving force behind the Group” not only because he actively promoted its aims in lectures, essays and so forth; he was also seen as a leader and initiator because he proposed and almost entirely funded the Studio Building to house Canadian artists who were interested in developing an indigenous art, and because he organized sketching excursions to Algoma and Lake Superior (Mellon 189). Of Harris, Frye wrote, he is “a missionary who wants to make his own faith real to others” (1971, 212).

36. As has been shown elsewhere, the Group did not claim to have broken from all the European movements (as Mellen, among other critics, seems to note [see page 22 of *The Group of Seven* where he suggests that “the artists themselves were not conscious of this continuing connection with Europe, and would have violently objected to having it pointed out”]); they resisted the idea

of slavishly imitating such movements. Percival is more accurate when he suggests that such nationalist aspirations involved the Group's interest in distancing themselves from the academic—and European—training to which almost all of them had been exposed and which provided what they saw as inappropriate techniques for their country: "They were all strongly attracted to the brilliance and splendour of Canadian landscape and the desire of the whole group was to paint it in a freer and more spontaneous way than the European tradition had so far permitted Canadian artists to do" (7). Almost inevitably, the postcolonial response—resistance to imperial centre's cultural forms of dominance—overlaps with and borrows from that centre; here, the Group's resistance may borrow from European art forms to create an amalgam and thus something new.

37. Letter dated 1 January 1933, Vancouver School of Art, as quoted in a McMichael Canadian Art Collection Leaflet (1987).

38. Yet Group members later participated in the development of the Federation of Canadian artists because they believed that "a movement or organization to integrate all these with the life of the people [ . . . ] can create a country wide unifying, cultural momentum" (NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "The Canadian Federation of Artists," vol. 5, file 22, 4).

39. The Royal Canadian Academy—initially called the Canadian Academy—was established in 1880, the result of Marquis de Lorne's proposal. Lorne further suggested that the Canadian Academy should establish both a National Gallery and art schools for the advancement of painting in Canada, and hold annual exhibitions in various cities across Canada (Harper 184). The "Royal" was added in response to Queen Victoria's injunction the following year (Harper 184).

40. The Ontario Society of Artists, the "first great Post-Confederation art organization," opened its first exhibition in April 1873, at which time the newly-elected president suggested what the purpose of the Society might be when he "deplored the fact that Canadian artists were forced to send their best paintings to the United States because local residents would rarely pay more than framing costs" (Harper 182). As such, it sponsored annual exhibits and established galleries in Toronto; yet, "its achievements were rigorously circumscribed both by mediocrity of performance in most of the members and conformity to the philistinism of the contemporary monied classes" (McLeish 37).

41. In fact, Reid (1982), Charles Hill (1995), and McLeish (1973) show that the debate in Canada was truly between the Academy and the Gallery, and specifically, Eric Brown, the Director of the Gallery, who was referred to as "Il Curatore!," over "which institution would represent Canadian art and artists both national and in the organization of international exhibitions" (McLeish 87). Brown wanted to establish the "best possible collection of Canadian art" and thus "to produce an artistic conscience in the country and to preserve all its inherent Canadianism" (McLeish 102-103). The collecting patterns of the Academy, however, tended to be toward conservative painters who employed a highly traditional manner in terms of subject matter and application of paint; the Gallery was purchasing and hence showing support for the Group of Seven's work and had selected a substantial number of paintings for the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924. The debate was heightened after this exhibition and appeared in the newspapers up to two

years after (McLeish 87). For a more detailed discussion about the centrality of the National Gallery's role in the development of English-Canadian culture, see Anne Whitelaw's article, "Whiffs of Balsam, Pine, and Spruce": Art Museums and the Production of a Canadian Aesthetic": she observes that "the debates that continue to rage over whether the gallery's collection is representative of artistic production in Canada [is] often a powerful statement about the contested territory of national cultural production and the role of the National Gallery in determining and legitimizing the territory" (131).

42. He explains how painting in Canada until the turn of the century lacked "seriously considered philosophical objectives" which would have provided some sense of direction, or would have resulted in a "broadly based national style" (1966, 180-181).

43. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "Art in Canada," vol. 4, file 17.

44. W.A. Sherwood's article, "A National Spirit in Art," published in 1894 is a manifestation of such interests.

45. Perhaps as importantly, the book was created as a kind of counterpart to another entitled *Picturesque America*, and, in this sense, may be seen as emulative, rather than originative. It might be noted that the word "views" suggests the picturesque—that is, he was seeking works that would have been "pretty," "pleasing," or "beautiful" rather than "sublime."

46. The Canadian Northern Railway hired A.Y. Jackson, along with C.W. Jeffreys and J.W. Beatty, in 1914 to paint scenes of "its new line being built through the Yellowhead Pass" (Reid 1979, 437).

47. Reid argues in *Our Own Country Canada* that after the "heyday of the mountains" (the result of the CPR commissions), "the Canadian art scene would continue to be dominated by a somewhat self-conscious orientation toward European art and European-trained artists. The next concerted attempt to express the "national" landscape would not come until the *début* of the Group of Seven, when landscape and, yes, mountains would once again be adventurously explored" (438). Nasgaard in *The Mystic North* argues that visual art history in itself is a mythology, and, within that mythology, that the Group were seminal in English-Canadian culture as image-makers: "in the mythology of Canadian art the Group of Seven is acknowledged to have formed the first genuine school of Canadian art and to have been the first to paint the Canadian north" (158).

48. Indeed, American artists were involved in the same process in the mid-nineteenth century; as Reid observes, "the American landscape painters [. . .] known as 'Luminists,' responded to the idea of expansive nature before that awareness had arisen in Canada, and so they became examples for some Canadians" (7). Group members were involved in other societies, including the Beaver Hall Group and the Canadian Society of Water Colourists, which Carmichael, Casson and Fred Brigden initiated.

49. Nasgaard demonstrates that the urge to initiate a new and indigenous national school of art preceded the Group of Seven: he cites W.A. Sherwood and J.A. Radford, but then also adds that

their “comments remind us that their earlier conceptions of Canadian native art probably had little in common with what MacDonald, Harris, Jackson, Thomson, and the others were to produce twenty years alter” (161).

50. Daniel Wilkie, the Canadian Art Club’s honorary president, as quoted in Hill’s *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation*, 44. It should also be noted here, as it will be noted later in the text, that such vocabulary resonates, appropriately, with critical terms associated with the sublime.

51. The Canadian Art Club made innovations, from a tonal, atmospheric style, to the adoption of Post-Impressionist techniques (including the elimination of tonal modelling, incidental or anecdotal detailing, and depth progression) that resembled some of the painting techniques the Group of Seven employed. Indeed, even many of their aims are strikingly similar: like Group members who were trained according to European standards, they believed that such training was inadequate for the purposes of depicting the specific attributes of Canadian landscape. The effects of light on atmosphere, an Impressionist technique, may have interested Group members, but they felt that that movement in painting “dealt ineffectively with the strength and ruggedness of the Canadian terrain” (Bice 30). As Newton MacTavish, editor of *Canadian Magazine*, observed, artists who were members of the Club were interested—as Group members were to be—in painting “Canadian subjects with the vigour and breadth that is characteristic of the country, and instead of going abroad for motives, they began to look about them at home” (as quoted in Hill’s *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation*, 45). Future members of the Group also communed with Jeffreys, who had produced *Chronicles of Canada* and made a number of artistic-related trips out West, and Arthur Hemming, who occupied a space in Harris’s Studio Building, and wrote and made illustrations about the North (Silcox 149). Harper argues that such artists prepared the way for the Group of Seven by creating “a climate receptive to radical change” (237).

52. Although Christopher Jackson has made some tentative links between the art of the Group of Seven and Scandinavian painting, and Nordic Romantic and Symbolist painting, the most thorough source on the subject is Nasgaard’s book / catalogue that accompanied the exhibition, *The Mystic North*.

53. Jackson cites Caspar David Friedrich’s *Tetschen Altarpiece*, Ferdinand Hodler’s *Eiger, Monch and Jungfrau above a Sea of Mist*, and Sohlberg’s *Winter Night in Rondane* as examples of Scandinavian and Germanic Symbolists and Romantics who “tapped the symbolic and mystical power of mountains” (33). If the employment of mountains, one of the primary images in Harris’s canvases, contained for the Scandinavian and Germanic Symbolists and Romantics “special and awesome power, that sense of power was heightened by Harris’s manipulation of light, which conveyed a sense of the ethereal (33).

54. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, Lawren Harris, “The Group of Seven,” lecture delivered in the Vancouver Art Gallery, 15 September 1954.

55. For a detailed discussion about the impact of the Scandinavian artists upon the canvases of the Group, see Hanna Martinsen, “The Scandinavian Impact on the Group of Seven’s Vision of the Canadian Landscape,” *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift LII*. Hafte 1 (Argang LIII 1984): 1-17.

56. NAC, J.E.H. MacDonald Fonds, MG 30 D 111, J.E.H. MacDonald, "Lecture on Scandinavian Art," vol. 3, file 27, 28.

57. MacDonald declared in a lecture on Scandinavian art that "This is what we want to do with Canada" (NAC, J.E.H. MacDonald Fonds, MG 30 D 111, "Notes: Arts and Letters Club," vol. 3, file 22).

58. Ann Davis notes that "of particular importance" to Harris and even Carr "were Whitman's concepts of the divinity of the individual and of nature, of the centrality of the here and now, of the importance of the artist" (51). Harris's involvement with Theosophy had a marked impact not only on his paintings, but also upon other members of the Group who discussed such ideas with Harris and read prolifically upon the subject. In their sketching trips, modern ideas about art and religion comprised a substantial part of the dialogue; Jackson wrote that "discussions and arguments would last until late in the night, ranging from Plato to Picasso, to Madame Blavatsky and Mary Baker Eddy. Harris, a Baptist who later became a theosophist, and MacDonald, a Presbyterian who was interested in Christian Science, inspired many of the arguments" (PC 56). In the 1920s Harris was reading Wassily Kandinsky's seminal book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, which was translated into English in 1926 and which, similar to Theosophist concepts, argued that "art was an agent through which spiritual transformation and liberation could be achieved" (C. Jackson 18). One of the immediate results upon Harris's work was the use of a limited palette—white, blue and yellow—colours which "for Theosophists, indicate truth, faith and divine knowledge" or intellectual gratification (C. Jackson 23). White was thus used strictly for the peaks of mountains or clouds, "since they are the elements closest to spiritual truth and enlightenment" (68). "Like Harris," Bice argues, "Carmichael was interested in the spiritual evocations of the wilderness landscape. Harris discussed Theosophy with him, giving him books on the subject early in their friendship. Judging by the contents of Carmichael's library, the belief inspired him to further study. Its theories of colour and clarity of form are also evident in Carmichael's work throughout the 1920s. But his spiritual explorations were not limited to writings on Theosophy; he owned a copy of the Koran and collected books about the Bible and Christian history. [ . . . ] Ada Carmichael was also intrigued by Theosophy, and their daughter recalls many Sunday dinner conversations in which religious beliefs were discussed, everything from Christian Science to Anglicanism, to Presbyterianism, to Theosophy" (48). Although A.J. Casson remembers Carmichael as a Theosophist, it was likely that Theosophy was only one of many strong interests.

59. That MacDonald, at least, was profoundly affected by these writers is confirmed by the fact that he named his son after Henry David Thoreau.

60. In *The Key to Theosophy*, Theosophy, a religion dating from the third century, is defined as "Divine Knowledge or Science," which originates with Ammonius Saccas; it was designed "to inculcate certain great moral truths upon [his] disciples, and all those who were 'lovers of the truth.' The chief aim of the Founders of the Eclectic Theosophical School was one of the three objects of its modern successor, the Theosophical Society, namely, to reconcile all religions, sects and nations under a common system of ethics, based on eternal verities" (1-3). Davis quotes Madame Blavatsky, who outlines three main proponents or principles of Theosophy in *The Secret*

**Doctrine:**

1. There is one absolute Reality which antecedes all manifested, conditioned, being.
2. The periodicity of the universe, its appearance and disappearance like a regular tide of flux and reflux.
3. The fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul, and the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul through the cycle of Incarnation. (1992, 98)

Whereas religion "stresses the reality of a spiritual existence, unseen and unknowable by mere physical and sensuous means alone," Theosophy referred to "divine knowledge" and the "continuing, spiritual 'I'" (Bice 51). It stressed the unification of all various permutations, and, in so doing, replaced Judeo-Christian notions of truth with a "higher, unified truth" (51). See Ann Davis's study, which describes how Theosophy affected Harris, Carr and Varley; however, the study excludes Lismer, who was member of the Theosophical Society in England, and J.E.H. MacDonald.

61. No author, "The Group of Seven and the Canadian Soul," *Toronto Star* 13 Jan. 1925. As quoted in Adamson 168.

62. Murray adds that Theosophy "sprang partly from Buddhist and Hindu texts, partly from the meditations of Madame Blavatsky (1831-1891) and Annie Besant (1847-1891)" (21). Harris circulated among other members and encouraged them to read Wassily Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, in which the author associated particular values with colours (blue, for example, was "associated with spirituality and religious feeling") (Reid 1985, 17). Harris was also a contributor to the *Canadian Theosophist* and, in 1923, joined the Toronto chapter of the International Theosophical Society. As Reid points out, Harris, however, had not been "active in proselytizing publicly on behalf of Theosophy" until the late 1920s (21).

63. Reid, among other critics, identifies November 1911 as the beginnings of the Group of Seven when MacDonald held his first private showing of his sketches, which brought him to the attention of Lawren Harris (1970, 9). Georges describe MacDonald, the most senior member of the group, as "the one behind its initial founding" (32). Reid describes MacDonald, along with Harris, as one of the Group's most prominent figures: "MacDonald's vision of an indigenous Canadian art and Harris's phenomenal energy and aggressive optimism acted as the attracting forces" (Reid 1970, 12). MacDonald actively engaged in public discussions, exhibits, and the solicitation of other artists who shared similar ideas: for this reason, in 1913, MacDonald participated in the *First Exhibition of Little Pictures by Canadian Artists*, which was intended to challenge the "existing art society and Academy structure" (Reid 12). Through Harris he was introduced to other future Group members at Grip Limited (Murray 1984, 9). It was he, claimed Jackson, whose influence on Thomson was pivotal: "without you he never would have associated himself with our little school" (MCAC, A.Y. Jackson Papers, Letter to J.E.H. MacDonald, 26 August 1917). MacDonald sought out Jackson after having seen at the O.S.A. exhibit in Toronto in March 1911 what has come to be recognized as a kind of cultural icon, *The Edge of the Maple Wood*. MacDonald brought to Jackson's attention the movement afoot in Toronto about a new way of painting: "[He . . .] wrote about the belief of some of the younger Toronto artists that it was time Canadian painters relied less on European traditions and began to paint our own country

as it was" (Jackson 26). Harris subsequently purchased the painting in 1913—what Jackson claimed to be a crucial moment in his life when he was considering leaving Canada for the United States because of the apparent lack of financial support in Canada and of an artistic community; he visited him shortly thereafter to speak to him "about the need for Canadian artists to assume a more aggressive role" (Reid 1970, 36). One significant result of both MacDonald's invitation to Jackson and Harris's persuasiveness was that Jackson "began [his] association with the artists responsible for changing the course of Canadian art for many years to come" (PC 26).

64. Daniel Francis adds: "[u]nlike their European counterparts, thrust by the spiritual crisis of the war into nihilistic experimentation, most evident in Dada and Surrealism, the Canadians regrouped in Toronto more determined than ever to paint the native landscape" (1996, 28).

65. See NAC, Franklin Carmichael Fonds, MG 30 D 293, "General Signs," vol. 2, file 33. Carmichael discusses the importance of visual language and design. He argues that a vertical stroke represents and directs attention toward God or a yearning for transcendence, whereas the horizontal stroke suggests earthly concerns. The intersection of the two, as in the cross, is a meeting of both realms.

66. NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, "Canadian Art from 1910," lecture / broadcast, c. 1920, vol. 2, file 14, 2.

67. Other "Canadian" symbols or motifs which Jackson cites in his autobiography include "the trillium, pine trees, blue jays" (29).

68. NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, "Canadian Art from 1910," lecture / broadcast, c. 1920, vol. 2, file 14, 2, 2.

69. NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, A.Y. Jackson, "Finale," vol. 2, file 1.

70. NAC, Yvonne Housser Fonds, MG 30 D 305, Letter from Lismer to Fred Varley, 15 June 1936, vol. 1.

71. NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, "Projected Book History," vol. 2, file 6 .

72. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "The Canadian Spirit in Art," vol. 3, file 35, 2.

73. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "NOTES-Miscellaneous," vol. 3, file 33, 7.

74. NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, "Tom Thomson, 1877-1917: A Canadian Painter," *Educational Record of the Province of Québec, July-Sept. 1954*, vol. 2, file 4.

75. MCAC, Recollection by S.H.F. Kempt, October 1955, Literary Documents and Reminiscences, Tom Thomson Collection.

76. A member of the Group likely wrote the catalogue.

77. As quoted in Murray 1999, 96. Lismer writes that he had “an unerring instinct for finding the right trail through its tangle and newness, a passion for the north country”: “he did it with apparent ease, taking it with his stride, like paddling a canoe in a stiff breeze, or swinging an axe, casting a line or building a camp fire and painting a sketch of a shore line of bush country with a golden hill of maple and a turbulent sky as a background” (NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, vol. 2, file 4).

78. Murray suggests that Thomson was not only operating as the Romantic artist, who sought refuge from society in the natural world: “Besides the idea of the forest as refuge, he would have thought of another idea, drawn from age-old spiritual beliefs, that people who seek visions must go alone into the wilderness and live there for a time. If they are chosen, they will return with a message, a vision, or a marvellous occurrence which, if not a prophecy, will at least be worth discussion and meditation” (12).

79. MCAC, A.Y. Jackson Papers, Letter to J.E.H. MacDonald, 4 August 1917.

80. NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, untitled, vol. 2, file 2.

81. He was not entirely untrained: in 1906, he took up drawing classes at the Central Ontario School of Art and Design under the tutelage of William Cruikshank and received further training and advice from his co-workers at Grip Limited (Murray 1999, 38).

82. Employing similar rhetoric, Harris wrote in a letter to the editor of *The Daily Colonist* (Victoria, B.C.) that the Prime Minister’s decision (1945) to employ a European to “prepare a master plan of Ottawa” was erroneous especially because, for Harris, it was a national project which ought to reflect national interests: “Does he realize that a people establishes its symbols through its own creative life and work in the arts, translates thus its feeling for its country into clear and potent expression, clarifies its aspirations so helps to shape its individuality? Does he realize that his own people cannot hope to rise to a decent and self-reliant nationhood unless they create their own public works in their own terms before the world?” (NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, “New Clippings,” 28 October 1945, vol. 5, file 1).

83. See R.G. Haliburton’s “The Men of the North” (*The Ottawa Times*, 20 Mar. 1896) and Carl Berger’s *The Sense of Power* for a fulsome assessment of such a notion, that is, the belief that the Canadian environment was producing a hardier people.

84. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, “Art and Society in Canada,” vol. 5, file 3, 6.

85. Lawren Harris, *The Story of the Group of Seven Catalogue* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1954) 10.

86. AGO, Arthur Lismer Fonds, “Canadian Painting of Today,” section 11, AGO, 5.

87. Housser’s text endorsed the work of the Group of Seven and thus corroborated many of the ideas underlying their work: that they were an art movement indigenous to Canada and that they had developed an entirely new style of painting.

88. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, untitled, vol. 5, file 1, 6.

89. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, untitled, vol. 5, file 1, 7.

90. The body of his work includes approximately thirty large scale canvases and four hundred sketches produced over a five-year period in which Thomson endeavoured to capture the spirit of the Algonquin Park with techniques—pure application of colour, visible brushstrokes, and the emphasis on large forms—that became part of the legacy of the Group of Seven.

91. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, “Grants for Artists,” vol. 6, file 3, 2.

92. NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, “Art and Understanding,” lecture / broadcast, vol. 2, file 14, 1-3.

93. Allan J. Fletcher in “Industrial Algoma & Myth of Wilderness”(M.A., University of British Columbia, 1977) suggests that Algoma was industrialized at the time the Group was painting there; as such, their paintings were “carefully contrived wilderness vistas” that promoted one particular vision of Canada (5).

94. Harris added: “To us there was also the strange brooding sense of Mother Nature fostering a new race and a new age.”

95. The resulting canvases are thus described frequently as “direct transcripts from nature” or as “faithful records of rough bush country” (C. Jackson 31).

96. These ideas and painting objectives with respect to his work subsequently became popularized in press releases and critical journals by the 1920s. In May 5, 1927, a review in *Le Figaro Artistique* of the Exhibition of Canadian art, “At the Musée du Jeu de Paume,” assessed Thomson’s importance to Canadian art in terms that resonate with some of the Group’s own notions: “He was rooted to the soil. He never left his country. He painted on his canvases only such pictures as his native land could offer him. Truly, he may be said to have discovered the beauty and grandeur of this nature” (NAC, Blowden Davies Collection, MG 30 D 38, newspaper clipping, vol. 11).

97. NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, “Canadian Art From 1910,” lecture / broadcast, c. 1920, vol. 2, file 14, 1.

98. MCAC, Arthur Lismer Papers, incomplete letter, c. 1917, Victoria School of Art and Design, Halifax, N.S.

99. NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, untitled document, vol. 2, file 4.

100. MCAC, J.E.H. MacDonald Collection, J.E.H. MacDonald to Fred Housser, 20 December 1926.

101. AGO, Marjorie Lismer Bridges Collection, “Memorial Exhibition to Artist of North.” Also, NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, “Clippings, 1917-1949,” vol. 1.

102. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "Art and Society in Canada," vol. 5, file 3, 2-3.
103. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "Statement by the Group of Seven," vol. 6, file 4.
104. Lawren Harris, "Revelation of Art in Canada," *The Canadian Theosophist* 7.5 (July 1926): 86.
105. NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, Lawren Harris, Foreword to *The Lismer Catalogue of Paintings*, vol. 4, file 4, 2.
106. "Canadian Art," *The Canadian Theosophist* 5.12 (15 Feb. 1925): 178.
107. William Cruikshank, who had been "trained in Edinburgh at the Royal Scottish Academy and in London at the Royal Academy School, was one of his instructors" (Murray 1999, 37).
108. Murray suggests that the artist-hero of the poem acknowledges that others will complain about "the brilliant and unusual colours he has used," even if these are the colours he claimed to see; Thomson, she asserts, "appropriated the hero's words for his own" (1999, 70).
109. Murray also shows parallels between William Wilfred Campbell's poetry and Thomson's paintings, one of these being the painting Thomson painted in early 1915 that shares the title of Campbell's poem, "A Northern River" (Murray 1999, 65).
110. Murray explains that Grip was "named for the cynical raven in Dickens' novel *Barnaby Rudge*, the same raven used in the flag and name of *Grip Weekly*, a newspaper of political comment established in 1873 by the Canadian cartoonist John W. Bengough. To make engravings for this paper, the company established a small engraving department that rapidly grew to serve other newspapers and commercial houses. Though *Grip Weekly* discontinued publication in 1884, its art and engraving department continued to flourish" (1999, 38-40).
111. Albert Robson, of Grip Limited, had hired Lismer and Carmichael in 1911, at which time Johnston, MacDonald, and Thomson were already working there; Varley was hired in 1912, although, after three weeks of work there, he followed Carmichael, Johnston, and Thomson, who had departed for Rous & Mann slightly earlier (Hill 1995, 49). During lunches and after hours, the future members of the Group and Thomson were assembling at The Arts & Letters Club, where they were discussing how to counteract the dominant and imported methods of painting, which they saw as inadequately reflecting Canadian landscape and atmosphere. Also, as Thomson and Jackson resided and worked together in the Studio Building in 1914, the latter claimed that he shared his knowledge about techniques related to Impressionism and Pointillism, what he had learned from his three trips to France to further his training: "[He told] him about the work of Pissarro, Sisley, and Monet, as well as of the men themselves, whom Jackson implied he knew—at least by reputation. [. . .] Jackson had shown him how to work his brushes in little strokes, like Monet or Seurat, and he tried the effect first in sketches, then in his canvases. Jackson would have spoken to Thomson of complementary colour, of bolder painting handling, of flattening the picture plane" (Murray 1999, 76). He also suggests that he learned from Lismer's "loose style of

impressionistic painting” (35). It is perhaps the result of such contact that Thomson became interested in making “records” in 1917, that is:

He “wanted to see them all together, since hanging them would show him if his series worked. [. . .] Until [that moment] he had worked in the traditional way, from the sketch done in nature to the canvas developed in the studio back in Toronto. A series was a new idea for him—and an important one. His use of the word ‘records’ was also important [. . .] He felt he had created documents of the scene before him. [. . .] He saw his work as evidence, a literal document, not only of nature, but also of his own daily experience within that nature. He was, in addition, using ‘records’ in the Impressionist sense, as notations of perception, light, and climatic change. (Murray 1999, 84)

Such an approach to the landscape suggests not only the possible exposure to Impressionist method of painting, but also Thomson’s interest in documenting Canadian landscape. Silcox correctly disputes that Thomson’s contribution to the Group of Seven resided in the provision of a new artistic vocabulary, or in the “discovery” of the Canadian North; his contribution lay in his use of colour, in the “development of gestural brushwork,” and its union with his vision of the North (101). His focus upon Algonquin Park allowed a “latitude in colour and technique that would not have been tolerated in painting something in Toronto in the same way” (Silcox 148).

112. MCAC, Arthur Lismer Papers, incomplete letter (or ms?), c. 1917, on “Victoria School of Art and Design” letterhead.

113. Those artists who preceded the Group of Seven and were native to Canada by birth, if not by citizenship, did not create authentic or “true” representations of Canada, according to Housser, because they “sever[ed] themselves from their native soil”: that is, they “studied abroad and they continued their work here after the manner of foreign schools” (18). Of Paul Kane, Housser notes that he had “the necessary physical requirements of the new type of artists demanded by the country, but his pictures [. . .] can scarcely be classed as works of art, their interest being archaeological and historical” (19); of Cornelius Kreighoff, he suggests that although “we see a direct emotional response to Canadian environment, the first to be recorded on canvas [. . .] the landscape is merely a setting like the background on a stage” (20); of J.W. Morrice, he acknowledges that “he had a feeling for the landscape of his native land,” but that “his painting was inspired by quite another environment” (22) until he became completely absorbed by Europe. The artists of Montreal “kept in much closer touch with Europe. [. . .] This has given the work of the Quebec painters a certain derivative quality. Most of them have drawn their inspiration chiefly from France. Toronto drew its inspiration from the backwoods” (56). Maurice Cullen was the first artist to show manifestation of a “true Canadian spirit,” particularly in his opposition to the influence and domination of “the omnipresent Barbizon and Dutch schools” (23); yet even he, Housser asserts, was too early as a “Canadian” artist because “Canada was still, to herself and to her painters, little more than an outpost of Europe” (23). Unlike Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven, these artists were still “shackled” by European traditions. Their “misty landscapes [. . .] were out of character with Canadian jack-pines, burnt-over hills and the rough and rugged north” (90).

114. Algonquin Park had been set up as a provincial reserve in 1853, but was largely regarded as a place for “American visitors and a few eccentric artists and nature lovers from Toronto” rather than a recreational park (Mellen 39).

115. This painting was “purchased by the Ontario government for \$250 from the 1913 spring exhibition of the Ontario Society of Artists” (Silcox 55). Notwithstanding the fact that Thomson did so well, which Silcox argues is proof against “hostile reception,” Hill (1995) demonstrates how few of the Group’s canvases sold before and for the first decade after their formation.

116. Likely, that school of art would have made its first appearance, although, as Reid suggests, “undoubtedly under another name (probably the Algonquin School)” (12). Such efforts may have culminated in the formation of the Group of Seven before 1920, but their attentions were diverted and their activity was foreshortened first by the demands of the First World War, which had the immediate effect of decreasing the “work in the lithography studios, and the complete disappearance of free-lance design commissions” (Lord 1974, 130). The war also saw the voluntary participation of Harris, Varley, and Jackson: Harris was “sent to Camp Borden as a musketry instructor” (Jackson, “Lawren Harris 1948, 9); Jackson, who initially enlisted in the 60<sup>th</sup> Battalion, was later engaged as a Canadian war artist when “it was urged that more Canadians be commissioned” in place of British artists who were documenting the war for the Canadian War Records (*PC* 49); and Varley was sent to France for the Canadian War Records (Jackson “Lawren Harris” 1948, 9). Evidence of an increasing sense of national fervour is manifested in the fact that at the outset of the war, “most of the artists who were commissioned were British soldiers appointed or transferred from active serve, but the Royal Canadian Academy soon protested this preponderance of British artists employed to record Canadian troop activity. Through the intervention of Sir Edmund Walker, who was Beaverbrook’s advisor in Canada and a member of the War Memorials Committee, the field was expanded to include more Canadians” (Kelly 23). In addition, Lismer left Toronto in September 1916 to accept a position as Principal of the Victoria School of Art and Design, a position which he held for a period of three years during which time he was also engaged in painting war-related themes (Kelly 11). Although the foundations of the Group had been established, the War temporarily dampened and diffused the energy of the movement. The devastating news of Tom Thomson’s tragic death compounded the dampening effect; indeed, Harris received a medical discharge from the army after suffering a nervous collapse, brought on by the double tragedy of Thomson’s drowning and then the demise of his older brother, who was killed in the battlefields of Europe (C. Jackson 8). After the war, Harris, Johnston, and MacDonald made concerted efforts to reinitiate their artistic efforts toward building a Canadian art by making a number of trips up to Algoma. Such trips again suggest that the Group believed in the importance of being directly engaged with the land. Harris “arranged [the] sketching party [. . .] and had a box car fitted up with bunks and a stove to accommodate us” (*PC* 56). These trips were made primarily to re-established “the connections made with the north”—an association they had made with Thomson and his work (Percival 20). Harris claimed that “there were skies over the great Lake Superior which in their singing expansiveness and sublimity exited nowhere else in Canada. [. . .] the whole north, over and above its differences in character and changing moods, was found to be a source of spiritual flow; remote, pristine, replenishing and inspiring” (as quoted in Duval 24). At the time, critics deplored such painting as unattractive—even repellant—renderings of the country, and thus as a deterrent to future

immigrants to Canada; clearly, however, immigration was not the issue for artists who were eager to develop an art tradition for those already living in the country (Jackson, "Lawren Harris" 1948, 11). The paintings from this period—around 1921—are considered to be the "first dramatic synthesis of his spiritual beliefs and their expression through landscape painting. The synthesis was heightened in the mountain and Arctic paintings that were to be both a peak and a watershed in his career" (C. Jackson 10).

117. In an interview with Joan Murray, A.J. Casson suggests that "in a way, [his] painting of the Northern Ontario landscape and the villages in particular is a way of recreating [his] own happy childhood"—terms that suggest that he was the only member of the Group working within the categories of the picturesque and beautiful and that his paintings were infused with a sense of nostalgia (NAC, Joan Murray Collection, MG 31 D 142, "A.J. Casson," c. 1970, vol 1. file 12).

118. Varley, letter to Dr. MacCallum (as quoted in Murray 1999, 58).

119. As quoted in Donald Buchanan, "The Paintings and Drawings of F.H. Varley," *Canadian Art* 7.1 (1949): 3.

120. NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, "Canadian Art," lecture (Toronto), 13 December 1926, vol. 1, file 14, 1, 4- 5.

121. He adds that "the aspects of winter and the fall; the green riot of spring, storm, and sunshine, against and on such a setting, are truly of epic grandeur—no timid play of subtleties, but bold and massive design. This design, or form of our country is its character, the elemental nature which we recognize as one recognizes a familiar loved shape. It partakes of our own character; its vitality and emphatic form is reflected in appearance, speech, action, and thought of our people" (See NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, "What is Child Art?" in *Canadian Art*, ts., vol. 2, file 20, 8).

122. NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, "Canadian Art," c. 1920, vol. 3, file 14, 2.

123. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "Canada and the Arts," vol. 5, file 2, 9.

124. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "Canadian Art," vol. 5, file 3, 6-7.

125. "Toronto Artist After Distinct Values in Art," *Leader Post* (30 July 1927): 3.

126. Many members of the English-Canadian artistic community celebrated the North. Bertram Brooker argued that, "The Canadian artist serves the spirit of his land and people. He is aware of the spiritual flow from the replenishing North and believes that this should ever shed clarity into the growing race of America and that this, working in creative individuals, will give rise to an art quite different from that of any European people. He believes in the power and the glory, for the North to him is a single, simple vision of high things and can, through its transmuting agency, shape our souls into its own spiritual expressiveness. He believes that this will create a new sense and use of design, a new feeling for space and light and formal relationships" ("Creative Art and Canada" 184).

127. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "Spirituality and Art," vol. 6, file 27.
128. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "Canadian Art," vol. 5, file 3, 2.
129. Although Harris explicitly uses the North as a way of distinguishing Canada from the United States, Nasgaard also suggests that he "uses terms which parallel the north-south juxtaposition that we have seen in the development of Scandinavian Symbolism and recall Theosophy's cultivation of the North as the site of the new renaissance" (167).
130. Lawren Harris, "Revelation of Art in Canada," *The Canadian Theosophist* 7.5 (July 1926): 86.
131. As quoted in McLeish 74.
132. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, Rev. of *The Unheroic North*, vol. 6, file 36, 3. The specific reference is Luke 2: 49. Christ rebukes his mother upon being questioned about his involvement with the religious leaders: "Know you not that I must be about my father's business?"
133. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "Function of Art," vol. 6, file 1.
134. NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 184, "Canadian Art," lecture given in Toronto at the Canadian Club, 13 December 1926, vol. 1, file 14, 7.
135. Murray notes that "Harris's reaction to the 1914-1918 war was characteristic of many Canadians of the period who responded to the futility of the war with a desire to discover what constituted Canada. In the early 1920s, *The Canadian Forum*, later the voice of intellectual left, carried a number of articles on the subject, notably by E.H. Blake and J.S. Woodsworth, who later founded the CCF" (Murray 1984, 11).
136. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, untitled, no date, vol. 2, file 8, 2, 4,5, and I (some page numbering appeared as roman numerals).
137. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "Spirituality and Art," vol. 6, file 27, 8.
138. "The Freedom of Art," *Canadian Comment* (April 1933): 25. In NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, vol. 1, file 17.
139. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, untitled, vol. 2, file 8, 2.
140. AGO, Arthur Lismer Fonds, untitled article (intended for *Canadian Comment*), c. 1932, section 10.
141. As quoted in McLeish 29.
142. Like Connor, the Group seemed to suggest that such egalitarian practices are the effects of the land itself. For similar reasons, Harris resisted the adoption of a Group leader, which conforms

to the Group's sense of creating both a movement and an art that resisted hierarchy, that would be egalitarian and that would affect Canadians uniformly: "The Group of Seven was not in any sense an art society. It never had a president, secretary or treasurer. Its members influenced each other far more than they were influenced by all other sources, but the one all powerful and engrossing scene was the Canadian scene itself. It dictated the subjects, the way of seeing, the technique and expression" (Harris, *Arthur Lismer* 1950, 9). Yet Harris is seen as presiding over the founding of the Group. His role in the initiation and materialization of the Group of Seven is seminal, especially because he actively sought out artists who were interested in creating a new art movement in Canada. Some critics—Harper, and Barry Lord—consider him to be an "unofficial leader" because his contributions extended well beyond promoter and supporter of Canadian artists ("The Development" 12; Lord 1974, 121). Harris himself was an artist, a disseminator of the theories of the Group (he was responsible for the foreword to the first "Group of Seven" exhibition), critic, and participant in an extraordinary number of Art related associations: "He was one of the founders of the Artists' League. He was a founding member of the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto in 1910. [ . . . ] In 1932 he was president of the American Foundation for Transcendental Painting; eight years later, he became a member of the Transcendentalist Group of Painters in Santa Fé. In 1940 he helped establish the Federation of Canadian Artists. Three years later he helped the formation of the Western Canada Art Circuit. He [served] on the board of the Vancouver Art Gallery and the National Gallery" (McNairn 9). This list, which is far from complete, indicates the support and concern he maintained for the development and promotion of Canadian art. In "Lawren Harris: A Biographical Sketch," Jackson cites Harris's tireless efforts in art societies to demonstrate how he contributed to the development of an art community in Canada: "[he] was one of the chief organizers of The Federation of Canadian Painters. He made a valiant effort to impress on the government the need of cultural centres in Canada. He paints, he plans, writes, broadcasts and lectures" (12). The centrality of Harris's role and commitment to fostering not only an indigenous and national art, but also a community of Canadian artists is particularly evident in his work toward establishing a Canadian artistic community: his well-conceived idea regarding the construction of a series of studios, a space not only where artists could work without interruption or care, but also where ideas about Canadian art could be exchanged, articulated and shaped, came to fruition with his and Dr. James MacCallum's financial assistance. The "Studio Building for Canadian Art," what Harper has called "a kind of spiritual home for new developments in Canadian painting," was a three-story building on Sever Street in which a series of studio apartments for individual artists was completed in 1913 ("The Development" 12). The Studio Building was sold in 1948, the same year he had a large-scale retrospective exhibit of his work at the Art Gallery of Toronto; Jackson stayed for a short period in the Building after Harris had sold it, but left shortly thereafter. He had lived in the Studio for approximately 35 years.

143. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, Arthur Lismer, "Art Education and Appreciation," incomplete ms, as quoted in Kelly 11.

144. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "Democracy and the Arts," vol. 5, file 15, 5.

145. NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, "Arts in Canada," Lawren Harris Notebooks, 1922-1925, vol. 4, file 12.

146. AGO, Arthur Lismer Fonds, "Book on Canadian Art for the Young," ts., 3.

147. AGO, Arthur Lismer Fonds, "Art Takes the Road (broadcast)," ts., 6 March 1953.

148. Lismer suggests that such icons might include a *pine tree* [ . . . ] or a maple in the "Fall-rapids-mountains-rivers-etc." and they might be regarded "as symbols that we recognize as being a part of our national-natural-and aesthetic [ . . . ] resources."

149. As quoted in Murray 18.

150. For a fuller treatment of the impact of the Group on the art of Emily Carr, see Gerta Moray's "Wilderness, Modernity and Aboriginality in the Paintings of Emily Carr" as it appeared in *Journal of Canadian Studies* 33.2 (Summer 1998).

**Chapter Four**  
**Canadian Art According to Emily Carr:**  
**The Search for Indigenous Expression and National Space**

“I should like, when I am through with this body and my spirit released, to float up those wonderful mountain passes and ravines and feed on the silence and wonder – no fear, no bodily discomfort, just space and silence.”  
– Emily Carr<sup>1</sup>

In 1927, at the invitation of Eric Brown, Director of the National Gallery, Emily Carr travelled to Ottawa to view her canvases and Native-designed crafts displayed for a National Gallery exhibition (held in conjunction with the National Museum) entitled “Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern.”<sup>2</sup> That voyage was to have profound repercussions for Carr and her work, not only because it secured both her place within an artistic community and her reputation on a national scale,<sup>3</sup> but also because it made an indelible impression upon her aesthetic sensibility, affected her style of painting, and re-galvanized her artistic practice. The latter had almost entirely lapsed for a period of approximately twenty years, since, feeling discouraged by the lack of communal and critical support in Victoria and, more broadly, in Canada, she became preoccupied with more mundane matters.<sup>4</sup>

Although these “matters” encompass her labours as both landlady and breeder of Old English Bobtail sheep-dogs, they also include the development of her writing endeavours. Carr claimed that she began to write prolifically, both fiction and non-fiction, when she suffered a heart attack in 1937 and was unable to pursue outdoor sketching and painting (Shadbolt 1993, 3);<sup>5</sup> yet, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that she did some writing in advance of her

illness, as an alternative to painting, and according to inclination.<sup>6</sup> About the latter she wrote to her friend Nan Cheney that “I feel more ‘writey’ than ‘painty’ these days.”<sup>7</sup> These efforts, which eventually bore out seven books, parallel her artistic proclivities on canvas, reflect her struggle to create a national art, and indicate that she perceived Canadian geography, especially the West Coast, as a spiritual entity that was seminal in the provision of unrestricted, unregulated “space,” both literal and imagined, in which she might forge an indigenous artistic expression and language.<sup>8</sup>

Her writing, like her painting, burgeoned after her contact with the Group of Seven, who deeply affected her when she met them for the first time in Ottawa.<sup>9</sup> She claimed that their canvases were a “revelation” about how to approach Canadian landscape aesthetically.<sup>10</sup> In anticipation of this meeting, which Brown himself had arranged, she read a book on the Group of Seven he had strongly recommended and that was then in vogue, Frederick Housser’s *A Canadian Art Movement* (1926).<sup>11</sup> She was not sufficiently prepared, however, for the experience of viewing their canvases. Her response would have delighted Group members, who sought to evoke precisely the kind of response she documented:

Oh, God, what have I seen? Where have I been? Something has spoken to the very soul of me, wonderful, mighty, not of this world. Chords way down in my being have been touched. Dumb notes have struck chords of wonderful tone. Something has called out of somewhere. Something in me is trying to answer.

It is surging through my whole being, the wonder of it all, like a great river rushing on, dark and turbulent, and rushing and irresistible, carrying me away on its wild swirl like a helpless little bundle of wreckage. Where, where? Oh, these men, this Group of Seven, what have they created? – a world stripped

of earthiness, shorn of fretting details, purged, purified; a naked soul, pure and unashamed; lovely spaces filled with wonderful serenity. What language do they speak, those silent, awe-filled spaces? I do not know. Wait and listen; you shall hear by and by. I long to hear and yet I'm half afraid. I think perhaps I shall find God here, the God I've longed and hunted for and failed to find. Always he's seemed nearer out in the big spaces, sometimes almost within reach but never quite. Perhaps in this newer, wider space-filled vision I shall find him.<sup>12</sup>

She recorded this response in the posthumously published journal, *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr* (1966), which Carr used – at Lawren Harris's prompting and sustained encouragement – to register her creative struggle to capture the spiritual essence of the Canadian West Coast in her paintings.<sup>13</sup> Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher claims that Carr, confiding in her about the exhibit, remarked “that the inspiration provided by these men, in particular by Lawren Harris, gave her the courage to go back to the woods again and try to capture their mystery on canvas” (1969, 10). Whatever Harris's influence may have been, her last book to be published, *Hundreds and Thousands*, underscores her commitment to developing an indigenous art and traces the second and more mature phase of painting between 1927, when she first met Group members, and 1941.<sup>14</sup>

In all her fiction, non-fiction, and journals, *Klee Wyck* (1941), *The Book of Small* (1942), *The House of All Sorts* (1944), *Growing Pains: An Autobiography* (1946), *The Heart of a Peacock* (1953), *Pause: A Sketch Book* (1953) and *Hundreds and Thousands*, Carr explored in varying degrees the impulses behind her paintings, the significance of Native art in relation to colonial Victoria and imported aesthetic forms, and the need to foster indigenous expression conditioned by the specificity of the West Coast.<sup>15</sup>

**What are we Canadian artists of the west going to do with our art? We are young yet, and are only slowly finding our way, but are we obliged to bedeck ourselves in borrowed plumes and copy art born of other countries and not ours? Shall we try to make Canada look English or French or Italian by painting conscientiously in a style that does not belong to us? Or shall we search as the Indian did, amid our own surroundings and material, for something of our own through which to express ourselves, and make for ourselves garments of our own spinning to fit our needs and become a very part of us?<sup>16</sup>**

Rather than “beautifying” Canada with imported feathers, Carr promulgated the development of a style and expression that is indigenous to the country. As if in rejoinder to Frye’s question, she asserted: “Not that the art of the Old World is not great and glorious and beautiful, but what they have to express *over there* is not the same as what we have to express *over here*. It is different. The spirit is different” (1930, 18, italics mine). She aligned herself with and attempted to create an art that bears similarities to Native cultural forms, which she regarded as “other” than European, because such art sprouted from “our own surroundings,” not from “somewhere beyond our own borders” (Brown 18); it was “something of our own,” not created by imposing imported techniques and standards.

