

TRANSCENDENTAL NATURE AND CANADIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY:
FRANKLIN CARMICHAEL'S REPRESENTATION OF THE CANADIAN LANDSCAPE

by

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	vi
Transcendental Nature and Canadian National Identity: Franklin Carmichael's Abstracted Representation of the Canadian Landscape	1
Figures	53
Bibliography	70
Vita	74
Abstract	75

List of Figures

Figure 1. Franklin Carmichael, *Bissett Farm*, 1933

Figure 2. Rockwell Kent, *Driftwood*, illustration in *Wilderness*, 1920

Figure 3. Rockwell Kent, Chapter VI illustration for “Excursion,” in *Wilderness*, 1920

Figure 4. Franklin Carmichael, *Lake Wabagishik*, 1928

Figure 5. Franklin Carmichael, *Upper Ottawa, Near Mattawa*, 1924

Figure 6. Franklin Carmichael, *Autumn Hillside*, 1920

Figure 7. Franklin Carmichael, *Snow Clouds*, 1938

Figure 8. Frederic Edwin Church, *Niagara*, 1857

Figure 9. Franklin Carmichael, *Wabajisik: Drowned Land*, 1929

Figure 10. Thomas Cole, *The Oxbow*, 1836

Figure 11. Franklin Carmichael, *Cloud Study*, 1930-39

Figure 12. Franklin Carmichael, *Cranberry Lake*, 1934

Figure 13. Lawren Harris, *North Shore, Lake Superior*, 1926

Figure 14. Franklin Carmichael, *North Shore, Lake Superior*, 1927

Figure 15. Photograph of Franklin Carmichael sketching above Grace Lake, Ontario, Oct. 1935

Figure 16. Winslow Homer, *Artists Sketching in the White Mountains*, 1868

Figure 17. Photograph by Fred Haines, *Franklin Carmichael on the south side of Grace Lake, on a hilltop facing towards Manitoulin Island*, n.d.

Figure 18. Tom Thomson, *Canoe Lake*, 1913

Figure 19. Tom Thomson, *Autumn Foliage*, 1916

Figure 20. Franklin Carmichael, *Autumn Orillia*, 1924

Figure 21. Photograph of Franklin Carmichael’s campsite at Port Coldwell, n.d.

Figure 22. Photograph of A.J. Casson at Port Coldwell campsite, n.d.

Figure 23. Franklin Carmichael, *October Gold*, 1922

Figure 24. Franklin Carmichael, *Cranberry Lake*, 1938

Figure 25. Franklin Carmichael, *Gambit No. 1*, 1945

Figure 26. Franklin Carmichael, *Farm, Haliburton*, 1940

Figure 27. Franklin Carmichael, *A Northern Silver Mine*, 1930

Figure 28. Franklin Carmichael, *The Ramparts*, illustration in Canadian National Railways Magazine, August 1932

Figure 29. Franklin Carmichael, illustration for John D. Robin's *The Incomplete Anglers*, 1942-43

Figure 30. Franklin Carmichael, *Michael Comes Home*, Chapter I woodcut illustration for Grace Campbell's *Thorn-Apple Tree*, 1942

Figure 31. Franklin Carmichael, *The New House*, Chapter III woodcut illustration for Grace Campbell's *Thorn-Apple Tree*, 1942

Figure 32. Franklin Carmichael, illustration for "Where There's a Will" in the *Canadian Courier*, 1919

Figure 33. Franklin Carmichael, *Man with Scythe*, illustration for *The Canadian Forum*, 1921

As a founding member of the Group of Seven, Franklin Carmichael (1890-1945) is recognized as one of the pioneers of a national art movement that foregrounded the unique spiritual and Transcendental quality of the distinctively Canadian wilderness. While each of the Group of Seven members maintained their own styles, Carmichael's style is hallmarked by his sensitivity for color, his simplified designs without fussy detail, and his use of strong, curvilinear forms that capture the topography of the land as well as the grandeur of the landscape. His brushstrokes are usually de-emphasized in the wake of descriptive color and his compositions capture the vast expanses of the Canadian landscape, including mountain ranges, lakes, trees, large skies, and clouds. Working in a variety of media, Carmichael's oil paintings and watercolors, graphite sketches, and prints maintain a veracity to his subject, nature, while creating evocative compositions of the sublimely rugged wilderness. In his notes for a lecture he gave to the Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour, Carmichael clarified that he does not merely re-present the landscape, but is, through unique observational sensitivity and artistic media, evocatively abstract in order to evoke the experience of the land:

It is influential that the artists reveal through the medium in which he is happiest, what he sees, thinks, and feels about his surroundings. It is his business, through keener powers of observation and a natural sensitivity that he draw your attention to those finer aspects moods and the feelings attached to them, with which we are surrounded.¹

Carmichael's studies and paintings, ranging from the minutiae of flowers to vast cloud-filled skies, reveal his personal intimacy with nature and dedication to detailed observation, which grants a verisimilitude and sincerity to all of his paintings. Likewise, Carmichael's oil paintings possess rough brushstrokes and color variation to represent a truth of experience and emotion.

¹ Typescript of notes for lecture entitled "Brief History of the Water Colour Society" to Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour by Franklin Carmichael, n.d., MG30-D293, vol. 5, File 26, Franklin Carmichael fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

His watercolors maintain the grit and earthiness of a landscape created by a technical tour-de-force of layered washes and manipulation of the media. Moreover, his earth-toned color palette and sketch-like forms that insinuate detail emphasize his dedication to the natural landscape. Hence, Carmichael's abstracted forms and compositions, colors, and lines, create cohesive landscape paintings that are relatable, geographically identifiable, and transcendently provocative.

Bisset Farm (1933, fig. 1), a representative example of Carmichael's style, confronts the union of man's organizing force and nature's power. In the watercolor, a farmstead nestles into a valley as a mountain range rises into the implicitly expansive distance. Snow melts in the truncated foreground to reveal fecund greens, violets, and browns, a small cobalt blue pond, and the violet and blue lines of a right-leaning diagonal road. In the middle ground, a horizontal row of six, relatively small, snow-capped buildings ground the verticality of the rising mountains behind and complement the horizontally rolling lines describing each stratum of the mountain range. Simple and unadorned, the buildings are described by blocks of solid color to de-emphasize the affect of the human presence on the landscape. The main house aligns with the foothills and curving mountains behind in a seamless transition that acknowledges—but does not dwell on—the soft whites, greens, and peaches of the farm land behind the buildings. The foothills, forested with short vertical lines of brown, light blue, and grey, melt into the growing curvatures of the mountains, drawing the viewer's eye through line, color, and light toward the muted greys, blues, and sage greens of the mountains to the left of the composition. This palette is echoed and deepened into soft terracotta, rose red, deep blues, violets, and dark browns as the foothills become swelling mountains, undulating across the whole of the composition.

