

"THE WEST WIND"

BY TOM THOMSON (1877-1917)

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses Tom Thomson's (1877-1917) last and perhaps most famous canvas, The West Wind.

Chapter One considers the facts concerning the painting and its sketch and reviews the various hypotheses advanced concerning the dating of the two works and the site from which the sketch was done. In the absence of any specific documents concerning The West Wind, it is necessary to refer to the testimonies of friends and acquaintances of Thomson, and occasionally to those of people whose interest in Thomson prompted them to individual research and speculation. It also outlines the history of both the sketch and the canvas following the death of Thomson in 1917 and problems concerning the title by which the canvas is known.

Chapter Two is a stylistic analysis of a selection of sketches and the associated canvases. The aim of this chapter is to place The West Wind within the context of Thomson's previous work, outlining the development of his style, subject matter and technique.

The third chapter explores the possible 'meanings' of The West Wind, the theme of the storm and the lone tree motif. It considers their use by his fellow artists and by Canadian poets in the latter years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century.

Chapter Four reviews the various critical commentaries upon The West Wind which show that although Thomson restricted his painting activity to a very small and very specific

area of Canada, The West Wind transcends its regional influences and remains a compelling image of Canada in the broadest sense.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS . . . . .	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . .	vi
Chapter	
I.    FACTS CONCERNING THE WEST WIND . . . . .	1
II.   THOMSON'S DEVELOPMENT AS AN ARTIST . . . . .	17
III.  THE THEMATIC BACKGROUND TO THE WEST WIND , , ,	56
IV.   COMMENTARY ON THE WEST WIND . . . . .	85
ILLUSTRATIONS . . . . .	96
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	114

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1.	<u>The West Wind</u> . . . . .	96
2.	<u>The West Wind</u> (sketch) . . . . .	97
3.	<u>Algonquin Park</u> (Province of Ontario, August 31, 1974; Ministry of Transportation and Communications) . . . . .	98
4.	<u>The Cauchon Lakes</u> (National Topographic System Map of Canada; 31L/2, Edition 3MCE, Series A751) . . . . .	99
5.	<u>A Northern Lake</u> . . . . .	100
6.	<u>The Drowned Land</u> . . . . .	101
7.	<u>Morning Cloud</u> . . . . .	102
8.	<u>Moonlight, Early Evening</u> . . . . .	103
9.	<u>Red Leaves</u> (sketch) . . . . .	104
10.	<u>Byng Inlet, Georgian Bay</u> . . . . .	105
11.	<u>Byng Inlet, Georgian Bay</u> (sketch) . . . . .	106
12.	<u>In The Northland</u> . . . . .	107
13.	<u>In The Northland</u> (sketch) . . . . .	108
14.	<u>Northern River</u> . . . . .	109
15.	<u>The Pool</u> . . . . .	110
16.	<u>Decorative Panel I</u> . . . . .	111
17.	<u>The Jack Pine</u> . . . . .	112
18.	<u>Pine Island, Georgian Bay</u> . . . . .	113

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## CHAPTER I

### FACTS CONCERNING THE WEST WIND

The West Wind (figure 1) is today one of the great paintings of the Canadian Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, though ironically the gallery turned it down when it first had the opportunity to acquire it in 1919.

We must rely on A.Y. Jackson for some of the details of the fate of the painting between 1917 when it was painted and 1926 when the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario) acquired it. A.Y. Jackson returned to Toronto from overseas service in 1919 and rented a studio on the top floor of the Studio Building where The West Wind, Chill November and "a dozen other canvases and about 200 sketches" had been stored after Thomson's death in July 1917.<sup>1</sup> Jackson put a price of \$650 on the painting and unsuccessfully encouraged the Art Gallery of Toronto to buy it.<sup>2</sup> The price was then raised to \$800<sup>3</sup> and the painting toured the United States in a travelling exhibition.<sup>4</sup> In 1924 it was one of a group of paintings by Thomson sent to the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley<sup>5</sup>: there they attracted some critical acclaim and The West Wind was one of the paintings considered for purchase by the Trustees of the Tate Gallery.<sup>6</sup> Upon its return to Canada, the National Gallery of Canada wished to purchase

it, but Dr. Harold Tovell, one of the members of the Art Gallery of Toronto, realised that the Gallery did not own a single work by Thomson and persuaded the Canadian Club to purchase it and present it to the Gallery in March 1926.<sup>7</sup> At the meeting of the Canadian Club on February 1, 1926, F.Y. McEachern, the President, made a motion, seconded by G. Wilson -

that the Executive of the Canadian Club of Toronto be empowered to purchase the picture painted by Tom Thomson entitled THE WEST WIND and present the same to the Art Gallery of Toronto as a contribution to their permanent collection of works by Canadian artists, the picture to be purchased out of the surplus funds of the Club.<sup>8</sup>

The report of the Honorary Treasurer for the Club Year ending April 20, 1926 lists among expenses paid that year "Painting by Tom Thomson, "The West Wind" - \$1,500.00."<sup>9</sup>

In the years since its presentation to the Art Gallery of Toronto, the canvas has been widely exhibited across Canada and the United States.<sup>10</sup>

The sketch for The West Wind (figure 2) was acquired by Dr. J.M. MacCallum<sup>11</sup> from the estate of Tom Thomson in 1917 and was passed on to his sons upon his death in 1944. It was then acquired by the Quarter Century Club of Canada Packers and presented to J.S. McLean on the occasion of his seventieth birthday in May 1946. J.S. McLean bequeathed the sketch to the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1970, where it hangs beside the finished picture based on it.<sup>12</sup> The sketch was not exhibited publicly until 1937 and has not been as widely exhibited as the canvas.<sup>13</sup>

In 1920 Barker Fairley reported that The West Wind canvas was unfinished<sup>14</sup> and Arthur Lismer reported that it was wet on Thomson's easel when he died.<sup>15</sup> This evidence indicates that the canvas was painted during the winter of 1916-17 in Thomson's Toronto studio. Thomson would generally go north to Algonquin Park as soon as the snow had melted sufficiently to provide access to the area, and he would remain in the north until the snow once again compelled him to return to Toronto. Thus it was during the winters in Toronto that he developed his large canvases, based on a selection of the spring, summer and autumn sketches.<sup>16</sup> Thomson had likely returned to Toronto in October or November of 1916 and he did not go north again until towards the end of March 1917<sup>17</sup>; thus the canvas's execution may be placed between November of 1916 and March of 1917.

The dating of the sketch is a more difficult problem. Several dates are offered in statements made by Thomson's friends and it becomes a matter of assessing the validity of each, and as Joan Murray points out that the dating of The West Wind sketch is complicated by the fact that as early as 1915 Thomson was making extensive use of the theme of "large trees blown by the wind."<sup>18</sup>

In 1952 Mark Robinson stated that Thomson showed him the sketch in 1915 and subsequently offered it to him; the offer was, however, declined.<sup>19</sup> If Robinson did indeed see The West Wind sketch, and not one like it, it must

have been before October 1915 when he enlisted in the army. He did not see Thomson again until the spring of 1917, by which time The West Wind had been painted.<sup>20</sup> Although we do not know of any earlier sketches similar enough to The West Wind to be confused with it, it seems almost certain that Robinson saw another sketch.

An early dating for The West Wind sketch is also indicated by Thoreau MacDonald who said he had a dim recollection of seeing Thomson working on The West Wind in his studio in Toronto during the winter of 1915-16.<sup>21</sup> This seems to corroborate Robinson's statement but Thoreau MacDonald was only fourteen years old at this time, and this brief testimony is hardly sufficient evidence.

The dating of the sketch is also discussed by Peter Mellen and Dennis Reid. Mellen believes it was done in the summer of 1916 although he points out that in a letter which Thomson wrote to Dr. MacCallum on October 24, 1916, he indicated that he had done very little sketching during the previous summer. Nevertheless, Mellen suggests that Thomson had the opportunity to execute The West Wind sketch and that of The Jack Pine during this summer.<sup>22</sup>

In his book The Jack Pine, Dennis Reid cites evidence to support his date of 1916 for the sketch. He links The West Wind sketch stylistically to those of The Jack Pine, Little Cauchon Lake and Rocks and Deep Water, suggesting that the four were done on a trip to Little Cauchon Lake which Thomson undertook in the company of

Dr. MacCallum and Lawren Harris in the spring of 1916.<sup>23</sup> Although the exact dates of this trip are not known, it was almost certainly in the spring of 1916, and Dr. MacCallum confirms that The West Wind sketch was done on this trip.<sup>24</sup>

In the light of this conflicting testimony, it seems advisable to reject that of Robinson and MacDonald and to accept that The West Wind sketch was done in the spring of 1916 and that the canvas was done in the winter of 1916-17.

The search for the site of the sketch has provided a rich subject for speculation and controversy over the years. The earliest attempt to pinpoint the location was made by Ed Godin in 1930. Although he was unable to locate the exact point of view, Godin believed that the sketch was done at Kiosk in the western end of Algonquin Park.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, his son Edward E. Godin said that

The West Wind was done at Pembroke. Thomson went to Pembroke for a few days during the summer leaving his sketching equipment in Camp. He told me on his return that he had borrowed sketching equipment from the Sisters in Convent there, saying that he had never seen anything that reached him as did the high wind and scenery of the Ottawa River west of Pembroke.<sup>26</sup>

We know that Thomson was a fire ranger based at Achray (on the C.N.R. line between Pembroke and North Bay) during the summer of 1916<sup>27</sup>, but if MacCallum's testimony that he actually saw the painting of the sketch



during the spring of 1916 be accepted, then this testimony of the Godins, father and son, must be rejected.

Professor Dwight has assembled detailed evidence to support his belief that The West Wind was painted at Lake Achray, from the place where Thomson's cabin then stood. By comparing photographs of the hills on the opposite shore at Achray with the hills in the sketch, he considered that they were indeed the same hills, allowing for changes in the terrain of the land due to new tree growth over the years. In fact, Professor Dwight thought he could not only identify the location, but also the tree.<sup>28</sup>

In Algonquin Story, Audrey Saunders makes another suggestion. For her, The West Wind is associated with the Grand Lake district for "even if we had not known that this was the area where he had been working during the summers of 1915 and 1916, it would have been possible to identify [it] with this part of the Park... the lakes are bigger and more windswept than in the southern sections, and the whole region is wilder, and more untouched."<sup>29</sup>

Of other identifications, the Watties believed that the sketch was done at Round Lake<sup>30</sup> and the Reverend Mr. Arthur Reynolds of Annan, Ontario, suggested that it was done at Fairy Lake near the lookout, on the road between Dwight and Huntsville.<sup>31</sup> Dr. R.P. Little compared the view himself and agreed with the Reverend that the view was very similar<sup>32</sup>; however, Winnifred Trainor assured

Dr. Little that The West Wind was actually painted at Cedar Lake in the north of the Park.<sup>33</sup> In 1970 William T. Little agreed that the sketch had been painted at Cedar Lake rather than Fairy Lake because "there is a ruggedness about this picture that is more characteristic of the craggy and clean-cut terrain of Cedar Lake than of the Lake of Bays country."<sup>34</sup>

All these opinions agree that the sketch was undoubtedly done in the Algonquin Park country but differ as to the exact site. There are, however, two documents which offer more specific evidence and it is important to note that these are first-hand accounts of the circumstances in which the sketch was actually painted.

Without mentioning the sketch by name, Lawren Harris in a lecture in 1948 relates:

...one afternoon in early spring on the shore of one of the Cauchon Lakes in Algonquin Park ... a dramatic thunderstorm came up. There was a wild rush of wind across the lake and all nature was tossed into turmoil. Tom and I were in an abandoned shack. When the storm broke Tom looked out, grabbed his sketch box, ran out into the gale, squatted behind a big stump and commenced to paint in a fury.<sup>35</sup>

In a letter of 1937, Dr. J.M. MacCallum states specifically that The West Wind sketch was done at this time:

It may interest you to know... that the West Wind was done at Lake Cauchon. Thomson, myself, Lorne (sic) Harris and his cousin Chester were up there. It was blowing very hard and Lorne Harris was painting farther up the shore. The wind blew down the tree of the picture and Harris first thought that Thomson was killed. but he soon sprang up, waved his hand to

him and went on painting.<sup>36</sup>

Although Harris and MacCallum differ slightly with respect to the locations of Thomson and Harris during the storm, the essence of the two accounts is so similar that they were no doubt speaking of the same day and the same event. MacCallum's account is perhaps the most valuable of the two for it mentions the sketch by name, and since it was in his possession until the time of his death, it seems unlikely that he would err in identifying the work which he saw being painted that day.

The two Cauchon Lakes are situated in the north central portion of Algonquin Park and are part of the Petawawa River System (figure 3). Little Cauchon Lake lies directly to the east of Cauchon Lake, and both run almost due east and west. They are long and narrow, each being a little less than a mile in width at the maximum and approximately three miles long.

Although the Canadian Northern Railway serviced this area by 1915<sup>37</sup>, it would seem more likely that Thomson and his party reached the lakes via the system of lakes and portages which leads from Canoe Lake, the entrance to the Park via train from Toronto, to the Cauchon Lakes, a distance of approximately eighty miles.

A study of the topographical map of the two Cauchon Lakes suggests that the most probable site lies about 400 yards east of Davenport on the north side of Little Cauchon Lake (figure 4). In addition to affording the

necessary wide view across the lake, this area was serviced by the railroad, and thus the shoreline would have been partially cleared. The hills in this area do not rise as sharply as do those on the other shores, and there is a sandy point from which it would have been possible to gain the shore. From this promontory, the hills on the south shore are very similar in contour to those represented in The West Wind. It should also be noted that Thomson would have had to be on the north shore looking south in order to paint a west wind, and in the sketch and the canvas, the foliage on the tree grows more abundantly on the leeward side than on the west, reflecting the predominance of westerly winds in this area.

There is no evidence to prove conclusively that it was Thomson who named the painting. Neither the sketch nor the canvas were exhibited until after Thomson's death, and thus it is not known what they were called during his lifetime. The West Wind was first exhibited at the 1917 Canadian National Exhibition as West Wind, Algonquin Park.<sup>38</sup> The location was subsequently dropped from the title and the painting became known simply as The West Wind.<sup>39</sup>

Winifred Trainor recalled that as late as 1917 the sketch had not been named<sup>40</sup> and Dennis Reid, cautioning that Thomson named very few, if any, of his sketches, suggested that Dr. MacCallum named most of them.<sup>41</sup>

If the title did not originate with Thomson, it is

indeed probable that Dr. MacCallum was responsible for naming the work. MacCallum would have likely known what Thomson might have wished to call it, and the fact that he was with Thomson when the sketch was done, suggests that he named it on the basis of his recollection that the wind was indeed a westerly one! The West Wind is certainly an appropriate title for the painting.

## FOOTNOTES CHAPTER I

1. A.Y. Jackson, A Painter's Country. The Autobiography of A.Y. Jackson, with a Foreword by Naomi Jackson Groves (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co. Ltd., 1958; reprint ed., Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co. Ltd., 1976), p. 52.
2. Ibid, p. 55.
3. In a letter to Mr. Harkness, January 10, 1922, A.Y. Jackson suggested that \$700 to \$800 would be a good price for The West Wind. (Tom Thomson File, Tom Thomson Memorial Gallery, Owen Sound).
4. Travelling Exhibition, American Tour, Group of Seven Canadian Painters, 1921; Shown at Worcester, November 1920; Rochester; Columbus; Toledo; Cleveland; Detroit; Buffalo, September 10 to October 3, 1921; Muskegan; Minneapolis.
5. London (England), British Empire Exhibition, Canadian Section of Fine Arts, 1924, no. 239.

The other paintings by Thomson that were exhibited were: The Jack Pine (no. 240); Northern River (no. 241) and Twelve Studies (no. 242).

6. F. B. Housser, A Canadian Art Movement. The Story of the Group of Seven (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada, 1926), p. 211. The other paintings which were considered for purchase were Arthur Lismer's September Gale, J.E.H. MacDonald's Beaver Dam, James Wilson Morrice's Beaupré and A.Y. Jackson's Entrance to Halifax Harbour. The Tate Gallery bought A.Y. Jackson's painting.

The critical commentaries on the paintings of Thomson and the other Canadian painters have been collected in Press Comments on the Canadian Section of Fine Arts, British Empire Exhibition, 1924-1925 (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1926).

7. Jackson, A Painter's Country, p. 55.
8. Quoted by S.L. Rodway, Secretary-Treasurer of the Canadian Club of Toronto, in a letter to the author dated December 20, 1977.

9. Ibid.

10. Dennis Reid, The Group of Seven, Exhibition held at the National Gallery of Canada, 19 June - 8 September 1970 and at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 22 September - 31 October, 1970 (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1970), p. 104. The following list of exhibitions in which The West Wind has been seen is largely based on Reid's extensive research.