Of Carr’s two phases in painting, therefore, the first is also generally concerned with Native cultural forms because she believed they were “taken straight from nature” and the materials from “the country itself”: “The Indians of the west coast of Canada have an art that may be termed essentially ‘Canadian’ for in inspiration, production, and material it is of Canada’s very essence and can take its place beside the art of any nation” (“Modern and Indian Art” 2). She valorized aboriginal art and its corresponding value system because it was not

inherited from or “tainted” by imported forms:

the Indian [found] that great Art of his [. . .] Not in academics, or travel, or pictures, or books. He got it from profound observation, absorption of his material by all of his five senses. Only when he had made himself familiar with his material from bones to skin did he venture to express the thing in his art.<sup>17</sup>

By extension, Carr believed that only after immersing herself in the West Coast forests would she too be able to express “the thing” in art. Direct response in relation to the spiritual essence of nature was pivotal: one had “to go out and wrestle with the elements,” she argued, in order “to see and hear, and feel [. . .] the closeness of mother earth and the lonely brooding silence of the vast west” (“Modern and Indian Art” 6). Although she focussed on Native totem poles and images in her early canvases, and although the idea of painting “Western forests did not occur to [her] in that period,” the shift from the former (Native) to the latter (West Coast forests), which she conceived of as the spiritual force behind the totem poles, is thus consistent with her artistic aims: to forge an indigenous artistic language and expression that reflected larger, national concerns as it also conveyed a national spirit.<sup>18</sup>

Initially, however, she seemed interested only in documenting Native cultural artefacts, as manifested in her petitioning the British Columbia provincial government to “purchase the collection [she had made of various totem poles across the West Coast] and to underwrite the continuation of her documentary project” (Stewart 11).<sup>19</sup> From 1907, over a period of twenty years, she “made eight trips to the northwest and Interior of B.C., to the northern coast of Vancouver Island, and to the Queen Charlotte Islands – now known as Haida Gwaii – seeking totem poles” (Braid 2000, 7). Having met Theodore J. Richardson, an American painter who found it lucrative to paint Sitka villages, people and totem poles in Alaska and then sell his

work through a New York gallery, Carr was certain she might do the same: “I shall come up every summer among the villages of B.C. [. . .] and I shall do all the totem poles & villages I can before they are a thing of the past.”<sup>20</sup> She was determined to be “absolutely truthful & exact,” since she was “working for history.”<sup>21</sup> John O’Brian encapsulates her artistic endeavours of the period thus: “Like most individuals of her era who were embroiled in fantasises of colonial fulfillment, Carr saw First Nations culture as in eclipse – and consequently in need of documentation and salvaging before it disappeared entirely” (9). Her efforts to paint Native totem poles, then, might not only be seen as a demonstrated commitment to documenting the First Nations images and artefacts, but also as a display of what Moray terms “aestheticized nostalgia” for a purportedly vanishing culture (1993, 25).

Carr was also motivated by the possibility of the development of an-other authentic national culture.<sup>22</sup> She felt compelled to record facets of Native culture because, aside from regarding that culture as being steadily obliterated, she conceived of their abandoned villages and the corresponding totem poles as indigenous, national “relics”:<sup>23</sup>

I glory in our wonderful west, to leave behind me some of the relics of its primitive greatness. These things should be to we Canadians what the ancient Briton’s relics are to the English. Only a few more years and they will be gone forever into silent nothingness and I would gather my collection together before they are forever past.<sup>24</sup>

In this phase of painting, she was intrigued by aboriginal images in part because she believed that these, rather than her own artistic expression forged in response to the West Coast, might be deemed indigenous. Robin Laurence suggests that her canvases operated as “a vehicle for Canadian [nation-building] – evidence of an ancient culture entirely original to the New World,

without any ties to Europe and therefore symbolic of this great land” (20). In part, the impetus behind the employment of Native images in her canvases, especially totem poles, was to foster a national art (the West Coast exhibit in Ottawa had conferred much attention upon that notion) that had freed itself from or was unassociated with European conventions, even as she, somewhat contradictorily, employed techniques she had acquired abroad in order to do so.<sup>25</sup>

That Carr was also expected to paint only “primitive relics,” however, became evident in 1926 when she responded to the British Columbia Art League’s invitation to contribute paintings with the condition that she would neither contribute nor lecture about “Indian stuff,” but submit only landscapes: the response was “thanks and regrets.”<sup>26</sup> A year later, she was to exhibit at the National Gallery with the same conditions imposed. At this time, her contributions to the art world were patently appreciated only for their association with Native art; she herself was to be seen increasingly as a mediator of West Coast aboriginal culture. She continued to pursue Native themes between 1928 and 1930 in monumental sized paintings; simultaneously, however, she commenced what Shadbolt identifies as “a second group of works [ . . . ] in which she combines the strong exotic and formal appeal of the Indian carvings with a powerful statement of the rank, fearsome nature of the coastal forests” (1974, 33). She began to interpret both the forest and totem poles in tandem, and then, during the 1930s, her canvases focussed almost exclusively upon forest-related themes.<sup>27</sup>

By the 1930s, Carr decided to leave off “the Indian stuff,” upon which she had become overly dependent for her own artistic expression and for the development of indigenous art.<sup>28</sup> Part of this shift may be accounted for by Harris’s encouragement to look directly to nature for the source of both material and techniques. He advised her to “[find] something that was peculiarly [her] own” because he felt her reliance upon Native iconography was impeding her

artistic maturity. To counterbalance this dependence, he suggested that she “saturate [herself] in our own place, the trees, skies, earth and rock,” and to allow her art to “grow out of these. [. . .] It is the life that goes into the thing that counts.”<sup>29</sup> Shortly after the East Coast exhibit, therefore, she began to regard Native artefacts and culture not as subject matter, but as an example of how to approach Canadian landscape:

We may not believe in totems, but we believe in our country; and if we approach our work as the Indian did with singleness of purpose and determination to strive for the big thing that means Canada herself, and not hamper ourselves by wondering if our things will sell, or if they will please the public or bring us popularity or fame, but busy ourselves by trying to get near to the heart of things, however crude that work may be, it is liable to be more sincere and genuine. (“Modern and Indian Art” 4)

Most importantly, she regarded Native totem poles as authentic expressions of indigenoussness from which “newer” Canadians might learn. The shift in subject matter from Native villages and totem poles to forest interiors, however, did not necessarily mean a shift in terms of her artistic impulses: part of that impulse was to create an indigenous art, the other, according to Ruth Gowers, to find “some form of religious thought through which she could express her profound sense of the unity of all creation, and the unity of nature and God” (76).

Carr eventually conferred undivided attention upon the West Coast, about which she suggested “there’s always something new to see [. . .] and glory in.”<sup>30</sup> Even in light of the interest generated in the canvases that render Native themes and images, as manifested in those displayed in the National Gallery exhibition, she believed, as do many critics, that her best work was that which appeared after such paintings and specifically after that exhibition, when her

second phase of painting commences. She acknowledged in a letter to Brown, "I expect you select the Indian material for variety among the landscape work. but I confess forests & woods, spaces & sky are more engrossing to me these past few years. I feel they are more completely my own expression and interpretation."<sup>31</sup> Her sense of her artistic maturation is matched by her belief that her paintings ought to reflect a distinctly Canadian subject in an indigenous style (and, as such, share an affinity with Native cultural endeavours, but not depend on them for artistic expression) and convey a sense of the national spirit.

Carr is certain that her visual and verbal renderings of the spirit of the Canadian West Coast are, as she believed of Harris's depictions of Canadian landscape, religious in inclination: of Harris, she asserts that "his religion, whatever it is, and his paintings are one and the same," and of his canvases that "[t]here is a holiness about them, something you can't describe but just feel."<sup>32</sup> She expresses great disappointment, therefore, when she observes a priest strolling by his canvas, "Mountain Forms," at a Royal Canadian Academy exhibit because she assumed that "the spirituality of the thing [ought] to appeal to one whose life was supposed to be given up to these things."<sup>33</sup> On July 16, 1933, she again writes, "Once I heard it stated and now I believe it to be true that there is no true art without religion. [. . .] If something other than the material did not speak to [the artist], and if he did not have faith in that something and also in himself, he would not try to express it."<sup>34</sup> Only a few days later, on July 17, she reveals the source of her own "faith": "God in all. [. . .] Nature is God revealing himself, expressing his wonders and his love, Nature clothed in God's beauty of holiness."<sup>35</sup>

Her "Art," a means of rendering God in "Nature," becomes "an aspect of God."<sup>36</sup> In a manner that bears resemblance to the Group's own expression of how their canvases are "witnesses" to the spiritual potential of Canadian landscape, she describes how she believed her

canvases ought to function. When she receives a letter from Hanna Lund about how her painting, entitled “Peace,” “represents Divinity,” Carr records in her journal how “my soul spoke to hers, or rather, God spoke to her through me. Then he spoke back to me through her thought of writing me. I am humbly grateful that my effort to express God got through to one person.”<sup>37</sup> God “speaks” to her, she claims, through nature: not only are the woods “God’s tabernacle,” but she could “eat the woods [. . .] as one eats the sacrament.”<sup>38</sup> This curious Catholic metaphor, curious because Carr’s entire family was given over to the Protestant faith, suggests that she believed that she was obliged to internalize the West Coast forests and that this process of internalization, like the receiving of the sacrament, was an act of faith. Her emphasis on the importance of sincerity and faith in one’s artistic pursuits, her fascination with the Western Canadian forests, and her invocations to God as those made in the November 17 journal entry where she records her response to the Group of Seven paintings suggest that not only the Group’s canvases,<sup>39</sup> but also, specifically and primarily, the West Coast Canadian landscape, “God in His woods’ tabernacle,” operate as a catalyst for Carr’s renewed approach to painting and for her desire to “strive for the spiritual in [her] paintings.”<sup>40</sup>

The rhetoric employed in that entry about her first experience with the Group paintings – “dark,” “turbulent,” “wild,” “silent, awe-filled spaces” – is not only “familiar to mystics,” as Ann Davis argues, but is also a response to the sublime, which is characterized by both a sense of transcendence (that is, that which is spiritual and rises above ordinary experience) and ambivalence (1992, 7): both attraction to and fear of the subject matter in the canvases of the Group (“I long to hear and yet I’m half afraid”), and a sense of serenity and terror, the latter being what Susan Glickman would identify as “regenerative.” As Glickman suggests, however, the Canadian sublime is used to develop a sense of itself in opposition to British conceptions of

the picturesque, which were in currency in Canada at that time. If “[a]rtists from the Old World” were alarmed by the West and found it “crude, unpaintable,” and if they felt “[i]ts bigness angered, its vastness and wild spaces terrif[ying],” Carr, as a New World artist, “loved every bit of it.”<sup>41</sup>

She would have been mystified by those who believed that English-Canadian artists were dissatisfied with the country in which they lived or that they felt stifled by its vastness, as is confirmed when she declares: “It is wonderful to feel the grandness of Canada in the raw, not because she is Canada but because she’s something sublime that you were born into, some great rugged power that you are part of.”<sup>42</sup> The repeated juxtaposition of references in her texts to West Coast topography and culture, to her artistic motivations in relation to national identity and modern expression, and to her spiritual beliefs indicates how Carr regards these as operating simultaneously in the formation of Canadian indigenous art, and that she herself, like any good artist, was a mediator for their expression. In another entry, Carr asserts, “Empty yourself, come to the day’s work free, open, with no pre-conceived ideas. [. . .] You yourself are nothing, only a channel for the pouring through of that which *is* something, which is all. Your job is to keep that channel clear.”<sup>43</sup> For Carr, the artist was insignificant outside of the message – “that which *is* something” – being conveyed in relation to the national spirit. She thus believed that, in response to the vastness of the West Coast landscape, in part what she means when she employs the term “space,” and as a direct result of her keen attentiveness to its spiritual properties, she would be able to forge a new and indigenous language.

Her canvases, the embodiment of her artistic struggle to find a language that conveys “imaginings” that “rise above the objects,” that is, to capture and express variously a sense of the sublime, the spiritual, and indigenoussness, is regarded by critics as having surpassed the

Group in terms of artistic maturity and originality, notwithstanding both her awe and deep appreciation of their, and especially Harris's, canvases and the manner in which their work contributes to the re-launching of her career.<sup>44</sup> A number of critics argue that her pursuit of aesthetic excellence did not fall short. R.H. Hubbard commends her work because it is "a highly personal expression of the fantastic growth of vegetation in the rain forest" (1960, 25). Eric Newton praises her for "find[ing] her own formula" with which to depict the West Coast and thus becoming "independent of any tradition, Canadian or European."<sup>45</sup> Terry Fenton asserts that her later work "was more resolutely modern" and qualifies as "some of the most direct and expressive – and absolutely original – Canadian paintings of this century" (52). Karen Wilkin argues that "the best of Carr's tremulous, rhythmic, near-abstractions of growth were altogether more individual, more inventive, and looser than that of her male contemporaries—in a word, more modern" (27). Robert Thacker believes that Carr creates a new vision of the West Coast and "teach[es] us to see" it, "as if for the first time" (1999, 183). Most importantly, she is valorized as an artist because her interpretation of Canadian geography "is not generalized and de-historicized," as it is in the canvases of the Group of Seven ("Excerpts" 87). Other critics uniformly recognize her vast personal and artistic achievements: she not only "struggle[d] to forge an economic and professional space as an artist, but [she also] defied the expectations for women's art and found her own authentic forms" (S. Walker 1996, 93).<sup>46</sup>

Less frequently, critics comment upon the ambivalent facets of her work and person. Carr consistently negotiates an artistic style that does not definitively emulate artistic standards from abroad, even as she interrogates and integrates some of those artistic conventions with that which she conceives as indigenous to Canada. One exception is the critical assessment made by Lizbeth Goodman and Stephen Regan who assert that she "rejected the explicitly

'colonial' attitudes associated with material and patriarchal appropriation of lands, stories, and images, by positioning herself between cultures, as a self-conscious 'outsider' to both" (157). Roxanne Rimstead observes that in *Klee Wyck* there is a "constant pull between the dominant culture and values of Carr's time, which she herself depicts as colonial, materialist, Victorian, and patriarchal, and the marginal perspective she learns to adopt in the forest as a freer, larger spirit than her own world would permit her to be" (31). Eva-Marie Kröller notes that her "personality and achievement as an artist straddle the gap between Victorianism and the advent of modernism in Canada" and that Carr herself "never completely resolved the contradictions she tried to overcome" (1981, 42-43). Robert Linsley directs attention toward her work in relation to a "culture [that] anxiously fixated on the problematics of a stable Canadian identity" and suggests that the ambivalences of her work may "point us toward a more open future, one free from defensive compulsions" (94).

Thacker suggests that the narrator of *Klee Wyck* is positioned "between her own civilization, the natives,' and the haunting beauty [. . .] of the lush forest" (189), although it would be fruitful to add another dimension: if Carr locates herself between colonial Victoria and Native culture, she sees herself straddling, even if at a further remove, Old World Britain and Canada, especially as reflected in the West Coast forests. Her complex cultural background and approaches to her work are self-acknowledged. In *Growing Pains*, she explicitly remarks upon how she embodies such ambivalences: she describes herself as "Canadian-born as the Indian, but behind me were Old World heredity and ancestry as well as Canadian environment. The new West called me, but my Old World heredity, the flavour of my upbringing, pulled me back" ("Vancouver" 427).<sup>47</sup> Seeing herself as a relative outsider to these cultures – Native, colonial Victoria, Old World Britain – however, she is influenced by all these realms. She thus

mediates between a number of poles of difference and becomes preoccupied with forging a language that may be indigenous but that is also informed by such tensions: imperial and colonial; British and West Coast Canadian topography; colonial and Native; and even Western and Eastern Canada.<sup>48</sup>

Many critics also tend to suggest that the permutations in Carr's employment of "space" and her fascination with that term are informed by only one facet of her personal life or artistic endeavours. Goodman and Regan associate her employment of "space" with sexuality, a feminist desire for freedom from patriarchal restrictions.<sup>49</sup> Catherine Mallory claims that "Carr's love of space could be attributed to the simple fact that she disliked dark, restricted rooms or conventional boundaries of any kind since they reminded her of a Victorian world" (55). Using *Klee Wyck*, Rimstead argues that "[t]he overriding aesthetic [of space]" which governs the text may be seen as broken down into a binary system: "in her depiction of houses, people, and culture, open space consistently admits freedom, energy, and naturalness whereas enclosure in various forms prefigures spiritual smallness, stagnation, and unnaturalness" (33). Generally, the conflation of her sense of imagined and real space, both of which were of importance to Carr's creative output, contributes to such critical confusion.<sup>50</sup> Such a binary is limiting, since Rimstead fails to consider the implications for enclosed, forest interiors, which she also found liberating and associated with freedom and energy, and for those domestic scenes that she recalls with fondness and that also contest conventional behaviour. Natural enclosed space, as in "Skedans" in which the "luxuriant growth" grows into "a dense thicket," is also "full of vitality" (*KW* 31). In *The Book of Small*, she recalls her mother and her friend singing out unabashedly within the home: it was "extraordinary," she wrote, "to see Canada suddenly spill out of their eyes as if a dam had burst."<sup>51</sup> For Carr, space was both a spiritually-inflected,

imagined concept, associated with a release from conventional forms and behaviours, especially as it related to national identity, and a geographical reality.

The focus on one facet of Carr, her life, or her artistic endeavours also partially accounts for the “sharpening critical divide over the positioning of Emily Carr as both artist and writer within English-Canadian culture”:

the manner in which she is configured in various biographical and critical studies signals [more than it] encapsulates these ambivalences: Is she modern or postmodern? Colonial or postcolonial? Regional or national? Is she feminist or is she perpetuating the patriarchal conventions of her time? Does she treat Native culture sensitively, or has she appropriated that culture for her own artistic purposes?<sup>52</sup>

That critics tend to isolate these impulses and influences rather than regarding them as operating simultaneously in her work results in critical divisiveness; such criticism also tends to separate not only the effect of either colonial Victoria, West Coast Native culture, or England, as examples, but also the impulses and interests behind Carr and her artistic endeavours: the spiritual/mystical, the Native, the geographical/natural, or the national, that is, English-Canadian identity.<sup>53</sup> Frequently, the spiritual or mystical facet of her work or person is isolated and only occasionally as a function of the West Coast forests. Elizabeth Kilbourn asserts that she “had in one sense the attitude of a mystic, and the awe and ardour wakened by nature were for her a religious experience” (76-77); Christopher Varley identifies how she “thought of art and life holistically and expressed herself in romantic and spiritual terms” (6); Nancy-Lou Patterson argues that “her finest works have the awe-inspiring intensity of religious art” (n.pag.); and Stephanie Kirkwood Walker, interested in Carr primarily in relation to

autobiography, regards her writing as essentially a “religious act inherent in writing the self,” and the biographies that have proliferated around her as emphasizing her “religiosity, at once unique and representative,” which “reveals a deep longing for meaning that modernism addressed through art” (1996, 4;3). Walker does yoke her spiritual impulse with her interest in the British Columbia forests and suggests that Carr’s satisfaction with her canvases was affected by how she evaluated her relationship with God, that is, she measured her own success in relation to how “in tune” the “God quality in me is” with the “God in [the woods]”;<sup>54</sup> she adds that her sense of spirituality functioned outside organized religion, its institutions and structures.<sup>55</sup> In particular, she regards her fascination with the work of Walt Whitman, “like her sympathetic comprehension of native art,” as a support for “her religious understanding of solitude – ‘how extraordinarily alone everyone is’” and as manifestation of “her distrust of institutional religion” (114).<sup>56</sup> Not surprisingly, then, she concludes *Growing Pains* with a quotation from Whitman’s work: “*We but level this lift to pass and continue beyond*” (“Wild Geese” 471).