Looming in a third of the composition, the mountains dwarf the buildings and the foreground, existing as a weighty presence that could be sublimely threatening as evidenced by the dark colors and steep lines, or beguiling as seen in the welcoming foothills and inviting colors—each interpretation depending on one’s attitude toward the wilderness. The multitude of clouds and their sketchy, geometric, and organic qualities are neither threatening nor tranquil, rather they reinforce the predominance of nature.

The vastness of space implied by Carmichael’s composition and the grandeur of the mountain range evoke a sublime and spiritual response, a sense of awe and wonder at nature’s dual tranquility and danger. Simultaneously, Carmichael’s appealing earth-toned color palette and careful attention to color as a topographic descriptor honors both the monumental and minute elements of the landscape. Even the snow of *Bisset Farm* appears natural in its layers of grey, white, and other soft hues that abstractly convey the character and reality of snow. Carmichael’s use of white, light blue, and cream mimics the atmosphere of a snowy landscape yet remains a simple and expressionistic impression, one inherently tied to his spiritual and experiential contemplation of the detailed and topographical terrain before him.

As *Bisset Farm* exemplifies, Franklin Carmichael’s distinctive use of color and space, his portrayal of the relationship between humans and nature, and his subject—the Canadian wilderness—evidences his and the Group of Seven’s transnational philosophic affinity for nineteenth-century Transcendentalism as well as his enthusiastic commitment to artistically solidifying Canada’s national identity.

Linking Canadian national identity to the wilderness was a common practice after Canadian independence from the British Empire in 1867. Hence, Carmichael and the Group of Seven’s efforts toward solidifying a distinctively Canadian visual tradition were rooted in the

unique visual and experiential qualities of the national wilderness. A crucial influence on the Canadian experience of nature, Transcendentalism originated in early-to-mid-nineteenth-century America as a spiritual, philosophical, and literary movement that endeavored to reach the essence of things through a direct encounter with nature.² Transcendentalists, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman, believed that nature manifested and evidenced the presence of God far more than institutionalized religion.³ In rejecting religious rites and explanations, these men sought an intimate and uninhibited encounter with reality most fully expressed in the rawness of nature. Loosely inspired by German Romanticism and Immanuel Kant, Transcendentalism expanded upon the ideas of German philosophers such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), who believed nature to be the living garment of God, and Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854). Schelling constructed his *Naturphilosophie* (aesthetic system) and his philosophy of identity (which looked on nature and mind as identical) upon the idea that the “human soul and nature were but extensions of the same spirit” and that art rooted in the true understanding of nature would extend beyond mimicry and become *Sinnbilder* (sense images).⁴ Thus, just as *Sinnbilder* allowed viewers to experience the spiritual quality of nature through art, beautiful and sublime vistas granted access to a transcendently spiritual experience of nature. For example, Emerson believed that nature was ecstatic and “bursting with creative

² Ann Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting, 1920-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 43.

³ While Whitman did not attend the original 1836 Transcendentalist Club, he greatly admired Emerson and professed a spiritual harmony with the Transcendentalist tenets of the divine inherent within nature.

⁴ Timothy Mitchell, *Art and Science in German Landscape Painting 1770-1840* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 102; Catherine L. Albanese, “Introduction,” in *The Spirituality of the American Transcendentalists*, ed. Catherine L. Albanese (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1988), 6-7; Paul F. Boller Jr., *American Transcendentalism, 1830-1860: An Intellectual Inquiry* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1974), 41.

power. . . . There was an inexhaustible supply of divine energy in the universe and it had a tendency to push its way with irresistible force and utter abandon into every nook and cranny of the natural world.”⁵ Likewise, inspired by Emerson’s Transcendentalist belief that the “world is a temple, whose walls are covered with emblems, pictures, and commandments of the Deity,” Walt Whitman, a “poet of Transcendentalism,” proclaimed, “surely there is something more in each of the trees, some living soul.”⁶

Unlike other spiritualities explored by Carmichael and the Group of Seven, such as Theosophy and Christian Science, that sought an ultimate reality beyond nature, Transcendentalism understood God to be intrinsically evident within nature. As art historian Barbara Novak describes, “ideas of God's nature and of God in nature became hopelessly entangled . . . If nature was God's Holy Book, it *was* God.”⁷ For Emerson, nature was “the externalization of the soul . . . the incarnation of a thought, the plantations of God.”⁸ To this end, Emerson wrote, “We can never see Christianity from the catechism—from the pastures, from a boat in the pond, from amidst the songs of the wood-birds, we possibly may.”⁹ Moreover, for Transcendentalists, nature’s inherent otherness, its transformative and transcendent quality lay

⁵ Boller, *American Transcendentalism*, 70.

⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Poet” in *Emerson Essays and Lecture*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 454; Walt Whitman, “Song at Sunset,” in *Leaves of Grass* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 609; Roger Asselineau, “Transcendentalism,” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Walt Whitman*, ed. J. R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings (New York: Routledge, 1998), 737.

⁷ Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape Painting 1825-1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3. Many spiritualities intrigued other Group of Seven artists: J. E. H MacDonald and Lawren Harris expressed interest in Christian Science and Theosophy.

⁸ Boller, *American Transcendentalism, 1830-1860*, 67.

⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Circles,” in *The Spiritual Emerson: Essential Writings*, ed. David M. Robinson (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 158.

not simply in the idea but in the experience.¹⁰ Emerson and his fellow Transcendentalists recognized the experience of nature as the “sally of the soul into the unfolding infinite” which granted moments of illumination.¹¹ Emerson’s “transparent eye-ball” in “Nature” (1836) exemplifies this unity with the divine through nature:

in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky . . . I have enjoyed perfect exhilaration. . . . In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life . . . which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, all mean egoism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.¹²

Emerson’s concurrent experience of nature and the spiritual is expressed again in “Nature”: “The noblest ministry of nature is to stand as the apparition of God. It is the organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it.”¹³

Given Emerson’s reflections on the universal spirit and his generalized descriptions of nature, the Transcendental experience of nature would not seem geographically or temporally limited. However, in 1916, literary critic Norman Foerster claimed that Henry David Thoreau and his fellow Transcendentalists “found nature communicative only when [they] stayed close to home” and Transcendentalism generally became a phenomenon centered in New England,

¹⁰ Early in Emerson’s career, Philip Gura argues, the philosopher was less interested in man’s “ability to comprehend ‘symbolic’ experience than he was in reaffirming his belief that there did, indeed, exist a realm of spirit approachable in moments of illumination.” Philip F. Gura, *The Wisdom of Words: Language, Theology, and Literature in the New England Renaissance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, Press, 1981), 105.