Toronto, The Canadian National Exhibition, 1917, no. 214, repr. p. 66; Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario, A Memorial Exhibition of Paintings by Tom Thomson, 13-29 February, 1920, no. 41; Group of Seven American Tour, 1921, no. 27 (no. 29 in Buffalo catalogue); Owen Sound, Exhibit of Paintings by Tom Thomson, 1922; Toronto, Art Gallery of Toronto, Retrospective Loan Exhibition of the Works of Members of The Ontario Society of Artists, 1922, no. 170; London, British Empire Exhibition, 1924, no. 239; Ottawa, The National Gallery of Canada, First National Gallery of Canada Annual, 1926, no. 162; Toronto, Art Gallery of Toronto, Art Gallery of Toronto Inaugural, 29 January - 28 February, 1926, no. 259; Philadelphia, Department of Fine Arts, Sesquicentennial International Exposition, 1926, no. 1550; Paris, Musée du Jeu de Paume, Exposition d'Art Canadien sous Le Patronage Officiel du Gouvernement Canadien et du Gouvernement Français, 11 April-11 May, 1927, no. 230; Toronto, Art Gallery of Toronto, Summer Exhibition, 1935, no. 69, repr. p. 23; Toronto, Art Gallery of Toronto, Loan Exhibition of Paintings, 1935, no. 154; San Francisco, Golden Gate International Exhibition, Department of Fine Arts, Contemporary Art, 1935, no. 24; Toronto, Art Gallery of Toronto, Tom Thomson - Horatio Walker Exhibition, January 1941, no numeration; Toronto, Art Gallery of Toronto, Great Paintings, 1944, no. 74; New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, Canadian Art, 1944, no numeration; Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, Art of the United Nations, 1945, p. 14, repr.; Toronto, The Art Gallery of Toronto, The Development of Canadian Painting, January 1945, no. 133; Toronto, The Fine Arts Pavilion, Canadian National Exhibition, August 27- September 11, 1945, no. 20; Hamilton, The Art Gallery of Hamilton, Inaugural Exhibition, December 1953- January 1954, no. 51, repr. pl. 29; Vancouver, The Vancouver Art Gallery, Group of Seven, March 29 - April 25, 1954, no. 63, repr.; Toronto, Art Gallery of Toronto, Comparisons, January 11-February 3, 1957, no. 78; Vancouver, The Vancouver Art Gallery, Images for a Canadian Heritage, September 23- October 30, 1966, no. 70; Ottawa, The National Gallery of Canada, Three Hundred Years of Canadian Art, Summer 1967, no. 200, repr. p. 127; Owen Sound, The Tom Thomson Memorial Gallery and Museum of Fine

- Art, First Anniversary Exhibition, May 24 - June 9, 1968, no. 7; Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, The Group of Seven, June 19- September 8, 1970, no. 68, repr. p. 104; Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario, The Art of Tom Thomson, October 30 - December 12, 1971, no. XVI, repr. p. 64; Owen Sound, The Tom Thomson Memorial Gallery and Museum of Fine Arts, The Tom Thomson Memorial Exhibition, May 4 - June 1, 1977; no. 1.
11. Dr. James MacCallum was a Toronto eye specialist who became the patron of Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven. In January of 1914 he and Lawren Harris financed the construction of the Studio Building on Severn Street, and this became the headquarters of these artists.
  12. Toronto, The Art Gallery of Ontario, The J.S. McLean Collection of Painting, 1968, no. 80.
  13. Reid, Group of Seven, p. 102. The sketch has been seen in the following exhibitions: Toronto, The Mellors Galleries, Loan Exhibition of Works by Tom Thomson, March 13-31, 1937, no. 81; Toronto, The Art Gallery of Ontario, Tom Thomson-Horatio Walker Exhibition, January 1941, no numeration; Ottawa, The National Gallery of Canada, Paintings and Drawings from the Collection of J.S. McLean, 1952, no. 88, repr.; Hamilton, The Art Gallery of Hamilton, Inaugural Exhibition, December 1953 to January 1954, no. 52; Toronto, The Art Gallery of Ontario, Comparisons, January 11-February 3, 1957, no. 77; Vancouver, The Vancouver Art Gallery, Images for a Canadian Heritage, September 23 - October 30, 1966, no. 69, repr. and in colour on the front cover; Toronto, The Art Gallery of Ontario, The J.S. McLean Collection of Canadian Paintings, September 19- October 20, 1968; no. 80, repr.; Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, The Group of Seven, June 19- September 8, 1970, no. 66, repr. p. 102; Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario, The Art of Tom Thomson, October 30 - December 12, 1971, no. 99, repr. p. 85.
  14. Barker Fairley, "Tom Thomson and Others," The Rebel 4 (March 1920): 246.
  15. Joan Murray, The Art of Tom Thomson, Exhibition organized for the Art Gallery of Ontario, October 30 to December 12, 1971 (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1971), p. 45. Murray's source is A Lismer, "Tom Thomson: A Tribute", unpublished manuscript in the possession of Marjorie Lismer Bridges, p. 11. Lismer was in Halifax at this time and must have obtained his information from J.E.H. MacDonald, Lawren Harris or Dr. MacCallum.
  16. Reid, Group of Seven, p. 109.



17. In a letter which he wrote to Dr. MacCallum on April 21, Thomson said he had been in the Park "for over three weeks." (McMichael Collection).
18. Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 44.
19. Ottelyn Addison and Elizabeth Harwood, Tom Thomson. The Algonquin Years (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1969), p. 55.  
  
Mark Robinson (1967-1955) was a ranger in Algonquin Park during the years Thomson was visiting this area. He was in the army from October of 1915 to Spring of 1917.
20. "Mark Robinson Talks About Tom Thomson. Toronto, October 1956." Published in William T. Little, The Tom Thomson Mystery ( Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1970), p. 195.
21. Addison, The Algonquin Years, p. 55. Thoreau MacDonald (b. 1901) was the son of Thomson's painting companion, J.E.H. MacDonald.
22. Peter Mellen, The Group of Seven (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1970), p. 49.
23. Dennis Reid, The Jack Pine (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1975), p. 19.
24. Letter from Dr. MacCallum to Miss A.L. Beatty, Secretary to the Curator of the Art Gallery of Toronto, dated 14 May 1937. (Library, Art Gallery of Ontario). Quoted in Reid, Group of Seven, p. 104.
25. Letter from Ed Godin to Blodwen Davies, dated November 17, 1930. (Public Archives of Canada). Ed Godin was the ranger with whom Thomson worked on Lake Achray during the summer of 1916.
26. Letter from Edward E. Godin to Blodwen Davies, dated June 15, 1931. (Public Archives of Canada). Edward E. Godin was the son of Ed Godin and was also a fire ranger at Achray with Thomson during the summer of 1916.
27. The letters referred to in the two preceeding foot-  
notes attest to this.---
28. Letter from Professor Dwight to Martin Baldwin at the Art Gallery of Ontario, dated January 14, 1955. (Art Gallery of Ontario, Library). Dwight notes that the actual trees upon the site at Achray are white pines, but he suggests that Thomson "substituted

two twisted red pines as might be found on the top of a hill or some other very exposed position. It is fairly obvious I think that he put them into the foreground of THE WEST WIND to accentuate the idea of a windy day."

Professor T.W. Dwight was a Professor of Forestry at the University of Toronto. In 1908, while a student in the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Toronto, he accompanied the first "forestry field practice camp" to Burnt Lake, Algonquin Park. Ottelyn Addison, Early Days in Algonquin Park (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1974), p. 101.

29. Audrey Saunders, Algonquin Story (Toronto: Department of Lands and Forests, 1947), p. 174.
30. Addison, Algonquin Years, p. 54. Tom Wattie was a staff member of Algonquin Park from 1909 to 1929, stationed at North Tea Lake. (Ibid, p.91, footnote 25.)
31. R.P. Little, "Some Recollections of Tom Thomson and Canoe Lake," Culture 16 (June 1955): 203. Dr. Little was a former guide in Algonquin Park.
32. Ibid, p. 203.
33. Ibid, p. 203.
34. Little, The Tom Thomson Mystery, p. 34. William T. Little was Provincial Judge of the Provincial Court (Family Division) of York County, Ontario, at the time this book was published.
35. Lawren Harris, "The Group of Seven in Canadian History," The Canadian Historical Association (Toronto, 1948), p. 33.
36. cf. footnote 24.
37. Atlas of Canada (Ottawa: Government of Canada, Department of the Interior, 1915), pp. 43-44.
38. Toronto, Fine Arts Pavilion, Canadian National Exhibition, 25 August - 10 September, 1917, no. 214, repr. p. 66.
39. Toronto, The Art Gallery of Toronto, A Memorial Exhibition of Paintings by Tom Thomson and a Collection of Japanese Colour Prints, February 13-29, 1920, no. 41; here the work is simply entitled West Wind.
40. Addison, The Algonquin Years, p. 93, fn. 49. Winifred Trainor is rumoured to have been Thomson's girlfriend.

41. Dennis Reid, "Photographs by Tom Thomson," National Gallery of Canada Bulletin 16 (1970): 3, footnote 12.

Reid notes that "It should... be remembered that Thomson named very few, if any, of his own paintings. Dr. MacCallum appears to have titled most of the sketches."

In a letter to the author dated January 19, 1978, Reid explains that this was the result of his observation that in most instances when a name is written on a sketch, it is in Dr. MacCallum's handwriting. The notation in this case is usually a description of place.

## CHAPTER II

### THOMSON'S DEVELOPMENT AS AN ARTIST

In 1913, Thomson exhibited his first large canvas, A Northern Lake (figure 5), at the Ontario Society of Artists exhibition.<sup>1</sup> It was received favourably by critics, and one reviewer commented that:

Tom Thomson's Northern Lake is remarkable for its fidelity to the northern shore; boulders and undergrowth in the foreground, the brown water turned to the deep blue of the sky under the fresh gale that is putting white caps on the little lake.<sup>2</sup>

The canvas was purchased by the Ontario government for \$250<sup>3</sup>, a factor which no doubt influenced Thomson's decision to continue painting large exhibition pieces.

The painting, described by Dr. MacCallum as "one of the small northern lakes swept by a northwest wind..."<sup>4</sup>, was based on at least four sketches that Thomson had done on a trip to Mississauga with William Broadhead in late August and September of 1912<sup>5</sup> and was worked up in the studio of Rous and Mann in Toronto during the winter of 1912-13.<sup>6</sup>

A comparison of A Northern Lake with Thomson's previous work indicates the significant advances made in this canvas. F. Housser reported that the sketches done on the 1912 fall trip were "low in tone and laboured; just shore-lines and old swamps; mist on lakes and smoky dawns; moods

smudged into panels."<sup>7</sup> A similar critique was offered by Dr. MacCallum who said that the sketches were "dark..., muddy in colour, tight and not wanting in technical defects"<sup>8</sup>, and Albert Robson, Thomson's art director at Grip, called the sketches "timid and self-conscious in execution" but conceded that they "had caught the real northern character." He particularly recalled one of the sketches "of drowned land which impressed me as having the wierd loneliness of the country."<sup>9</sup> The Drowned Land is today in the collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario (figure 6 ).<sup>10</sup>

The two most arresting qualities of The Drowned Land are the acute sense of photographic fidelity which Thomson achieved and the display of his great technical virtuosity. It is even possible that Thomson used a photograph as a basis for the composition<sup>11</sup>, but it is also possible that he was using a realistic approach to counterbalance his commercial art work, and that he was not yet aware of the freedom with which he would later develop his canvases.

In this picture, Thomson's interest is in the land, the water and the sky, and there is no presence of man in the work. The horizon is kept to the bottom third of the canvas and there is a bluff of trees across the middle ground. In the foreground the trees and the deadheads have been represented painstakingly, and the thin application of paint in much of the area permits the canvas to show through. Also of interest is Thomson's use of a low-key

palette of primarily brown, grey and blue.

It was from sketches done at the same time as The Drowned Land that Thomson developed A Northern Lake. This too is a northern Ontario landscape, but the composition itself is very different. The view is from a rocky foreground ledge across the water to the opposite shore and above rises the sky. The horizon is located slightly over two-thirds of the way up the canvas: the foreground occupies the lower third and the water and the far hills occupy the middle third. On either side of the foreground ledge are trees whose tops extend beyond the upper perimeters of the canvas. These trees are repoussoir elements, guiding the viewer's eye toward the far shore and, as the only vertical elements in the composition, they also unite the four horizontal layers of the composition.

The treatment and handling of the paint is different from that of The Drowned Land. Thomson has abandoned the photographic likeness of the earlier work, perhaps because of the larger scale of A Northern Lake, and has become more physically involved with the act of painting the canvas. The foreground rocks have been defined with a palette knife instead of with a brush, giving a tactile impression of the solidity and texture of these rocks. The palette knife was used by Homer Watson, Suzor-Côté and Maurice Cullen who were exhibiting in Toronto at this time, and Thomson would have been exposed to such an approach while sketching with Beatty and MacDonald who were also

experimenting with this technique.

The water is lively and is rendered with a brush, the whitecaps are emphasized with a flick of white on the dark green water, and a light green stroke on the distant hills brightens the far shore. A lively, textured brush-stroke is also seen in the treatment of the sky.

R.H. Hubbard points out that the arrangement of rocks and trees before water and distant hills was adopted by the other members of the future Group of Seven, and that this was continued by Thomson in later canvases.<sup>12</sup> Elaborating on this point, Barry Lord notes that Thomson and the others moved the trees to the centre of the canvas shortly thereafter to "break with the conventions of the picturesque."<sup>13</sup> Certainly Thomson did not use this particular format again: he retained his interest in the basic composition of water, far hills and sky, but abandoned the use of symmetrical enframing trees on either side of the composition.

In transposing the small sketches of 1912 into A Northern Lake, Thomson succeeds in imbuing a degree of spontaneity into the composition, particularly in the water and the sky. He also expands his palette and introduces greater colour, particularly in the light green patch along the hills in the background and in the foliage on the left. Moreover, this canvas is not so painstakingly photographic as The Drowned Land. Thomson has broken the bonds of his realism and attempts a freer interpretation of the landscape.

Following his success in the 1913 Ontario Society of Artists exhibition, Thomson went north to Algonquin Park from May to November.<sup>14</sup> He continued to explore the compositional possibilities of rocks, water and distant hills, and became interested in the effects of light on water; nevertheless, he maintained a low-key palette.

A.Y. Jackson describes these sketches as being:

surprisingly sombre and dead in colour, and... peculiar in composition, in that many of them were of an upright panel shape, showing a low shoreline and a big sky. The country in them seemed always to be viewed extensively. There were no gay little rapids or wood interiors, or patterned rocks, but only the opposite shores of lakes, far hills, or wide stretches of country.<sup>15</sup>

Thomson's use of an upright panel as well as his preference for dark and low-key colours may have been the result of his close association with both J.W. Beatty and J.E.H. MacDonald. In 1913 these two artists were frequently Thomson's sketching companions, and were perhaps the most experienced painters with whom he was in contact. Both had been impressed by the Barbizon painters during their trips abroad: Beatty was reported to have felt "a spiritual affinity with the Barbizons" and "raved about Corot's habit of doing the same scene in one hundred varying moods."<sup>16</sup> Similarly, MacDonald is known to have been interested in the work of the Barbizon painters.<sup>17</sup> Thus it is understandable that Thomson's early sketches are so reminiscent of this tradition in their low horizon, wide panorama and dark colour scheme.

Upon his return to Toronto in November of 1913, Thomson



was introduced to A.Y. Jackson.<sup>18</sup> Although this was the first meeting between the two artists, Thomson had seen Jackson's Edge of the Maple Wood at the 1911 Ontario Society of Artists exhibition<sup>19</sup> and is reported to have remarked that "it first opened his eyes to the possibilities of Canadian landscape."<sup>20</sup> At the time of their meeting, Jackson was painting The Northland, now known as Terre Sauvage<sup>21</sup> in Lawren Harris's studio, and Thomson went back several times to watch its development.<sup>22</sup>

While Edge of the Maple Wood is an impressionistic interpretation of a Quebec farmyard developed in tones of pale green, Terre Sauvage is, in contrast, a bold Post-Impressionist description of the Georgian Bay landscape. In it Jackson uses a bold black line to delineate the simple contours of the trees silhouetted against the sky, and he makes extensive use of the Impressionist device of placing complementary colours side by side to brighten the canvas: the red maple is seen beside the green fir tree and its orange leaves are silhouetted against the royal blue sky. Jackson retains the strong sense of contact with the earth of the earlier work, but the pattern of lines created by the shadows of the trees in Edge of the Maple Wood is now used to delineate the masses of rock in Terre Sauvage.

By January of 1914, Thomson and Jackson were sharing a studio in the new Studio Building erected by Lawren Harris and Dr. MacCallum.<sup>23</sup> A legend has grown up about this association : it is said that Thomson's contribution lay

in imparting his love of the northland to Jackson<sup>24</sup> while Jackson is said to have taught Thomson how to build up canvases and how to combine pure colours by using little separate strokes or "clean-cut dots."<sup>25</sup> He also told Thomson about "Europe, the art schools, famous paintings... and the Impressionist school."<sup>26</sup>

Thomson exhibited two canvases in the 1914 Ontario Society of Artists exhibition: Morning Cloud (figure 7) and Moonlight, Early Evening (figure 8).<sup>27</sup> Like A Northern Lake of the previous year, these two canvases are views of the far shore, though the foreground rocks have been eliminated, resulting in compositions of only three horizontal bands: water, land (far hills) and sky. The horizon line is very low and the sky predominates. The omission of the repoussoir trees which were present in A Northern Lake has eliminated all vertical elements in the two compositions, emphasizing the horizontality of each. Thomson concentrates on the sky and on the water, and the far shore is indistinct, general, and not associated with any specific locale.

Of the two works executed over this winter, Moonlight, Early Evening is the most progressive and certainly the boldest in terms of technique. Morning Cloud only suggests the sun behind the cloud, whereas Moonlight, Early Evening centres on the moon as a compositional element and the emanating light is portrayed by means of large radiating brushstrokes. In Morning Cloud Thomson blends short

brushstrokes and soft, subdued colours to create the impression of a light-infused scene. In the water, the brushstrokes are longer than those in the sky.

Morning Cloud is similar to J.W. Beatty's Evening Cloud of the Northland<sup>28</sup>, a work with which Thomson would have been familiar. In each work we find a diagonally sweeping clouded area, a low shoreline and a vast sky. However, Thomson's interpretation of the theme is distinctly Impressionistic in style while Beatty's is clearly situated within the Barbizon manner.

Joan Murray suggests that the "increased daring with which Thomson applied his knowledge" was due to Jackson's advice while he was painting the canvases<sup>29</sup>, and Dennis Reid assumes that Moonlight, Early Evening was probably painted "under Jackson's direct tutorship."<sup>30</sup> The technical influence of Jackson on Thomson during this time was certainly decisive, but their association in the Studio Building over the winter of 1913-14 has obscured the likely sources for Thomson's interest in sunlight or moonlight falling on water.

It was in sketches such as Stormy Evening<sup>31</sup> of the summer of 1913 that Thomson first manifested an interest in this specific subject matter. The theme was common among the French Impressionists and through his reading of Studio, Thomson would certainly have been familiar with reproductions of Monet's Waterloo Bridge and The Houses of Parliament.<sup>32</sup> The theme was particularly prevalent in

Canadian art at the turn of the century. Of the many examples available, one may cite Blair Bruce's Marine Sunset of 1896<sup>33</sup>, J.W. Morrice's Quebec Citadel by Moonlight of approximately the same date<sup>34</sup>, and Maurice Cullen's Cap Diamond of c. 1904-05.<sup>35</sup>

The theme continued to be explored in the first decades of the twentieth century by Canadian artists, and of those artists close to Thomson, it was J.E.H. MacDonald who was particularly interested in it, for example, in Early Evening, Winter of 1912.<sup>36</sup> MacDonald was most impressed by the Scandinavian painter Gustaf Fjaestad when he visited the Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art in Buffalo in 1913<sup>37</sup>. In a 1931 lecture he describes a work by Fjaestad entitled Moonlight on a Mountain Lake as a composition "where water and cloud reflections beat in a calm rhythm of colour and solemnity. His pictures were...painted in large pointillism of touches of related colour."<sup>38</sup> The description of this work is reminiscent of Thomson's sketches done during the summer of 1913 and of his large canvas Moonlight, Early Evening, and it is possible that Thomson was inspired by MacDonald's enthusiasm for Fjaestad's work: MacDonald may even have had a reproduction of Moonlight on a Mountain Lake in his possession. However, the prevalence of this theme among Thomson's colleagues and in the works being exhibited in Toronto at this time cautions against too strenuous an attempt to pinpoint the exact source of Thomson's inspiration; rather, it is clear that Thomson was

making use of a part of the thematic vocabulary of the day.