Walker suggests that Carr’s strong mystical and spiritual impulses, although unconventional, are more typical for women:<sup>57</sup> it is “the response of powerless, marginalized women searching for authority outside traditional Christian practices,” even if Carr’s response was “not unlike the romantic notion of inspirational artistic genius and the abstract Theosophical ideas that interested Carr during her friendship with Lawren Harris” (88).<sup>58</sup> Walker’s assessment is odd, however, given the fact that at Harris’s promptings, she dabbled in Theosophy,<sup>59</sup> and that virtually all Group members sought authority for their work outside of traditional Christian ideology. These male artists also pursued alternate forms of validation and inspiration: as English-Canadians, they, like Carr, were interested in developing an artistic

response and vocabulary against existing, imperial standards. To isolate, moreover, any one impulse – her mystical and spiritual tendencies, or her interest in Native culture and artefacts, or her desire to interpret the West Coast of Canada in relation to the sublime and an imperial Other – is to take a partial view of what she herself believed to be at the centre of her work. Her response to Canadian landscape as a function of national identity and indigenous expression and as the same source for the richness of West Coast Native culture entails differentiating that response from other artists' endeavours in both Victoria and imperial England. It is also a spiritual experience, which accounts for her employment of the notion of “space” and the religious rhetoric adopted to articulate that experience.<sup>60</sup>

Consistently throughout her artistic career, Carr believed that the British Columbia forests, and initially Native culture itself, contained a spiritual force that operated outside of institutionalized religion. Her description of the established Christian institution in Victoria suggests her view of institutions:

Alone, I crept in to many strange churches of different denominations, in San Francisco, in London, in Indian villages way up north, and was comforted by the solemnity. But at home, bribed occasionally into the Reformed Episcopal, I sat fuming. [ . . . ] I wanted to stand up and screech and fling the footstool and slap the prayer books. Why must they have one voice for God and one for us? [ . . . ] Why feel disapproval oozing from them and trickling over you? Why feel yourself get smaller and smaller, wilting like spinach in the process of being boiled? I longed to get out of church and crisp up in the open air.<sup>61</sup>

The “us” employed here is revealing: Carr does not believe herself to be a willing participant in colonial, Victorian culture, even as it is implied by virtue of her presence there. She

acknowledges, however, that she is a “bribed” rather than willing attendant. The manner in which she feels physically constrained also corresponds to the spiritual, social, and artistic limitations with which she was obliged to contend.

Simultaneously, her desire to understand, to interpret the experience of the sublime as elicited by West Coast geographical particularities, and to forge a language for an experience that is not easily contained either verbally or visually permeates her journals:

Oh, these mountains, great bundles of contradiction, hard, cold, austere, disdainful, remote yet gentle, spiritual, appealing! Oh, you mountains, I am at your feet – humble, pleading! Speak to me in your wordless words! I claim my brotherhood to you. We are of the same substance for there is only one substance. God is all there is. There is one life, God life, that flows through all. He that formed me formed you. Oh, Father of all, raise my consciousness to that sense of oneness with the universal. Help me to express Thee. Do Thou use me as a channel, help me to keep myself clear, open, receptive to Thy will. Open my understanding and make my eye to see and ear to hear.<sup>62</sup>

Her experience appears to be beyond the grasp of conventional verbal and visual expression: her plea here, “Help me to express Thee,” is one example, and her musing in the November 17 entry, “What language do they speak, those silent, awe-filled spaces?,” is another. Carr patently believed that such an experience was not easily apprehended or secured. Over the next few years, she becomes preoccupied with listening attentively to, interpreting or hewing out a new vocabulary for, and then documenting this new language, both verbal and visual.<sup>63</sup> She struggles on canvas as much as she does in her writings to break with conventional forms of expression, since those forms neither adequately reflect nor represent her experiences: “[i]t’s all

the unwordable things one wants to write about, just as it's all the unformable things one wants to paint – essence.”<sup>64</sup> She repeatedly makes reference to her search for a new language and to the difficulties in forging its vocabulary (“wordless words”) because these experiences defy existing forms of expression and representation.<sup>65</sup> This problem is linked with the sublime: the difficulty is not only how to articulate that which has no verbal or visual equivalent, but also how to capture an unfamiliar experience and a geography that seemingly elude containment. Her fascination with uncontainable space, literal and imagined, interrelated as it is with English-Canadian national identity, geography, and spirituality, thus serves as the impetus for the creation of a modern, indigenous artistic language.

Carr suggests that a language exists, one which she must listen to (or see) with great attentiveness and which she must decipher: “staring, staring, staring – half lost, learning a new language or rather the same language in a different dialect.”<sup>66</sup> That “new language” is consistently associated with a sense of spirituality and, as a result, may find its source in one’s soul: “Aye, Artist, Poet, Singer, that is your job,/Learning the soul’s language, trying to express your God.”<sup>67</sup> In *Klee Wyck*, Carr also associates language with Native totem poles:

[T]he poles were left standing in the old places. But now there was no one to listen to their talk any more. By and by they would rot and topple to the earth, unless white men came and carried them away to museums. There they would be labelled as exhibits, dumb before the crowds who gaped and laughed and said, “This is the distorted foolishness of an uncivilized people.” And the poor poles could not talk back because the white man did not understand their language. (“Greenville” 51)

She sensitively renders the irony of the fact that those who “rescue” the poles from complete

decay are those who have caused the decimation of Native villages from which the poles are being rescued. In this instance, her role as artist entails bridging the gap between imperial and Native culture, the latter having been isolated and rendered virtually mute by the destructive patterns and the unwillingness of the “white man” to communicate and understand.

The totem poles of Greenville are “dumb” before the crowds, as Carr suggests, not because they lack speech, but because the language is a “different dialect” and thus incomprehensible to imperialist ears:<sup>68</sup>

[An Indian] cut forms to fit the thoughts that the birds and animals and fish suggested to him, and to those things he added something of himself. When they were all linked together they made very strong talk for the people. He grafted this new language on to the great cedar trunks and called them totem poles and stuck them up in the villages with great ceremony. Then the cedar and the creatures and the man all talked together through the totem poles to the people. The carver did even more – he let his imaginings rise above the objects that he saw and pictured supernatural beings too. (“Greenville” 51)

Carr also endeavours to render “aboriginal culture [in] a language that can be understood by the colonizer,” even as she tries to develop an indigenous and modern painterly vocabulary and idiom that parallels the carver’s efforts (Thomas 9). She translates her “own search for integration into expressive form” (9): she subtitles *Klee Wyck* “Tales in Cedar” because she finds an analogue for her own artistic struggle, that is, to make “very strong talk,” in the totem poles, which integrate but do not entirely belong to the natural, human (Native), and spiritual realms.

Hilda Thomas argues that Native aesthetic is “animistic”: “Before the trees can be

'enriched' by the thoughts of the carver, and thus made to speak of the relationship between human and natural worlds, they must be 'mutilated,' 'shorn'; a 'new language' – the language of particular culture – is then 'grafted' on to the cedar trunk. The process is one of imaginative transformation, the poles deriving their strength not from nature, but from culture" (10). Carr regards their strength as derived, not from culture, but from nature, the "God in it all," and her role as artist as involved with understanding "their language, unspoken, unwritten talk":

"answer back to them with their own dumb magnificence, soul words, earth words, the God in you responding to the God in them."<sup>69</sup> In "Hopes and Doldrums," therefore, Carr articulates how she believes that the superior artist does not make the "mistake [of] trying to humanize the woods to make them conform to us," but rather goes "out to them in a spirit of recognition of the God spirit among them."<sup>70</sup> In 1936, she writes: "The trouble with our painting lies largely with our trying to impose our ideas and our technique on the picture instead of allowing our subject to *impose itself on us*, asserting ourselves instead of making ourselves a blank and letting the subject express on that blank that which it will. When you are out in nature she works for you."<sup>71</sup> As Crean observes, rather than "a tabula rasa" upon which the artist projects ideas, the land, as Carr perceived it, was "a source of spiritual power with which [her soul identifies]" (1988, 18). The woods, too, are regarded by Carr as autonomous, that is, as able to select "those moments when [she is] quiet and off guard to reveal [themselves]."<sup>72</sup> She believed herself to have been not only successful in integrating the natural, human (cultural) and divine, but also as privileged: she expresses gratitude that she has "been permitted to give pleasure by writing and painting [. . . and] that these things spoke so that I might hear and in a language I understood even a little of."<sup>73</sup> The language of that world was sufficiently audible and comprehensible to Carr as artist because she patiently attended to it.

She had been searching for a way to express on canvas a form of spiritual transcendence (“the God I’ve longed and hunted for and failed to find”) that was rooted in her beloved West Coast and that was related more largely to national identity, even as that search was informed by and couched in the rhetoric of the sublime and American transcendentalism.<sup>74</sup> If she did not begin, she at least considered making a fresh attempt at painting the West Coast well before seeing the Group’s canvases, especially because western Canada, even artists from the West, had been entirely neglected by the National Gallery and overlooked again when Canadian paintings were being sent to the Wembley Exhibition in England in 1924. That desire to make a fresh attempt is confirmed after viewing their canvases: Carr observed that if Group members “are building an art worthy of our great country” then “I want to have my share, to put in a little spoke for the West, one woman holding up my end.”<sup>75</sup>

Her interest in the spiritual dimensions of the Western forests and, more broadly, of art is also indicated in one of Carr’s letters, which appeared well before the 1927 exhibit. On April 8, 1912, her letter, printed in the *Vancouver Province*, addresses what she conceives of as authentic art:

The poor mere copyist has no chance, he is too busy worrying over the number of leaves on his tree,<sup>76</sup> he forgets the big grand character of the whole, and the something that speaks, that vital something with no name he overlooks altogether though he may have exactly matched its colours locally, he has not allowed for the light and sunshine that is the whole glorious making of it. He has tried for the ‘look’ but forgotten the ‘feel.’<sup>77</sup>

Carr seems to advocate the Johnsonian notion of the artist who, as opposed to the copyist, is moved to capture that which underlies mundane surfaces, that is, “the inner meaning of the

forms,” since these outward details insufficiently convey “that vital something with no name,” an interesting reverberation of how God is described in the New Testament (Harris 1945, 22).<sup>78</sup> Even if the arrangement of pictorial elements “please[d] the aesthetic sense, the beauty sense, satisf[ied] the eye,” Carr believed that “that is not enough”: “They must say something to the soul to justify their existence as a picture, set up a yearning and a longing for something; an ensemble that has been suggested and holds one either consciously or subconsciously.”<sup>79</sup> When one of her canvases received attention for “showing spirituality,” she was delighted and exclaimed: “Oh, if it really *were* a ‘spiritual interpretation.’ Will my work ever really be that? For it to be that I must myself live in the spirit. Unless we *know* the things of the spirit we cannot express them.”<sup>80</sup>

She returns to such ideas later, in March 1930, when she addressed the Victoria Branch of the Women’s Canadian Club. In this speech, she differentiates between the camera, an instrument that merely “copies,” and the canvas, a means of securing authentic artistic impression and deeper spiritual meaning:<sup>81</sup>

The camera has no mind.

We may copy some thing as faithfully as the camera, but unless we bring to our picture something additional – something creative – something of ourselves – our picture does not live. It is but a poor copy of unfelt nature. We look at it and straightway we forget it, because we have brought nothing to it. We have had no new experience.

“Creative Art” is “fresh seeing.” (3)

Direct transcription is not tantamount to connecting with and distilling the spiritual essence of nature, or, for Carr, the Canadian West Coast: the artist must engage with that world, “[sweep]

away the unnecessary,” and search for “something deeper,” that is, meaning that resides below surfaces, for which Carr was in the process of forming a language (4). In *Growing Pains*, she noted a fellow student’s “crit” – that “surface vision is not Art” – because she too conceived of truth and meaning as located below external realities.<sup>82</sup> She wished to forge a new vocabulary – to “make words” – to evoke that which evades conventional verbal and visual language, that which resists imported methods, and that which captures the underlying meaning or mystery of life, of nature, and specifically of the West Coast. In “Modern and Indian Art of the West Coast,” she argued that the role of the artist involves “search[ing] beneath the surface for the hidden thing which is felt rather than seen, the ‘reality’ in fact which underlies everything” (2).

In “Rejected,” she again considered the difference between the results of the camera and those of her paintings, which involved “simplification”:

More than ever I was convinced that the old way of seeing was inadequate to express this big country of ours, her depth, her height, her unbounded wideness, silences too strong to be broken – nor could ten million cameras, through their mechanical boxes, ever show real Canada. It had to be sensed, passed through live minds, sensed and loved. (*GP* 437)

Despite the fact that “people did not want” or were reluctant to “see beneath surfaces,” Carr believed that that was where meaning resided and that the artist’s “sense” and love for the country would be conveyed through one’s artistic endeavours. “There is something bigger than fact,” she wrote after viewing A. Y. Jackson’s paintings for the first time; she claimed that, from that moment, she would pursue “the underlying spirit, all it stands for, the mood, the vastness, the wildness, the Western breath of go-to-the-devil-if-you-don’t-like-it, the eternal big spaceness of it.”<sup>83</sup>

As Carr endeavoured to convey an experience that results in transcendence, these efforts were also informed by the modern conception that meaning is located “below” the surface:<sup>84</sup>

On, on, deeper and deeper, with the soul of the thing burrowing into its depths and intensity till that thing is a reality to us and speaks one grand inaudible word – God. The movement and direction of lines and planes shall express some attribute of God – power, peace, strength, serenity, joy. The movement shall be so great the picture will rock and sway together, carrying the artist and after him the looker with it, catching up with the soul of the thing and marching on together.<sup>85</sup>

Part of this endeavour to seek meaning below surfaces had also been shaped by her broad, if sporadic, reading patterns: one of the books she had read, Mary Cecil Allen’s *Painters of the Modern Mind* (1929) outlined how “the function of the artist is to translate ‘the images of the seen world into other terms,’ [and] to remove them into ‘another sphere of being’”<sup>86</sup> Carr affirms such notions when she employs metaphors that suggest that meaning is located below the readily accessible, physical world: “in a great country with much unbroken newness to explore,” the creation of indigenous art “necessitates much digging and searching, burrowing as deep as one is able.”<sup>87</sup> This metaphor is reminiscent of one employed by the Group of Seven, that art was a tool with which to cultivate the Canadian soil, that “the arts of man are ways and means of digging oneself into the world of reality and meaning.”<sup>88</sup> Unsurprisingly, her search for “higher things” was bolstered substantially by Harris, who instructed her to go “*deeper*” in her work – “it’s a case of dig” – because meaning and insight were believed to be located beyond or below the external and were neither readily directly apprehended nor available to the

casual glance.<sup>89</sup> That “digging and searching, burrowing as deep as one is able” was clearly both an intuitive and spiritual exercise, since it entailed the use of one’s “heart as well as [one’s] eyes.”<sup>90</sup>

The indirectly apprehended subject also seems to be linked to her fascination with “mystery,” to which she repeatedly referred in her journals and fiction. On November 10, 1927, the first entry of *Hundreds and Thousands*, she comments upon the landscape she viewed from the train on her trip to Ottawa as both “mysterious” and “weird”:

Now we are in heavier pine-wooded country and it is snowing hard. The trees are heavy with it. There is a cold, mysterious wonder amid the trees. They are not so densely packed but that you can pass in imagination among them, wonder what mysteries lie in their quiet fastness, what creeping living things, what God-filled spaces totally untrod, what voices in an unknown tongue.<sup>91</sup>

As Frye suggests, Carr’s vision was “always probing into the distance,” often searching ““deeper into the forest”” (1965, 828). She consistently attributed to the forests a meaning and a language that were not readily accessible or penetrable without patient, imaginative exploration.<sup>92</sup> When she reflected upon and wondered “[w]hat is that vital thing [ . . . ] that takes us out of ourselves, that draws and attracts us, the unnameable thing claiming kinship with us?,” she concluded it is “the divine in us calling to the divine in all else.”<sup>93</sup> Since she also adds that “[t]he only thing worth striving for is to express God” and that “[e]very living thing is God made manifest,” one might deduce that, for Carr, the spiritual is especially perceived and located in the area she frequents, the West Coast forest interior.<sup>94</sup> That she selected Western British Columbia as her subject matter rather than persons relates to her belief as to where meaning might be located: she observed that “I think I go deeper in places than in people.”<sup>95</sup>

Her affection for and insistence upon the West Coast as the primary subject matter of her canvases may seem incongruous with Carr's determination to study abroad in order to find techniques with which to approach and capture the British Columbia forests and, in her earlier work, facets of Native culture: for a woman eager to forge an artistic vocabulary specific to the West, it may seem odd that she eagerly put aside her earnings to pursue training in Europe on more than one occasion, and, in fact, used that education as a defence when attacked in a local Victoria paper because of her new methods of painting.<sup>96</sup> She first studied not in Europe but in San Francisco in 1893 at the California School of Design, where she received some rudimentary training from Lorenzo Latimer and Amédée Joullin:<sup>97</sup> their paintings of the Pueblo Indians of California may have initially provided Carr with the idea of painting Native villages and totem poles. She was recalled to British Columbia in 1893 when her family's financial situation could no longer sustain her studies abroad. Then, in 1899, after saving money from the art classes she had given to young children, Carr left for London, England, where she stayed until 1904. She began her studies at the Westminster School of Art. In 1901, she went to St. Ives, Cornwall, where she studied under Julius Olsson, an art instructor who had acquired a solid reputation as an Impressionist artist of seascapes, and Algernon Talmage, who introduced her to one of her favourite places in England, Tregenna Wood. The fact that she had decided to paint there was remarkable, notwithstanding its picturesque qualities, as Maria Tippett argues, since "few artists had even considered setting up their easel in a forest" (1979, 51).<sup>98</sup> It was here, according to Tippett, that Carr would begin to learn how to approach the British Columbia forest, even if the conventions she was employing needed to be adapted to western Canadian landscape (51). Later, she pursued her training with John Whiteley, although she had meant to study at the Herkommer School of Art in Bushey, Hertfordshire, from which

she had been barred because she was past the age limit.<sup>99</sup>

For Carr, however, it was most important to “go to Paris [because] everyone said Paris was the top of art and I wanted to get the best teaching I knew.”<sup>100</sup> In 1910, at the age of forty, she travelled to France, where she was exposed to Post-Impressionist techniques, particularly the bright colour palette of the Fauvists. Although she was initially trained there by Henry Phelan Gibb, he recommended that she move to the Académie Colarossi because he believed that Carr “would benefit from ‘the stronger work of men’”: Carr always resented the fact that he would “never let me forget I was only a woman. He would never allow a woman could compete with men.”<sup>101</sup> The strain of working in an academy where the criticisms were delivered entirely in French proved too difficult for Carr, and, after having consulted with Gibb, she studied privately under John Duncan Fergusson, and later, in Concarneau, under Frances Hodgkins. Her education abroad was supplemented back in Canada by the art instruction of Mark Tobey, an American artist who experimented with Cubism, who taught Carr over a period of three weeks in 1928, and who helped her realize that art was far more important than the distractions that had prevented her from painting prior to 1927.<sup>102</sup>

Given such extensive training abroad and even such training from those with such status as Tobey, Carr clearly still paid homage to the notion that one must be trained elsewhere to receive proper art instruction or to be validated as artist: she felt compelled to train in Europe because “she knew of no artist or art school able to teach her to paint such immensity” (Burns 224).<sup>103</sup> Still, in *Growing Pains*, she confessed that she was “disappointed at hearing” that the “only places you could learn to paint in were London or Paris” (“Home Again” 344). Whatever she may have learned abroad, moreover, she believed that her training was modified by “Indian Art” which had “broadened my seeing, loosened the formal tightness I had learned in England’s

**schools”; in assessing her training, she concluded that even though she had “learned a lot from the Indians” and even though she had been trained in England and San Francisco where she had been provided with some sense of technique, “who except Canada herself could help me comprehend her great woods and spaces? San Francisco had not, London had not.”<sup>104</sup>**

**Upon her return home, she realized that if she might adapt some techniques for the purposes of rendering the West Coast in paint, the wholesale adoption of such techniques would be inappropriate because of the differing qualities of landscape:**

**Even across one field there was soft hazy distance, distance gradations were easier here to get than in our clear Canadian atmosphere and great spaces; everything was faded, gentle here. Colour did not throb so violently. English landscape painting was indolent seeing, ready-made compositions, needing only to be copied.<sup>105</sup>**

**Old World artistic conventions, which, in terms of technique, involved subtle colour effects and, in terms of subject matter, picturesque trees and streams, were not appropriate for a landscape that was delicate neither in terms of colour nor in the arrangement of elements. One might also note the measure of disdain in Carr’s assertion that the landscape needed “only to be copied” in relation to her dismissal of outright imitation as an artistic method. Instead, she believed that “Canada and her sons cry out for a hearing but the people are blind and deaf. [. . .] Dominated by dead England and English traditions, they are decorating their tombstones while living things clamour to be fed.”<sup>106</sup> To cling to English standards of artistic practice and to spurn Canadian topography was, for Carr, “to carry the garrison mentality to its most ludicrous extreme. It was to cling obsessively to the safety of an obsolete tradition ” (Blanchard 48).<sup>107</sup> Carr often expressed contempt for anything associated with England, and which she identified**

as an Other, although she deliberately travelled there to be trained and adopted some artistic techniques from such training.<sup>108</sup> She was thus concerned with the erasure of the “boundary between her western Self and the indigenous Other,” which “offered freedoms available only at the periphery of order,” and with the creation of a boundary between the newly-fostered Western Self, as predicated on its association with the land and with Native culture, and the English Other (S. Walker 1996, 6). Dominant culture was impugned, whereas the indigenous – or the primitive – was seen as offering an alternative or as providing insights that the dominant culture would occlude (21).<sup>109</sup>

Her spiritual and national concerns are thus yoked together by her sense of space that, in some capacity, offered Carr the freedom she required for her artistic practice: these concerns are rooted in the specificity of British Columbia landscape. Spiritual, geographical – the specificity of which was important in relation to both self and a larger community – and national impulses are thus imbricated as she articulated her concerns about developing an authentic expression of Canada, influenced by Native culture, and later, in what is now recognized as her second, and superior, phase of painting, based entirely on Canadian landscape itself. She asserted, “I am a Westerner and I am going to extract all that I can to the best of my ability out of this big glorious West. The new ideas are big and they fit this big land.”<sup>110</sup> This also explains her insistence upon outdoor sketching, of working “under pressure of time and uncertain weather,” like Group members who often worked outdoors, and why she only made fuller-sized canvases from these sketches if she “felt some idea merited further study”: the experience could be translated and best captured by an immediate response to the land (Stewart 11; Hembroff-Schleicher 35).<sup>111</sup>

She believed that if the Group had succeeded in conveying higher spiritual values and in

capturing a national Canadian spirit, they had failed to depict the particularity – the spiritual essence – of the West. Carr, who was “a mystic, deeply religious, but not in any conventional sectarian manner,”<sup>112</sup> wanted to emulate what Group members were doing with their canvases, but for the Canadian West: not only “to show God manifest in nature,” but God manifest in nature on the West Coast (Burns 235; Pagh 1994, 49). If she had not reached her peak of artistic maturity at this point in her career, and was not yet on par with the work of the Group – she herself felt that “her paintings were not as good in workmanship” – certainly she matched, if she did not surpass, the efforts of the Group later (Tippett 1979, 148). She would eventually lose what she conceived of as dependence upon the Group: “Now [that] they are torn away and I stand *alone* on my own perfectly good feet,” she would “look with [her] own eyes.”<sup>113</sup> As Tippett observes, “she could now project her westernness into their Canadianness and share their ambition to create a new art for Canada and their quest for an artistic expression of the essence of the land” (1979, 152). Notwithstanding the Group’s claims and efforts to depict all of Canada, as fulfilment of their nationalist agenda, some members did not travel beyond central Canada; those who did, A.Y. Jackson being the best example, sometimes confessed to feeling uneasy about painting other parts of the country.