¹¹ Emerson, “Nature,” 47; J. August Higgins, “The Aesthetic Foundations of Religious Experience in the Writings of Johnathan Edwards and Ralph Waldo Emerson,” *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 38, no. 2-3 (2017): 166.

¹² Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nature,” in *Emerson Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1983), 10.

¹³ Emerson, “Nature,” 40.

despite the movement being philosophically beholden to European ideas.¹⁴ Yet, Thoreau's *A Yankee in Canada* evinces his admiration of the Canadian wilderness declaring, "there is nothing of the kind in New England to be compared to it."¹⁵ Correspondingly, Canadians refused to accept any temporal or geographical limitations of Transcendentalism: J. E. H. MacDonald (1873-1932), Carmichael's friend and fellow founding member of the Group of Seven, named his only son Thoreau and proclaimed that Walt Whitman, the Transcendentalist and Romantic poet who traveled considerably in Canada, "is a great specimen of humanity. . . . He draws our attention widely and speaks deeply for all from the soul of man. As an artist, then, I would ask you to admire Whitman's scope, his variety, his color, range of sympathy, language & prolific detail, his vast sense of the heavens and the sea."¹⁶

Despite J. E. H. MacDonald's veneration of Whitman, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* was restricted in Canada, requiring, as MacDonald experienced as a youth in Toronto, an application and cross-examination by the librarian "before being allowed to sit in his room to read the book under his general supervision."¹⁷ Despite the public's limited access to *Leaves of Grass*, due to the Walt Whitman Club of Bon Echo and the Whitman Fellowship of Toronto, among others, many Canadians believed, as did the Fellowship's founder, Flora MacDonald Denison, that "Life is one ever lasting miracle and Whitman its great apostle."¹⁸ J. E. H. MacDonald concluded that Whitman's Transcendental influences on the Group of Seven's art "gives us the freedom of the

¹⁴ Norman Foerster, "Whitman as a Poet of Nature," *PMLA* 31, no. 4 (1916): 736.

¹⁵ Henry David Thoreau, "A Yankee in Canada," in *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, eds. Bradford Torrey and Franklin B. Sanborn, vol. 5, *Excursions and Poems* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1906), 58.

¹⁶ Typescript of "An Artist's View of Whitman" Lecture by J. E. H. MacDonald, 1926, MG30-D111 vol. 3, files 28 and 29, MacDonald fonds, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Ottawa, Ontario.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Davis, *Logic of Ecstasy*, 43-44.

world . . . his auroral mysticism fills the landscapes.”¹⁹ Accordingly, the universality or, at least, transnational effect of Whitman and the Transcendentalists can be seen in the paintings by the Group of Seven, particularly Carmichael’s landscapes, rich with an affection for his native land. Of Carmichael’s indelible connection to the experience of nature, curator Ian Thom wrote, “Carmichael is fluent in expression, his themes are new and worthy; he has found a brooding beauty in nature, deeply moving and hitherto obscure. . . . One has a feeling of being there with the artist and the excitement at nature.”²⁰

The inextricable influence of American Transcendentalism on Carmichael and the Group of Seven artists forged what I am terming a transnational philosophical framework: a permeation of philosophical, poetic, and artistic ideas across the border between the United States and Canada despite the nationalistic tendencies in each country by the late nineteenth century. The term “nationalism” used here is not meant in the current understanding of the word, which might imply a negative connotation or denote an aggressive sense of national superiority. While Benedict Anderson and Hugh Seton-Watson recognized that the nation and nationalism “proved notoriously difficult to define,” for the purpose of this paper, I am adopting Benedict Anderson’s definition of the nation as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”²¹ Thus, the Group of Seven espoused a nationalistic sentiment that ardently supported Canada as a sovereign imagined community, a community politically, socially, and artistically distinct from Europe and the United States. Nationalism and ardent patriotism at the turn of the twentieth century and for Carmichael and the Group of Seven meant

¹⁹ Davis, *Logic of Ecstasy*, 48.

²⁰ Ian Thom, “Introduction,” in *Franklin Carmichael Watercolours, September 3 – October 30, 1981* (Victoria, British Columbia: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1981), n.p..

²¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed., (New York, Verso: 2006), 3, 5-6.

forming a national identity based on Canadian landscapes without a reliance on established and foreign artistic traditions. Likewise, the term “transnational” is not meant to undermine or contradict the ardent patriotism expressed respectively by Canadians and Americans at the time. Rather, this transnationalism recognizes the Canadian familiarity with the American Transcendentalist philosophies of Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau.

It is also important to note that Transcendental philosophies did not only influence Carmichael and the Group of Seven but also simultaneously influenced their American contemporaries at the turn of the twentieth century. For instance, Rockwell Kent (1882-1971), a Transcendentalist in the tradition of Emerson and Whitman, found inspiration in the solitude, honest work, and austerity of the wilderness. He recorded his Transcendental ideas in his work and in his journals: “It seems that we have . . . come to stand face to face with that infinite and unfathomable thing which is the wilderness; and here we found OURSELVES.”²² A pupil of Robert Henri (1865-1929), the “earnest . . . impassioned . . . invariably personal” American artist dedicated to Whitman and Emerson and who considered Whitman as the “ideal model for young artists,” Kent inherited Henri’s passion for the Transcendental and the individual experience of nature.²³ In 1905, writer Doug Capra notes, “Henri introduced Kent to the rugged cliffs of Monhegan Island off the coast of Maine” where the artist “lived and painted . . . built himself a small house . . . read Emerson, Thoreau, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Ruskin, Schopenhauer,

²² Doug Capra, *Wilderness: A Journal of Quiet Adventure in Alaska* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), xi.

²³ Rockwell Kent, *It’s Me O Lord* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1955), 81; Ruth L. Bohan, “Robert Henri, Walt Whitman, and the American Artist,” *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, 29 (2012): 140, 136; Edward H. Madden and Marian C. Madden, “Transcendental Dimensions of American Art,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 32, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 155, 170.