The canvases which Thomson executed during the following winter of 1914-15 reflect another change in his painterly thinking as a result of his activities during the summer and fall of 1914.

In late April or early May of 1914, Thomson and Arthur Lismer spent three weeks sketching together in Algonquin Park<sup>39</sup>, but it is impossible to identify any of Thomson's sketches done during this trip.<sup>40</sup> Following his trip with Lismer, Thomson went to Dr. MacCallum's summer home on Georgian Bay for two or three weeks before returning to Algonquin Park in August.<sup>41</sup> Some of the sketches done at Georgian Bay were used to develop canvases the following winter.

The most important development in Thomson's art was the result of a trip which he, Jackson, Lismer and Varley took to Algonquin Park in the fall of 1914.<sup>42</sup> Jackson was reportedly pleased with the results of Thomson's work during the summer of 1914 when they were not together, and noticed in particular the "freshness" and "breadth in [his] handling of brushes and pigment."<sup>43</sup> Under the eye of Jackson in the fall of 1914, Thomson was "transposing, eliminating, designing, experimenting, finding happy colour motives amid tangle and confusion, revelling in paint, and intensely interested."<sup>44</sup>

The sketch of Red Leaves (figure 9)<sup>45</sup>, although

not worked up into a large canvas, indicates the directions in which Thomson was working at this point in his career. The view is through a foreground screen of trees and shrubs to a river and the opposite shore. In choice of motif it is very similar to Jackson's Red Maple<sup>46</sup> and it is likely that Jackson was encouraging Thomson to attempt more intimate scenes. Thomson's familiarity with art nouveau through his training as a commercial artist and by his reading of art magazines is evident in this sketch, particularly in the shape of the branches and the foliage on the trees. The foliage is reduced to flat, monochrome abstractions and little attempt is made to add depth to the composition except by the use of turquoise to indicate the water and the sky. The hill seen through the trees is a dark silhouette with a shape only suggested by Thomson.

The use of art nouveau devices on such a monumental scale, as in the sketch of Red Leaves, seems to be the result of a more intimate approach to the motif. When no longer dealing with panoramic views, as in his previous works, Thomson changes his technique, preferring the flat art nouveau vocabulary to the photographically realistic one of The Drowned Land or the impressionistic one of Morning Cloud.

During the trip, Lismer noted that Thomson "has a lot of fine wood interiors rich in colour - he seems to be selecting his material carefully and using a finer sense

of colour than his previous works show", and he attributed this to Jackson's influence.<sup>47</sup> When Thomson returned to Toronto in November of 1914, Dr. MacCallum was pleased to note that "his colour had broadened marvellously, but the old feeling and sympathy remained. The sketches were much higher in key, with not a trace of muddiness, but painted in clean, pure colour ranging from one end of the spectrum to the other."<sup>48</sup>

The use of the smaller format of the panel always adds a greater degree of flexibility to Thomson's hand, and in Red Leaves he uses a 'gestural' impasto in which he covers the surface of the panel with a profusion of brushstrokes whose directional forces define the organic aspects of each natural form. Like A.Y. Jackson, Thomson permits the actual board of the sketch to show through in the area around the trees and the leaves, and the result is a unification of the composition by means of these contour lines. The use of the natural colour of the board by Thomson and Jackson in these sketches is similar to Jackson's black contour line in Terre Sauvage for it delineates the masses, forcing them to emerge sharply from the background. However, the webbed contour line is no longer painted on the work, but is an integral part of the board on which the paint is being applied, creating a light and airy feeling throughout the sketch.

In view of the obvious art nouveau elements present in Thomson's sketches of this fall, as well as in those of

Jackson, it is curious to note the reaction of Jackson and Varley to Thomson's work. A.Y. Jackson declares that Thomson is showing "decided cubistical tendencies" and suggests that he might "have to use a restraining influence on him yet"<sup>49</sup>, and in a letter written at approximately the same time, Varley says that "Tom is rapidly developing into a new Cubist."<sup>50</sup> It would be a mistake to attach too much specific importance to the mention of Cubism in these comments. Thomson undoubtedly uses a greater degree of abstraction than the other artists in interpreting the landscape, but we have yet to establish the extent to which he or any of his associates were conversant with the aims of Cubism. The mention of Cubism may refer to Thomson's two-dimensionality for many of his sketches are essentially flat despite the bold colours and the use of a receding colour (blue) for the water and the sky.

Thomson likely returned to Toronto in November of 1914<sup>51</sup> and shared studio space with Jackson until the latter left for Montreal.<sup>52</sup> He exhibited three canvases at the 1915 Ontario Society of Artists exhibition: Northern River, Split Rock, Georgian Bay and Pine Island, Georgian Bay.<sup>53</sup> Although only three were exhibited, it is almost certain that Thomson executed at least one more canvas during the winter of 1914-15. Byng Inlet, Georgian Bay (figure 10) was based on a sketch by the same name done on his summer of 1914 trip to Georgian Bay.<sup>54</sup>



The Georgian Bay sketches are remarkably different from both the sketches Thomson had done the previous summer and from those he would do in the fall of 1914. Dennis Reid suggests that these sketches "represented the first clear steps that he took in accomplishing his personal style."<sup>55</sup> The change in composition is in part due to the geographical differences of the Georgian Bay area. Thomson was no longer presented with broad panoramas of lake, hills and sky, but rather with "low whalebacks of fundamental strata... [which] support a few struggling conifers and junipers...."; a rugged land where "even in the inner bays the pines are bent and twisted in acknowledgement of the convincing power of the wind."<sup>56</sup>

In the sketch for Byng Inlet, Georgian Bay (figure 11), Thomson faithfully reproduces the terrain described above, again working with a horizontal format. A.Y. Jackson had explored a similar theme during his 1913 trip to Georgian Bay, and his work Night, Georgian Bay (then known as Land of the Leaning Pine)<sup>57</sup> may have been a source of inspiration for Thomson's interpretation. Unlike Jackson, Thomson prefers a more intimate view of the subject and situates himself directly in front of the group of bent trees. These trees, situated on a rocky promontory, extend across the middle ground of the sketch in an even, horizontal band, effectively halting the distant panorama found in Jackson's work.

Thomson uses his commercial art vocabulary in the

stylized, flat clusters of foliage on the trees. He appears to have adopted it in part to convey the effect of trees silhouetted against the sky, as did Jackson in Terre Sauvage. The board is allowed to show through in the sketch, enhancing the sense of spontaneity in the wind-bent trees; however, in the large canvas, Thomson stabilizes and anchors these trees by delineating them with black contour lines. The tops of the trees in the sketch extend to the upper perimeters of the board, and there is little space between the foreground rocks and the trees of the middle ground. The result is a feeling of the proximity of the spectator to the trees. However, in translating the sketch to the canvas, Thomson increases the foreground space by enlarging the land masses, and he brings the tops of the trees firmly within the boundaries of the canvas. Despite the rapidity of the brushstrokes in the sketch, they are all fairly uniform in texture. In the rendering of the sky, the brushstrokes are free and rapid, proceeding in a variety of directions.

In his use of colour, Thomson has 'opened up' considerably, but he is still tied to a literal colouristic representation of the main areas: blue-yellow for the sky, dark blue for the trees silhouetted against the sky, green for the masses of foliage and blue for the water. The lightening of the sky in the sketch may be due, in part, to the three weeks spent sketching with Lismer in the spring of 1914. Although there does not appear to be a direct

stylistic link with Lismer's work of this time, it would seem probable that Lismer, whose work was considerably lighter in tone, encouraged Thomson to abandon his previous dark colouring, and explore a lighter, more colourful palette.

The influence of the intervening trip with Jackson, Varley and Lismer is seen in the comparison between the colour used in the sketch and that of the canvas. In the canvas, Thomson retains the dark colours for depicting the trees, but he lightens the other areas considerably, especially the foreground. The rocky foreground masses are now bright yellow with occasional splashes of green and orange, indicating Thomson's increasing confidence in subjective rather than literal use of colour. He also uses Jackson's technique of placing dots of pure colour throughout the composition to enhance it: for example, in the red dabs of paint on the water.

The colour scheme of Byng Inlet appears almost harsh when compared with Morning Cloud of only one year earlier, and it is clear that Thomson is moving rapidly in his colour development.

Thomson's sketches are now considered autonomous works of art and are remarkable for their spontaneity and freedom; however, when he transposed them into canvases or exhibition pieces, he was not always able to arrive at a satisfactory technique. As a result, his canvases differ from each other considerably and often appear to be

odd mixtures of styles and techniques. In the canvas Byng Inlet, Thomson uses flat art nouveau patterns to render the forms of the trees but in the water he uses short, choppy brushstrokes arranged horizontally across the surface as in Moonlight, Early Evening, although in this earlier work the brushstrokes are not as horizontal nor as colourful. In the delineation of the rocks he uses longer brushstrokes of equal width to physically 'force' his way through the curves of the land masses, emphasizing the dynamic forces therein.

The treatment of the sky is an elaboration of this Post-impressionist brushstroke: the strokes lie in horizontal layers across the surface of the canvas, but they appear to have been applied rapidly for they are not uniform in size or evenly applied. Thomson's use of this brushstroke for the sky was likely a development from his works of the previous winter, and it may be noted that the technique is an effective one for painting the sky on the larger scale demanded by the canvas.

It is possible that another canvas was done during the winter of 1914-15, although it certainly dates from the 1915 portion of the season. In the Northland is signed and dated 1915 (figure 12)<sup>58</sup> and has traditionally been assumed to date from the winter of 1915-16. Joan Murray includes it in a discussion of the works of the winter of 1915-16<sup>59</sup> and Dennis Reid also believes that it was done at this time.<sup>60</sup> However, its close similarity

to Northern River (figure 14) of the winter of 1914-15 suggests that it was done earlier. The two canvases are compositionally similar in that each is a view through a screen of trees, and the disposition of elements in each is a mirror image of those in the other work. In addition, the two canvases are exactly the same size, an occurrence which is rare in Thomson's work: Northern River is a vertical format, 45" x 40" and In The Northland is horizontal in format, 40" x 45".

In The Northland is considered by Dennis Reid to be a re-working of the Northern River theme and he also points out the stylistic links between A.Y. Jackson's Frozen Lake, Early Spring, Algonquin Park<sup>61</sup> and Thomson's Northern River.<sup>62</sup> The real link, however, appears to be between the Jackson work and In The Northland. Thomson adopts from Jackson the idea of viewing a scene through a screen of trees arranged along the foreground of the canvas; he also borrows Jackson's use of a tree placed diagonally across the canvas to unite the various horizontal elements of the composition. The similarity in the treatments of the foreground is also worthy of note: each artist carefully delineates the gently rolling curves of the mounds of hard earth. The trees in Thomson's composition slant in various directions, as do those in the Jackson work, but those in Northern River are uniform and conform to the plumb-line.

In his use of colour in In The Northland Thomson departs from Jackson and uses many of the colours which now

become standard in his work. The water is a deep royal blue and is rendered in long, horizontal brushstrokes; the individual brushstrokes only become apparent upon close scrutiny. Thomson brightens the orange foreground rocks, renders the foliage in vibrant yellows and uses bright red to indicate the foliage on the small tree slightly to the right of centre; this foliage becomes the focal point of the composition.

A comparison between the painting and its sketch (figure 13) reveals one significant difference.<sup>63</sup> In the canvas Thomson adds an upright tree trunk to the extreme left foreground. This tree creates a specific point from which the landscape may be entered by the viewer, and it also serves to 'fill in' an area which in the sketch had been void. More importantly, this tree stresses the flatness of both the canvas and the composition itself.

During the winter of 1915-16, Thomson again works with this compositional format in The Pool (figure 15)<sup>64</sup>, but a more intimate view of the landscape is adopted, resulting in the dismissal of almost all sky.

The Pool is remarkable for its use of bright reds, greens and yellows. Thomson places complementary colours side by side to achieve a radiating effect: for instance, red foliage is placed beside green, and the blue water is seen against an orange undercoat of paint.

An interesting contradiction in Thomson's work becomes apparent when the sense of depth in The Pool is

studied. Thomson makes use of the traditional devices for introducing depth to a painting: bright, warm colours are placed in the foreground; the water in the middle ground is rendered in cool shades of blue and green, as is the background from which all warm colours are excluded; and the foreground foliage is represented clearly and precisely while that in the background is not seen in detail nor as clearly. However, despite these devices, The Pool remains a basically flat composition. The foreground foliage is represented in flat abstract shapes and the bright yellow leaves form a garland around the pool and the opposite shore. The pool itself is rendered in long, flat brushstrokes of green and blue applied on an earthy orange undercoat, but the colour and the brushstrokes do not change substantially as the far shore is neared; thus the impression of depth in the scene is reduced. The foliage on the far shore is rendered in strictly vertical brushstrokes of pale greens and blues. In The Northland is a similarly flat canvas, but it is not as decorative as The Pool.

Thomson's further experiments with decorative art during the winter of 1915-16 seem to have coincided with a change in studio companions and mentors. His association with A.Y. Jackson, who had encouraged him in the use of various Impressionist techniques, ended in January 1915 when Jackson moved to Montreal, and when Thomson returned to Toronto in November of 1915, his closest association

was with Harris and MacDonald who were still in Toronto. At this time, both Harris and MacDonald were working in an extremely decorative style: Harris was painting a series of snow scenes and continuing his studies of houses, and MacDonald was doing preparatory sketches for his large canvas, The Tangled Garden.<sup>65</sup> The influence exerted on Thomson by this association seems to have been particularly strong.

Harris's sketch In The Ward<sup>66</sup> reflects the concerns of all the artists at this time and serves as an interesting comparison with The Pool. The flat, decorative treatment of the motif in Thomson's work is also present in that of Harris, and like Thomson, Harris adopts a close-up, intimate view of his subject which excludes almost all sky and atmosphere. Harris places a single large tree extending the height of the sketch in the extreme foreground, slightly to the left of centre; this tree reinforces the flatness of the composition, as do the trees in The Pool.

It is in the palette used by each artist that the similarity between these two works is most remarkable: it almost appears that the same palette was circulating between Thomson and Harris. The same turquoise is present in the sky in each work, the same red, the same mauve, the same pale green and the same royal blue. The bold yellow foliage which in each work assumes the same shape would appear to be a Harris device as it first appears



in his 1913 Houses.<sup>67</sup> The sharing of stylistic vocabularies at this time among the Toronto artists makes it difficult to ascertain who was responsible for each new advance. It must be noted that both Harris and MacDonald were deeply aware of the possibilities of decorative art, and this may well be the factor which inspired Thomson to brighten his palette further and to simplify and bolden his composition.

The drive towards decorative art by Thomson, Harris and MacDonald was motivated by their reading of magazines such as Studio and Jugend, and in the case of MacDonald and Thomson, by their careers as commercial artists. But more importantly, it presented another possible solution to the problem of dealing with the northern Canadian landscape. A.Y. Jackson claims that Impressionism "was too involved a technique to express the movement and complex character of our northern wilds"<sup>68</sup>, stating that "we frankly abandoned any attempt after literal painting and treated our subjects with the freedom of the decorative designer, just as the Swedes had done, living in a land where the topography and climate are similar to our own."<sup>69</sup>

This shift had already begun in 1914 when the artists, although experimenting with the Impressionist technique, had found it inadequate when confronting the motif from a very close range, and had adopted instead an art nouveau vocabulary. It is Lawren Harris who outlines most succinct-

ly this shift in style:

Living and wandering the North, and more or less literally copying a great variety of her motives led to a decorative treatment of her great wealth of material in designs and colour patterns conveying her moods of seasons and places with suggestions of her pervading spirit. It seemed the only way to embody the charm of so many of her motives and the intricacies of her extraordinarily rich patterns.

The artists saw decorative patterns everywhere in the North, and material for every possible form of embellishment for our daily life, and all of it waiting to be used to create a home for the spirit of a new-seeing people.

This decorative phase touches the whole glorious display of nature, and creates patterns in the flat, re-expressing her moods. <sup>70</sup>

Thomson's awareness of art nouveau is clearly established in a series of seven panels which he executed for Dr. MacCallum's cottage on Georgian Bay during the winter of 1915-16. During the fall of 1915, Dr. MacCallum commissioned Thomson, Lismer, and MacDonald to paint a group of panels to decorate the living room of his cottage, intending to provide the artists with a livelihood during the first years of the war; the panels were then executed over the winter of 1915-16 and installed the following April. <sup>71</sup>

Though Thomson produced seven decorative panels for the cottage, only three were placed in position. The other four were stored in Jackson's studio for a number of years and were then donated to the National Gallery of Canada in the MacCallum Bequest. <sup>72</sup>

The panels have received very little attention in studies of Thomson's work, perhaps because they were intend-

ed as nothing more than pure decoration, and as such, were seen as simply extensions of his career as a commercial artist. All the panels are vertical in format, and unlike those by the other artists, they deal only with landscape motifs, consisting of either a single tree or a group of trees.

In Decorative Panel I (figure 16) <sup>73</sup>, for example, Thomson creates a very flat and linear composition with no sense of depth whatever. He outlines the stylized tree and its foliage with heavy contour lines; the colours are solid and flat, enhancing the overall two-dimensionality of the composition, but they do not approximate reality; and the tonality of the composition as a whole is dark and low-key with the exception of the bright red leaves placed along the trunk of the tree.

With these panels, Thomson's decorative art reaches its height. They are not based on sketches, as far as is known, and are not the result of direct observation of a particular scene. Thus they differ significantly from works like The Pool which, though decorative, retain a link with the particular landscape of northern Ontario.

Thomson went north again in the spring of 1916 though the actual date of his departure from Toronto is not known.<sup>74</sup> It was at this time that the sketching trip occurred with Harris and Dr. MacCallum which has been mentioned above. It is here accepted that The West Wind sketch was done on this trip, and although there is no similar testimony, it

is assumed that the sketch for The Jack Pine was also done at this time.<sup>75</sup> These sketches were then worked up into large canvases in Thomson's shack behind the Studio Building in Toronto during the winter of 1916-17.

The composition of both The Jack Pine and The West Wind is in many ways a return to that of A Northern Lake of 1913. From a foreground ledge the viewer looks across a body of water to the hills and the sky beyond. However, in the 1916-17 compositions, a single tree stands to the right of centre, uniting the four horizontal layers. In each, the tree extends beyond the top of the canvas, bringing the foreground area, including the tree, closer to the viewer.

It seems that The Jack Pine (figure 17) was the first of the two paintings to be executed.<sup>76</sup> The composition reflects a lingering effect of the decorative art nouveau vocabulary used in The Pool and in the panels of the previous winter; however, Thomson is now again working with nature in the context of a specific landscape and as a result, The Jack Pine is not as decorative as the panels.