Although Carr has been compared to the Group of Seven and their interest in drawing upon “sentiments of nationalism linked to the northern mystique of the Canadian landscape,” the geographical specificity of Carr’s subject matter is important (S. Walker 1996, 11). Harris believed that she had been able to depict the form and spirit of the West in a way that had no equivalent geographically and artistically in the East:

The Pacific coast landscape in all its forms and moods is made for modern expression in paint. Its fullness of growth, its skies and hills, mountains, islands

and headlands have a plastic amplitude, design and pattern such as exists in no other part of the continent. It is another world from all the land east of the Great Divide. Emily Carr was the first artist to discover this. It involved her in a conscious struggle to achieve a technique that would match the great, new motifs of British Columbia. (1945, 21)

Jackson apparently admitted to Carr that he did not like the West and “found it unpaintable” because it was so lush and overgrown, although he made a number of sketches after having visited with Harris in 1924, and then again in 1926 with the anthropologist Marius Barbeau and the Montreal artist who later became a Group member, Edwin Holgate (Mellen 111). The paucity of Jackson’s attempts from his sketching trip is suggestive: he “painted [. . .] only three canvases when he returned East. None of them was very successful” (Mellen 164). Whatever the reason for Jackson’s lack of success, Carr was certain that his lack of affection for the West vitiated his endeavours: “I always felt that A.Y.J. resented our West. He had spent a summer out at the coast sketching. He did not feel the West as he felt the East.”<sup>114</sup> In a letter to Nan Cheney, dated September 20, 1940, she made the same observation in relation to Harris: “Dont think Lawren cares about west” and that, as a result, “His present work would find no sympathy out West.”<sup>115</sup>

Still, Carr believed the Group more generally understood how Canadian landscape functioned in the development of national identity and culture, and were more advanced than other painters of the period, including herself, in terms of interpreting it and of capturing its spiritual essence with authenticity: they had “burst themselves free, blazed the trail, stood the abuse and lived up to their convictions.”<sup>116</sup> Of Lismar’s lectures, she argued that he was “spreading the gladness of the newer way, revealing the big, grand things of our country to its

sons and daughters without the fret and carping of his students or the scorn of his adversaries. He is spreading his wings and soaring up, up!"<sup>117</sup> Their advocacy of this new art movement as she describes it is worth noting because of its Christian connotations: Group members were akin to New Testament apostles who were on a quest to spread the "gospel" of national confidence and to interpret Canada on its own and in innovational terms. Like members of the Group, Carr was apologetic about financial transactions or making a profit from her work: "an unbusinesslike attitude was considered almost something to take pride in, for the artist was one who valued the inner life rather than material possessions" (Street 21).<sup>118</sup> Similarly, she derided London, regarded it as primarily responsible for having destroyed England's "sublime song-filled land with money-grabbing and grime," and strove to foster an indigenous form of art that circumvents that process.<sup>119</sup>

When she evinced contempt for the "art" by members of Victoria's Arts and Crafts society, she again employed a biblical allusion to describe their second-rate endeavours: they were "a neclace (sic) of millstones around the neck of Art."<sup>120</sup> Such inauthentic work impeded the development of a "true" expression of the Canadian spirit: clearly, she did not regard members of the Arts and Crafts Society as artists. She was certain, like the Group, that the artist is a gifted individual who has the ability to see beyond what the "copyist" records, which occasionally arises from patient observation. This idea was fostered, as it was for Group members, by her reading of Walt Whitman, who perpetuated the notion that the transcendent might be located in nature. In one journal entry, she wrote that "living the creative life seems more grandly desirous (opening up marvellous vistas) when one is searching for higher, more uplifting inspiration, when one is listening intently for what a thing is saying for the urge of life pouring through all things."<sup>121</sup> A dream she recorded in *Growing Pains* ratifies this approach to

**nature:**

**One night I had a dream of greenery. I never attacked the painting of growing foliage quite the same after that dream I think; growing green had become something different to me.**

**In my dream I saw a wooded hillside, an ordinary slope such as one might see along any Western roadside, tree-covered, normal, no particular pattern or design to catch an artist's eye were he seeking subject-matter. But, in my dream that hillside suddenly lived – weighted with sap, burning green in every leaf, every scrap of it vital!**

**Woods, that had always meant so much to me, from that moment meant just so much more. (“Green” 458)**

**The dream confirmed for Carr that the artist must look not only for pattern, but also for that “vital something” that lies below the natural realm: both meaning and spirituality are manifested in the natural world which becomes available to the artist as the result of prolonged, patient observation.**

**Carr even esteemed her own early work, especially the canvases created in San Francisco, as “objects honestly portrayed, nothing more. As yet I had not considered what was underneath surfaces nor had I considered the inside of myself. I was like a child printing alphabet letters. I had not begun to make words.”<sup>122</sup> Like her European predecessors who had “visited the north-west coast of North America during the 1770s and worked within the categories of the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque,” she initially had difficulty adapting the techniques and visual language she had acquired and that were related to the categories of interpreting the landscape before her (Tippett 1991, 86). Tippett argues that**

Carr's unique approach to the West was cultivated in her later years and that, in fact, Carr's earlier responses to the landscape were aligned with the imperialist tendency to see it as a hostile force – that she “regarded the forest wilderness with fear” (1991, 88)<sup>123</sup> – that generates the “garrison mentality” of the kind that first E.K. Brown and then Frye regarded as inhibiting genuine cultural activity in Canada. In “Art as Act: Emily Carr's Vision of the Landscape,” she asserts:

Emily not only perceived nature through what she felt to be the Indians' relationship to it, but, as I mentioned earlier, she shared the late nineteenth-century British settlers' vision of the land too. It was one that regarded the forest wilderness with fear and related that fear to God. From early childhood the forest had been inimical to Emily. [ . . . ] When Emily travelled to Ucluelet for the purpose of portraying the native Indians she had either omitted the forest altogether from her watercolour paintings or had rendered it, in keeping with the late eighteenth-century artists of Captains Cook and Vancouver, as a silhouetted back-drop to the things that interested her more. (88-89)

In terms that recall Frye's assertions about English-Canadian literature in general, Tippett argues that late nineteenth-century British perceptions of landscape affect Carr's vision of the land and that, as a result, she could only approach that landscape in similar ways.<sup>124</sup>

Gerald Lynch draws similar conclusions in his reading of *Klee Wyck*. He interprets it within the context of Frye's “admittedly selective and tendentious reading” of Canadian literature in his “Conclusion” because, as Lynch argues, the vast Canadian wilderness promulgates a sense of anxiety in Carr regarding “unanswerable denial of [ . . . ] values,” a sense of “self-annihilation in wilderness space,” and the need to locate “appeasement of and

accommodation within that threat” (116; Frye 1965, 225; 117).<sup>125</sup> He observes that she “wants ‘to get into’ the trees that represent a nature everywhere unconsciously bent on obliterating her sense of self. This getting into the trees involves a process – a cyclically repetitive process – of discovering the power of the trees in their totemic form and of identifying herself with the Indians who created the totems” (116). In this capacity, he adds, Carr’s autobiographical sketches in some ways anticipate D.G. Jones’s “admonition in *Butterfly on Rock* to ‘let the wilderness in’” (116).

But why return if the threat is so ominous? Why must identity be forged in relation to the threat of such self-annihilation and why does “Klee Wyck” feel compelled to “search for appeasement” of that threat? Carr herself posed – and indirectly responded to – similar questions in other work: the manner in which these questions are articulated indicate that she was seeking a spiritual essence that she thought the British Columbia forests would contain, but that would also provide her with a sense of completion or wholeness: “I am always asking myself the question, What is it you are struggling for? What is that vital thing the woods contain, possess, that you want? Why do you go back and back to the woods unsatisfied, longing to express something that is there and not able to find it?,” she wondered.<sup>126</sup> If Carr herself felt this way, however, the eponymous heroine of *Klee Wyck*, as Lynch observes, does feel the threat of “oblivion”: in “Salt Water,” the narrator observes that “the rush of wild growth swooped and gobbled up all that was foreign to it. Rapidly, it was obliterating every trace of man,” and, still later that she feels deep horror at the “nothingness, behind, around” (*KW* 74-5). In “Greenville,” she regards the “avalanche of growth” as “overwhelming” in its “immensity,” a response to the sublime that Frye would have appreciated (*KW* 52). Yet, her entire corpus – both verbal and visual – needs to be considered when one determines why Carr

herself, rather than just “Klee Wyck,” returns to such a presumably threatening locale, especially since her first book is forged as a literary text, and, as such, with a sense of its dramatic potential in mind.

To conform to Frye’s notion of wilderness, Carr would have had to conceive of nature and the West as an “other” with which to negotiate. At times, in her other writings, Carr does: these instances are rare indeed. More frequently, she uses the West and its forests as a way of differentiating Canadian imaginative tendencies from those of Britain. From the forests she derives the experience of transcendence, as occasioned by the sublime; that experience involves the dissolution of boundaries between self (or inhabitant of Canada) and other (wilderness). In this process, another larger self – Canadian national identity – and another “other,” imperial Britain, are forged. This form of the sublime may be fruitfully contrasted with that elicited by Carr’s experience in London: “Always as I approached London, the same feeling flooded over me [. . . in] the stomach of the monster, [there was] no more You an individual but You lost in the whole. Part of its cruelty part of its life part of its wonderfulness part of its filth part of its sublimity and wonder, though it was not aware of you any more than you are aware of a pore in your skin.”<sup>127</sup> This experience of the sublime corresponds to Frye’s description, but as he sees it generated by the Canadian wilderness and not, as Carr here suggests, by a city and certainly not by the imperial centre. Her employment and description of the Canadian sublime, however, is a positive, if terrifying, experience, which results in the undoing of any connection to British imperialist ideas, which is the matrix for the forging of a distinct Canadian identity (123).

Distinctions need to be made, moreover, between “transcendence” and “oblivion” and between seeing the wilderness as “other” and Britain as “other.” If she is trying to evade

“oblivion,” so Carr’s persona, Klee Wyck, is also seeking out transcendence as a way of allying herself with Canadian wilderness and creating an identity that might be regarded as separate from that of Britain. She was endeavouring to mediate between achieving transcendence, that is, being subsumed by a larger entity, an experience both terrifying and exhilarating, and circumventing oblivion, which would have involved self-annihilation, not the incorporation of her identity into a larger imagined whole, the national spirit. The West Coast forests offer her the opportunity for transcendence, a raising above personal and individual concerns, and the ecstasy involved in a sense of belonging to something higher, communal, and anti-individualistic. If selfhood is threatened, it is because Carr does not want to be associated with the selfhood that borrows from or is contingent upon a sense of British-ness. Native culture and persons do not rescue her so much as facilitate the process of entering this space where an identity separate from that of Britain might be forged.<sup>128</sup> Such a distinction would also explain Carr’s own desire to return to the forest, for which, by all friends’ accounts – and Carr’s own – she felt a deep attachment, as she did for Native culture:<sup>129</sup> “Oh, just let them open their eyes and look! It isn’t pretty. It’s only just magnificent, tremendous. The oldest art of our West, the art of the Indians, is in spirit very modern, full of liveness and vitality. They went far and got so many of the very things that we modern artists are striving for today” (“Speech” 194). If her British predecessors were “bewildered by the vastness and untamed quality of Western Canadian scenery,” and deemed it “unpaintable,” as Ira Dilworth declared, Carr perseveres (1945, 13); if she initially experiences fear, part of the experience of the sublime, when she approaches the wilderness of the West Coast, she eventually cultivates an intuitive relationship with it, one that she also shared with Native culture; if Canadian landscape was initially seen as a vast and threatening force, that threat slowly ebbs away.<sup>130</sup>

In a speech delivered to the Women's Canadian Art Club in 1930, Carr asserts that the literal and imagined space with which she is provided by the West Coast forests permit the freedom necessary to develop authentic spiritual expression. She also employs "space" in a similar fashion when she first encounters the Group's canvases: she claims she is transported "in that new world of planes and spaces."<sup>131</sup> These spaces signify, among other things, an unrestricted locale where she feels uncircumscribed by social and cultural conventions, British, European and even those of Victoria, and with which she associated Canada.<sup>132</sup> Walker suggests that such social and cultural dictates, especially of Victoria, complicate her desire to delineate the West Coast. As a woman, moreover, she would have discovered that her freedoms were limited. The "western Self," to borrow Walker's distinction, not only opposed British conceptions of what might be considered appropriate subject matter (and in the process established a distinct sense of indigence) but also those conventions that restricted what a woman ought to paint, if a woman were accepted as artist at all. She observes that "as a modernist Carr could dismiss institutions and conventions, but as a female artist those structures were never fully accessible to her, whether they were the conspicuous ones of school, church, image and self": that is, the centre-periphery relationship generated tensions that were sharpened because of her gender and that marginalized and excluded her from the institutions of art and of religion (13).<sup>133</sup> The maturation process involved in becoming an artist not only induced the "growing pains" that Carr experienced, but also the difficulties in "forging values in a world that does not recognize or accommodate her ambition" (S. Walker 1996, 18). Carr would thus comment upon how "to church-goers I am an outsider, but I *am* religious and I always have been" and also how she regarded herself as "an isolated little old woman on the edge of nowhere," whose work the Canadian National gallery initially rejected.<sup>134</sup>

She eschewed formal, organized religion to find space in which personal identity might be defined in relation to a larger, national one; in so doing, she foregrounded her sense of gender and place in Canada because both related to her sense of isolation.<sup>135</sup> Carr was sensitive about her gender in relation to her career and choice of subject matter, and sometimes believed that she had difficulties connecting with other, notably male, artists as a result. To Nan Cheney, she wrote: "I have never hit it off with A.Y.J. always feels he desp[i]sess me for a *woman* artist. [. . .] He used to give me fatherly advice which I did not take, & I guess that aggravated him. I always felt he was commercial-hearted, at bottom," and later that, "A.Y. and I never did hit it off. I think he resents my being a *woman* has always sniffed towards me perhaps because I went to sleep when he was exhibiting his sketches once" (144).<sup>136</sup> Yet Carr could scarcely be considered a champion for Canadian female painters: she gives voice to concerns related to gender on only a few occasions.<sup>137</sup> On April 16, 1937, she acknowledges that she had been "forgetting women painters": "It's them I ought to be upholding, nothing to do with puny me at all [. . .] I am also glad that I am showing these men that women can hold up their end."<sup>138</sup> That she needs to remind herself of her role as a female painter and as representative of a larger group of painters based on gender suggests that this concern was not foremost.

Carr seems to indicate that the concept of "space" was more broadly associated with the experience of transcendence, a spiritual uplifting or imaginative ascent, and with freedom from a variety of prescriptive cultural norms; she used that concept to free herself from artistic, cultural and social (and hence gender-based) limitations.<sup>139</sup> The overwhelming evidence in Carr's journals and stories, as Nancy Pagh claims, points to Carr's "search for God or holiness in her work than [to] a search for a distinctly feminine perspective or voice" (1994, 45). Carr's initial response to Harris's canvases suggests that she regarded his use of space as an

alternative to existing aesthetic approaches; she most frequently makes reference to space after she viewed his work and claims they have an impact upon her sense of composition and design: “The mountains seem more beautiful since I have seen Mr. Harris’s pictures which have helped me to see them in a bigger way. I judge space better now. How I do want to learn more about space!”<sup>140</sup> She also perceived his canvases, however, as an avenue to this sense of release, as a contrast to and liberation from the turmoil of daily experience: “It is as if a door had opened, a door into unknown tranquil spaces.”<sup>141</sup> After seeing the canvases of the Group, she was determined to “find God in those silent, awe-filled spaces” and infuse her own canvases with that sense of awe (Davis 1993, 11):

I have never felt anything like the power of those canvases. They seem to have called to me from some other world, sort of an answer to a great longing. As I came through the mountains I longed so to cast off my earthly body and float away through the great pure spaces between the peaks, up the quiet green ravines into the high, pure, clear air. Mr. Harris has painted those very spaces, and my spirit seems able to leave my body and roam among them.<sup>142</sup>

Simultaneously, Carr referred to these spaces as an “unchartered sea of tremendousness,” just as the Group of Seven referred to the “unpioneered” territory of painting in Canada<sup>143</sup> in which the artist must “probe its soul,” which the artist must map, and for which the artist must provide a new language.<sup>144</sup> She claimed to love Canada as “a land of spacey sweeps of thousand mile spreads of fir trees, wild mountains, tearing rivers: a land of terrific silences;”<sup>145</sup> she believed that Canada’s “wide spaces and mighty mountains” should impel artists to “[see] and [feel] things in a fresh, creative way. [. . . The country] wants something strong, big, dignified and spiritual that shall make her artists better for doing it and her people better for

seeing it” (1930, 9). She, like the Group, was engaged with the process of “shaping a nation.” In part, therefore, Carr’s artistic motivations were engaged with the English-Canadian nation-building discourse that was prominent at the time.<sup>146</sup> “To accept a part in imagining the national soul, to join with the Group of Seven in devising images for the Canadian imagination, was to adopt a persuasive and compelling rhetoric that rested easily on the shoulders of a modern artist in a young country” (S. Walker 1996, 58).

The vast open spaces of the Canadian West Coast intrigued her because she regarded these as literal, spiritual, and metaphorical alternatives to regulated space, to the conventions and limitations of everyday experience: “[t]here is room to breathe; space to feel out into and think.”<sup>147</sup> That response was deepened every time she confronted West Coast topography, its mountains, “quiet green ravines” and “high, pure, clear air”: “the lovely wild vastness did something to it all. I loved every bit of it—no boundaries, no beginning, no end, one continual shove of growing—edge of land meeting edge of water, with just a ribbon of sand between. [ . . . ] vastness by day, still deeper vastness in dark when beginnings and endings joined.”<sup>148</sup> Space, as manifested in the West Coast forests and reflected in her aesthetic endeavours, was not overwhelming or inhibiting; if ever there were an artist and writer for whom the vastness of Canada and the wilderness were not a source of terror, but of spiritual growth, who was certain where “here” was, and who eagerly strove to fashion an art that corresponded to that sense, it is Carr: “This is my country. What I want to express is *here* and I love it. Amen!”<sup>149</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

1. “Meeting with the Group of Seven, 1927,” 10 November 1927, *HT* 655.

2. The exhibit, jointly organized by Eric Brown and Marius Barbeau of Ottawa's Victoria Memorial Museum, was the manifestation of a "shift in attitude within European avant-garde circles towards regarding native artifacts as art rather than as ethnographic specimens" (Moray 1993, 21). Carr's displayed canvases and pottery were Native in terms of subject matter and style. She was also asked to design the cover the catalogue. She was brought to the attention of Eric Brown by the combined efforts of Marius Barbeau and H. Mortimer Lamb of Vancouver. Finally, Brown paid a visit to Carr's studio and was so impressed with her work that the paintings he subsequently included in the West Coast exhibit outnumbered the contributions of any other individual artist. He had visited Victoria before in 1921 and 1922, but had not made time to meet Carr or other local artists because he was occupied "lecturing and promoting the National Gallery": he had been given the "mandate to build up a collection of Canadian and European art" and set himself to the task accordingly (Gowers 67; Moray 1993, 16). After this exhibit, which was the most attention she had received in years, her popularity heightened. In February 1936, she exhibited at the University Library with such painters as F.H. Varley and J.W.G. MacDonald; in 1938, she had a one-person show in Vancouver, and, in 1930, another at the University Library. Within a ten-year period, she had exhibited in sixteen international exhibitions, "including the American Federation of Arts, Washington; the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; the Paris International Exposition; the Tate Gallery, London, and the Group of Seven, Toronto" (Burns 234).

3. Doris Shadbolt writes that the Group's "acceptance of her as a fellow Canadian painter and their praise of her work were to end forever her sense of crippling artistic isolation": she was also "received into a community which understood and valued, not merely tolerated, the urgency of her expressive drive" (Shadbolt 1974, 14).

4. After a poorly received exhibition in 1909 for the Island Arts and Crafts Society, Carr claimed to have left off painting for a period of fifteen years (until 1927), although art historians have now discovered that she painted an average of two canvases a year, still a meagre output, in addition to making pottery and hooked rugs. In general, the period between 1913-1928 is regarded as one of general inactivity and frustration. A. Y. Jackson observed that "no artist had a more difficult struggle than Emily Carr. [ . . . ] These years left their mark on her" (PA 112).

5. In *Growing Pains*, Carr suggests that, since one "approach is apparently cut off" as the result of her illness, she would "try the other" ("Alternative" 460).