Spencer, and Haeckel.”²⁴ Having both read these authors and experienced solitude within nature, Kent recognized the importance of returning to untamed nature in his works and his journals, publishing his illustrated Alaskan journals in *Wilderness* in 1920. Celebrated by *The New Statesman* as “easily the most remarkable book to come out of America since *Leaves of Grass*,” *Wilderness* rings with his passion for the wilderness, the solitude, the seclusion, and the uniqueness of the North:²⁵

I came to Alaska because I love the North. I crave snow-topped mountains, dreary wastes, and the cruel Northern sea with its hard horizons at the edge of the world where infinite space begins. Here skies are clearer and deeper and, for the greater wonders they reveal, a thousand times more eloquent of the eternal mystery than those of softer lands.²⁶

Echoing the conviction of Carmichael and the Group of Seven artists, Kent’s declaration recognized the Transcendental uniqueness of the Northern wilderness, the vastness of its skies, and the majesty of its mountains.

Kent’s accompanying illustrations in *Wilderness* such as *Driftwood* (fig. 2) represents a man within the wilderness, carrying a fallen tree with great effort, his back hunched and his muscles tensed as he leans diagonally forward in order to take his next step. He is alone, set into the dramatic Alaskan wilderness through line and shadow as if to reemphasize the ruggedness of the wilderness as a necessary backdrop for his labor. *Driftwood* and the other figural woodcuts are also accompanied by chapter illustrations of the Alaskan landscape, absent of people, which capture the expanses of the Alaskan wilderness: its mountains, its lakes, its sky. Compositionally

²⁴ Capra, foreword to *Wilderness*, xii.

²⁵ Capra, foreword to *Wilderness*, xi. Even though estate records do not indicate that Carmichael owned *Wilderness* at the time of his death, he was at least aware of Rockwell Kent and owned a copy of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* illustrated by Kent. “Franklin Carmichael Library Part I Finding Aid,” compiled by Jo Beglo and Lisa Di Noble for the National Gallery of Canada Library, Ottawa, Ontario.

²⁶ Kent, “Introduction to Alaskan Drawings,” *Wilderness*, xxxi.

comparable to Carmichael's Canadian landscapes, these illustrations, despite their relatively small size, capture both the atmosphere of the wilderness and the topography of the land through line and light. *Excursion* (fig. 3) features rays of light exploding from behind a looming mountain described by purposefully directional lines, bulbous clouds hang in the sky, heavy and waiting, while a distant mountain range is illuminated by the unseen sun and a foreground of trees frame the agitated lake to the right as its water eagerly rushes toward the shore.

Kent's awareness of the potential energy of the wilderness, the vastness of northern space, and the harmony between land and sky visually and philosophically echo Carmichael's *Lake Wabagishik* (fig. 4) with its detailed topographical delineations, vibrancy of light, and the potent strength of the clouds as the storm approaches. These landscapes without a human presence, and even those that recognize human harmony with nature, reaffirm nature's sublimity and the comparably overwhelming insignificance of a traveler in the face of transcendent nature.

The transnationalism of Transcendental philosophies evidenced by Carmichael and Kent was also informed by the sentiment of national identity that the Canadian artists aimed to imbue in their landscapes. Carmichael's only artist statement reaffirms his commitment to Canadian distinctiveness through the Northern wilderness.

My philosophy of art is, I hope very simple. My association and membership in the Group of Seven ever since it was formed in 1920 should speak for itself. While I have nothing but admiration for the best of what has been produced in the past in other countries, I see no reason why we should impose outside ideals upon our own efforts. That would be admitting an incapacity to shape our own ideals. We have everything out of which to build ideals and traditions, to fail to make use of them would simply be throwing away a priceless heritage of spirit and material. Traditions grow, they are not formed in a day and it is only through an unswerving attachment to an ideal, that grows out of a continual and intimate contact with our own life and surroundings, that an artist

can hope to contribute towards that which in time will become the traditions of his own country.²⁷

Correspondingly, in his preparation notes for a lecture given to Vancouver Art School students entitled “Art in Canada,” Lawren Harris (1885-1970), a prominent member of the Group of Seven and Carmichael’s close friend, wrote:

We have been too busy pioneering our new and vast land to give ourselves to the full life of the mind and spirit. . . . It is the cause of our lingering sense of inferiority. It is the reason we still look beyond our borders for our creative and cultural standards. [We need] our own statement of universal harmony in terms of our own time, our own place and our own people. This is the long creative process of reflecting the life of the spirit into the life of the people. This is, and has been, the function in art in every age and place.²⁸

As artists who publicly stated their belief in a distinct Canadian identity in lectures, newspapers, interviews, and exhibition pamphlets, the Group of Seven actively helped form the kind of national consciousness that Benedict Anderson attributes to “the revolutionary vernacularizing thrust of capitalism” and mass print reproduction.²⁹ In regard to the latter, Carmichael illustrated several books which emphasized the distinctiveness of the Canadian wilderness, including Grace Campbell’s Canadian pioneering tale *The Thorn-Apple Tree*. The Group of Seven’s dedication to representing the shared experience of the Canadian wilderness contributed to a visual language that united their imagined community, further inspiring Canadian patriotism and national distinctiveness.

²⁷ Correspondence from Franklin Carmichael to D. C. Scott at the Vancouver School of Art, January 1, 1933, MG30-D293, vol. 5, file 22, Franklin Carmichael fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

²⁸ Typescript of “Art in Canada” lecture from notes Talk to Vancouver Art School students by Lawren Harris, undated, MG30-D208, vol. 4, Lawren Harris fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

²⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 39.

Carmichael and the Group of Seven were not, however, the founders of this nationalistic movement nor the authors of Canadian identity as people of the Northern wilderness, rather they were the inheritors. Historically, as early as the 1840s, Canada came to be seen as a site of renewal based on its abundant landmass, which set it apart from the industrialism of “the old country.”³⁰ Various calls for native literature and art resonated throughout the isolated colonies, such as Lower Canadian Statesman Thomas D’Arcy McGee’s declaration that “We have the materials—the position is favorable—northern latitudes like ours have been famed for the strength, variety and beauty of their literature.” The British North America Act in 1867, which established the Canadian Confederation as a self-governing entity within the British Empire, fueled national spirit and inspired the Canada First movement.³¹ The movement’s founder W. A. Foster entreated for a national distinctiveness free from the influence of the British Empire or United States: “It is the duty of all Canadians, whether by birth or adoption to recognize the pressing necessity for the cultivation of a national sentiment which will unite the people of various provinces more closely in the bonds of citizenship.”³² Further distinguishing Canada from America, Foster later wrote: “the old Norse mythology, with its Thor hammers . . . appeals to us—for we are a Northern people—as the true out-crop of human nature, more manly, more real, than the weak marrow-bones superstition of an effeminate South.”³³ Similarly, Robert Grant

³⁰ Eric Kaufmann, “‘Naturalizing the Nation’: The Rise of Naturalistic Nationalism in the United States and Canada,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 40, no. 4 (October 1998): 681.