The form of the jack pine itself is the most arresting element of the painting. The hanging tendrils of the tree recall Northern River of 1915, but the drooping masses of foliage recall Harris's treatment of snow-laden boughs in works such as Snow of c. 1915-16.<sup>77</sup>

The treatment of the water and the sky in The Jack Pine

deserves particularly close scrutiny. For the first time, Thomson has presented each area in the same terms: long, broad brushstrokes in pastel shades. The use of this type of brushstroke was not unprecedented among the Toronto group at this time. As early as 1912, Lawren Harris had used a similar technique in Building the Ice House, Hamilton<sup>78</sup> and he continued to use variations of it intermittently up until the time that Thomson painted The Jack Pine. One may note the sky in In The Ward of 1916 in this connection.

Although the basic composition of The West Wind is so similar to The Jack Pine, Thomson adopts an entirely different technique in The West Wind.<sup>79</sup> The correspondence here between the sketch<sup>80</sup> (figure 2 ) and the finished canvas (figure 1 ) is close except that the position of the tree has changed slightly. In the sketch the tree is placed just to the right of centre, with the result that its branches extend far into the left hand side of the composition, creating an imbalance with the right side which is empty. In the canvas, Thomson positions the tree further to the right to correct the balance between the two sides.

Large portions of the board are visible in the sketch, not only in the area around the tree, but also in the water and in the sky. The tree trunk is defined with one large stroke of purple, and the clumps of dark foliage are defined with a minimum number of brushstrokes. The foreground ledge is vague and undefined, and is rendered in shades of

purple; purple is the basic colour in the sketch to such an extent that it may be considered an exercise in variations of purple, with the exception of the patches of bright blue sky.

Thomson's predominant interest in the sketch appears to be the creation of the mood of a particular day. The sombre tonality and the attention given to indicating the various masses of the clouds and the whitecaps on the water suggest that Thomson's concern is to secure a record of the scene under these particular conditions.

The rendering of the tree in the large canvas, as already mentioned, bears an exact correspondence with the sketch though Thomson is more exact and painstaking in his translation of this element onto the canvas. In the sketch, Thomson uses the sketch board as an outline around the tree; in the canvas, he uses the vermilion undercoat of paint to outline the foliage and dark contour lines to outline the trunk and the branches of the tree.<sup>81</sup>

The foreground ledge is elaborated upon and given definition in the canvas; Thomson breaks the area into separate components, differentiated by size, shape and colour, and he expands his colour scheme: red is added, as is green in some areas. However, it is difficult to establish whether the foreground area is composed of bare rocks, mounds of hard earth or moss-covered rocks. The configuration of the distant hills is very similar to The Jack Pine. In both canvases, the hills are indistinct and are out-

lined, top and bottom, by the vermilion underpaint. In both the brushstrokes of blue paint are strictly vertical. The hills in The West Wind, unlike those in The Jack Pine, do not bear traces of snow, suggesting an earlier time in the season.

The treatment of the water in The West Wind recalls the earlier painting A Northern Lake. Thomson is concerned in each to present the wind blowing along the water, creating whitecaps.<sup>82</sup> In The West Wind, the brushstrokes in the water are short and choppy, like the water itself, and they are no longer rendered in variations of a single hue, but are pink, yellow, turquoise, beige and purple. In technique they recall those of Byng Inlet, but are much longer and lighter.

The contrast between the broad, regular horizontal bands in The Jack Pine and the short, choppy brushstrokes in The West Wind is striking and establishes that Thomson is now concerned with a vastly different interpretation of the landscape.

Thomson's treatment of the sky in The West Wind is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this painting, as he was reported to have been dissatisfied with the final results<sup>83</sup>, though the extent of his concern and the reasons for it are not known. Joan Murray suggests that Thomson was forced to look out of his studio window for the rendering of the sky in the large canvas, the indications of the sketch being felt inappropriate for the large work.

She bases her argument on her conviction that the blowing clouds in the canvas are not in unison with the direction of the wind in the tree in the sketch.<sup>84</sup>

Murray's notion that The West Wind is a "magnificent failure" due to the disharmony between the wind in the sky and that in the tree<sup>85</sup> seems to derive not from a meteorological problem at all, but from a technical and painterly one. In The West Wind Thomson is experimenting further with the problem presented in The Jack Pine. While retaining the basic composition of the previous work, he is now interested in creating a dynamic variation on the theme and is seeking to do so by moving from a decorative treatment to a more realistic one, in order to express this dynamism. The treatment of the sky is the most realistic of any of Thomson's canvases, but he chooses to combine this realistic sky with the flat, art nouveau tree form of The Jack Pine. The result is a combination of stylized rocks against less stylized water, and of an art nouveau stylized tree against a naturalistic sky. The tree has been flattened until it is parallel to the picture plane. The disharmony noticed by Murray, though present to some extent, does not weaken the composition nor diminish its force of expression.

That Thomson chose to enlarge, of all the sketches from the previous sketching season, two which deal with the lone tree motif, indicates the extent to which he was interested in this particular compositional theme. Never-



theless, we must note some significant differences between the two canvases.

The treatment of the water and the sky in the two is radically different. In The Jack Pine the sky and the water are painted in similar fashion and are so harmonious as to be indistinguishable from each other, whereas in The West Wind, the sky and the water are different in technique, and while both contribute to the mood of the picture, they do so in different ways. In each painting the foreground ledge on which the tree stands is different. In The Jack Pine it slopes from upper left to lower right and the tree is found in the lower righthand part, while in The West Wind, the land rises from lower left to upper right, and the tree, which stands in the same location as in The Jack Pine, now sits close to the crest of the hill rather than in the hollow. The disposition of these foreground land masses in the two paintings form mirror images of each other. Although the positioning of the tree is the same in each and extends beyond the top of the canvas, there can be no doubt that although each is highly stylized, they are two different species of pine tree.<sup>86</sup>

The tree in The Jack Pine stands perfectly tall and straight, as does the tree to the right of it; the small tree to its left bends over double, reflecting the shape of the hills in the background and the downward thrust of the tendrils of the large tree. In The West Wind, there is a large tree, a slightly smaller one to its left and two small

subsidiary trees to either side of the large tree. The trunk of the large tree leans pronouncedly to the left, in direct contrast to that in The Jack Pine, and the smaller trees repeat this movement to the left. Peter Mellen points out a circular rhythm within this group of trees and suggests that Thomson adopted it to counterbalance the strong movement from right to left across the surface of the canvas.<sup>87</sup>

There is also a difference in the use of colour in the two paintings. The Jack Pine is consistently brighter in its colour scheme, using bold yellows, greens and reds, while The West Wind is rendered in darker blues and mauves. The colours are directly related to the mood of each work: in The Jack Pine one senses the rising sun of the morning while the darker tonality of The West Wind suggests the end of an afternoon.

This analysis of a selection of Thomson's large canvases and their sketches suggests some tentative conclusions which may be offered regarding Thomson's development as an artist. He had a natural ability to assimilate techniques and styles quickly and this, coupled with his interest in experimentation, poses chronological problems and impedes any attempt to plot an absolutely systematic course in his development. Transition points are difficult to establish for he rarely abandoned a technique, preferring instead to introduce it to his vocabulary and re-use it in subsequent works.

Nevertheless, although Thomson did not follow a well-regimented course of development, certain stages of stylistic development may be discerned in his works.

His first works are tight and realistic, such as The Drowned Land of 1912, but he rapidly moves into a looser yet still academic approach such as that exemplified by A Northern Lake of 1913. Under the influence of Impressionism, he then begins to break up his brushstroke (Morning Cloud) and to add colour (Byng Inlet, Georgian Bay). An increasing reliance on his commercial art training manifests itself when he approaches the motif from a more intimate range (Red Leaves, In The Northland and The Pool), culminating in the series of seven panels for Dr. MacCallum's summer home on Georgian Bay in 1915-16. At the end of his career, before his premature death in July of 1917, he returns to a more naturalistic interpretation of the landscape while maintaining an art nouveau vocabulary for the rendering of certain forms. Thus, in his last canvas, The West Wind, he simplifies the forms of the hills on the opposite shore, but for the foreground land mass and the large tree he offers a distinctly art nouveau interpretation. The rendering of the sky and of the water, however, suggests a return to a more naturalistic vocabulary.

The West Wind stands at the end of his evolution as an artist. It does manifest a return to a concern with greater naturalism, but lacking stylistic resolution, it remains much within the context of Thomson's previous work.

## FOOTNOTES CHAPTER II

1. A Northern Lake, oil on canvas, 30" x 36"; Collection of the Ontario Department of Public Works. Reproduced in Mellen, Group of Seven, p. 31 in colour.

The Ontario Society of Artists Exhibition was held from March 14 to April 11, 1913. A Northern Lake was no. 88 in the catalogue, but was not reproduced.

2. Fergus Kyle, "The Ontario Society of Artists," Yearbook of the Arts in Canada (Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1913), pp. 186-7.
3. Addison, The Algonquin Years, p. 89.
4. J.M. MacCallum, "Painter of the North," The Canadian Magazine, March 1918, p. 376.
5. Murray, Thomson, p. 22.
6. Albert H. Robson, Tom Thomson (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1937), p. 7.
7. Housser, A Canadian Art Movement, p. 62.
8. MacCallum, "Painter of the North," p. 376.
9. Robson, Tom Thomson, p. 6.
10. The Drowned Land, oil on canvas board, 6-7/8" x 9-13/16", signed recto l.r. 'Tom Thomson'; Art Gallery of Ontario. Reproduced in colour in David Silcox and Harold Town, Tom Thomson. The Silence and the Storm (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1977), p. 39.
11. Dennis Reid, "The Photographs of Tom Thomson," p. 5. Reid points out the similarities between The Drowned Land and one of the surviving Thomson photographs but does not attempt to take the comparison further. I concur with his judgment.
12. R.H. Hubbard, Tom Thomson (Toronto: Society for Art Publications. McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1962), p. 7.

13. Barry Lord, The History of Painting in Canada. Toward a People's Art (Toronto: NC Press, 1974), p. 126.
14. Reid, Group of Seven, p. 53.
15. Montreal, The Montreal Arts Club, Catalogue of an Exhibition of Paintings by the Late Tom Thomson, Foreword by A.Y. Jackson, March 1 - 21, 1919, n.p. Hereafter listed as Jackson, Foreword.
16. Dorothy Hoover, J.W. Beatty (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1948), p. 10.
17. Nancy E. Robertson, J.E.H. MacDonald, R.C.A. 1873-1932, Exhibition organized for the Art Gallery of Toronto, November 13 - December 12, 1965 (Toronto: Art Gallery of Toronto, 1965), p. 6.
18. Jackson, A Painter's Country, p. 31.
19. Edge of the Maple Wood, oil on canvas, 22½" x 26", signed and dated l.r. 'A.Y. JACKSON/1910'; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in colour in Mellen, Group of Seven, p. 15.
20. Toronto, Art Gallery of Toronto, A.Y. Jackson Paintings 1902-1953, Foreword by Arthur Lismer, October - November 1953, p. 5. Lismer states that he, MacDonald and Thomson saw Edge of the Maple Wood at this exhibition and that they discussed its quality.
21. Housser, A Canadian Art Movement, p. 78.
22. Terre Sauvage, oil on canvas, 50" x 60", signed and dated l.r. 'AY JACKSON/1913'; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in colour in Mellen, Group of Seven, p. 34.
23. Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 25.
24. Jackson, A Painter's Country, p. 32.
25. Ibid, p. 35.
26. Housser, A Canadian Art Movement, p. 92.
27. Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 26.
28. Jackson, A Painter's Country, p. 34.
29. The Ontario Society of Artists exhibition was held from March 14 - April 11, 1914.
30. Morning Cloud, oil on canvas, 28¼" x 39-7/8";

- Private Collection, Sarnia, Ontario. Reproduced in colour in Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 57, Plate II.
- Moonlight, Early Evening, then known as Moonlight, oil on canvas, 20-3/4" x 30"; Purchased by the National Gallery of Canada from the 1914 Ontario Society of Artists exhibition. Reproduced in black and white in Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 67, no. 13.
28. Evening Cloud of the Northland, 1910, oil on canvas, 38 1/2" x 55-3/4"; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in black and white in Mellen, Group of Seven, p. 30.
  29. Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 26.
  30. Reid, Group of Seven, p. 55.
  31. Stormy Evening, oil on canvas board, 10" x 7-7/8"; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 66, no. 10 in black and white.
  32. Studio 32 (1904): 167. The treatment of the water in Morning Cloud is particularly close to that used by Monet in Waterloo Bridge.
  33. William Blair Bruce, Marine Sunset, oil on canvas, 11" x 14 1/4"; Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Jules Loeb, Toronto. Reproduced in Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario, Impressionism in Canada 1895-1935, catalogue by Joan Murray, November 17, 1974 - January 5, 1975, p. 17. This catalogue will henceforth be referred to as Murray, Impressionism.
  34. James Wilson Morrice, Quebec Citadel by Moonlight, oil on canvas, 21-7/8" x 15-1/8"; Collection of Miss F. Eleanore and Mr. David R. Morrice, Montreal. Reproduced in Murray, Impressionism, p. 41.
  35. Maurice Cullen, Cap Diamond, oil on canvas, 57 1/4" x 68-3/4"; Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton. Reproduced in Murray, Impressionism, p. 26.
  36. Early Evening, Winter, oil on canvas, 33" x 28"; Art Gallery of Ontario. Reproduced in Robertson, MacDonald, p. 18, no. 8, in black and white.
  37. Buffalo, Albright Art Gallery, Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art, January 4-16, 1913. Lawren Harris and J.E.H. MacDonald travelled to Buffalo to see this exhibition. Mellen, Group of Seven, p. 22.

38. J.E.H. MacDonald, Scandinavian Art, Typewritten notes for a lecture given at the Art Gallery of Toronto on April 17, 1931. Copy in the Art Gallery of Ontario Library.
39. Addison, The Algonquin Years, p. 28.
40. Reid, Group of Seven, p. 74. Reid refers the reader to Evan H. Turner, "A Current General Problem and a Specific Issue," Canadian Art 20 (March-April 1963): 108-111 for a discussion of a work which may have been produced on this trip.
41. Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 31.
42. Reid, Group of Seven, p. 76.
43. Blodwen Davies, A Study of Tom Thomson, with a Foreword by A.Y. Jackson (Toronto: The Discus Press, 1935; reprint ed., Vancouver: Mitchell Press Ltd., 1967), p. 61.
44. Jackson, "Foreword," n.p.
45. Red Leaves, oil on panel, 8½" x 10½"; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in colour in Mellen, Group of Seven, p. 41. Thomson adopted this standard size of sketching panel in 1914.
46. Red Maple, oil on panel, 8½" x 10½", McMichael Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. Reproduced in black and white in Reid, Group of Seven, p. 79, no. 49.
47. Letter from Arthur Lismer to Dr. MacCallum, dated October 11, 1914. McMichael Collection, Kleinburg.
48. MacCallum, "Painter of the North," p. 376.
49. Letter from A.Y. Jackson to Dr. MacCallum, dated 13 October, 1914, in the National Gallery of Canada. Partly reproduced in Reid, Group of Seven, p. 69.
50. Letter from Varley to Dr. MacCallum, no date, National Gallery of Canada Archives; Quoted in part in Reid, Group of Seven, p. 70.
51. Reid, Group of Seven, p. 76.
52. Reid, Jack Pine, p. 11. Jackson appears to have left Toronto for Montreal in December of 1914. or January of 1915.
53. The 1915 Ontario Society of Artists Exhibition was held from March 13 to April 10. The canvases which

Thomson exhibited were Northern River, oil on canvas, signed recto l.r. 'Tom Thomson', 45" x 40"; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in colour in Mellen, Group of Seven, p. 51.

Split Rock, Georgian Bay, oil on canvas, 36" x 45"; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in black and white in Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 72, no. 39.

Pine Island, Georgian Bay, oil on canvas, 60½" x 50½"; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 72, no. 40.

54. Byng Inlet, Georgian Bay, oil on canvas, signed recto l.r. 'Tom Thomson', 28-¾" x 30½"; McMichael Collection, Kleinburg. Reproduced in colour in Silcox and Town, The Silence and The Storm, p. 93 as Summer Shore, Georgian Bay.

The sketch is Georgian Bay, Byng Inlet, oil on panel, 8½" x 10½"; The Roberts Gallery, Toronto. Reproduced in colour in Silcox and Town, The Silence and The Storm, p. 92.

55. Reid, Group of Seven, p. 76.

56. Charles Comfort, "Georgian Bay Legacy," Canadian Art 8 (Spring 1951): 106.

57. Night, Georgian Bay, oil on canvas, signed and dated l.l. 'A Y JACKSON/1913', 21" x 25½"; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in Reid, Group of Seven, p. 47, no. 14, in black and white.

58. In The Northland, signed and dated l.r. 'Tom Thomson '15', oil on canvas, 40" x 45"; Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Reproduced in black and white in Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 82, no. 83.

59. Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 42.

60. Reid, Jack Pine, p. 15.

61. Frozen Lake, Early Spring, Algonquin Park, signed l.r. 'A Y JACKSON', oil on canvas, 32" x 39"; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in Reid, Group of Seven, p. 70, no. 38.

62. Reid, Jack Pine, p. 11.

63. Blue Lake, oil on panel, 8½" x 10½"; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 82, no. 84.



64. The Pool, oil on canvas, 30" x 32 $\frac{1}{4}$ "; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in colour in Patricia Godsell, Enjoying Canadian Painting (Don Mills, Ontario: General Publishing Company Ltd., 1976), p.125.
65. The Tangled Garden, oil on board, 48" x 60"; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in colour in Mellen, Group of Seven, p. 67.
66. In The Ward, oil on board, 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 13-3/4"; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in colour in Bess Harris and Peter Colgrove, Lawren Harris (Toronto: MacMillan and Company, 1969), p. 25.
67. Houses, oil on board, 32" x 36"; Collection of J.C. Fraser, Toronto. Reproduced in colour in Harris and Colgrove, Lawren Harris, p. 36.
68. A.Y. Jackson, "Arthur Lismer- His Contribution to Canadian Art." Canadian Art 7 (1950): 89.
69. Jackson, "Foreword," n.p.
70. Quoted in Harris and Colgrove, Lawren Harris, p. 45. Unfortunately, this statement by Harris is not dated.
71. Dennis Reid, The MacCallum Bequest and the Mr. and Mrs. H.R. Jackman Gift, Exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada, January 25- February 23, 1969 (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1969), p. 23.
72. Ibid, p. 69. Unfortunately there is almost no documentation about these panels either by Dr. MacCallum or by the artists involved in the commission, and why Thomson produced four panels that were too large is a mystery. It should perhaps be noted that the panels were too large by a very small degree: those that did fit their intended locations measured 47-3/4" x 33" while those that were too large measured 47 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 38".
73. Decorative Panel I, oil on board, 47 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 38"; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in colour in Silcox and Town, The Silence and the Storm, p. 48.
74. Addison, The Algonquin Years, p. 50.
75. Reid, Jack Pine, p. 22.
76. As has been mentioned previously, The West Wind was said to have been unfinished and wet on Thomson's easel when he died, and there is no reference to The Jack Pine as being unfinished.