6. In a letter to Nan Cheney, she wrote, "too wrought up [for painting]. but queer to say I *did* write. I find when I need *calming* I get it that way best. some times if I am too worried to sleep I do a little and take myself off into the woods & places that way" (2 February 1941, *Dear Nan*, ed. D. Walker 293). Robin Laurence describes Carr as a "'compulsive' scribbler of prose scraps and doggerel verse since childhood" (24). Carr took a correspondence course in short story writing in 1926; then, in 1934, she took another such course at the Victoria Summer School. Her writing was later fostered by the support of G.G. Sedgwick, Hunter Lewis, who lectured and wrote about her work, Ruth Humphrey, who typed and copy-edited her stories, and, most famously, Ira Dilworth. Her writing efforts, however, intensified after her 1937 heart attack during a period of convalescence. She wrote, completed, and revised stories about her sketching trips and her

encounters with Native people, life, and culture. Initially, her writing enjoyed greater success than her paintings: *Klee Wyck* won the Governor General's Award in 1941 and *The Book of Small*, which followed *Klee Wyck*, sold comparably well. Carr's creative output was channeled in different directions, aside from writing and painting: in 1905, Carr supplied *The Week* with cartoons that commented upon current affairs (Hembroff-Schleicher 1969, 69).

7. Letter to Nan Cheney, 27 March 1938, *Dear Nan*, ed. D. Walker 69. In "Alternative," she suggests that one advantage to her "double approach," that is, "[t]his saying in words as well as in colour and form," and to "wording" questions in her "little notebook" was that the latter helped to preserve "essentials only, [and to discard] everything of minor importance" (GP 460).

8. Dilworth notes that her "preoccupation with writing increased steadily" in later years: "She was conscious of the value of 'wording' her experiences as a means of clarifying them in preparation for painting. She was not, at any rate at first, conscious of any literary ambition in this writing" (1945, 16)

9. In *Stormy Weather*, Tippett notes that if Carr respected and admired their work, that respect did not necessarily extend to each member of the Group: "Varley made it known that he did not like Carr personally: he told one friend that she was masculine and dirty. Carr, characteristically, repaid Varley's compliment by calling him—in reference either to his cool temperament or to his drinking habits — 'a fish'" (171).

10. Harris believed the impact of the Group's paintings upon Carr to be extraordinary, in spite of the fact that she "pursued [Canadian landscape] the same as ourselves" before having been introduced to their work; in a lecture on "Art in Canada," presented on June 21, 1950, he asserts that after her visit to the East "she painted the best work of her career" and, perhaps overstating the case, that "that was the first notable effect of the work of the Group" (NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, vol. 4, file 13, 2).

11. In "Rejected," Carr writes that after he recommended the book, "I ran to town and bought a copy of *A Canadian Art Movement*, and read it from cover to cover" (GP 441). Housser was a "Whitman scholar, theosophist and personal friend of the group [with whom] he shared [. . .] an aesthetic vision that owed much to nineteenth-century transcendentalism, modern mystical religion and a passionate Canadian nationalism" (Blanchard 171). He also wrote *Whitman to America*, which Carr had read. On July 30, 1933, she wrote in her journal: "Fred knows his Whitman and Whitman knew life from the soul's standpoint. What glorious excursions he made into the unknown!" ("The Elephant," HT 687).

12. "Meeting with the Group of Seven, 1927," 17 November 1927, HT 657 - 658.

13. Tippett observes that Carr's correspondence with him helped to clarify "her aims and beliefs. Harris's replies were sympathetic, encouraging, suggestive, and gave her much-needed support. He advised her not to let her bouts of depression and feelings of isolation interfere with her task" (1979, 153). He eventually paid her the same kind of homage in an article entitled, "Emily Carr and her Work": "it is an art whose full sustenance is drawn from the soil and the sea, from great rocks and trees and the lush undergrowth of the Pacific slope and from the mystery of the sky"

(278).

14. Harris is regarded by many critics as most influential in Carr's life: Stephanie Kirkwood Walker argues that he "would facilitate her art and enlarge the dimensions of her spiritual life" (1996, 52). See also Linda Street, "Emily Carr: Lawren Harris and Theosophy, 1927-1933" (M.A. Thesis: Carleton U, 1979). Other critics seem to agree with this assessment: Anne Morrison, in "Harris: The Fruits of a Natural Growth," argues that "it was to a large extent her contact with Harris and his continued support of her work that gave her courage to paint" (17). MacKay asserts that Carr was undeniably influenced by Harris, who "chose to idealize and generalize forms in the interest of strong sculptural effects" (6). In addition, "he preached theosophy to her. With its pseudo-complexity, theatrical symbolism, and theory of progressive spiritual enlightenment, it seemed to offer Carr the guidance that she felt so strongly in need of in the late twenties and early thirties. Its emphasis on rhythms, 'natural order' and hierarchies, light and the symbolic function of the triangle were all reflected in her paintings of the time" (13). McKay also suggests that, from Harris, she "acquired an understanding of Post-Impressionist architectonics" (18). Laurence observes that the effect of the exhibition upon the canvases that followed was primarily in terms of scale, rather than in technique; he adds, however, that her "[c]ontact with the Group—and especially with Lawren Harris, their unofficial leader—inspired her to resume painting in a newly focussed and energized way" (18). Harris's influence also extends to the development of "her own understanding of the spiritual in art. It was the spiritual element in Harris's austere and reductive landscapes that first called out to Carr" (19). Notwithstanding her struggle with and reluctance to accept Theosophical principles which Harris advocated, especially since these principles were not in accord with her "long-established Christian beliefs," she did adopt Harris's notion that the artist's role involved a "higher moral purpose" (19). Ann Davis believes that it was at Harris's promptings that Carr "took her [search] increasingly into the forest [and] started to drop the Indian themes to concentrate on nature"; the trees Carr depicts, Davis adds, are "devotions on trees—attempts to probe the essence of treeness, to understand the rhythms, the laws of geometry and design that permeate trees. In this attempt she was following theosophical teaching: every form of plant life is built rhythmically, with every detail placed according to fixed laws of geometry and design" (1992, 107-108). Shadbolt argues that, as the direct result of Harris's influence, Carr "adapted to her own use a kind of massive sculptural stylization of nature forms. The object of this was primarily expressive, though it had its decorative aspect as well. Through him too she first came to be aware of transcendentalism as a goal for art" (1974, 30).

Carr apparently also credited Harris with changing her notions about how to approach Art: "the day I [. . .] was met by Mr. Harris and led into his tranquil studio,—that day my idea of Art wholly changed. I was done with the boil and ferment of restless, resentful artists, cudgelling their brains as to how to make Art pay, how to 'please the public.' Mr. Harris did not paint to please the public, he did not have to, but he would not have done so anyway" ("Lawren Harris," *GP* 452). In *Growing Pains*, Carr suggests that "[h]is work and example did more to influence my outlook upon Art than any school or any master. They had given me mechanical foundation. Lawren Harris looked higher, dug deeper. He did not seek to persuade others to climb his ladder. He steadied their own, while they got foot-hold" ("Lawren Harris" 452). She adds that it was also Harris "who first suggested I make [the] change" from relying upon "Indian material" to finding her own expression of the West (453).

15. *The House of All Sorts* and *The Heart of a Peacock* are least concerned with these impulses; the former revolves around her experience as a landlady, the latter around the menagerie of animals in her life. Her first book, *Klee Wyck* (1941), concerns her visits to remote Native settlements and her painting endeavours there, inasmuch as it deals with the formation and sensibility of “Klee Wyck”; *The Book of Small* (1942) deals with the subject of her childhood, her family, and life in Victoria, explored through the persona, “Small”; *The House of All Sorts* (1944) anecdotally captures her life as a landlady and that of the tenants with whom she often struggled, in addition to the sheep dogs she was breeding; *Growing Pains* (1946), as is suggested by the title, is an autobiographical account of her development as a person and an artist, and thus includes accounts of her travels and studies abroad; *Pause* (1953) reflects the eighteen months she spent in an English sanatorium; and *The Heart of a Peacock* (1953) is a compilation of stories that document her interest in animals, especially Woo, her pet monkey.

16. “Modern and Indian Art of the West Coast,” *Supplement to the McGill News*, 4.

17. Emily Carr, notebook, no date, as quoted in *Sunlight in the Shadows*, n.pag.

18. Carr’s writing career is not divided in this manner because she came to writing later in life. She remarks upon the latent spiritual facet of the West Coast forests and topography well before meeting the Group of Seven, as is indicated first by a journal entry around 1909: she describes the “appalling solemnity, majesty & silence” of a forest nearby Stanley Park as “the Holiest thing I ever felt” and that she was beginning “to see a glimmer of something beyond objectivity,” although she “could not express it” (BCARS, Emily Carr Papers, unpublished journals, as quoted in Tippet 1979, 73).

19. As Ian Thom observes in *Emily Carr: Drawing the Forest*, although Carr “was deeply committed to the goal of documenting what she believed to be the vanishing cultures of the First Nations of the region,” in this period she “had little real sense of her work participating in a larger modernist conversation” (n.pag.). Perhaps at the encouragement of Mark Tobey, who “was producing work at the time that was influenced by both modernist ideas and his explorations of spiritual matters,” and that of Lawren Harris, Carr was to become more self-conscious of her technique in the second phase of her painting. Later, therefore, she realized “that she was an artist participating in the development of a Canadian modernism, an art rooted in the landscape but which reflected larger artistic currents” (Thom n.pag.).

20. As quoted in Tippet 1979, 74-75. Gerta Moray also suggests another possibility for Carr’s interest in Native cultural artefacts: she met “William Halliday, the agent at Alert Bay who later became notorious as the most zealous figure in the suppression of the potlach during the 1920s. It is probable that her conversations with him added to her pessimism about the survival of native culture. They would certainly have impressed upon her the determination of the authorities to stamp out traditions” (1993, 164). In an unpublished notebook entry, Carr addresses her concern about Natives destroying totem poles because some “are becoming ashamed [. . .] fearing that the white people whom they are anxious to resemble will laugh at them” (as quoted in *Sunlight in the Shadows*, n.pag.).

21. BCARS, *Emily Carr Papers*, unpublished journals, as quoted in Tippet 1979, 75. The timing would have been deemed appropriate, since federal art institutions were enthusiastic about collecting “the cultural relics of Canada’s aboriginal peoples as part of the national heritage”: “it offered evidence of benevolent appreciation in Canadian cultural circles for the glories of a native traditional culture that was now relegated to the past” (Moray 1993, 15). If Carr is to be believed, these canvases were more concerned with the anthropological rather than the aesthetic impulse. That impulse explains why Carr contacted Henry Esson Young, the provincial secretary and Minister of Education, to solicit the province to purchase her paintings for the “new wing of the government buildings in Victoria [which] was to include a picture gallery” and to fund future sketching trips. Dr. Charles F. Newcombe was engaged by Young to evaluate the anthropological, rather than artistic, value of Carr’s work. The emphasis on the anthropological, historical facet of her collection is also emphasized by Carr herself (Gowers 53). Newcombe was an astute observer of the ironies and hypocrisies of white practice: he apprehended “the irony of salvaging for the white man what the white man had conspired so energetically to destroy” (Blanchard 134). Given his long-standing friendship with Carr, it is likely they discussed such notions.

Other critics believe that Carr valorized Native art and culture because, in part, it had “anthropological interest, for many of the poles and houses which she painted were to disappear very shortly” (Shadbolt 1974, 24). Gowers corroborates the fact that Emily “had been struck anew by the necessity of recording the Indians’ traditions before it was too late: she had seen too many community houses and totem poles abandoned, rotting, in some cases deliberately destroyed by Indians converted to Christianity who were now ashamed of their former pagan ways, to have any illusion that the old ways was safe” (52). Sitka, a Tlingit village, was Carr’s “first full exposure to native sculpture” and was first seen by Carr in August 1907 on a trip with her sister to Alaska (Blanchard 109). As “settlement and economic development of the province reached its peak of momentum in the first two decades of the century,” Native communities were increasingly being displaced, and their culture increasingly threatened (Moray 1993, 14). Moray notes that in 1913, a “Royal Commission on Indian reserve lands moved into action as the result of a series of violent incidents and organized native protests that had expressed native anger and distress at white occupation of hitherto native lands, and at the inadequacy of the reserves provided by the provincial government. Carr’s attempt to create a visual survey of Indian villages was thus not only professionally venturesome, but let her into politically troubled territory” (73-74). The rhetoric Carr was employing was common at that time: Natives were described as “noble, proud, authentic” when contextualized in the past, but seen as “defeated, directionless, exotic shadows of their former selves” (76). She had been reading Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Man*, in which she had underlined all the passages that mentioned the Indian. The image therein was closely allied to that being perpetuated during Carr’s time: a romantic image of the Indian who was seen to embody the most worthy natural attributes of humankind. Even A. Y. Jackson, on a trip with Marius Barbeau in 1926 to the Skeena River, believed Native art to be disappearing: “When we were in the area they were no longer being made, but the few remaining totem poles kept alive the memory of days when the tribes were numerous and powerful. [ . . . ] The big powerful tribes, Tsimshians, Tlingits and Haidas, have dwindled to a mere shadow of their former greatness. They produce little to-day in the way of art” (PC 109, 111).

Robin Laurence observes that “[a] conflict is evident, however, between the ideas and techniques Emily Carr learned in France and her desire to truthfully record the poles and villages

of Northwest Coast native people. The documentary impulse behind her 1907 resolution clashed with modernist self-expression, with her new longing to simply form, juice up her brush strokes, employ heightened or non-naturalistic colour, and experiment with two-dimensional patterns. [. . .] the evolved forms and traditions of one culture are uncomfortably overlaid with the experimental techniques of another” (15). Since her trip to France, Carr’s style of painting had become complicated as much as refined. In France, Carr learned to shift her attention “from the depiction of subject to the process of picture-making itself: to the life she can create on the surface, as pattern, colour and texture become concerns in themselves” (Shadbolt 21). In addition, she was affected by the theories of Clive Bell, who esteemed “primitive art for its freedom from descriptive qualities and its absolute purity of purpose, based as he felt it was on a passionate desire for expression”: Carr adopted those qualities and applied them to her own canvases (Street 31). Her paintings, therefore, were rejected on the grounds that they were not precisely documentary in nature: she was employing a modernist approach—a Fauvist palette and Post-Impressionist techniques—to render the Native villages and totem poles. As Carr was to discover, artistic and documentary tendencies were often at odds: “on the one hand she was trying to convince people of the accuracy of her record, and on the other she was trying to win their respect for the artist’s vision of the world” (Blanchard 136). Marcia Crosby is the first art historian to critique Carr’s work—and all of the reviews that praised Carr uncritically—for the “assumptions of loss and salvage” that underlie her canvases: “the paintings represent the land as devoid of its original owners [. . .] thus lending tacit support for the actual dispossession of the property of First Nations people” (274).

22. If Carr employs Native imagery, and on occasion, makes reference to Natives themselves in both her writing and her painting, in *Klee Wyck* she “does not valorize Indians as Rousseauesque noble savages,” although, as Penny Petrone notes, her sketches are at times “endearing, slightly sentimental” (Lynch 128; Petrone 96). Although Pearson claims that “Carr understood the Indians fully and loved them,” her interpretive approach to Native culture and to Natives themselves is affected by the imperialist notions to which she had been exposed (31). This is most evident in the fact that, upon her return from Paris, she employs a Fauvist colour scheme to interpret the scarcely accessible, distant Native villages and Native totem poles and tried to pass these paintings off as a form of documentary rather than devising a method that suited the subject matter at hand, what she endeavours to accomplish in her later paintings. Part of the difficulty was Carr’s confusion about the purpose of her renderings: her efforts to pass these paintings off as a form of documentary about Native culture, which she believed was on the verge of extinction, suggests that she considered her work as realistic and anthropologically useful as well as aesthetic.

23. Robert Fulford remarks that Carr did not appropriate “Indian art for the use of whites, and [ignore] the native culture of her own time. [. . .] As Moray shows, she was not an artist seizing on Indian art for purely formalist reasons; all to the contrary, her art was a public, political act, owning as much to her civic conscience as to her artistic sensibility. She specifically opposed the white authorities, whether missionaries or government employees, who were urging natives to change their way of life, and she saw the totem poles as part of ‘an integrated and complex native culture.’” (38). He adds that Carr also perceived that if Natives desired to assimilate, they “were ignoring or destroying the evidence of their cultural past, and she wanted to persuade them that this art was worth saving” (39). Aside from Fulford and Moray, whose respective critical work

demonstrates how Carr's work was not a form of appropriation but of homage to Native culture, Laurence also shows how her work "reflected a sincere desire to preserve evidence of what Carr understood to be disappearing cultural forms" (11-12). Her work was a small attempt to counterbalance the cessation of the creation of totem poles of such "northern tribal groups as the Haida and Tsimshian"; the totem poles "appeared to be under threat, carried away for museums and private collectors, damaged by weather, neglect or vandalism. Those left standing in deserted villages were rotting or being consumed by the rain forest" (12). Over the span of twenty-three years, she visits approximately thirty Native villages from which she makes sketches and drawings that served for the production of full canvases later back in the studio (12). He concludes that whereas "she could be criticized for a benign racism that generalized and romanticized native people and culture, she also could be admired for lobbying her positive observations at the stony wall of social and cultural prejudice, for arguing against the negative stereotypes about natives that existed in the minds of her white audience. Emily Carr also promoted the great accomplishments of native artists as a valuable part of Canadian cultural heritage" (Laurence 16).

24. Emily Carr's Notebook, April 1913, as quoted in *Sunlight in the Shadows*, n.pag.

25. Moray argues that the authors of the catalogue "made much of the concept that native work was 'entirely national in its origin and character [. . .] truly Canadian in inspiration. It has sprung up wholly from the soil and the sea within our national boundaries'" (1993, 22).

26. Minute Book, Gallery Committee, Vancouver City Archives, British Columbia Art League, 26 October and 25 November 1926, as quoted in Tippet 1979, 132.

27. *Strangled by Growth* is considered by Ruth Gowers to be a transitional painting because it manifests her love of both Native imagery and forest scenes: "a totem pole almost engulfed by the encroachment of vigorously-growing branches" (76).

28. Carr has been criticized today, "especially by Native writers, for summoning up the presence of Native history in the landscape in a way that precludes the real contemporary Native (Crosby 267); they are monophonic, they seem only dense enough to carry one voice, that of the white artist, for whom Native culture has a strictly symbolic value" (Linsley 1994, 211).

29. BCARS, Emily Carr Papers, Lauren Harris, letter to Emily Carr, 4 November 1932, as quoted in Tippet 1979, 175-6.

30. Emily Carr, letter to E. Hembroff-Schleicher, 15 March 1937. As reproduced in *M.E.: A Portrayal of Emily Carr* (101). The difference between the journals and her letters, as S. Walker notes, is that "the metaphysical situation of the artist predominates in her journals," whereas the letters capture "the immediacy of daily living and the inexorability of time passing" (1996, 20). In both forms, Carr documents the fact that her "greatest source of joy and inspiration was the woods and seashore where she could sit in silence and absorb the all-pervading vibrations of earth, sea and sky, light and shadow, soaring trees and dancing saplings, and then paint with great rapidity, powerfully aware that she and all things were parts of an Infinite Whole—the Living Universe" (Burns 235).

31. NG, Correspondence with Artists, Emily Carr to Eric Brown, 30 June 1938, 7.1 C.
32. "Meeting with the Group of Seven, 1927," 13 December 1927, *HT* 665; 27 November 1927, *HT* 661. Later, she asserts that for both of "us religion and art are one" ("Beckley Street," 10 May 1936, *HT* 826).
33. "Meeting with the Group of Seven, 1927," 5 December 1927, *HT* 662. The Royal Canadian Academy apparently did accept some of the paintings by Group members for their exhibits.
34. "The Elephant," 16 July 1933, *HT* 683.
35. "The Elephant," 17 July 1933, *HT* 684.
36. "Moving Forward," 12 April 1933, *HT* 734.
37. "Spring and Summer," *GP* 786.
38. "A Tabernacle in the Wood" 19 September 1934, *HT* 799; 11 October 1934, *HT* 799. She concludes this entry with the following: "If you face [the growth] calmly, claiming relationship, standing honestly before the trees, recognizing one Creator of you and them, one life pulsing through all, one mystery engulfing all, then you can say with the Psalmist who looked for a place to build a tabernacle to the Lord, I 'found it in the hills and in the fields of the wood'" (28 November 1934, 804). In an earlier entry, "Drawing and Insubordination," she also refers to figuratively ingesting the woods: her horse "nibbled" on the grass, she "at the deep sacred beauty of Canada's still woods" (*GP* 307).
39. In "Rejected," Carr wrote that especially the canvases of Harris evinced a strong spiritual and emotional reaction: "They had torn me; they had waked something in me that I had thought quite killed, the passionate desire to express some attribute of Canada" (*GP* 442).
40. "A Tabernacle in the Wood," 11 October 1933, *HT* 799; "Simcoe Street," 27 January 1933, *HT* 678.
41. "Home Again," *GP* 344, 345.
42. "Hospital," 16 April 1937, *HT* 861.
43. "Simcoe Street," 27 January 1933, *HT* 678.
44. "Greenville," *KW* 51. Jock MacDonald believed: "in my opinion she is undoubtedly the first artists in the country and a genius without question" (NG, letter to McCurry, 24 October 1938, vol. 7, file 1, as quoted in Tippett 1979).
45. "A Century of Canadian Art," *Manchester Guardian Weekly* (14 Oct. 1938): 337.
46. Women were generally "excluded from full participation in the institutions of art, deprived of a place in the production of meaning, left in a category of their own to paint domestic scenes"

(94). Evidence of such exclusion is evident even in some of Carr's art colleagues: Nan Cheney, in a letter to Carr dated July 10, 1939, claimed that "I missed doing a portrait of Dr Klinck as he wouldn't have a woman paint him" (*Dear Nan*, ed. D. Walker 186).