³¹ Kaufmann, “Naturalizing the Nation,” 681.

³² Quoted by Kaufmann, “Naturalizing the Nation,” 682.

³³ *Ibid.*

Haliburton, a Canada First leader, proclaimed “we are the Northmen of the New World” to the Montreal Literary Club in 1869.³⁴

Such nationalism was reiterated by each of the Group of Seven’s geographically indelible tie to the Northern wilderness: Tom Thomson, an early associate of the Group of Seven, was raised near Owen Sound; Lawren Harris spent many childhood summers in near Lake Muskoka; and Franklin Carmichael grew up in Orillia, a small hamlet nestled between two Ontario lakes.³⁵ Historian Peter Mellen affirms the Northernness of the Group, noting that Doctor J. M. MacCallum (1860-1941), the Group’s chief benefactor, overall champion, and, according to Carmichael, their “patron saint,” was “a great enthusiast for the Canadian North. He had been camping and canoeing around Georgian Bay long before many of the Group were born. . . . His reaction to their work was a simple one—if their paintings conveyed a feeling for the northern landscape, he liked them.”³⁶ J. E. H. MacDonald remembered a “real stirring of Canadian ideals” at the “Canadian evenings” at the Graphic Arts Club (of which they belonged) where the members sang nationalistic anthems. He also remembered “visiting evenings” at various artist studios, where “each artist made half-hour compositions on Canadian subjects and other members criticized them.”³⁷ Of the Group of Seven’s paintings being rooted in the expression of

³⁴ Carl Berger, “The True North Strong and Free,” in *Nationalism in Canada*, ed. Peter Russell (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 6. Robert Grant Haliburton was the son of Thomas Chandler Haliburton, the famous judge, author, and statesman after whom Haliburton county is named. Haliburton county is adjacent to Simcoe County, where Carmichael was born, and features in several of Carmichael’s landscapes.

³⁵ Peter Mellen, *The Group of Seven* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd. 1970), 24. These locations were considered to be on the border between civilization and the northern wilderness, especially early in the twentieth century.

³⁶ Correspondence from Franklin Carmichael to his wife Ada, February 6, 1914, vol. “correspondence,” Franklin Carmichael fonds, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario; Mellen, *The Group of Seven*, 24.

³⁷ Correspondence from J. E. H. MacDonald to F. B. Housser, Dec. 20, 1926 quoted by Mellen, *The Group of Seven*, 17.

national identity, Harris proclaimed, “Our art is founded on a long and growing love and understanding of the North and in an ever clearer experience of oneness with the informing spirit of the whole land and a strange brooding sense of Mother Nature fostering a new race and a new age.”³⁸

As for Carmichael, his personal and artistic commitment to fostering national identity is, again, clearly stated in his artist statement: “I see no reason why we should impose outside ideals upon our own efforts. That would be admitting an incapacity to shape our own ideals. We have everything out of which to build ideals and traditions.”³⁹ An extension of his patriotic intentions, Carmichael’s landscapes capture the impressive and unique qualities of the wilderness from which Canadian national identity is built. Frederick B. Housser, art critic, Transcendentalist, and friend of the Group of Seven, spoke of Carmichael’s respect for and peace in Canada’s uniquely Northern nature: “The skies, the great pitching lake, the bold stern coast country with its big design motifs, drew a response from Carmichael that no other landscape had . . . the magic of the North had touched him . . . it got to him as it gets all who come to know and feel it.”⁴⁰

Carmichael’s painting *Upper Ottawa, Near Mattawa* (1924, fig. 5), for example, reifies his declaration and represents the natural elements that constitute the Canadian visual language: pine trees and forests, rippled lakes and bays, rocky terrains, and undulating mountains and hillsides

³⁸ Lawren Harris, “Creative Art in Canada,” *Supplement to the McGill News* (December 1928), 3, 5; Catharine Mastin, “Introduction,” in *The Group of Seven in Western Canada*, ed. Catharine Mastin (Toronto: Glenbow Museum, 2002), 26.

³⁹ Correspondence from Franklin Carmichael to D.C. Scott at the Vancouver School of Art, January 1, 1933, MG30-D293, vol. 5, file 22, Franklin Carmichael fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

⁴⁰ Catharine Mastin, *Portrait of a Spiritualist: Franklin Carmichael and the National Gallery of Canada Collection* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2001), n.p. Quotation from Fred Housser’s first history of the Group of Seven.

all contribute to the content of the uniquely Canadian wilderness.⁴¹ *Upper Ottawa, Near Mattawa* features a quintessentially Canadian scene: a steep rocky cliff and forested mountains soar upward as they flank an intensely blue bay which reflects the immensity of the unseen blue sky. More than strict re-presentation of these features, *Upper Ottawa, Near Mattawa* also impresses the monumentality of the wilderness upon the viewer. Painted from Carmichael's favored lofty viewpoint, the composition places the viewer, like the pine, precariously at the edge of the rocky cliff, far above the sunlight dappled bay and visually equal to forested peaks on the opposite shore. Yet, the viewer is simultaneously dwarfed by a massive jack pine in the center and the mountain to the right as they implicitly rise far beyond the painting's upper edge. *Upper Ottawa, Near Mattawa* visually corroborates the national distinctiveness of the North with its expansive and forbidding terrain. Hence, Carmichael's landscapes represent the wilderness as an emblem of Canadian strength, uniqueness, and national identity, reaffirming his and the Group of Seven's honorific as the first Canadian national art movement.

The Group of Seven's embrace of a national sensibility set them apart from the American Transcendentalists, whose philosophy so affected the artists.⁴² However, the Transcendentalists' historical context in the early to mid-nineteenth-century United States associates them with the era's demand for distinctly American literature and art, such as the novels of James Fenimore

⁴¹ Tom Thomson, a friend of the Group of Seven artists before his untimely death, favored compositions featuring a lone jack pine. A tree of the North, the jack pine is representative of the Canadian wilderness. After Thomson's death, the jack pine also became a visual symbol of strength adopted by Carmichael and the Group of Seven.