- The Jack Pine, oil on canvas, 50½" x 55"; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in colour in Silcox and Town, The Silence and the Storm, p. 124.
77. Snow, oil on canvas, 27" x 42"; McMichael Collection, Kleinburg. Reproduced in colour in Mellen, Group of Seven, p. 46.
  78. Building The Ice House, Hamilton, 1912, oil on board, 10½" x 12½"; L.S.H. Holdings Limited. Reproduced in Reid, Group of Seven, p. 59, no. 27 in black and white.
  79. The West Wind, oil on canvas, 47½" x 54-1/8"; Art Gallery of Ontario. Reproduced in colour in Silcox and Town, The Silence and the Storm, p. 175.
  80. The West Wind, oil on board, 8½" x 10½"; Art Gallery of Ontario. Reproduced in Silcox and Town, The Silence and The Storm, p. 174, in colour.
  81. We must thank Joan Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 45 for this observation.
  82. The wind has to be blowing at least 12-15 knots before whitecaps will occur.
  83. Addison, The Algonquin Years, p. 93, footnote 49. It was Winifred Trainor who recalled this.
  84. Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 45.
  85. Ibid, p. 45.
  86. In his letter to Martin Baldwin of January 14, 1955, Professor Dwight notes that the tree in The West Wind is a red pine while that in The Jack Pine, is, as the title indicates, a jack pine.
  87. Mellen, Group of Seven, p. 60.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE THEMATIC BACKGROUND TO

#### THE WEST WIND

Thomson's large canvases following his 1913 success with A Northern Lake at the Ontario Society of Artists exhibition reflect a concern with motifs which might most succinctly express his vision of the northland. Only approximately thirty of more than five hundred sketches were developed into large canvases<sup>1</sup> and so it may be reasonable to attach special significance to the motifs which he did choose to pursue on canvas.

The West Wind is one of the most powerful and enduring of these images and it must be studied in terms of its inherent themes and motifs. The canvas is essentially the motif of the lone tree within the theme of a storm. The storm, reflected in the water and in the sky, is rendered in naturalistic terms while the lone tree is highly stylized.

Thomson had already developed the tree motif in The Jack Pine; but now he introduces the theme of the storm, creating a dynamic statement. Both paintings show Thomson searching for a 'realization' of the varying possibilities presented by the lone tree and so far as is known, he did not concern himself with this motif during the last spring

or summer of his life.

Thomson's pursuit of both motif and theme in The West Wind may be related to the similar interests of Lismer, MacDonald, Jackson and Harris prior to 1917.

In 1913, the theme of the storm was explored by MacDonald, Lismer and Jackson in the Georgian Bay area and by Thomson in Algonquin Park. During their 1913 visits to Georgian Bay, MacDonald and Lismer each produced important canvases whose essential theme is the state of flux in the northern sky and its reflection in the clouds and on the water. A lingering influence of Constable's skies suggests itself in both MacDonald's The Lonely North<sup>2</sup> and Lismer's Georgian Bay,<sup>3</sup> and in each, the landscape plays a subordinate role to the water and the sky.

Thomson explored the same theme in Algonquin Park and painted A Northern Lake in 1913. A similar interest in the storm's effect on the water and the sky is present in this canvas, but Thomson's interpretation of the theme includes a more definitive treatment of the actual landscape than that of MacDonald or Lismer.

A.Y. Jackson's visit to Georgian Bay in 1913 produced a different response.<sup>4</sup> In Night, Georgian Bay, he chose to depict "an autumn gale...[when]... the whole shoreline of the bay seems to crouch and the crooked trees lean the same direction as the waves."<sup>5</sup> Within the Toronto group immediately associated with Thomson, this was the first large work that actually focussed on the trees as

the vehicles by which the motion of the wind may be expressed, and it is significant to note that Thomson was inspired by these same aspects of Georgian Bay when he went there during the summer of 1914. As noted in the previous chapter, he created several large canvases during the following winter of 1914-15, two of which are based on the theme of trees blowing in the wind.

Of Byng Inlet, Georgian Bay (figure 10) and Pine Island, Georgian Bay (figure 18), it is the latter which states this theme the most emphatically. The island on which the group of trees stands is not separated from the viewer by an expanse of water, hence the trees are in the foreground of the canvas. There can be no doubt that Thomson was in part influenced by Jackson's 1913 treatment of the theme; however, the Georgian Bay area is particularly noted for "crooked windblown pines...on the islands... [whose] limbs twist away from the prevailing west wind and wave like black banners against unbroken stretches of pure sky!"<sup>5</sup>, and Thomson would not have needed a previous example using this particular subject matter.

Thomson's interest in the tree as motif seems to have been present from an early stage in his career. Indicating a date of 1912, Mark Robinson recalled that Thomson asked him where he could find "a pine, with the old branches coming out low down and large branches, the ugliest old thing you know of, and bark, on some of it; old pine is preferred."<sup>7</sup>

There are a number of sketches which might be identified as the one that was ultimately produced after Robinson had referred Thomson to an appropriate subject, but the precise identification cannot be established.<sup>8</sup> None were developed into large canvases.

The use of a single tree as one of the main, if not the dominant, compositional elements in sketches and paintings prior to 1917 is seen in MacDonald's 1914 Winter Sunshine and 1914-15 - 1917 Evening Thornhill<sup>9</sup>, in which he uses a single large tree to establish his composition and to unite the various horizontal planes. Harris also places a large tree whose top extends beyond the upper edge of the composition in his 1916 sketch In The Ward. Yet it must be admitted that the situation of the tree in the works of MacDonald and Harris is very different from any in Thomson's work: the former two place their trees against a city or suburban countryside whereas Thomson's are situated in Algonquin Park. In all the works the structural role of the tree within the work is the same, and each artist has reduced all extraneous elements until the tree becomes a dominant feature of the composition. However, it is only in The Jack Pine and The West Wind that the tree is elevated to the position of primary landscape motif.

Following his 1913 Georgian Bay, Lismer continued to explore the theme of stormy weather, creating in 1914 Breezy Weather, Georgian Bay and in 1916 A West Wind,

Georgian Bay.<sup>10</sup> In the latter canvas he introduces to the foreground a small tree which bears the force of the wind. This canvas is very important within the context of Lismer's subsequent development of the theme, but stylistically it is not as close to The West Wind as the previous examples cited which use the lone tree motif. Lismer's tree does not break the upper edge of the canvas, nor is it situated in the extreme foreground of the composition. Rather than a reduction of elements, Lismer's development of the theme at this point involves the addition of elements. Even so, by 1916, trees blowing in the wind had become part of the thematic vocabulary of these artists - one may also cite MacDonald's The Elements<sup>11</sup> in this connection - and it is significant that in his sketches of the summer of 1916, Thomson extended his lone tree motif to include the theme of the storm.

Although influenced by the explorations of his fellow painters in the area of Georgian Bay, Thomson's final statement of the theme emerged in Algonquin Park, united with the lone tree motif in The West Wind. However, despite the parallels and thematic similarities between Thomson and his fellow painters, The West Wind is very much an epic statement unto itself and remains one of the most compelling images to have emerged in Canadian painting during the second decade of the twentieth century.

But there are additional currents within the cultural

climate of the time which may have influenced Thomson's paintings in general and The West Wind in particular.

In 1971, Joan Murray, citing evidence that Thomson read poetry, noted that he "specifically quoted fragments from (William Wilfred) Campbell in his titles and Campbell may have been the source of some of his themes as well."<sup>12</sup> She points out that:

the general tone of Campbell's nature verse with its odes to the sunset ('Glory of the Dying Day'), studies of wind ('Wind' and 'The Wind Dancer') and numerous reveries on autumn colour or winter snow form a convincing parallel to Thomson's choice of subject matter,<sup>13</sup>

and she notes an undeniable parallel between Thomson's Northern River and Campbell's poem of the same name.<sup>14</sup>

Murray does not, however, extend her study to The West Wind, except to note that the west wind was a common landscape theme at the turn of the century<sup>15</sup> together with the theme of the wind and its effect on trees.<sup>16</sup>

Pursuing this matter further, more parallels with Campbell's work and with the work of other poets working at the same time become apparent, and suggest that in choosing the theme of the west wind, Thomson was working with a thematic vocabulary that was prevalent in the turn-of-the-century Canadian poetry.

William Wilfred Campbell, whose Collected Poems appeared in Toronto in 1905<sup>17</sup>, had abandoned the Anglican ministry in 1891 and was a civil servant in Ottawa at the time of the publication of this book. Like Duncan Campbell



Scott (1862-1947) and Archibald Lampman (1861-1899), who also combined careers as civil servants with the writing of poetry, Campbell derived his inspiration from the countryside surrounding Ottawa, working around the Bruce Peninsula between Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. By 1906 he was a popular and respected poet in both Canada and in Britain: Andrew Carnegie ordered five hundred copies of Collected Poems for the Carnegie Libraries and in 1906 Campbell was presented to Their Majesties when he received an honorary degree from the University of Aberdeen.<sup>18</sup>

In the Introduction to his Collected Poems, Campbell notes that:

Poetry may have many messages; but above all stands the eternal appeal from life and nature... In the work of the great nature poets, the very strength and beauty of the verse is owing to the fact that the thought and imagination dwell upon the human, and nature as affecting the human, rather than upon the mere objective nature, as solely an esthetic aspect. The greatness of such verse consists in its lofty emotion, whereby it conveys to the soul an impressive sense of the majesty of life and death. It is not merely the work of the literary artist, who paints in words on a sort of literary canvas, but whether the idea be death or a season, the mood is a creation of a soul strongly imbued with a feeling of the sublimity of life.<sup>19</sup>

The themes and motifs present in the nature poems of Campbell show affinities with the work Thomson would do ten years later. The wind is the specific inspiration of three of his poems, and an underlying preoccupation with it is to be found in a number of his works. Unlike Thomson, Campbell views the wind as a light and often whimsical or frivolous spirit. In Wind, he describes its

ephemeral presence:

All unseen I walk the meadows,  
Or I wake the wheat,  
Speeding o'er the tawny billows  
With my phantom feet.<sup>20</sup>

and in The Wind's Royalty, he celebrates this monarch  
of the skies:

Here reigns a king, the happiest known on earth,  
That blithesome monarch mortals call the wind,  
Who roves the galleries wide in vagrant mirth,  
His courtier clouds obedient to his mind;  
Or when he sleeps his sentinel stars are still,  
With ethiop guards o'ertopping some grave hill.<sup>21</sup>

And one wonders whether the "ethiop guards" are perhaps  
pine trees.

In The Wind Dancer, although the wind is not seen  
as a powerful and awesome force as in Thomson's canvas,  
Campbell uses musical imagery similar to that suggested  
by The West Wind. Arthur Lismer likens the tree in the  
canvas to "a harp of the wind"<sup>22</sup> and in his poem, Campbell  
draws an analogy between the wind in the trees and a  
stringed instrument:

For when a wind-breath wakes the world  
And stirs each drowsèd tree  
Like magic silver works his bow  
In fiddlings merrily.<sup>23</sup>

In The Dryad, Campbell uses the more specific harp  
imagery:

Her soul was sown with the seed of the tree  
Of old when the earth was young;  
And glad with the light of its majesty  
The light of her beautiful being upgrew.  
And the winds that swept over land and sea,  
And like a harper the great boughs strung,  
Whispered her all things new.<sup>24</sup>

as does his contemporary, Bliss Carman who, in Songs of the Sea Children V, refers to himself as "a harpstring in the wind."<sup>25</sup> The presence of the harp image in both the poetry of the period and in Thomson's canvas reflects an affinity between painting, poetry and music.

In The Dryad, Campbell describes a lone tree whose majesty and placement in the 'foreground' of the poem evokes an association with the tree in The West Wind:

The tree reached forth to the sun and the wind  
And towered to heaven above...<sup>26</sup>

Associations continue to suggest themselves in the following lines:

But all things come to an end at last  
When the wings of being are furled.  
And there blew one night a maddening blast  
From those wastes where ships dismantle and drown,  
That ravaged the forest and thundered past,  
And in the wreck of that ruined world  
The dryad's tree went down.<sup>27</sup>

Thomson's canvas is concerned with the tree as it stands blowing in the wind, and ostensibly it gives no indication of blowing over. But the leftward leaning of the tree creates a sense of the moment arrested in time and a heightened feeling of unpredictability. We do not know that this tree will not blow over: and it will be recalled that in MacCallum's account of the circumstances of The West Wind sketch, the tree was felled by the wind shortly thereafter.

Campbell's associations with the pine tree were derived from his reading of Ossian and are overtly Celtic in character. In 1905 he wrote:

As the beechwood is Greek, and the maple and elm-wood Gothic, so the pinewood is distinctly Celtic. There is an undefiled wildness and sense of primitive savagery under its mighty shades, where in the stillest days you can hear a needle drop for half a mile, and where, at other times, the wind roars like the Atlantic in the swaying tops. Its poetry is more of Ossian than of Homer.<sup>28</sup>

While Thomson may have been aware of Campbell's sources, this would be hard to establish. Both Campbell and Thomson were of Scottish descent, though as far as is known, Thomson did not express any particular interest in his Scottish ancestry. Nevertheless, his response to the majesty of the pine tree was similar to Campbell's.

The mythological personifications upon which Campbell relied in much of his nature poetry are conspicuously absent from Thomson's work, but Joan Murray's link between the subject matter of Campbell's poetry and that of Thomson's paintings must certainly be accepted.

The themes with which Campbell dealt- especially those of the wind and of the tree blowing in the wind- are present in the works of other poets at this time. Archibald Lampman, Duncan Campbell Scott, Charles G.D. Roberts (1860-1943) and Bliss Carman (1861-1929) are known as the 'Confederation Poets' or the 'Poets of the Sixties'.<sup>29</sup> Although deeply influenced by the nineteenth century romantic tradition in poetry, their work was inspired by- and responded directly to- the Canadian landscape. Each worked within a very small area of Canada, as did Thomson: Scott and Lampman worked in the Great Lakes area of Ontario

and Roberts and Carman worked in the Maritimes. Although each poet was distinct in his approach to nature, their solidarity of theme united them and they were very popular in the latter years of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century.

Like Wilfred Campbell, Archibald Lampman was fascinated by the wind. Included in his volume Among the Millet, published in Ottawa in 1888, is a poem entitled Lament of the Winds in which he deals with this ephemeral presence, using the wind as a symbol to convey those aspects of the human cycle to which Campbell referred in his 1905 Introduction. Storm is closer to Campbell's The Dryad, but Lampman's concept of the wind is more sophisticated and infinitely more complex than Campbell's. He uses the wind to unleash his own soul, desperately trying to immerse himself in nature:

O Wind, wild-voiced brother, in your northern cave,  
My spirit also being so beset  
With pride and pain, I heard you beat and rave,  
Grinding your chains with furious howl and fret,  
Knowing full well that all earth's moving things inherit  
The same chained might and madness of spirit  
That none may quite forget.

. . . . .

I most that love you, Wind, when you are fierce and free,  
In these dull fetters that cannot long remain;  
Lo, I will rise and break my thongs and flee  
Forth to your drift and beating, til my brain  
Even for an hour grow wild in your divine embraces,  
And then creep back into mine earthly traces,  
And bind me with my chain.<sup>30</sup>

The concept of the wind in this poem is similar to

that in The West Wind. Here the wind is a primal force and the poet stands in awe of its freedom and lack of restrictions. It is seen as the antithesis of man and it becomes apparent that although man can aspire to - and temporarily attain - the spirit of the wind, he must ultimately return to his chained state.

The theme of the wind occupies many of the poems of Lampman's contemporary, Bliss Carman. Carman was born in Fredericton in 1861 and was educated at the universities of New Brunswick, Edinburgh and Harvard. Reluctant to remain in New Brunswick, he moved to New England in 1886 where he remained for the rest of his life, except for trips to Canada and abroad. He was widely read on both sides of the Atlantic and devoted his maturity to editing and writing.<sup>31</sup>

In The Wind and the Tree, Carman personifies the spirit of man in the tree which remains chained to the land in direct contrast to the wind which is free:

The lover Wind is away, away,  
Leaving a word with the lady Tree;  
For his heart is out on the golden bay,  
Trampling the perilous floor of sea.

The lady Tree from her lonely hill  
Sends a sigh through the world to roam  
The Wind's wild way at the Wind's sweet will;  
But her heart abides at home, at home.<sup>32</sup>

In both this poem and The West Wind, the tree and the wind are presented as separate elements whose identities, nevertheless, are inextricably bound up with each other. The wind in Thomson's canvas is revealed by the tree for the

tree derives its present form from the wind. Again, the concept is one of antitheses: free versus bound, air versus ground, and in the case of the poem, male versus female. Like Lampman, Carman is obsessed by the wind as a natural force to which man can aspire but never subdue. In A Windflower, he poignantly pleads:

Surely the wind is but the wind  
And I a broken waif thereon.<sup>33</sup>

Carman is preoccupied with the wind, as were Thomson and the poets of the day, but it is Carman who feels compelled to question it, displaying a definite ambivalence and lack of resolution in his own attitude to it.

In Summer Storm, Carman describes the visual effects of wind as it presages the coming storm; dwelling on the moment before the actual storm breaks:

The hilltop trees are bowing  
Under the coming of storm.  
The low gray clouds are trailing  
Like squadrons that sweep and form,  
With their ammunition of rain.<sup>34</sup>

Wilfred Campbell, Archibald Lampman and Bliss Carman established themselves very early in their careers and were sufficiently well-known by 1889 to be included in William D. Lighthall's Songs of the Great Dominion, published in London.<sup>35</sup> In addition to signifying the already established reputation of those poets included in his book, Lighthall ensured that their fame would continue to spread, introducing readers to poets with whom they may not have been previously familiar. The book enjoyed wide

appeal and popularity in both England and Canada and was held in high regard, being one of the first anthologies of Canadian poetry to appear.

Among the many poems in this anthology relevant to our discussion, one may single out Charles Heavysege's The Autumn Tree. In the Introduction to the collection, Lighthall informs the reader that Heavysege (1816-1876) "was originally a drama-composing carpenter, then a journalist in Montreal, and wore out his soul at the drudgery of the latter occupation and in poverty."<sup>36</sup>

Although of a generation before Thomson, Heavysege was interested in the theme of the wind in the trees, a tradition that continued into the poetry of Thomson's contemporaries:

Hark to the sighing of yon fading tree,  
Yon tree that rocks, as if with sense distressed;  
It seems complaining that its destiny  
Should send the gale to desolate its breast.<sup>37</sup>

E. Pauline Johnson is also represented in Lighthall's anthology. The daughter of the Head Chief of the Six Nations and an English woman, Johnson was born on the Six Nations Indian Reserve near Brantford, Ontario.<sup>38</sup> She was very popular in her day: she gave the first recital of her own work in 1892 and continued to do so until ill health forced her retirement in 1908. In the course of her recital travels, she visited most of Canada, the United States and England. However, her most important poem, The Song My Paddle Sings, was not published until 1912.



in Flint and Feather, the complete collection of her poems.<sup>39</sup> It is significant to note that this book was published in Toronto close to the time when Thomson was beginning to paint seriously.