47. Yet, in response to inquiries about her activities as an artist in the woods, Carr writes that "the creature did not know I was as indigenous to these woods as a pine tree" (Emily Carr's notes, no date, as quoted in *Sunlight in the Shadows*, n. pag.)

48. This may also extend to female and male approaches to painting, although Carr infrequently makes reference to such ideas in her journals.

49. Blanchard observes that "Until recently the history of art in Canada, at least as perceived by historians, had been thoroughly male, and writers of the day tended to consign 'women painters' to a separate category. Women were not admitted to full membership in the Royal Canadian Academy, and even in literal circles there was an informal tradition of exclusion. [ . . . ] she was right to perceive that to [the Group of Seven] she was an outsider, not only as a westerner but also as a woman" (177). Goodman and Regan also add that this sense of space, "physical, psychic, artistic, political," and associated with the First Nations peoples of British Columbia, was denied her by "her late Victorian (post)colonial 'community'" (157). Given her anecdotes about her rebellious spirit as a child, however, one may conjecture that she was searching for "space" or freedom from the social and cultural limitations imposed upon her, and that she seemed to find it in the land itself, even if the Native peoples of British Columbia facilitated the process.

50. She suggests that, in *The Book of Small*, "Small" "reflects as much about the restricted space a staunch Victoria upbringing allowed a vibrant and sensitive girl as it does about the author's age and place in the family" (30).

51. "Singing," *BS* 109.

52. Morra 7. John O'Brian observes that West Coast artists themselves question "the precise kind of legacy she left behind her and how these works should be read in relation to the region's colonial past and its post-colonial present" (8).

53. There are still other critics who emphasize Native subject matter and influence in Carr's paintings, and remark upon the development of and innovations in a style that became recognized as distinctly Canadian, and yet that was independent of any relation to the subject matter. In *Northwest Coast Culture and the Early Indian Paintings of Emily Carr, 1899-1913*, Gerta Moray constructs a "more historically and specifically focussed investigation of Carr's changing contacts with and interpretations of the very diverse native cultures of the west coast" (1993, 51).

54. "Simcoe Street," 17 June 1930, *HT* 674.

55. Carr "had as little possible to do with institutions or formalities of any kind during her lifetime" (Daniels 1962, 119). That Carr continuously expressed frustration with the lack of attention to her work is evidence that the systems and institutions outside of which she was operating would not support her unconventional artistic pursuits. Painting as a career was not a

conventional option for women in this period: art was considered a pastime, “as a minor and lady-like social grace, not as a social force” (Harris 1945, 20). Within her own family, she was considered to have been an anomaly, her paintings to have been “a hushed thing in the family. something not quite-quite” (Carr, letter to Nan Cheney, 17 October 1938, *Dear Nan*, ed. D. Walker 114).

56. A number of critics have correlated her interest in nature with her love for Whitman, although his work was also a self-proclaimed influence upon Carr: “When I want to realize growth and immortality more, I go back to Walt Whitman—he sure had a grip of it. *Everything* seemed to take such a hand in the everlasting on-going with him—eternal overflowing & spilling of things into the universe & nothing lost” (Letter to Ruth Humphrey, 25 April 1938, “Letters from Emily Carr” 128). Carr records in one letter that “I love Walt W[h]itman he takes you right out & up. & hits the spot every time & is so understandable. I’ve learnt heaps of him by heart” (16); and in another that, after a hard week, “I went to Walt Whitman I never tire of him. Song of the rolling Earth. Song of Myself” (*Dear Nan*, ed. D. Walker 66). Shadbolt asserts that “the poetry of Walt Whitman was an important influence in the development of her ideas; his *Leaves of Grass* was virtually her bible. On sketching trips it was a constant companion, and she found time to read from it every day” (1974, 58). Tippett notes that, aside from Whitman, Carr was also influenced by the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Raja Sing, as well as numerous other books: they were seminal “in her search for a deeper experience of the informing spirit and for the means by which she could be raised into another dimension of being. While Emily never embraced any of these doctrines fully, each lecture, sermon, and book not only confirmed her feeling that God could be found in nature, but convinced her that communion with Him through her art could elevate her soul to a oneness with the divine universe” (1979, 178).

57. A number of critics have seen Carr’s relationship with nature as informed by feminist concerns. As Gerald Lynch argues in *The One and the Many* (2001), however, it is not critically responsible to view Carr as “a kind of fully formed and feminist idolater of Nature and Native civilization,” as such critics as Helen Buss (1993), Susan Crean (2001), and Walker have argued (115). Hilda Thomas also suggests that one of the critical traps in studying Carr is the tendency toward “romanticizing Carr’s attitude towards both the native peoples and women, of appropriating her text by means of insufficiently grounded notions of ‘the goddess,’ or unsubstantiated dreams of matriarchal power” (5). This is the kind of critical quagmire into which Rimstead—and one might add Goodman and Regan, Monika Langer, and, at times, Walker—falls when she argues that if “female heroes feel a close affinity with nature and native animism it is often because, from their marginal position, they see society as the engulfing monster which threatens to enclose them in restrictive roles (unlike Frye’s male hero who fears being engulfed by nature)” (37). Lynch notes that “she is both mistakenly radicalizing reading options along gender lines and misprisioning Frye” (116).

58. Walker is here making reference to Alex Owen’s study, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England*, as support for her assessment about Carr’s writing.

59. In *Hundreds and Thousands*, Carr discusses her abandonment of theosophical principles in order to “feel a real God” and later, on May 22, 1934, how “theosophy makes me shudder now. It was reading H. Blavatsky that did it, her intolerance and particularly her attitude to Christianity” (“Moving Forward,” 29 January 1934, *HT* 722; “Noah’s Ark,” *HT* 744). Carr was raised as a Presbyterian (her father’s religious background) and an Anglican (her mother’s) (see *BS*, “The Blessing” 105); her inability to accommodate the Theosophical inclinations of Harris and the Houssers relates to their “denial of the divinity of Christ,” and their belief that He ‘was *only a good man*’” (BCARS, Cheney Papers, Carr, letter to Cheney, 22 December 1940, as quoted in Tippet 1979, 210). If Carr dabbled in Theosophy for a few years, she returned to her original beliefs, without rigorously practising the forms associated with them. Laurence adds that the impact of both Theosophy and even Whitman’s Transcendentalism remained and are manifested in “works that express the divine spirit in all things—and the endless cycle of nature. Trees are anthropomorphized into beings, young and extroverted or old and reserved, and the forest itself opens up, dark interiors giving way to unexpected clearings and bright patches of new growth” (22). MacKay argues that the inheritance of Theosophy shows itself in her desire to express “what she perceived as the underlying unity of nature. She thought of art and life holistically and expressed herself in romantic and spiritual terms”: “driven by a pantheist fervour to celebrate God’s animation of and presence in every facet of nature,” and feeling confident about rejecting Theosophical principles, MacKay concludes that her sketches became lighter and more variegated (6; 15).

60. In a letter to Humphrey Toms, she claimed that the “spiritual meaning” of a nation was vastly more important than its “national traditions,” the “weak & sentimental side as a nation” (4 December 1940, *Dear Nan*, ed. D. Walker 274).

61. As quoted in Rimstead 33.

62. “Simcoe Street,” 7 June 1933, *HT* 680.

63. S. Walker suggests that the “modernist move toward abstraction [. . .] was articulated as a spiritual endeavour peripheral to conventional religious behaviour” (1996, 21).

64. “Moving Forward,” 24 April 1934, *HT* 737.

65. Carr writes: “a name would weight it and keep it down. It could not have a name of this world because it is of another. One day we will go out and meet it in another world and then we will know its name because we will understand that language” (24 April 1934, *HT* 738).

66. “Rejected,” *GP* 444.

67. “Simcoe Street,” 2 December 1930, *HT* 677. Catherine Sheldrick Ross interprets this desire to find a new language as part of a ritual of initiation: “White establishment culture has withheld something each central character needs to know in order to become a complete woman” (87). There is very little by way of Carr’s journals and stories to support that finding a new language relates to her development as a “complete woman.” Any reference Carr makes in terms of forming a new language is made in relation to a number of spiritually-altering or transcendent experiences,

of which her viewing of the totem poles is included, and these experiences are not consistently related to gender.

68. That she believes a language exists is evident in her claim in "Vancouver" that the "Indian's language was unwritten": "his family's history was handed down by means of carvings and totemic emblems painted on his things" (GP 427).

69. "Simcoe Street," 12 November 1931, HT 675.

70. 6 September 1934, HT 761.

71. "Beckley Street," "Good Friday" 1936, HT 822.

72. "Green," GP 457.

73. Emily Carr, letter to Ira Dilworth, 14 February 1942, as quoted in *Sunlight in the Shadows*, n.pag.

74. Rimstead argues that the "wilderness passages" of *Klee Wyck* in particular seem "to point beyond romantic flight, which is fundamentally transcendent, to a more earthy and holistic attachment to the particularity of place" (35); both specificity, the "earthiness" that Rimstead identifies, and transcendence, the sublime experience, are at work in Carr's response and artistic endeavours. Peter Stich confirms this notion when he argues that Carr's "word-consciousness grows out of the liberal Protestant tradition of transcendentalism; she appears to play a Whitmanesque role for her spiritual needs" (165). Johanne Lamoureux argues that if "the sublime is the notion of something unrepresentable that goes beyond intellectualism for which the representation will try to compensate but also try to convey the fact that it remains unrepresentable," then there is a foundation for arguing that the sublime is present in Carr's creative endeavours ("Excerpts" 94).

75. "Meeting with the Group of Seven, 1927" 15 November 1927, HT 657.

76. There is no evidence that she read Samuel Johnson's work, but a passage from "Preface to Shakespeare," in which he asserts that the poet is "the interpreter of Nature" and must strive to capture "general truths" not the "number [of] the streaks of the tulip," seems to be resonating here (208-09).

77. As quoted in Gowers 50. Carr ostensibly condemned photography because, as she claimed, it was a limited medium:

The camera cannot comment.

The camera cannot select.

The camera cannot feel, it is purely mechanical. [. . .]

The camera has no mind. (1930, 3)

She occasionally employed photographs, however, in the artistic process. Tippett has also discovered that she sometimes employed them "to check the accuracy of her often-hurried watercolour sketches when making finished oils and watercolours in the studio" (1979, 108).

Hembroff-Schleicher also suggests that her painting *Blunden Harbour* is an exception in that “it is one of the few of her canvases done entirely from a photograph—perhaps the only one”: “One day when I dropped into her studio, she was sitting before the easel putting the last touches to this canvas. Tacked on the right side of the easel frame was a photograph of fair size. She had painted her own background but the totems themselves, the wharf and the canoes, were taken from the photograph, with only superficial change” (1969, 56).

78. See Acts 17:23.

79. Emily Carr’s unpublished journal, 10 December 1935, as quoted in *Sunlight in the Shadows*, n.pag.

80. “Moving Forward,” 19 December 1933, *HT* 718. In “Westminster Abbey—Architectural Museum,” Carr impugns English approaches to painting on similar grounds: “Why must these people go on, and on, copying, copying fragments of old relics from extinct churches, and old tombs as though those were the best that *could ever* be, and that it would be a sacrilege to beat them? Why didn’t they *want* to outdo the best instead of copying, always copying what had been done?” (*GP* 356).

81. Lismer and Group members also subscribed to such ideas. In one of the objectives cited for a book project, Lismer argued that “a photograph *generalizes*, it tells everything. A work of art *emphasizes* the significance of characteristic things—through the artist we become aware of the character of our lakes and mountains, seaports and villages, etc” (NAC, Arthur Lismer Fonds, MG 30 D 218, Projected Book History, ts., vol. 2, file 6).

82. “Difference Between Nude and Naked” 317.

83. “Meeting with the Group of Seven, 1927,” 14 November 1927, *HT* 656.

84. In *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*, James Clifford argues that, after the First World War, in relation to the interest in the primitive as a source of the aesthetic, “for every local custom or truth there was always an exotic alternative, a possible juxtaposition or incongruity. Below (psychologically) and beyond (geographically) ordinary reality there existed another reality” (120-21). Carr seems to be interested in meaning “below” the surface (what Clifford sees as the psychological), “beyond” it (what he describes as “geographical”), and then the resulting experience that was “above,” that is, the transcendent.

85. “Trip to Chicago,” 14 October 1933, *HT* 701-02. On August 12, 1933, she writes how she is motivated by the search “for higher, more uplifting inspiration”: “I find that raising my eyes slightly above what I am regarding so that the thing is a little out of focus seems to bring the spiritual into clearer vision, as though there were something lifting the material up to the spiritual, bathing it in the above glory” (“The Elephant,” *HT* 688).

86. Mary Cecil Allen, *Painters of the Modern Mind* (New York, 1929), 76-7. As quoted in Tippet 1979, 179. Tippet cites A.M. Berry’s chapter on “Movement and Rhythm” in *Animals in Art* (1929) as another influential text in which Carr underscored passages related to how

movement was observed in nature and conveyed in art: “Reading Allen and Berry not only reinforced her previous ideas of volume and form, of tension and structure, of reducing an object to its barest essence in order to reveal its spirit, and of using nature as a source for that inspiration; the books also impressed on her the concept of rhythm, of the unity of part to whole, of balance and transition in movement and colour” (182). Her reading was further enhanced by Horace Shipp’s study of the British artist Lawrence Atkinson, *The New Art* (1929): “Shipp explained how Atkinson relied on his subconscious to explore the structure and relationship of planes and masses, the directions of growth and movement in every object” (Tippett 1979, 182).

As evidence of Carr’s increasing sense of the spiritual as manifested in her journals, Ann Davis cites Carr’s copy of Katherine Drier’s book, *Western Art and the new Era* in which Carr has “annotated and underlined [. . .] heavily” various parts (1992, 110). Specifically, Davis suggests that Carr was fascinated by Drier’s emphasis on “the artist’s quest to discover the innate spirituality in everything and the potential of art to develop the soul”; she asserted that “all art stems from the ‘great spiritual forces that continue to unfold and develop the spirit of man’; she stressed the necessity to be true to one’s inner nature while at the same time going beyond the merely personal” (110-112).

87. Emily Carr’s notes, no date, as quoted in *Sunlight in the Shadows*, n.pag.

88. AGO, Marjorie Lismer Bridges Collection, Arthur Lismer, “Old Arts on New Soil,” broadcast, 27 February 1953, 1.

89. Letter to Nan Cheney, 7 February 1932, *Dear Nan*, ed. D. Walker 13.

90. Emily Carr’s notes, no date, as quoted in *Sunlight in the Shadows*, n.pag.

91. “Meeting with the Group of Seven, 1927,” *HT* 655.

92. In another entry, Carr writes, “Sketching in the big woods is wonderful. You go, find a space wide enough to sit in and clear enough so that undergrowth is not drowning you. Then, being elderly, you spread your campstool and sit and look around. ‘Don’t see much just here.’ ‘Wait.’ Out comes a cigarette. The mosquitoes back away from the smoke Everything is green. Everything is waiting and still. Slowly things begin to move, slip into their places. Groups and masses and lines tie themselves together. Colours you had not noticed come out, timidly or boldly” (“A Tabernacle in the Wood,” September 1935, *HT* 793).

93. “Simcoe Street,” 26 January 1933, *HT* 677.

94. “Simcoe Street,” 3 November 1932, *HT* 675.

95. Carr declared that, among other reasons, she loved trees because they “are so much more sensible than people. steadier & more enduring” (Letter to Nan Cheney, 20 March 1932, *Dear Nan*, ed. D. Walker 17).

96. In an anonymous letter to the *Province* on April 3, 1912, Carr was attacked as an arrogant artist who believed she could improve “nature in all her sublimity.” Carr responded, interestingly

employing European valorization as support, as follows: “With the warm kindly criticisms of some of the best men in Paris still ringing my ears, why should I bother over criticisms of those whose ideals and views have been stationary for the past twenty years? When the “Paris Salon” has accepted and hung well two of my pictures, why be otherwise than amused at the criticisms of one who gives no name” (*Province*, 8 April 1912).

97. The Director of the California School of Design was Arthur F. Mathews, who had returned from studying at the Académie Julian in Paris and under whom Carr learned about “drawing from the antique” (63).

98. Emily is largely unimpressed by English landscape; Tregenna wood, a forested hill in St. Ives, is one of few exceptions for which Carr did not express disdain. The forests of England, she claimed, were “huge and grand but tamed. [. . .] The forest was almost like a garden—no brambles, no thorns, nothing to stumble over, no rotten stumps, no fallen branches, all mellow to look at” (“Martyn,” *GP* 384).

99. Her studies were not continuous. She apparently suffered a nervous breakdown as the result of a number of pressures: “the spiritual deprivation of the city, the pressures of time and money, the uninspiring state of English art in general, her shaky physical health, the social factors that forced women to see marriage as a vocation in itself, the subtle prejudices that discouraged them from aiming at the very highest rank of artistic achievement” directly contributed to the pressure Carr experienced (Blanchard 94).

100. BCARS, Emily Carr Papers, unpublished manuscript, as quoted in Thom 1991, 8.

101. Blanchard 115; “France,” *GP* 432.

102. Although Carr had met Tobey in the early 1920s, he visited Carr in 1928, “at which time he made a Cubist derived painting in her studio” (MacKay 13). MacKay observes that by the 1930s, on the “advice of Lawren Harris and Mark Tobey,” Carr began to turn her “attention from Indian totems, and towards the forests and beaches in and around Victoria” (7). At the same time, she began to use oils in lieu of watercolours, possibly, as MacKay speculates, “because she felt that it did not provide her with a powerful or versatile enough means for depicting the massive, volumetric forms of trees in the western forests” (7).

103. Carr also claimed that there were no art schools in Victoria at the time. Perhaps as a corrective to the lack of artistic instruction and art-related institutions in both Victoria and Vancouver, Carr offered her own services as an art instructor and made arrangements in her will to foster indigenous art: “Emily founded the Emily Carr Trust Collection by which she willed 170 of her best work in oils, watercolour, and black and white to the Province of British Columbia on condition that they be permanently housed and exhibited at the Vancouver Art Gallery as there was then no gallery in Victoria. In addition she left 500 other works to be sold for the benefit of the Emily Carr Scholarship Fund to assist young, talented British Columbia artists. [. . .] By these two unique and magnificent gifts Emily Carr enriched the artistic and historical heritage of the people of British Columbia” (Burns 238).

104. "Vancouver," *GP* 427.

105. "The Other Side of Life," *GP* 392.

106. "Meeting with the Group of Seven, 1927," 5 December 1927, *HT* 661.

107. Part of the difficulty in adopting such techniques resided in the fact that England was different in terms of its topography and atmosphere: it was "pretty," whereas that of Canada was "sublime." The other part related to sheer artistic preference borne of familiarity: "This is my own country. [ . . . ] England is pretty and—orderly. One misses the mountains and woods. I do not mean to detract from the beauty of English scenery, but I suppose it is natural to prefer the scenes one has always been accustomed to" (*Week* [Victoria] 17 Feb. 1905: 1).

108. Later in life, Carr differentiates between England and London: "you will see I think that I did love *country* England It was London & the english worship of traditions that riled me" (Letter to Humphrey Toms, 12 March 1944, *Dear Nan*, ed. D. Walker 403). Such views coincide with her insistence upon sincerity and her deep aversion to hypocrisy or "posing." Her aversion to English culture apparently begins with childhood and is seen by many critics as a way of redirecting her hostility toward her father, "a forceful personality" who apparently "clung to the rules of English middle-class decorum" and whose "preoccupation with form and propriety kept him identified, in [Carr's] mind, with the Old Country" (Blanchard 16; 47). She resented and rebelled against his authority, even though he was also the person who encouraged her artistic abilities: when she was still a child, he paid her five gold pieces for his portrait. In spite of his apparent show of support, Carr observed that "I was always made to feel a waster & blighter. when I dabbled in paint—family would say. can't you do this or that, youre' not *doing anything* meaning that I was only sitting painting or going out sketching" (Letter to Nan Cheney, 27 March 1938, *Dear Nan*, ed. D. Walker 69). According to Carr, Richard Carr valorized English culture as against any sense of Canadian-ness, a notion that was consolidated for Emily by his decision first to settle in Victoria, a Canadian city "more British than Britain," and also to cultivate an English garden to which he tended carefully:

Father wanted his place to look exactly like England. He planted cowslips and primroses and hawthorn hedges and all the Englishy flowers. He had stiles and meadows and took away all the wild Canadian-ness and made it as meek and English as he could. [ . . . ] Everything about [the garden] was extremely English. It was as though Father had buried a tremendous homesickness in this new soil and it had rooted and sprung up English. ("Sunday," *BS* 93; "Beginnings," *BS* 137)

Carr suggests that, by contrast, she preferred the "Cow Yard," which is a precursor to how she would view West Coast topography and which represents freedom and unconventionality, a space in which she was able to revise and construct her own social and moral codes. Yet Richard Carr is also regarded as the first who "roused her interest in native peoples of North America. [ . . . ] Her enthusiasm for the forest and its people was nurtured by her father and his accounts of his adventures" (Gowers 11). Tippett observes that Richard Carr left England because, as he recorded in his own journal, he discovered that the English "are not exactly what I thought they were" (Diary of Richard Carr, 84, as quoted in Tippett 1979, 4).