⁴² That being said, in his 1837 "The American Scholar" lecture, Emerson advocates for a distinction between the United States and Europe, proclaiming: "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe." Emerson, "The American Scholar," *Emerson Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1983), 70.

Cooper and the art of the Hudson River School.⁴³ Thoreau wrote perhaps his most patriotic sentiment in “Walking” (1851):

If the moon looks larger here than in Europe, if the heavens of America appear infinitely higher, and the stars brighter . . . [it is] symbolical of the height to which the philosophy and poetry and religion of her inhabitants may one day soar . . . else to what end does the world go on, and why was America discovered?⁴⁴

Thoreau’s emphasis on the uniqueness of the land reflects the concurrent American effort to differentiate itself from Europe by its terrain, just like Carmichael and the Group of Seven more than half a century later. This sentiment toward nature continued to grow throughout the nineteenth century, culminating in nature being used symbolized national distinctiveness. Seen throughout North America, the Canadian calls for national distinction as early as the Canada First Movement foundationally relied on in the idea of Canadian nationhood being defined by the uniqueness of Canada’s natural environment.⁴⁵

While the Group of Seven, which initially exhibited together in 1920, is known as the first national Canadian art movement, the concept of nation as nature had previously emerged in early nineteenth-century America. For example, through dramatic and sublime visual language, Thomas Cole popularized the landscape along the Hudson River Valley and inspired a bustling tourist industry seeking the sublime. Historian Stephen Daniels describes: “[It became] nothing less than a national duty for Americans to admire the river scenery and to show it off to visiting Europeans.”⁴⁶ Cole’s sublime landscapes visually associated American nationhood with its

⁴³ Kaufmann, “Naturalizing the Nation,” 672.

⁴⁴ Henry David Thoreau, “Walking,” in *Collected Essays and Poems*, ed. Elizabeth Hall Witherell (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2001), 237–38.

⁴⁵ Nationhood defined by nature has been described many ways, including Eric Kaufmann’s “naturalistic nationalism” or what Perry Miller formulated as the title of his 1967 book, *Nature’s Nation*.

⁴⁶ Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision. Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 146.

nature. In his *Essay on American Scenery* (1836), Cole clearly supported a distinctively American terrain tied to nationalism: “Though American scenery is destitute of many of those circumstances that give value to the European, still it has features, and glorious ones, unknown to Europe . . . and the most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wildness.”⁴⁷ By the 1830s, writers also in New England and New York responded to this sensibility: Transcendentalists such as Thoreau and Emerson retreated from civilization at Walden Pond and Brook Farm colony in Massachusetts, respectively.⁴⁸ Later, historian Frederick Jackson Turner recognized that it was the “wilderness that masters the colonist” and the outcome of the uniquely challenging and sublime terrain created “a new product that is American.”⁴⁹

Likewise, just as the wilds of the United States formed the American colonist and frontiersman identities, the wildernesses of Canada became the measure that defined the country’s national distinctiveness. The reflections of the American Walt Whitman on the interwoven relationship between national identity and nature in his original preface to *Leaves of Grass* (1855) correlate with the Canadian experience: “The largeness of nature or the nation were monstrous without the corresponding largeness and generosity of the spirit of the citizen. . . . His spirit responds to the country’s spirit. . . . He incarnates its geography and natural life and rivers and lakes.”⁵⁰ With their identity rooted in indomitability, perseverance, and survival, Canadians matched the strength and power of the wilderness. The Canadian identity as a people of the

⁴⁷ Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 67.

⁴⁸ Kaufmann, “Naturalizing the Nation,” 672.

⁴⁹ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1920), 4.

⁵⁰ Walt Whitman, “Whitman’s Introduction,” in *Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 6-7.

North demanded an intimate relationship with the country's unparalleled Northern wilderness as represented in the landscape paintings by Carmichael and the Group of Seven.

Carmichael and his fellow artists expressed their Canadian identity by engaging directly with the wilderness, painting landscapes *en plein air* and representing the indelible relationship with and spiritual experience of Canadian nature artistically aligned with Transcendentalist ideals. However, it is important to note, as art historian Ann Davis recognized, that Transcendentalism "was a literary and religious movement, having virtually no pictorial form, its influences were of a philosophic rather than visual character [with] no specifically transcendental iconography."⁵¹ Therefore, the claim of nature's spirit is communicated in art through subject matter—the land—and stylistic expression through color, space, form, and composition. In particular, although not explicitly stated outright by the artist, Carmichael's treatment of the Canadian landscape is both deliberately emblematic of the Canadian wilderness and expressionistically indicative of Transcendental influences. While Carmichael did not specifically acknowledge Transcendentalism as an influence on his art, his lifelong interaction with nature and his oeuvre manifest unmistakable affinities with the philosophical movement.

Having spent his childhood in the northern frontier of Orillia, Ontario, a border town between civilization and the wilderness, Franklin Carmichael experienced nature as wild and untamed, beautiful and dangerous.⁵² He began working with watercolors at an early age, focusing on natural subject matter—trees, flowers, landscapes—with what Megan Bice describes as "an intensity and closeness of observation exceptional for a novice."⁵³ Carmichael studied at

⁵¹ Davis, *Logic of Ecstasy*, 42.

⁵² Megan Bice, *Light and Shadow: The Work of Franklin Carmichael* (Toronto: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1990), 10.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

the Ontario College of Art in Toronto under George A. Reid (1860-1947) and William Cruikshank (1848/9-1922) and at the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Antwerp, Belgium with Isidor Opsomer (1878-1967) from 1913 until the outbreak of World War I.⁵⁴ Returning to Toronto, he worked at several graphic design firms, including Grip Ltd. where he met his future Group of Seven friends. A graphic designer for many years, Carmichael also illustrated major, national ad campaigns, such as Canadian National Railways promotional brochures, as well as many nature-oriented novels.

Carmichael remained devoted to the importance of nature in his personal and artistic life, building a cabin alongside Cranberry Lake in Ontario in 1935.⁵⁵ Further, in his unpublished manuscript “Notes on Art,” Carmichael wrote: “We can only get out of any picture what we ourselves bring into it. [Our] emotional response or experience.”⁵⁶ His sketchbooks and notes frequently feature his attachment to the wilderness and cite a crucial intimacy not unlike Emerson’s transparent eyeball moment in “Nature” (1836) which discerned the unity of the divine through nature.⁵⁷ Emerson claimed that “the noblest ministry of nature is to stand as the apparition of God. It is the organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it.”⁵⁸ Similarly, Carmichael understood that nature’s

⁵⁴ Typescript of Franklin Carmichael’s “Information Form,” undated, Documentation of the Franklin Carmichael (1890-1945), Franklin Carmichael fonds, National Gallery of Ontario Archives & Library, Ottawa, Canada.