In The Songs My Paddle Sings, Johnson beseeches:

West wind, blow from your prairie nest  
Blow from the mountains, blow from the west  
The sail is idle, the sailor too;  
O! wind of the west, we wait for you.<sup>40</sup>

The poem ends with a particularly northern Canadian image, and one that strongly evokes the image of the tree in The West Wind:

And up on the hills against the sky,  
A fir tree rocking its lullaby,  
Swings, swings, its emerald wings,  
Swelling the song that my paddle sings.<sup>41</sup>

Johnson's concern with the west wind is an entirely different one from Thomson's as she is awaiting its arrival. What is important in this poem is the use of the two images - that of the tree and that of the wind - as in Carman's The Wind and The Tree and as in The West Wind.

Between 1914 and 1916 Carman again used the motif of the lone tree in combination with the wind in his poem The Pine. The poem was not published until 1929 in the volume Wild Garden<sup>42</sup> and it thus seems impossible that Thomson would have read it. Again, the use of the tree and the wind in this poem creates a mood slightly different from The West Wind, but the imagery of the poem is remarkably similar to both The Jack Pine and The West Wind, and there can be no doubt that this theme was

prevalent during the time that these two works were painted.

Tall as a mast in morning light  
 Stands our old pine against the sky,  
 A sentinel upon the height  
 To watch the wheeling days go by.

His dark boughs etched against the blue  
 Are like a print of old Japan,-  
 Some war-god marking the review  
 Of the mysterious march of man.

Eastward above the sleeping land  
 He sees the growing dawn unfold,  
 Until the Holyoke ranges stand  
 Purpled against the silent gold.

. . . . .

Unwearying through snow and rain  
 He signals courage from the steep,  
 And when night settles on the plain  
 He has his starry watch to keep.

Then when the winter storms arise,  
 And the gay leaves are fled in fear,-  
 In a great grieving voice he cries  
 His reassurance, "I am here!"<sup>43</sup>

The poetry which has been discussed so far reflects an overwhelming concern on the part of the poets with a glorification of the wind, especially when it manifests itself in a storm. The theme of the storm was very much a part of the cultural thought in Canada prior to 1913 when Lismer and MacDonald stated it in paint in Georgian Bay at the same time that Thomson was exploring it in Algonquin Park. Of greater significance, though, is the fact that in Campbell's The Dryad, Heavyside's The Autumn Tree, Johnson's The Song My Paddle Sings, and Carman's The Wind and The Tree and The Pine, the motif of the lone

tree is present, playing a very important and very specific role in conjunction with the wind.

In Johnson's poem, it is the west wind that is specifically mentioned; thus, as in Thomson's canvas, the lone tree motif and the west wind are presented in relation to each other. The specific mention of the west wind theme may also be found in the work of Bliss Carman.

The Word in the Beginning is essentially Carman's celebration of the return of spring to nature. The 'Word' is "the long Aprilian cry"<sup>44</sup> and throughout the prelude to the poem, the South Wind consistently says "Come forth" while the West Wind elaborates on this message, bidding the elements to "Go far!", "Be swift!", "Be wise!", and "Be free!".<sup>45</sup>

Carman clearly associates the west wind with the advent of spring and in this poem, it becomes the bearer of the specific messages of this season. Carman's symbolism stems from classical mythology in which Zephyrus, the west wind, is the rain-producing spring wind.<sup>46</sup>

The poem is too long to quote in its entirety, but the following passages illuminate Carman's basic philosophy of spring and the kinship between man and nature:

This is the Word that came  
To the spirit of Man,  
And shook his soul like a flame  
In the breath of a fan,  
Till it burned as a light in his eyes,  
as a colour that grew  
And prospered under the tan.

The South Wind said, "Come forth",  
And the West Wind said, "Be free!"

Then he rose and put on the new garb,  
 And knew he should be  
 The master of knowledge and joy,  
     though sprung from the tribes  
 Of the earth and the air and the sea.<sup>47</sup>

Donald Stephens has noted that for Carman "spring is the time when... the wind cannot be grasped as a physical object but is present in all things."<sup>48</sup> He further explains that:

the wind, for Carman, is more than a physical phenomenon, constantly rising and falling and blending; ... He associates it with life and death and searches for the reasons why it does not give notice as to when it will come... The wind for Carman becomes a meaningful symbol, as it reflects the conflicts and ambiguities of life.<sup>49</sup>

In Our Lady of the Rain from the 1904 volume Songs from a Northern Garden, Carman explicitly associates the west wind with the coming of spring, expressing a profound desire for communion with nature:

Be thou the west wind's brother  
 And kin to the bird and tree  
 The soul of Spring may utter  
 Her oracles to thee.<sup>50</sup>

In Sonnet L from Songs of the Sea Children, the west wind is male while the flower is female, recalling the use of similar imagery in The Wind and the Tree. Again, an antithesis between that which is free and that which is bound is suggested, and although spring is not specifically mentioned, the west wind bears connotations of renewal and regeneration:

I was the west wind over the garden,  
 Out of the twilight marge and deep;  
 You were the sultry languorous flower,  
 Famished and laid to sleep. 51

In Sonnet XIV, the west wind is a nostalgic spring  
 wind:

The nightwind from the West,  
 The broad eaves of the sky,  
 Brings back across the orchard hills  
 The memories of a thousand springs with him; 52

and in Sonnet VII, the wind is again associated with the  
 coming of spring, although it is not referred to as the  
 west wind:

Once more in every tree-top  
 I hear the hollow wind  
 A-blowing the last remnants  
 Of winter from the land. 53

Sonnet LXXIV returns again to the theme of the winds  
 of spring as messengers, as in The Word in the Beginning:

Once when the winds of spring came home  
 From the far countries where they roam,  
 I heard them tell  
 Of things I could not understand,  
 And strange adventures in a land  
 Where all was well. 54

In Earth Voices, Carman explains the specific functions  
 and associations of the spring wind, outlining its  
 regenerative powers:

I heard the spring wind whisper  
 Above the brushwood fire,  
 "The world is made forever  
 Of transport and desire.

"I am the breast of being,  
 The primal urge of things;  
 I am the whirl of star dust,  
 I am the lift of wings.

"I am the splendid impulse  
That comes before the thought,  
The joy and exaltation  
Wherein the life is caught.

"Across the sleeping furrows  
I call the buried seed,  
And blade and bud and blossom  
Awaken at my need. 55

Wilfred Campbell also dedicated poems to spring, but while the wind is present in these poems, Campbell does not imbue it with the same degree of importance. Unlike Carman, he does not mention the west wind as being the specific wind of spring, but he yearns for the same fundamental kinship between this season and the soul of man. In Spring he writes:

Season of life's renewal, love's rebirth,  
And all hope's young espousals, in your dream  
I feel once more the ancient stirrings of earth!

Now in your moods benign of sun and wind,  
The worn and aged, winter-wrinkled earth,  
Forgetting sorrow, sleep and icèd snows,  
Turns joyful to the glad sun bland and kind,  
And in his kiss forgets her ancient woes.

. . . . .

And I, too, blind and dumb, and filled with fear,  
Life-gyved and frozen, like a prisoned thing,  
Feel all this glory of the wakening year,  
And my heart, fluttering like a young bird's wing,  
Doth tune itself in joyful guise to sing  
The splendour and hope of all the splendid year,  
The magic dream of spring. 56

Archibald Lampman's response to spring is similar to Carman and Campbell's, and again, the wind is an essential component of this season. In April in the Hills he writes:

I feel the tumult of new birth;  
 I waken with the wakening earth;  
 I watch the bluebird in her mirth;  
 And wild with wind and sun,  
 A treasurer of immortal days,  
 I roam the glorious world with praise,  
 The hillsides and the woodland ways,  
 Till earth and I are one.<sup>57</sup>

The celebration of spring pervades much of the nature poetry being created in Canada at this time. After the cloak of winter had been shed, the poets viewed spring as the moment of rebirth and rejuvenation and immersed themselves in its various manifestations in the landscape. The identification of their own souls with that of nature was sought, and in many cases, attained, through a mystical communion with nature.

A similar spirit of celebration pervades many of the works of Thomson. For him, spring was the season during which he could free himself of Toronto and return to Algonquin Park to commence sketching again. Dr. MacCallum romantically described how "the northern spring radiant with hope bursting riotously forth from the grim embrace of winter always found him in the woods ready to chronicle its beauties"<sup>58</sup>, and Thomson is reported to have planned a series of daily sketches recording the unfolding of spring in Algonquin Park in 1917.<sup>59</sup>

The spring season was clearly associated with the west wind in Bliss Carman's mind, although he occasionally referred to the less specific "winds of spring". A similar concern with the phenomenon of the wind in spring has been

seen in the poetry of Archibald Lampman and Wilfred Campbell. It will be recalled that both Lawren Harris and Dr. MacCallum stated that The West Wind sketch was done in the spring and the suggestion may be offered that The West Wind is in part a painting about spring, using the traditional connotations of the west wind and the winds of spring to reveal this message. Thomson may have had a nostalgia and yearning for the return of spring similar to that of the poets when he chose to create this large canvas based on a spring sketch in his Toronto studio during the winter of 1916-17.

A fascination with the wind has been seen in the poetry of Thomson's day. The poets studied it in all its forms and manifestations, but for Carman and Lampman, it became a symbol of freedom and mobility, contrasting with the earthbound existence of man. The spirits of these poets were akin to the wind: they too were restless, itinerant and romantic. In many of the poems, the other natural elements, and one must include man here, are quite helpless in the face of the storm. Thomson was also fascinated and stimulated by the spectacle of a storm and one may well believe that its appeal for him was heightened by the fact that it took place in the north of Algonquin Park, away from human habitation. In The West Wind, man's absence is so total that his signature is not even affixed to the canvas.

The West Wind is a painting about the wind and the tree. Unlike the 1913 A Northern Lake, which was inspired



by a similar experience, the 1917 canvas reveals the tree bending under the onslaught of the wind, existing in a fundamental relationship with it. The painting does seem to belong within the current of Canadian nature poetry of this period, particularly those poems concerned with the relationship between nature's opposites. In recalling Carman's The Wind and the Tree, Campbell's The Dryad and Heavyside's The Autumn Tree, one can see that Thomson was also concerned with the interplay of elements: tangible (tree) and ephemeral (wind); earth-bound (tree) and free (wind); and permanent (tree) and impermanent (wind). It is interesting to note that in his canvas, Thomson has not only emphasized the tree in the foreground but also the ledge upon which it stands. The same brown colour continues down through the trunk of the tree into the foreground land mass, creating a powerful sense of the fundamental kinship between the tree and the soil from which it springs. The variety of form and colour in the actual mound on which the tree stands even suggests the subterranean roots of the tree.

Many of the poets of Thomson's day were concerned with recording the visual phenomena presented to their eyes. But the poetry we have discussed above goes beyond mere description of the landscape, and reveals the poets to be deeply in touch with the very soul of nature, using her motifs as a point of departure for the expression of their own souls. Thomson may well have felt himself iden-

tified with the natural elements as did these poets. Indeed, Lawren Harris, recalling the day on which The West Wind sketch was done, remarked that:

He was one with the storm's fury, save that his activity, while keyed to a high pitch, was nonetheless controlled. In twenty minutes Tom had caught in living paint the power and drama of storm in the north. Here was symbolized, it came to me, the function of the artist in life: he must accept in deep singleness of purpose the manifestations of life in man and in great nature and transform these into controlled and ordered and vital expressions of meaning.<sup>60</sup>

It is interesting - and reassuring- to note that a similar link between Thomson and the poets of this period has been noted by Northrop Frye. Working from the literary, rather than the art historical angle, Frye has concluded that the Confederation poets:

... are romantic and subjective poets, at best when confronting nature in solitude, in moods of nostalgia, reverie, observation or extra-sensory awareness. Their sensibility is emotional in origin, and they attain conceptual precision by means of emotional precision... This subjective and lyrical sensibility, sharp and clear in its emotional foreground but inclined to get vague around the conceptual fringes, is deeply rooted in the Canadian tradition. Most of its characteristics reappear in the Group of Seven painters, in Tom Thomson and Emily Carr, with their odd mixture of art nouveau and cosmic consciousness.<sup>61</sup>

### FOOTNOTES CHAPTER III

1. Housser, A Canadian Art Movement, p. 95 reports that Thomson did over five hundred sketches, and in the most recent book on Tom Thomson, Silcox and Town, The Silence and the Storm, p. 15, the authors state that they had over five hundred works to choose from when selecting material for the book. The most complete list of Thomson works, sketches and canvases, remains Joan Murray's 1971 catalogue. No one has yet compiled a catalogue raisonné of Thomson's works.
2. The Lonely North, signed and dated lower right: J.E.H. MacDonald '13, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"; Collection of Mrs. David Stratford, Vancouver. Reproduced in colour in Mellen, Group of Seven, p. 29.
3. Georgian Bay, signed and dated lower left: 'A. Lismer/1913', oil on canvas, 28½" x 36"; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in black and white in Reid, Group of Seven, p. 65, no. 37.
4. Reid, Group of Seven, p. 46.
5. Housser, A Canadian Art Movement, p. 87.
6. Ibid, p. 87.
7. "Mark Robinson Talks...", in Little, The Tom Thomson Mystery, p. 188.
8. It may have been The Ragged Pine (McMichael Collection, Kleinburg) or The Lone Pine, reproduced in Addison, The Algonquin Years, p. 45.
9. Winter Sunshine, signed lower left: 'J.E.H. MacDonald', oil on canvas, 20" x 30"; The Art Gallery of Ontario. Reproduced in Robertson, MacDonald, p. 22, no. 14.  
Evening, Thornhill, signed lower left: 'JM', oil on board, 28½" x 36½"; Beaverbrook Art Gallery. Reproduced in Robertson, MacDonald, p. 25, no. 19.
10. Breezy Weather, Georgian Bay, oil on canvas, 20-1/8" x 24-1/8"; New Brunswick Museum, St. John. Reproduced in Barry Lord, "Georgian Bay and the Development of the September Gale Theme in Arthur Lismer's Painting

1912-21," The National Gallery of Canada Bulletin 9-10 (1967): 34.

A West Wind, Georgian Bay, oil on canvas, 25½" x 31½"; National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced in Reid, Group of Seven, p. 93, no. 57 as A Westerly Gale, Georgian Bay. Joan Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 45, suggested that the title of this work was the immediate inspiration for the title of Thomson's The West Wind.

11. The Elements, signed and dated lower left: 'J.E.H. MacDonald '16', oil on board, 28" x 36-1/8"; The Art Gallery of Ontario. Reproduced in colour in Mellen, Group of Seven, p. 69.
12. Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 19. That Thomson read poetry was indicated in a personal interview Murray had with A.Y. Jackson on March 4, 1971, and she also refers the reader to a letter from Louise Henry to Blodwen Davies dated March 11, 1931, p. 10. (Blodwen Davies Papers, Public Archives of Canada). In addition, it must be noted that Arthur Lismer, "Tom Thomson (1877-1917) Canadian Painter," The Educational Record of the Province of Quebec 80 (July-September 1954): 172 remembers that Thomson read poetry.
13. Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 19.
14. Ibid, p. 35. Murray also notes that Thomson's 1912 painting entitled Sky (The Light That Never Was) bears a title which occurs in the Introduction to Collected Poems. Ibid, p. 19.
15. Ibid, p. 45.
16. Ibid, p. 32.
17. The Collected Poems of Wilfred Campbell (Toronto: William Briggs, 1905).
18. Carl F. Klinck, ed., Literary History of Canada, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 438.
19. Collected Poems, p. vii.
20. Wilfred Campbell, "Wind," in Collected Poems, stanza 3, lines 9-12.
21. Wilfred Campbell, "The Wind's Royalty," in Collected Poems, stanza 2, lines 9-14.
22. Arthur Lismer, "The West Wind," The McMaster Monthly 43 (January 1934): 163.

23. Wilfred Campbell, "The Wind Dancer," in Collected Poems, stanza 5, lines 17-20.
24. Wilfred Campbell, "The Dryad," in Collected Poems, stanza 1, lines 1-7.
25. Bliss Carman, "Songs of the Sea Children V," in The Pipes of Pan (Boston: The Page Company, 1906), stanza 1, line 3.
26. Wilfred Campbell, "The Dryad," in Collected Poems, stanza 2, lines 8-9.
27. Ibid, stanza 7, lines 43-48.
28. The Evening Journal (Ottawa), April 8, 1905, n.p. Quoted in Carl F. Klinck, Wilfred Campbell: A Study in Late Provincial Victorianism (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1942), p. 21.
29. Malcolm Ross, ed., Poets of the Confederation (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1960), p. vii. Ross refers to Roberts, Carman, Lampman and Scott as the "Confederation Poets" while Donald Stephens, Bliss Carman (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1966), p. 128 refers to this same group as "the sixties group" and singles out Carman and Roberts as the leaders.

Wilfred Campbell was closely associated with this group but he is not included among them.

30. Archibald Lampman, "Storm," in Among the Millet (Ottawa: J. Durie and Son, 1888), stanza 7, lines 43-49 and stanza 10, lines 64-70.
31. Malcolm Ross, Poets of the Confederation, p. 128.
32. Lorne Pierce, ed., Bliss Carman's Scrapbook (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1931), p. 22. The Wind and the Tree appeared as a broadsheet in New York in August 1892 and was published in Lippincotts in 1893.
33. Bliss Carman, "A Windflower," in Low Tide on Grand Pre, (Chicago and Cambridge: Stone and Kimball, 1893), stanza 5, lines 19-20.

The poem was written at Fredericton and appeared in the Toronto Globe (Christmas 1889). Pierce, Bliss Carman's Scrapbook, p. 13.

34. Bliss Carman, "Summer Storm," in John R. Sorfleet, ed., The Poems of Bliss Carman (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1976), stanza 1, lines 1-5.

The poem was written on January 31, 1913. Sorfleet, Poems, p. 168.