Another reason for her resistance to English-ness is suggested in a letter to Nan Cheney in

which she implies that she found the English condescending toward Canadians:

[t]hose beastly type English who think Canadians only fit to wipe their boots on, you know the type coming out without money or ability & slanging the colonies & taking, taking, all they can get. we used to get millions of them particularly in B.C. because they considered it the *most* English place to come to they were Canada's worst Trial. (9 January 1941, *Dear Nan*, ed. D. Walker 285)

Apparently, this attitude has its roots during her residence in London, when she felt herself categorized as “a colonial, a status that had a taint of inferiority” (Tippett 1979, 36). Tippett adds that Carr thus took pleasure in her nonconformity, “raising what she felt were her and her country's virtues of honesty, forthrightness, and naturalness to the point of exaggeration” (37). She demonstrated the same kind of contempt for missionaries, whom she saw as “Ultra-English” and who “used the Bible as a ‘civilizing’ influence on children, native Indians and other assorted barbarians” and, finally, for private schoolmistresses from England, who apparently had come to Canada to erase the “Canadian-ness” from Canadians (Blanchard 47):

Politeness-education ladies had migrated to Canada [. . .] to teach the young of English-born gentlemen how not to become Canadian, to believe that all niceness and goodness came from ancestors and could have nothing to do with the wonderful new land, how not to acquire Colonial deportment, which was looked on as crude, almost wicked. (“Schools,” *BS* 160)

In a letter to Humphrey Toms, dated December 4, 1940, she criticizes her female contemporaries for adhering to behavioural patterns that are based on English notions of superiority: “the women middle-class, prim. wouldnt dream of crossing the street without gloves & umbrellas—well they mind their own business anyhow but they are not alive just *very respectably dead*” (*Dear Nan*, ed. D. Walker 275). Carr was exposed to the same kind of upbringing, even if she resisted such cultural norms.

Ira Dilworth suggests that this attitude manifested itself when she was merely homesick for Canada: “she was longing for its freedom and freshness; London stifled her. As a result she felt seriously ill and had to live for more than two years in a sanatorium. One of her doctors there said, ‘Oh these Canadians! They're used to too much space. To put one of them down in London is like planting a pine tree in a flower pot’” (Roy Dunlop Fonds, MG 30 D 349, CBC broadcast, c. 1944, vol. 1, file 20, 6).

109. Her own sisters reflected the established social—and English—codes by adhering to such Christian practices as mission work, (which challenged Carr's own affinity with Native views and practices); by conforming to the approved behavioural standards for women (they were to be self-effacing and gentle); and by expressing disapproval, according to Carr, of her work. According to Blanchard, with respect to Emily's paintings, “both sisters [Lizzie and Alice] typically greeted Emily's work with silence, broken in Lizzie's case by pointed references to Emily's lack of commercial success” (85). Whereas her sisters conformed to social and political expectations for women at the time, Carr resisted these expectations when she decided not to attend church with them regularly and when she decided to take on artistic pursuits as a full-time career, rather than as merely a pastime.

110. *The Vancouver Province* 3 April 1912, as quoted in Thom 35.

111. Stewart notes that, on her “early field trips,” she employed watercolour almost exclusively (11). In terms of method, Carr also forged an innovative approach in relation to materials, an approach that was rendered necessary by her financial limitations. Hembroff-Schleicher notes that she “was faced with the need to economize; she couldn’t keep up her usual scale of productivity without cutting down on expense somewhere. White paint and paper made the biggest dent in her pocketbook so she experimented with tins of ordinary white house paint of a good quality and bought large sheets of cheap Manila paper in wholesale quantities. This Manila paper, besides being cheap, had two added advantages: it provided a larger painting surface on which she could interpret more freely her wood subjects, and it gave her sketches of a standardized size, which simplified exhibiting and framing” (1969, 41-2). In addition, she mixed her paints with gasoline, so that the consistency and transparency resembled water colours.

112. S. Walker explicates how the pursuit “of meaning bears traces of belief in a traditional Christian omniscient God” (1996, 12); yet, Carr, like the Group, did not adhere strongly to any religious institution or belief system.

113. “Hopes and Doldrums,” 5 July 1934, *HT* 754.

114. “Rejected,” *GP* 443. Nan Cheney asserted that living in the West created the experience of feeling “cut off [from the East]—Those mountains seem to be the dividing line” (Letter to Eric Brown, 29 March 1938, *Dear Nan*, ed. D. Walker 72). Contrary to what Carr might have believed, Jackson appreciated Carr’s work, both visual and verbal, and believed that she should have been “recognized years earlier” (MCAC, A. Y. Jackson Papers, letter to “Reg,” 30 October 1966).

115. *Dear Nan*, ed. D. Walker 251. Indeed, her love for Western Canada apparently so permeated her artistic approach in relation to her writing, painting, pottery and so forth, that, Carol Pearson claims, Carr refused to employ for her pottery the clay that had “come from England”: “her love for the West included it all, even the earth” (Pearson 27). A few years before she died, Carr acknowledged how pleased she was about an exhibition held in 1937 at the Vancouver Art Gallery because “I had been able to make [. . .] Western places speak to [Westerners]” (as quoted in Reid 1973, 162). When Carr died, she left a legacy—a large collection of paintings—to the Province; that legacy was apparently intended for both White *and* Native audiences, which might be seen as consistent with her artistic practice throughout her life (Mastai 13).

116. “Speech” 1930, 8.

117. 16 November 1927, *HT* 657.

118. Carr wrote: “I hate business. I like to work and create but the money end ough! Yet one must live!” (Letter to Marius Barbeau, 5 May 1928, as quoted in Street 37).

119. “English Spring,” *GP* 380.

120. NG, Correspondence with Artists, Emily Carr to Eric Brown, 24 November 1938, 7.1 C.

121. "The Elephant," 12 August 1933, *HT* 688.

122. As quoted in Ira Dilworth, *Emily Carr: Her Paintings and Sketches* (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1945), 11.

123. Tippet does acknowledge that Carr related "that fear to God" (1991, 88).

124. Joanne Sloane's assessment is more forgiving: she notes that Carr possessed a "highly evolved aesthetic sensibility," but that this "taste for the primitive [was] developed by worldly European aristocrats. Carr's training would certainly have acquainted her with this history, as a renewed predilection for the primitive was raging in Paris while she was there" ("Excerpts" 90).

125. Such a notion also contradicts the critical assessments made in relation to Carr's canvases.

126. "Simcoe Street," 17 June 1931, *HT* 674.

127. *Growing Pains*, ms, as quoted in Blanchard 81.

128. Terry Goldie's notion of indigenization might be applied here.

129. Carr thus critiqued Hembroff-Schleicher's paintings of trees as inferior because "it's only the portrait of that tree. It does not express any universal feeling for *all* trees. It does not live among the trees. It must breathe, have spirit!" (Hembroff-Schleicher 1969, 16).

130. Critics sometimes interpret nature as depicted in Carr's canvases as threatening, but this scarcely conforms with Carr's own sense of her work; Donald W. Buchanan describes Carr's *Indian Village* as being pervaded by a sense of "foreboding dread, a fear almost of nature and its power" (75).

131. "Meeting with the Group of Seven, 1927," 18 November 1927, *HT* 658.

132. By way of contrast, she regarded Victoria as representative of English rather than Canadian cultural standards and practices. Socially and politically, Victoria itself was often described as more British than Britain, a "symbol of British national pride" (Blanchard 20): it was noted for the rigour with which it adhered to social morays that were not only seen as quintessentially British, but as outmoded or anachronistic in Britain itself. Since Emily was born there in 1871, she would have been exposed to religious, social and artistic codes, which were related to British hegemony, and were perpetuated in Victoria. She felt compelled to impugn and resist such codes. In a letter to Eric Brown, she described Victoria as "the most hopeless place" artistically and its Arts and Crafts Society as controlled by "old grandpas & grandmas [who] won't give over the reins to a younger generation. but hold office & run the society. Its main object is social teas." (NG, Correspondence with Artists, Emily Carr to Eric Brown, 26 March 1939, 7.1 C). As Crean observes, that Victoria was unable to respond to her paintings suggests how far Carr was drifting from what was considered to be normative approaches to painting at the time: "Victoria was shocked! [. . .] instead of England gentling me into an English Miss with nice ways I was more *me* than ever, just pure me" ("Cariboo Gold," *GP* 422). Burns notes that *The Week*, rather than

commenting upon or critiquing her paintings, provided “a long list of [the] guests” who appeared at her studio exhibition. She concludes that “this epitomized the reaction of Victoria at that time. The great totem poles with their bold, grotesque contours and strong colours shocked and mystified Victorians, and the freshness, brilliance and charm of her French pictures went unnoticed” (229) Victoria was far from encouraging artistic innovation and freedom: as she acknowledged to Ruth Humphrey, it was “about the most sleepily behind spot on earth for Art” (13 February 1938, “Letters from Emily Carr” 121). In Victoria, Carr fulminated, Art was used for one’s own self-aggrandizement: “Oh Art, Art, what a filthy thing they’ve turned the *name* into—all the piffle & muck they write—everybody & anybody who can gain money and ‘talk reputation’ thereby, all posing as lecturers, critics, & Radio talkers on “““Art”””” (Letter to Ruth Humphrey, 25 April 1938, “Letters from Emily Carr” 128).

133. If Carr’s employment of space is “gendered” or meant to oppose materialist tendencies, as some critics argue, the full implications of how she learns from Harris and his canvases about use of space has not been considered.

134. NG, Correspondence with Artists, Emily Carr to Eric Brown, 19 October 1934, 7.1 C.

135. Carr argued: “I do not call myself religious” (“New Growth,” 6 March 1940, *HT* 888). Harris himself believed that Carr was extraordinarily unconventional in her approach to painting: “If [she] had painted the kind of paintings the people in Victoria once wanted, the result would have been a series of maidenly and innocuous and tepid water colours. These would have had no relation whatever to the bold paintings of the full rhythms, depth and mystery of the west coast forest and totems she did paint and which were ignored or rejected by the popular taste of her day” (NAC, Lawren Harris Fonds, MG 30 D 208, “Art as Expression of the Day,” vol. 4, file 10, 20).

136. Letter to Nan Cheney, 9 December 1938; letter to Nan Cheney, 20 December 1938, *Dear Nan*, ed. D. Walker 141.

137. Carr might be better appreciated as a woman who tests “the limits of what it meant to be a woman and painter” (Udall 1). Joanne Sloane notes: “The paucity of female antecedents for such activity, either in the annals of Canadian history or in the prevailing mythos of the artist, meant that Carr would have to negotiate her own relationship to nature. In this respect, her work can be read as a history of her struggle to position herself in the British Columbia landscape, both physically and psychically, defining and re-defining her stance, not only as a singular woman in nature, but also as a woman artist” (“Excerpts” 89). She adds: “It is significant, therefore, that the landscape Carr ‘discovered’ was not a hideous wilderness [. . . but a place] where her own articulated response to nature met with the lingering presences of Native people who had lived on that land” (“Excerpts” 89). Still, the privileging of Carr’s access to Native culture and the wilderness as a woman simplifies matters considerably; as Sloane herself notes, such critical inclinations neglect “the ideological contradictions inherent in Carr’s desire as an Anglo-Saxon woman to ‘connect’ with Other cultures and artifacts while also disregarding the fact that the public persona Carr created—tough and independent rather than delicate and passive—contravened a social construction of femininity that had been naturalized as female” (“Excerpts” 92).

138. "Hospital," 16 April 1937, *HT* 861.

139. Tellingly, she describes not only her reaction to Harris's canvases in similar terms, but also her relationship with Sophie Frank, a Native woman, in this manner: "Her love for me is *real* and mine for her. [ . . . ] Somewhere we meet. Where? Out in the spaces? There is a bond between us where color, creed, environment don't count. The woman in us meets on common ground and we love each other" (Provincial Archives of British Columbia, unpublished journals, 25 December 1927, as quoted by Blanchard 108). Her friendship with Sophie Frank, a Salish woman who lived on a reserve in North Vancouver, lasted thirty years (Laurence 11). Harris also apparently described that relationship as evidence "that race, colour, class and caste mean nothing in reality; quality of soul alone counts. Deep love transcends even quality of soul" ("Lawren Harris," *GP* 454):

Clearly, colour, creed and environment are measured and forms of limitation in the world of colonial Victoria: the spaces of which Carr conceives, however, allow her the opportunity to transcend such limitations and justifies their desirability. Harris notes that Carr's relationship with Sophie was "an unusual thing": "so deep a relationship between folks of different races—goes to prove though that bodies, race, class and caste mean nothing in reality—quality of soul alone counts. [ . . . ] Though for some hundreds of years races and castes are supposed to have been balled up and humanity today to be in a confused mess and not capable of getting themselves sorted out [ . . . ] a few relationships shine out of the dark blur and have great and deep meaning. (NAC, Emily Carr Fonds, MG 30 D 215, letter to Carr, 24 June 1933).

140. "Meeting with the Group of Seven, 1927," 18 December 1927, *HT* 666.

141. "Meeting with the Group of Seven, 1927," 25 December 1927, *HT* 667. On December 11, 1927, she returns to view his canvases and writes: "Peace. My spirit entered the quiet spaces of the picture" (*HT* 663).

142. "Meeting with the Group of Seven, 1927," 11 December 1927, *HT* 664.

143. As quoted in Tippett 1979, 98.

144. 27 November 1927, *HT* 660.

145. Emily Carr's notes, no date, as quoted in *Sunlight in the Shadows*, n. pag.

146. After the First World War, "effort was put into articulating separation from Britain. The Social Gospel movement, devoted to creating a just society for all [ . . . ] had an influence on the coalition of Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregationalist churches" (S. Walker 1996, 57).

147. Emily Carr's journal, 1929, as quoted in *Sunlight in the Shadows*, n. pag.

148. "Home Again," *GP* 345.

149. "Moving Forward," 7 March 1934, *HT* 727.

## **Concluding Remarks**

**“‘Creative Art’ is ‘fresh seeing.’ [ . . . ] there is all the difference between copying and creating [ . . . ]”**

**– Emily Carr (1930, 1)**

**“Fresh seeing” not only engenders new approaches to art, as Emily Carr suggested, it also gives rise to new approaches in criticism: “re-viewing the cultural landscape” requires fresh seeing. Looking with different critical lenses will not only bring into sharper focus the artists and aesthetic work that may have suffered from a limited interpretive vision, that is, the unaccommodating reading of Northrop Frye and his adherents, but also encourage the scanning of a broader literary horizon to see what other work may not have fit within his visual range, the exclusionary paradigm that Frye establishes in his “Conclusion” to *Literary History of Canada*.**

**The English-Canadian cultural texts by Ralph Connor, Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven, and Emily Carr are poorly accommodated by Frye’s and other critics’ readings. In both the explicit articulation of their objectives and their artistic production, Canadian landscape was primarily configured as benevolent, its spiritual properties intended to effect change, to contribute to the experience of transcendence and faith in the nation, and to foster the development of an indigenous, aesthetic body of work rather than to generate fear and terror: in this manner, Canadian-ness was seen to be developed. Although Frye also claimed that the employment of Canadian landscape merely provides “distinctive settings and props to a writer who is looking for local colour” and that to suggest otherwise is “an obvious fallacy” since setting provided nothing**

“more than novelty,” Ralph Connor, the Group of Seven, and Carr were explicit in expressing their interest in the land as more than a peripheral feature of their work and far more than a means of generating “novelty”: it was seminal to their concerns about forging indigenous cultural forms that were distinct from their imperial counterparts (835).

Ralph Connor employed land in his narratives as a way of differentiating Canada from the imperial centre, even as he impugned the notion that Britain was “centre” at all: his novels indicate the increasingly distanced relationship between Canada, “here,” and Britain, “over there.” However ambivalent the yoking of Old World cultural forms (narrative structure) with Canadian setting may seem, his insistence upon the latter suggests that Connor was interested in the development of a national literature, in cultural self-definition. *The Man from Glengarry* is exemplary in demonstrating that his novels, on the one hand, may have been forged in such a way as to be recognizable to his readers abroad, but, on the other hand, were also encoded with the desire for an autonomous, self-sufficient nation. His concern with promulgating what he conceived of as the ideal English-Canadian citizen is reflected in his depiction of the protagonist, Ranald Macdonald: the narrative demonstrates how character, and then more largely national identity, is shaped by its connection to Canadian geography. Macdonald is thus not only recognized as “the man” from “Glengarry,” but also referred to interchangeably with this locale. That Connor upholds Macdonald as hero, as champion of Canadian political autonomy, and as superior to his British counterparts, reveals how he used landscape as a spiritual entity that created indigenous characters and, more largely, contributed to both a nation’s identity and its body of literature.

Similarly, the Group of Seven believed their canvases contributed to the formation of the nation and were thus a function of the nation’s cultural and spiritual development. The notion of

“witnessing” is as central to their cultural endeavours as it was to Connor’s: since they believed that their work was rendered indigenous by virtue of their exposure to the unique spiritual properties of the land and that the land itself was a “transmuting agency,” they concluded that their canvases would communicate the spirit of the land, generate faith in the nation, and effect in their viewers a conversion to Canadian-ness. To interpret their work within Frye’s assessment would involve a dismissal of the litany of articles and letters in which Group members articulated their aesthetic aims; it would also involve a simplification of the nature of the genre – the landscape painting tradition – within which they were working. Tom Thomson was upheld as the quintessential Canadian artist because he was not trained abroad (and not contaminated by such training) and was seen to be most responsive to the spiritual essence of the land: the Group saw his work as evolving directly from his contact with nature. That they strove to adapt, when they did not reject, imported methods and techniques, and incorporate these with a focus on Canadian land suggests their determination to forge a national aesthetic, traditions, and indigenous visual symbols that were not dependent upon imported cultural forms.

Emily Carr was equally fascinated by Canadian landscape, specifically the West Coast, and with how to devise new terms, that is, a new visual and verbal vocabulary, to reflect her experience of western Canadian topography. She wrote that “the old way of seeing was inadequate to express this big country of ours” and that a new way of seeing entailed genuine affection for the country: “It had to be sensed, passed through live minds, sensed and loved.”<sup>1</sup> She believed that “meaning” could not be adequately communicated until she dispensed with imported standards of and approaches to art. Such a difficulty relates to the depiction of the sublime: she was challenged by how to develop aesthetic expression for an experience that was unfamiliar and

that was entirely different from her experience and even her training in the “Old World.” Her interest in national geography, which eluded containment, literal and imagined, which is interrelated with English-Canadian national identity and spirituality, is the motivation for the creation of a modern, indigenous artistic language. Carr did not suffer from “garrison mentality,” to which her frequent treks to the heart of the British Columbia forests would attest. She believed that the forests would communicate something of higher spiritual importance, and that her canvases, if successful, would capture that importance: “Art and religion you can’t separate, for real art is religion.”<sup>2</sup>

The implications of this study, however, also extend beyond the work of these artists. In his “Conclusion,” Frye argues that artists are affected, whether consciously or not, by those artists who precede them, even in English Canada with what he sees as the dearth of worthy artistic, cultural production: that is, “that there does seem to be such a thing as an imaginative continuum, and that writers are conditioned in their attitudes by their predecessors, or by the cultural climate of their predecessors, whether there is conscious influence or not” (849). If an imaginative continuum exists, as Frye suggests, and if his proposed thesis for regarding English-Canadian artists as having suffered from “garrison mentality” is to be believed, then where have such writers, for example, as Stephen Leacock, Mordecai Richler, and Aritha van Herk developed their sense of the importance of the North – specifically, the Arctic – as ameliorative, as the matrix for moral, spiritual or imaginative regeneration? In the cultural production of such artists as Connor, Thomson, the Group of Seven and Carr, one may find the antecedents to the spiritual dimensions that contemporary artists see in landscape.

Frye’s dismissal of the employment of Canadian landscape – “it will be new only as

content” – suggests not only that he valorized form over content and that “to pour the new wine of content into the old bottles of form” resulted in inferior work, but also, paradoxically, that such imported bottles were regarded as “vintage” creative expression (835). That he expected Canadian artistic endeavours to conform to the shape of its imperial counterparts and that he believed such endeavours to have come short of such standards of excellence is indicated in the question he believed haunted Canadians – “why has there been no Canadian writer of classic proportions?” (822). As this study has demonstrated, Thomson’s lack of training in painting (and even Carr’s in writing – she claimed that she “knew nothing about the rules of writing”<sup>3</sup>) was upheld as superior to formal training because, as the Group of Seven fully recognized, the “new wine” of English-Canadian artistic endeavours also required “new bottles” of form. That Frye would argue that these same artists are colonial in their artistic approach suggests that his own critical standards were imported, sheds light on the reasons for his critical dismissal of their work, and implies that he did not apprehend that they were operating by differing aesthetic principles.

In making such assertions, then, he demonstrates that he himself is borrowing the critical apparatus from “over there,” which, according to Frye, determines the calibre of the artist and the quality of “lasting” artistic production. If, under the pressures of a new environment, artistic work must be forged that employs not only new content, but also new forms, then this imperative must also be extended to the critical measures applied to such works. If artists are obliged to be concerned with creating work that is shaped by matters suited to this country, critical inquiry must be as answerable to such demands. The sublime is related to this call for a re-viewing and the subsequent broadening of English-Canadian artistic and critical boundaries. His apparent disdain for novelty, moreover, is antithetical to the aesthetic principles upon which the sublime

operates: it is associated with challenging familiar and inherited forms of artistic production in relation to landscape; with dislocation from existing and conventional forms of representation and expression; and with creating discomfort, spiritual, physical, intellectual, and aesthetic. That sense of dislocation, however, may be extended to critical discourse. Rather than rejecting and sealing itself off from new artistic forms and adhering to “classic forms,” a kind of critical garrison as it were, critical investigation might move beyond established critical parameters. This study thus serves not only as a re-investigation of the cultural texts of Connor, Thomson, the Group of Seven, and Carr under different critical lenses, but also an invitation to re-examine the critical lenses that have been used in the past.

#### ENDNOTES

1. “Rejected,” *GP* 437.
2. “Hopes and Doldrums,” 8 February 1935, *HT* 779.
3. “Alternative,” *GP* 460.

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