⁵⁵ Bice, *Light and Shadow*, 60.

⁵⁶ Written notes entitled “Notes on Art” by Franklin Carmichael in Unpublished Annotated Manuscript, undated, MG30-D293, vol. 5, file 15, Franklin Carmichael fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

⁵⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nature,” in *Emerson Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1983), 10.

⁵⁸ Emerson, “Nature,” 40.

inherent otherness, its transformative and transcendent quality lay not simply in the idea but in the experience of nature.

Reflected in compositional choices throughout his oeuvre, Carmichael's dedication to the sublime and Transcendentally experiential qualities of the landscape expressly appear in *Autumn Hillside* (1920, fig. 6). In this painting, nature confronts the viewer in all its color, variety, and imperfection. In the foreground, the viewer's gaze is detained by an irregular conglomeration of rocks, fallen tree limbs, grasses, bushes, and small trees. This small grouping restricts immediate access to the colorful middle ground while the haphazardly natural composition and the background's looming cloud act as warnings of nature's sublime unpredictability and chaos. Further, the compositional play in *Autumn Hillside* between unattainable impersonal distance (background) and confrontational personal experience (foreground) emblemizes the two-fold sublime encounter of nature: its spiritually provocative beauty and its power.

Likewise, *Snow Clouds* (1938, fig. 7) situates the viewer inescapably within the landscape; however, here the viewer gazes at a vast, deep panorama of nature. As if atop a mountain and overlooking a mountain range covered in threatening storm clouds, the viewer sees snow or rain fall distantly in sheets as light filters through various openings between clouds to illuminate the undulating mountain ridges in jewel-toned blues and reds amidst snow whites and yellow-greens. Unlike *Autumn Hillside*, *Snow Clouds* does not confront the viewer with a foregrounded experience of nature. Through the intriguing play of light on the mountain peaks, the colorful striations of the landscape, and the looming storm clouds, nature becomes sublimely omnipresent and the viewer is seemingly absorbed into nature à la Emerson's transparent eyeball.

Carmichael, inspired by Transcendentalism, evoked the sublime because it acted as a vehicle for the experientially spiritual quality of nature; it inspired awe and terror and encouraged an experience beyond oneself. Transcendentalists like Whitman believed that art, particularly landscapes, must enliven the subject and inspire its viewer. Thomas Cole wrote that undisturbed landscapes “affect the mind with a more deepened emotion than [those] which the hand of man has touched. Amid them the consequent associations are of God the creator – they are his undefiled works, and the mind is cast into the contemplation of eternal things.”⁵⁹ Likewise, Carmichael’s landscapes inspire contemplation through his detailed and engaging application of color as well as his creation of sublime compositions that evoke God’s omnipresence in nature. Nature, in all of its terrifying unpredictability, power, and wildness is sublime; the danger of the wilderness evokes awe and terror as well as “admiration, reverence, and respect.”⁶⁰ Edmund Burke, whose influential eighteenth-century writing on the sublime resonated with later artists, argued that an experience of awe and terror is both an indication of the sublimity of nature and of the divine:

I know that some have said that we can contemplate the idea of God without terror or awe. If I may speak of this without impropriety, I will say that no conviction of the justice with which it is exercised, nor of the mercy with which it is tempered, can wholly remove the terror that naturally arises from a force which nothing can withstand.⁶¹

Appropriately, the experience of nature so crucial to Transcendental spiritualism and the communion with the divine is inherently connected to the wilderness, whether it be the power of

⁵⁹ Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," in *American Art 1700-1960, Sources and Documents in the History of Art Series*, ed. John W. McCoubrey (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 102.

⁶⁰ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1757), 96.

⁶¹ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 96.

Emerson's "unhandselled [untouched] savage nature" in the United States or the Northern wilderness crucial to Canadian identity.

The sublime was not a foreign aesthetic in North America: it had been celebrated in the eighteenth century by many, including the clergyman and historian Jeremy Belknap who wrote in 1784, "Almost every thing [*sic*] in nature, which can be supposed capable of inspiring ideas of the sublime and beautiful, is here realized. . . . Aged mountains, stupendous elevations, rolling clouds, impending rocks, verdant woods, chrystal [*sic*] streams, and gentle rill and roaring torrent, all conspire to amaze, to soothe and to enrapture."⁶² The sublime also permeated art in the majestic early-eighteenth-century landscapes of Thomas Cole as well as the repeated representations of the Catskill Mountains and Niagara Falls by a variety of American and international artists. Tourists in America and Canada also sought the sublime throughout the twentieth century. Patricia Jasen, a Canadian historian, recognized that "the craze of the sublime experience entailed a new appreciation of natural phenomena . . . among these were 'scars' on the earth's surface such as mountains and ravines, and other gloomy or violent phenomena such as cascading waters, bleak moors, dark forests, and thunderstorms."⁶³ In his 1830 travel guide encompassing New York to Quebec, Theodore Dwight pays homage to the cascades in the Catskills as "a singular and highly romantic scene" which features a stream that "terminates, very abruptly, at a high and shelving precipice, descending into a tremendous gorge between ridges of gloomy mountains."⁶⁴ Cultivated by the art of Hudson River School and visiting

⁶² Mary Woolley, "The Development of the Love of Romantic Scenery in America," *American Historical Review* (October 1897): 62.

⁶³ Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 8.

⁶⁴ Theodore Dwight, *The Northern Traveller and Northern Tour: With the Routes to the Springs, Niagara, and Quebec, and the Coal Mines of Pennsylvania: Also, the Tour of New England*, 4th ed. (New York: J. and J. Harper, 1830), 36.

European artists, the Catskills remained icon of the sublime for tourists seeking the sublime in America throughout the nineteenth century.