35. William Doww Lighthall, Songs of the Great Dominion: Voices from the Forests and Waters, The Settlements and Cities of Canada (London: Walter Scott, 1889).
36. Ibid, p. xxix.
37. Charles Heavysege, "The Autumm Tree," in Songs of the Great Dominion, stanza 1, lines 104.
38. Flint and Feather. The Complete Poems of E. Pauline Johnson, Introduction by Theodore Watts-Dunton (Don Mills, Ontario: General Publishing Co. Ltd., Paperjacks 1972), p. xix.
39. Ibid.
40. E. Pauline Johnson, "The Song My Paddle Sings," in Flint and Feather, stanza 1, lines 1-4.
41. Ibid, stanza 8, lines 49-53.
42. The poem appeared as a manuscript in a notebook dated January 1914. On the verso of the front cover is written "Moonshine, July 1914". The last lyric is dated January 1916. Information obtained from Miss Kinnear, Vancouver Public Library, March 9, 1978.
43. Bliss Carman, "The Pine," in Wild Garden (London: John Lane, 1929), stanzas 1-3, lines 1-12 and stanzas 6-7, lines 21-28.
44. Bliss Carman, "The Word in the Beginning," in The Pipes of Pan, Prelude, stanza 3, line 15.
45. Ibid, stanza 2, line 8; stanza 4, line 20; stanza 6, line 32; stanza 8, line 44 and stanza 10, line 56 respectively.
46. Philip Mayerson, Classical Mythology in Literature, Art and Music (Lexington, Mass: Xerox College Printing, 1971), p.35.
47. Bliss Carman, "The Word in the Beginning," stanzas 9 and 10, lines 49-60.
48. Stephens, Bliss Carman, p. 66.
49. Ibid, p. 49.
50. Bliss Carman, "Our Lady of the Rain," in Songs from a Northern Garden (Boston: L.C. Page and Co, 1904),

stanza 21, lines 161-168.

51. Bliss Carman, "Songs of the Sea Children L," in The Pipes of Pan, stanza 1, lines 1-4.
52. Bliss Carman, "Songs of the Sea Children XIV," in The Pipes of Pan, stanza 2, lines 10-13.
53. Bliss Carman, "Songs of the Sea Children VII," in The Pipes of Pan, stanza 1, lines 1-4.
54. Bliss Carman, "Songs of the Sea Children LXXIV," in The Pipes of Pan, stanza 1, lines 1-6.
55. Bliss Carman, "Earth Voices," in Later Poems (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1921), stanzas 1-5, lines 1-16.
56. Wilfred Campbell, "Spring," in Collected Poems, stanzas 1 and 2, lines 1-8 and stanza 13, lines 76-82.
57. Archibald Lampman, "April in the Hills," in Lyrics of Earth (Boston: Copeland and Day, 1895), stanza 5, lines 33-40.
58. J.M. MacCallum, "Painter of the North," p. 380.
59. "Mark Robinson Talks About Tom Thomson," in Little, Tom Thomson Mystery, p. 199. Thomson apparently told Robinson that "I have something unique in art that no other artist has ever attempted... I have a record of the weather for 62 days, rain or shine, or snow, dark or bright, I have a record of the days in a sketch." This statement which has been attributed to Thomson has not been substantiated by the series of sketches themselves and it seems that there may be cause to doubt whether they were in fact executed.
60. Lawren Harris, "The Group of Seven in Canadian History," p. 33.
61. Northrop Frye, "Poetry," in The Arts in Canada. A Stock-taking at Mid-Century, ed. Malcolm Ross (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1958), p. 84.

## CHAPTER IV

### COMMENTARY ON THE WEST WIND

In the years since 1917 The West Wind has become indelibly printed on the minds of Canadians. Many have seen it in its permanent home, The Art Gallery of Ontario, or in exhibitions across the country, and many more have been exposed to it through books, postcards and other reproductions. By 1943, barely twenty six years after its execution, A.Y. Jackson was able to claim that it was "the best known painting in this [Toronto] city"<sup>1</sup>, and as late as 1974, Kay Kritzweiser, in a mood of reckless abandon, ventured to suggest that The West Wind "with its scudding clouds, furiously chopping waves and the art nouveau branches thrusting out of red rocks is Canada's nearest thing to the Mona Lisa."<sup>2</sup>

Response to the painting has been consistently positive over the years, and this response in itself has contributed to assuring The West Wind a foremost position in the annals of Canadian art history. But the commentaries themselves reveal two different levels on which the canvas has been appreciated and enjoyed.

The first type of commentary which may be distinguished is that which responds to the painting with intuitive and unqualified appreciation. One of the earliest responses



in this manner was that offered by the reviewer for The Art News of New York who commented on both The Jack Pine and The West Wind after seeing them at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley. He noted that:

The magnificent "The Jack Pine" by the late Tom Thomson is possibly the best thing in the Gallery, though many will prefer another work by this artist, "The West Wind"... Nothing can be less academic than these two compositions and at the same time nothing less freakish - there is the boldest simplification, the most emphatic statement, and the strongest colour knit together in the most harmonious way. In the latter picture one can hear the wind howling - .....<sup>3</sup>

In 1928 S.W. Perry suggested that:

It is the invisible wind, a spirit power, which exerts its force upon the pliant forms of nature and gives them life and action.<sup>4</sup>

Albert Robson's response to The West Wind was, like that of the reviewer for The Art News, based on his appreciation of the way in which Thomson handled the composition:

One can almost feel the cool west wind as it sweeps out of the purple hills across the turbulent lake, and sings through the gnarled and wind-blown pine in the foreground. This picture has caught the mood of the time and place and transmits it to the observer in a masterly and poetical interpretation. The movement of the clouds and water both interpret the almost ceremonial pomp of the march of the wind. The billowing sail-like curve of the arrangement of pine foliage adds materially to the suggestion of blow. The vague suggestion of harp shape in the pine is more than a beautiful space-filling arrangement; it may be a deliberate and fanciful liberty taken with actual representation to carry the suggestion of the music of the wind in the pines.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most perceptive and sympathetic of the early commentaries on the paintings of Thomson was offered by Northrop Frye in 1940. For Frye:

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. This is the key to both his colour and design... Thomson has a marked preference for the transitional over the full season: he likes the delicate pink and green tints on the birches in early spring and the irresolute sifting of the first snow through the spruces; and his autumnal studies are sometimes a Shelleyan hectic decay in high winds and spinning leaves, sometimes a Keatsian opulence and glut.<sup>6</sup>

But curiously enough, Frye did not refer specifically to The West Wind in connection with the above. He responded instead to the formal elements of the painting, and his brief discussion of it centred on his thesis that Thomson "is primarily a painter of linear distance." Frye noted that:

This focussing on the farthest distance makes the foreground, of course, a shadowy blur; a foreground tree- even the tree in "West Wind" - may be only a green blob to be looked past, not at.<sup>7</sup>

A response similar to that of Perry was offered by Joan Murray in 1971. For Murray,

The innovation in Thomson's The West Wind lies in the creation of an image which still bears a powerful message on the forces of nature - for those who are able to see and comprehend.<sup>8</sup>

By contrast, the second group of commentaries choose not to place The West Wind in its own time but rather in a contemporary context, extolling its virtues in terms of the specific associations which it holds for the viewer. While these commentaries are again highly appreciative of the painting, it is because they interpret it in symbolic

terms although none go so far as to suggest that this is the 'meaning' intended by Thomson.

Responding to his own Canadian nationalism and that of the members of the Group of Seven at this time, F.B. Housser remarked that:

... this picture has in it the same spirit of reverence as the religious paintings of the old masters. What they felt for their madonnas Thomson re-experienced in his contact with northern nature. "West Wind" has a fullness and richness of colour, a power and sureness of execution rarely equalled in paint. There is the dignity of a great symphonic march in the succession of the oncoming waves. One sees the water in the middle distance like the side of a harp. On the other side of the lake, still hills calmly blocked against a moving sky seem stiffening to the breeze. It is northern nature poetry which could not have been created anywhere else in the world but in Canada.<sup>9</sup>

While we may be tempted to wonder why The West Wind was an image associated only with northern Canada for Housser, we find a similar theme appearing in the writings of Blodwen Davies in the 1930's.

In 1930 Davies stressed the symbolic importance of the painting to Canadians, suggesting that:

It is an interpretation of something we have experienced ourselves. We know our country through our interpreters, the poets, painters and musicians; they present aspects of life which we feel but cannot express for ourselves. This picture is an expression of what we feel about the beauty of Canada. It is a symbol of Canadian character- sturdy, vigorous and direct.<sup>10</sup>

In 1935, though not singling out The West Wind, Davies attached special importance to the pines which Thomson painted:

The pines that artists considered unpaintable were

to him beautiful in the infinite variety of their forms and compositions. There is something courageous about these trees that have adapted themselves to the furious elemental heat... that fragrant, ever-green foliage, pyramided up to a delicate, aspiring tip, seems to symbolize man's deathless spiritual yearning to reach to that which is not yet attained, in spite of all the buffetings of experience and initiation. Thomson realized character and significance in such things, and gave us these symbols in a form that passed on the insistent message of the new world to those not yet so sensitive to the subjective world about them.<sup>11</sup>

In 1936 Arthur Lismer referred to the continuing importance of The West Wind in the development of Canadian culture:

Thomson's West Wind, painted nearly twenty years ago, is a type of painting that has set a stage expressive of our national theme of background and mood- against such a setting all things in music, architecture, poetry and drama may happen.<sup>12</sup>

and in 1940 he again commented on the painting, believing that his response to it was shared by most, if not all, Canadians:

Tom Thomson's picture is the work of a great Canadian, who understood the North country. That is why the pine tree, swaying in the wind, resisting the impact of weather, appeals to our own sympathies with the lakes, trees and all the elements of beauty in the Canadian background. We feel, when we look at this masterpiece, the impress of truth. We recognize its great and eternal qualities.<sup>13</sup>

This view of The West Wind was echoed as recently as 1974 by Barry Lord who also saw it as an emblem or a symbol, though of a different kind of nationalism. Suggesting that "its theme is the staunch resistance of the trees to the unrelenting harsh winds", Lord declared that:

The tree in the wind is a symbol of the tenacious

grasp on the land and on life that our nation has maintained. Like the tree, Canadians have had to fight to survive. Nothing comes easily in this country. Canadian farmers and workers have had to overcome great hardship. And in the struggle to build our nation under the dominance of a succession of the world's leading imperialist powers, we have similarly had to dig in and hold on, to become and remain who we are.<sup>14</sup>

While one would not wish to quarrel with these opinions, which are obviously sincerely held and deeply felt, the fact must be faced that they do share an anglophone nationalistic bias. By contrast, Jules Arbec, writing in Montreal's Le Devoir, did not discuss The West Wind in terms of any impact it may have had on the people of Canada, but instead dealt with it only in stylistic terms:

Toutefois le style de l'artiste évoluera vers une schématisation et une réduction de la perspective. Le Vent de l'ouest illustre très bien cette transformation: ici, de grands traits larges ont remplacé les touches impressionnistes et les arbres du premier plan ramènent le lac et la montagne à un plan unique. Ces scènes tiennent beaucoup plus de l'art décoratif que du paysage mais elles conservent leur sobriété et leurs coloris.<sup>15</sup>

The general tone of this commentary is noticeably less enthusiastic than that of the reviewer for The Art News or that of Albert Robson, and points to the fact that The West Wind is simply not a symbol of Canada to the people of Quebec. François Gagnon has recently suggested the reasons for which the works of Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven have not been received with the same measure of acclaim and praise by French Canadians. He notes that the Group of Seven:

... had put forth a vision of the Canadian landscape

in a sort of pre-cultural state, devoid of the influence of difference cultures which transformed it into inhabited territory... The representation of the Quebec landscape, where traces are found on the environment of a different and older culture, posed specific problems to the painters of the Group of Seven.<sup>16</sup>

Gagnon firmly believes that:

the vision of an unspoiled Canada is that of only one culture, the Anglo-Saxon, which dwells on the romantic vision of Nature still to be tamed and transformed and resisting conquest with all its latent, unexploited energy.<sup>17</sup>

Yet we may question whether The West Wind is, in fact, a national symbol to the people of the other regions of Canada, or whether it is indeed possible to secure one characteristic image of this vast country whose cultural and geographical disparities are so pronounced.

The "North country" to which Arthur Lismer referred in his 1940 commentary is Algonquin Park, situated approximately 150 miles to the north of Toronto. It is thus a very specific part of Ontario and comprises a mere 2,910 square miles on the southern fringe of the Canadian Shield between Georgian Bay and the Montreal River. It was established by the Ontario Legislature in 1893 and was envisioned as:

a public park and forest reservation, fish and game preserve, health resort and pleasure ground for the benefit, advantage and enjoyment of the people of the Province.<sup>18</sup>

Although the Park was 'discovered' by artists as early as 1902, ten years before Thomson first went there,<sup>19</sup> none of these previous artists established such intimate

links with it as did Thomson. He became, in effect, the painter of Algonquin Park, and Arthur Lismer suggested, with good reason, that "Algonquin Park... is forever known as Thomson's land. He did nearly all his painting there, literally living and certainly dying there."<sup>20</sup>

The appeal which this area had for Thomson was undoubtedly immense, and as Lismer suggested, it was Thomson who immortalized it through his five years of sustained and prolific activity. Peter Mellen has noted that the Group of Seven (and Tom Thomson may be included here) were motivated by:

the genuine conviction that it was the northern landscape that represented and expressed the country's unique character. They believed that the rocks, the lakes and the forests were the basic symbols of the Canadian identity.<sup>21</sup>

and in Thomson's case the 'north' was Algonquin Park.

It has recently been suggested that "... Thomson was seldom far from civilization" and that "His 'North' was the vacationland for the urban south."<sup>22</sup> Yet the majority of Thomson's works, including The West Wind, exclude any references to man and his effect on the environment, and it may be argued that Thomson was, in fact, a latter-day romantic, motivated by a belief that the Park represented the northern frontier of Canada.

In sixty years our focus has shifted to another 'North'- and another frontier- that of the as-yet relatively unspoiled Territories. But while our vision and perception of Canada has changed, our appreciation of The West Wind need not

necessarily be compromised. If we allow ourselves to separate the image itself from the emphasis which has since been placed on its regional associations, it is still possible to see in Thomson's canvas a message which bears particular relevance to our own time. The tree, bending under the onslaught of the storm, is perhaps not so much a symbol of resistance and tenacity in the face of overwhelming hardship, as a symbol of adaptation and acceptance of the forces which act upon it while it nevertheless maintains its roots and its identity. In this light it is indeed time to reconsider and re-assess Arthur Lismer's famous statement of 1934 that The West Wind "is the spirit of Canada made manifest in a picture."<sup>23</sup>



#### FOOTNOTES CHAPTER IV

1. A.Y. Jackson, "Dr. MacCallum, Loyal Friend of Art," Saturday Night, December 11, 1943, p. 19.
2. Kay Kritzweiser, "The Essential Tom Thomson," Globe and Mail, May 11, 1977.
3. "The Triumph of Wembley," The Art News (New York), May 31, 1924. Reproduced in Press Comments on the Canadian Section of Fine Arts, British Empire Exhibition. (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1926), pp. 16-18.
4. S.W. Perry, "The West Wind by Tom Thomson," The School 17 (November 1928): 227.
5. Robson, Tom Thomson, p. 10.
6. Northrop Frye, "Canadian and Colonial Painting," in The Bush Garden. Essays on the Canadian Imagination (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Ltd., 1971), p. 200.
7. Ibid, p. 201.
8. Murray, Tom Thomson, p. 45.
9. Housser, A Canadian Art Movement, p. 120.
10. Blodwen Davies, Paddle and Palette. The Story of Tom Thomson (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1930), p. 2.
11. Davies, A Study of Tom Thomson, p. 46.
12. Arthur Lismer, "Foreword," An Exhibition of Paintings by the 'Canadian Group of Painters', Toronto, Art Gallery of Toronto, January 1936, p. 3.
13. Arthur Lismer, Canadian Picture Study (Toronto: The Art Gallery of Toronto, 1940), p. 19.
14. Barry Lord, The History of Painting in Canada, p. 128.
15. Jules Arbec, "Retrospective Tom Thomson," Le Devoir, mai 19, 1972.
16. François-Marc Gagnon, "La Peinture des Années Trente

au Québec/ Painting in Quebec in the Thirties,"  
The Journal of Canadian Art History III (Fall 1976):3.

17. Ibid, p. 4.
18. Richard L. Lambert, ed., Renewing Nature's Wealth (Toronto: Department of Lands and Forests, 1967), pp. 167-172. Quoted in Audrey Saunders, Algonquin Story, p. 85.
19. In 1902 three members of the Toronto Art Students League - W.W. Alexander, Robert Holmes and David Thomson (no relation to Tom Thomson) - took a canoe and sketching trip through the southern portion of the Park, travelling from Canoe Lake to Opeongo Lake. Artists J.W. Beatty and Tom McLean also visited the area prior to Thomson's first visit in 1912. Audrey Saunders, Algonquin Story, pp. 161-3.
20. Arthur Lismer, "Tom Thomson (1877-1917) Canadian Painter," The Education Record of the Province of Quebec 80 (July-September 1954): 172.
21. Mellen, Group of Seven, p. 200.
22. Silcox and Town, The Silence and The Storm, p. 198.
23. Arthur Lismer, "The West Wind," The McMaster Monthly 43 (January 1934): 163.

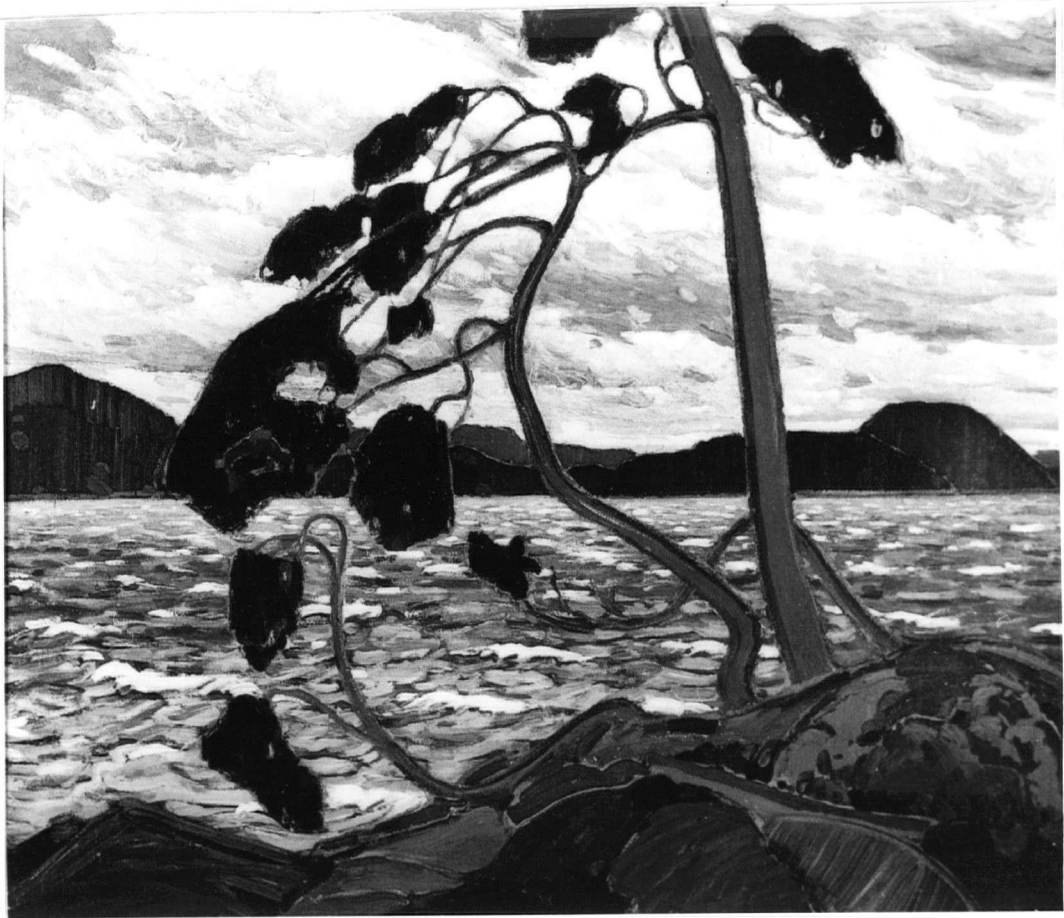


Figure 1.

THE WEST WIND



Figure 2.                    THE WEST WIND (sketch)

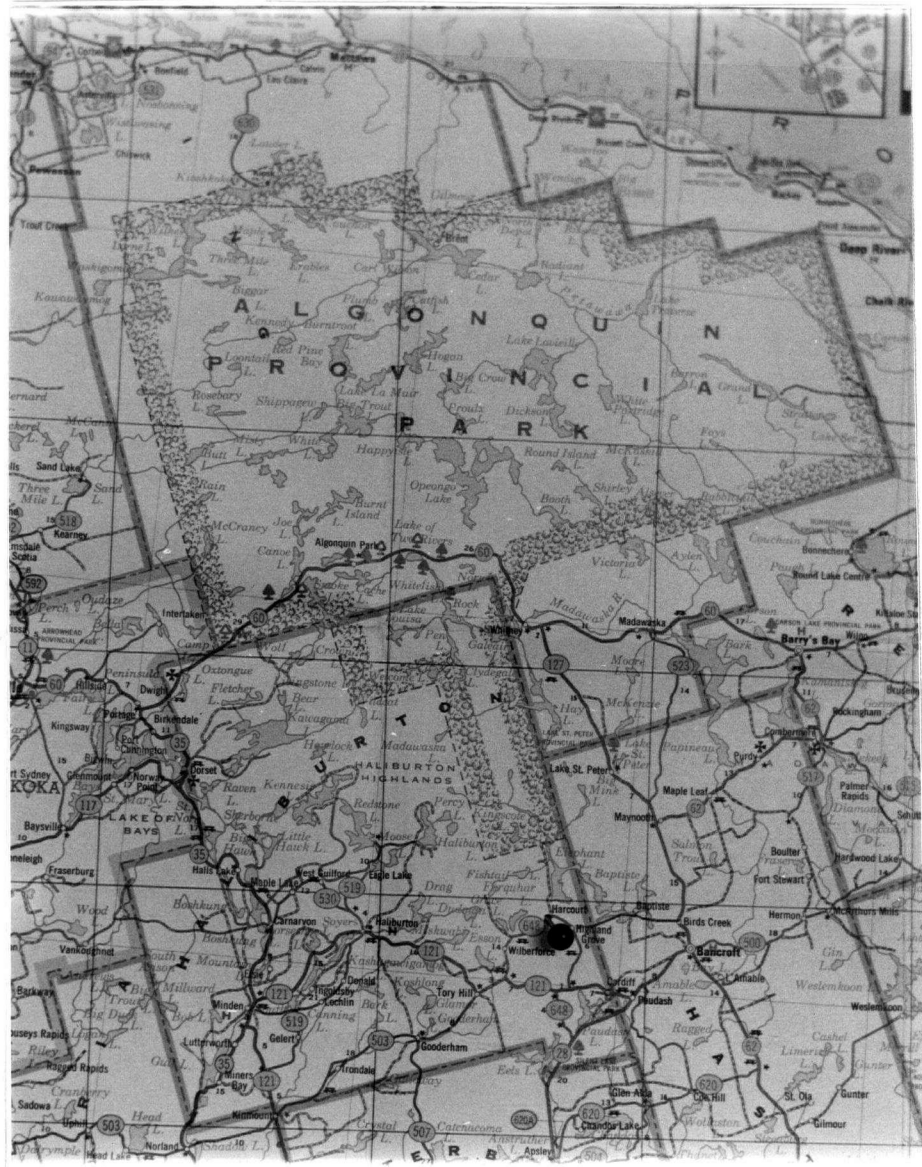


Figure 3. ALGONQUIN PARK

Province of Ontario, August 31, 1974

Ministry of Transportation and Communications

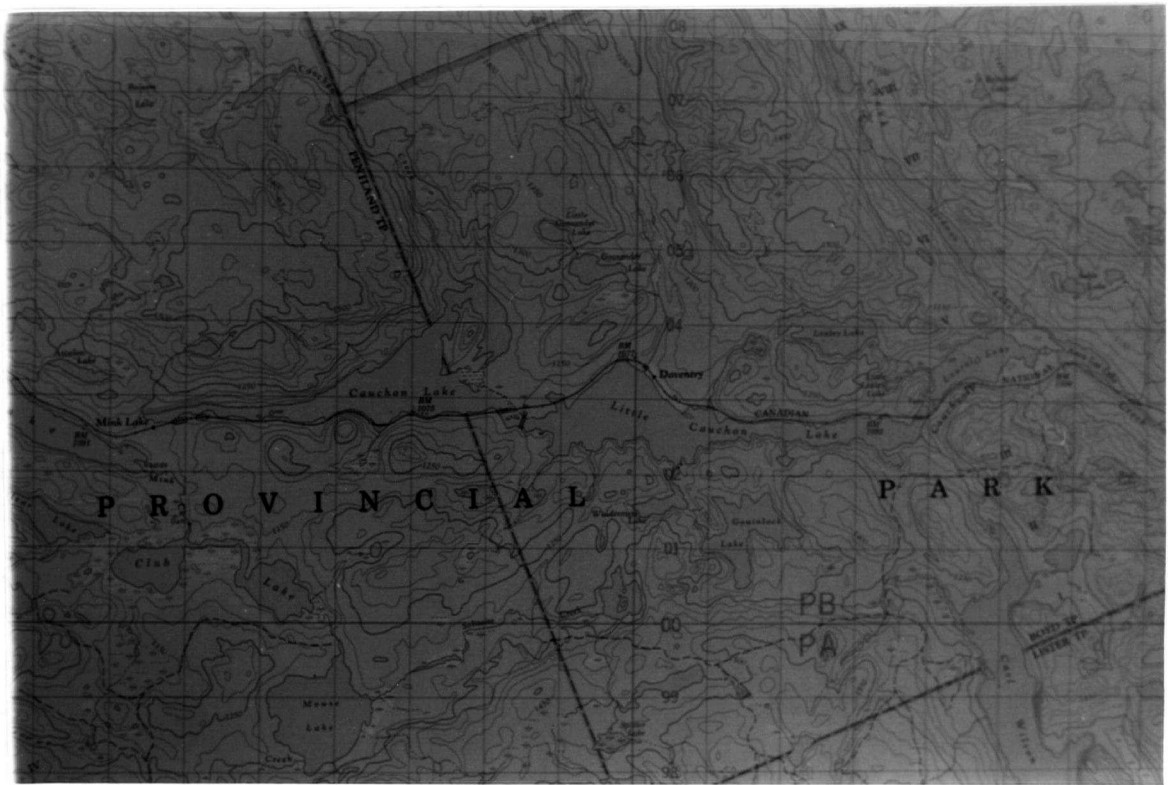


Figure 4.

THE CAUCHON LAKES

National Topographic System Map of Canada

31L/2

Edition 3MCE

Series A751



Figure 5.

A NORTHERN LAKE



Figure 6.

THE DROWNED LAND





Figure 7.

MORNING CLOUD

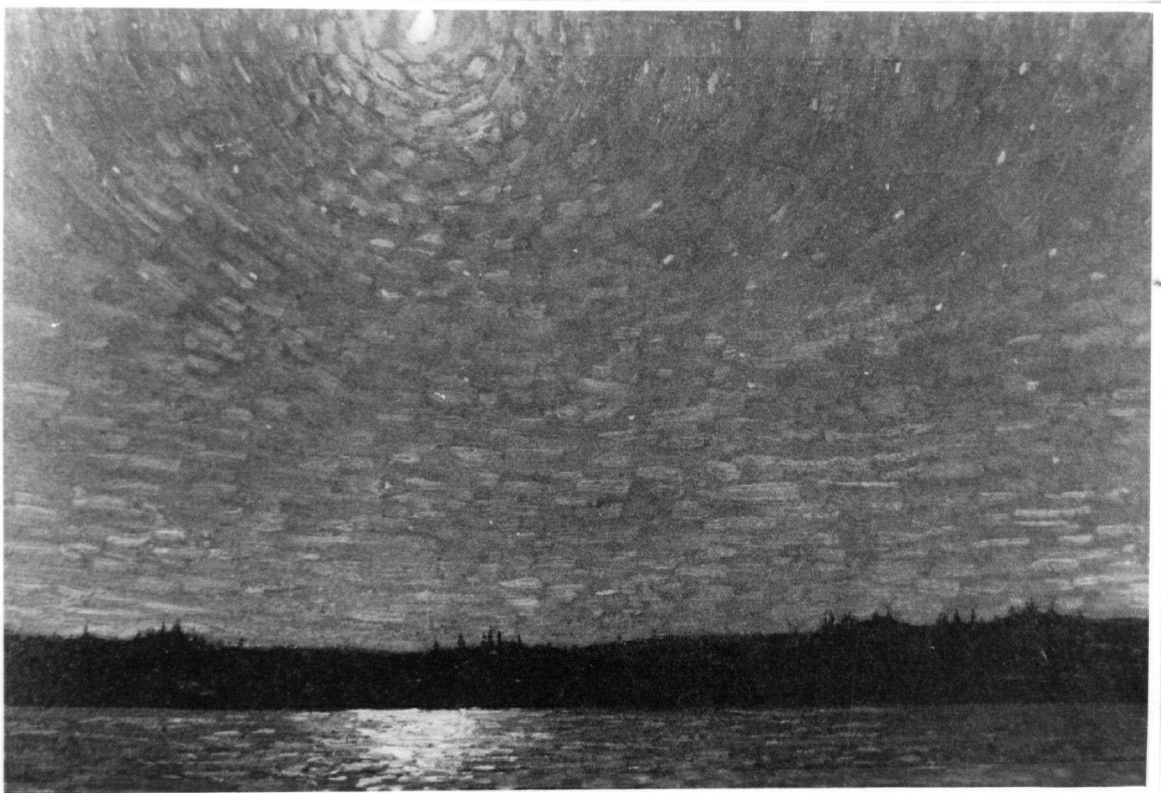


Figure 8.

MOONLIGHT, EARLY EVENING



Figure 9. RED LEAVES (sketch)



Figure 10.

BYNG INLET, GEORGIAN BAY

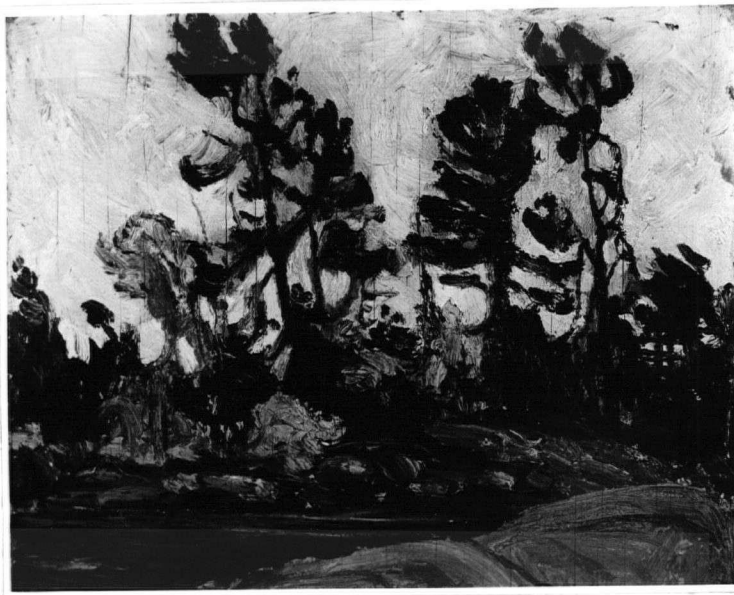


Figure 11. BYNG INLET, GEORGIAN BAY  
(sketch)

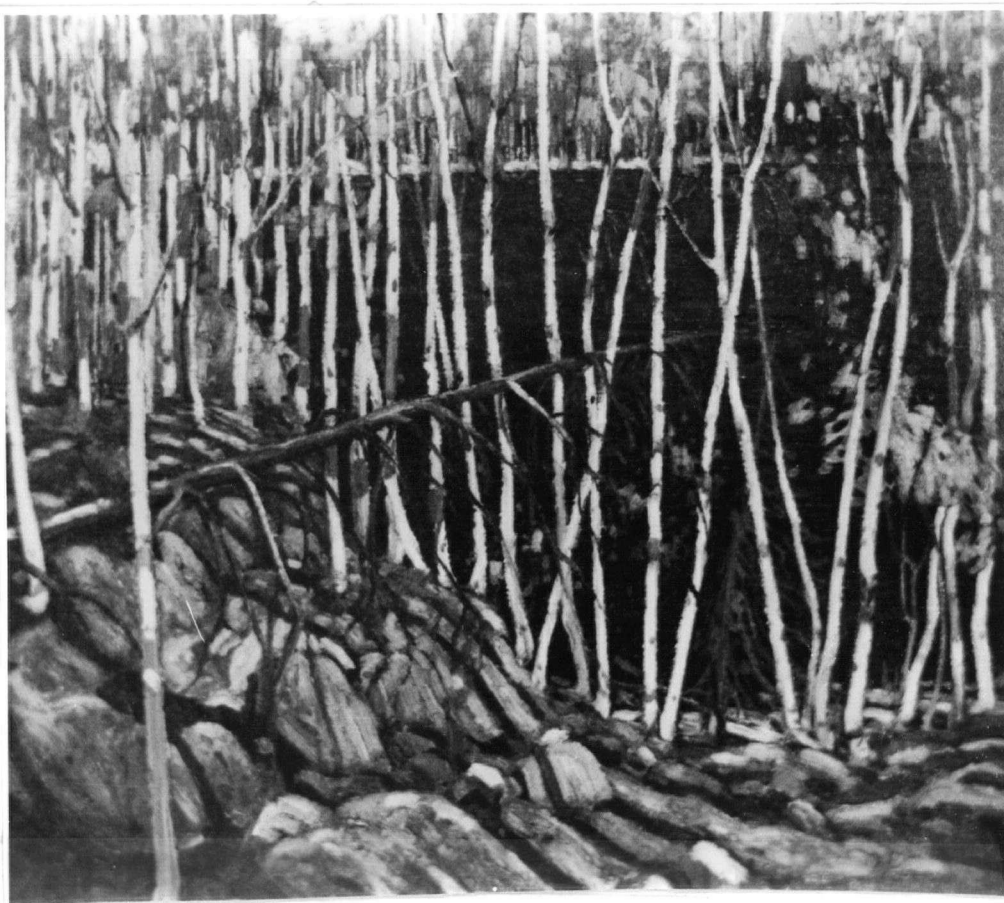


Figure 12.

IN THE NORTHLAND



Figure 13. IN THE NORTHLAND  
(sketch)



Figure 14. NORTHERN RIVER





Figure 15.

THE POOL



Figure 16. DECORATIVE PANEL I

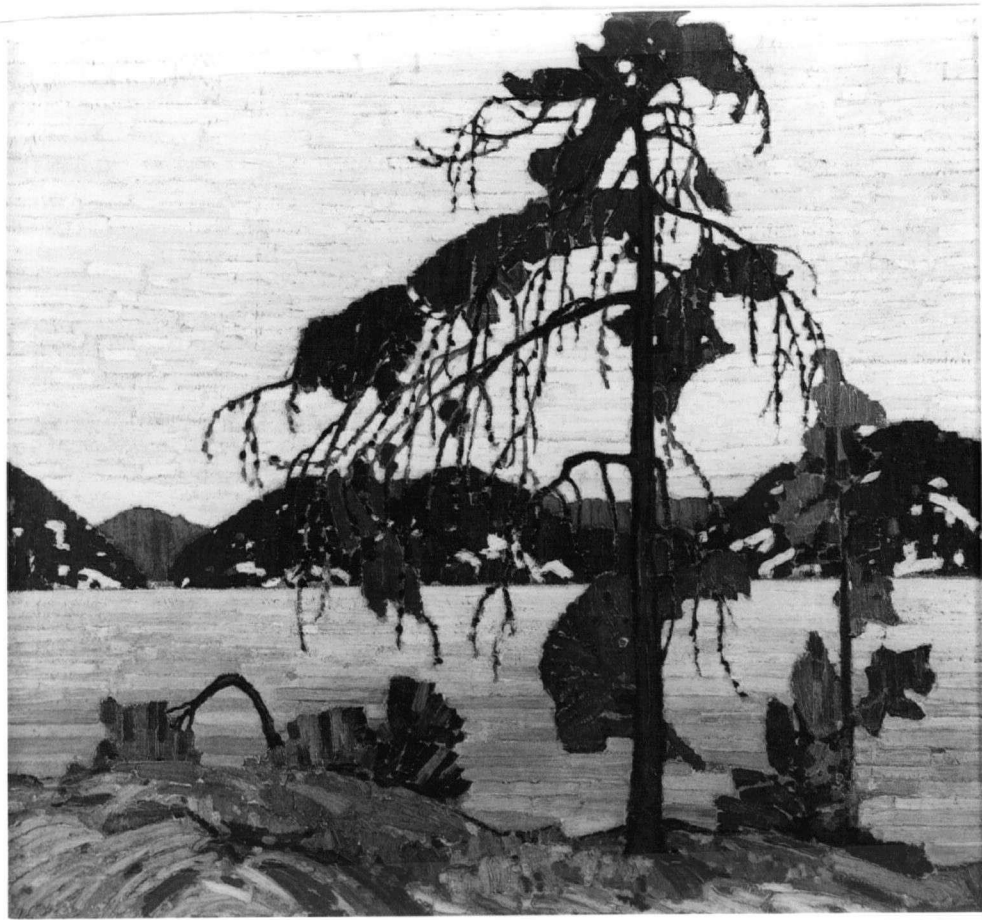


Figure 17.

THE JACK PINE



Figure 18. PINE ISLAND, GEORGIAN BAY

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