Canada likewise encountered and embraced tourists seeking the sublime, whether in regard to natural vistas or a more active sublime experience through hunting and fishing. Encountering the sublime meant experiencing, as Jasen describes, “an intensity of imaginative experience . . . being swept away by the beauty and terror of some natural phenomenon—being transported (however briefly) into another realm of being or level of consciousness.”⁶⁵

Ultimately, the tourist experience culminated at Niagara Falls: “The most ambitious journeyed to the place where the sublime was said to be incarnate . . . Niagara Falls [was] where this intensity of experience became firmly established as a measure of a holiday’s success.”⁶⁶ Given its location on the border, both Canada and the United States could claim the Falls as a national icon of the sublime sought after by visiting Canadians, Americans, and Europeans. However, the Canadian side of the Falls became known for offering a more genuine sublimity uninterrupted by tourist accommodations. Frederic Church’s painting *Niagara* (1857, fig. 8) depicts the Canadian side of the Falls and eliminates the foreground in order to position the viewer on the brink of the falls, reinforcing the sublime experience by emphasizing the power of the great natural wonder. Akin to Church’s grand picture, Franklin Carmichael’s evocative landscapes expressed the sublimity and power of the Canadian landscape and, in the process, reified a unique Canadian identity.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid., 29-30.

⁶⁶ Jasen, *Wild Things*, 9. The tourist industry at Niagara Falls actively heightened the lure of the sublime by using romantic and picturesque language in its promotional travel guides and brochures, creating a standardized travel narrative shared throughout North America.

⁶⁷ Karen Dubinsky, *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooning and Tourism at Niagara Falls* (Toronto: Between the Line, 1999), 4.

As sublime vistas capturing the monumentality and overwhelming presence of the Canadian wilderness, Carmichael's landscapes granted access to a Transcendentally spiritual experience of nature. His landscape *Wabajisik: Drowned Land* (1929, fig. 9) depicts a felt experience that art historian Catharine Mastin recognized as "assist[ing] us in realizing the majesty of nature and our place in a larger, more powerful, harmonious universe."⁶⁸ *Wabajisik: Drowned Land* situates the viewer in the lower fourth of the canvas, floating in the water and looking into the distance at velvety green and teal mountains rising from the lake. Punctured by whitened tree trunks, the lake water ripples with dark blue, light blue, and white as light and shadow play across the surface. Beyond the trees, the viewer's eye follows the undulating hills described by light and shadow, the diverse and stimulating yellows, light and dark greens, and royal blues, and the forms of the distant mountains and clouds. In the sky, monumental white, blue, and grey clouds billow and skim the mountain peaks; half of the composition's height, their size is larger than the mountains themselves. The viewer's experience of the sublimity of the mountains and clouds is reinforced by the drowned trees in the foreground struggling to rise from the dead, so to speak. Thus, the viewer's low position in the landscape, relative size, and vertical association with the vulnerable trees engenders a sublime experience which emphasizes one's powerlessness and vulnerability in the midst of overwhelming and omnipresent nature.

Similarly, the sky of *Lake Wabagishik* (1928, fig. 4) manifests the superior power and the awe-fullness of nature, translating it into a terrifying and sublime experience that transcends the mundane. An excellent example of Carmichael's continued interest in the sky and clouds and their effect on one's experience of the landscape, the upper half of *Lake Wabagishik* is dominated by swelling white, grey, and light blue clouds blanketing the sky. Similar to *Snow*

⁶⁸ Mastin, *Portrait of a Spiritualist*, n.p.

Clouds, the clouds are oppressive and pervasive, energetic and low, bringing with them a sheet of rain surging across the left half of the canvas and falling on the rising mountain and foothills at the center. The storm's strength as it rushes toward the viewer is furthered by the compositionally deep space of the painting which layers the rocky foreground terrain over an agitated lake and middle ground and background mountain ranges. The distance soon to be overtaken by the storm also provides a moment of pause for the viewer as they watch the storm approach with awe and dread. The central mountain compositionally and visually keeping the storm at bay contrasts sky blues and greys with swells and valleys delineated by brilliant colors ranging from bright yellow, green, orange, and dark brown. Yet, the enormity of the landmasses, the lake, the foreground terrain and the mountain range in the distance is diminished by the size and dominance of the storm clouds. And although the storm behind the mountain has not yet reached the foreground or the lake, its effects are clear: pines bend in the wind and the water churns with waves of black and green.

While not as dark as *Snow Clouds*, the light blues and greys of the sky in *Lake Wabagishik* do not alleviate the felt presence of nature. Rather, the sheer power of the rain implied by Carmichael's thick application of paint and powerful diagonals speaks to the authority of nature. Hence, subordinated to the clouds and storm, a glimpse of storm-less and sunny sky is obscured at the right of the composition and behind the several compositional layers of mountains and hills. Drawn toward the storm, the viewer's eye moves leftward toward contrasting colors, up and across the rising diagonals of the colorful lakeside mountain to rest on the light blue sheets of rain and the grey storm clouds. Much like Thomas Cole's *The Oxbow* (1836, fig. 10) of a vulnerable valley with ominous clouds and rain, the viewer's experience of

the sublime is inspired by an awe and terror of nature's overwhelming and uncontrollable strength as an oncoming storm.

Both *Lake Wabagishik* and *Wabajisik: Drowned Land* inspire a threefold contemplation of the sky and landscape, the transcendent and spiritually provocative experience of the sublime, and, finally, the divine, which Edmund Burke associates with awe and terror.⁶⁹ Art historian Ann Davis describes the Transcendental experience of nature as a manifestation of the divine and a vehicle for corresponding with the spiritual: "[the Transcendentalists experienced the] spiritual and natural worlds as the two extreme forms under which the universe can be realized . . . correspondence is then possible with three levels of existence: the Natural, the Spiritual, and the Divine."⁷⁰ Illuminated by light and crowned by clouds, the sky, water, and land of *Lake Wabagishik* are inextricably interrelated, connected by thick strokes of paint descending from the sky, traveling horizontally along the hill, and dancing across the lake toward the viewer. Just as Thoreau recognized the spiritual purity of light in the Canadian wilderness, claiming, "the purity and transparency of the atmosphere was wonderful," Carmichael illuminates his landscapes from above and plays with the reflecting light as it glistens on the water, rocks, and earth.⁷¹ In *Lake Wabagishik*, the distant sun drenched mountains speak to calm following the storm just as the beam of light breaks through the clouds in the middle ground, briefly alleviating the oppression of the approaching storm: the shore line is a startling white, the agitated water glistens with small strokes of white and blue, and bright green and yellow appears amidst dark striations of blue and brown. Acting as an additional unifier between land and sky, the light in in *Lake Wabagishik*, as

⁶⁹ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 96. Although spelled differently, *Lake Wabagishik* and *Wabajisik: Drowned Land* reference the same lake located north of Lake Huron and west of Sudbury, Ontario.

⁷⁰ Davis, *Logic of Ecstasy*, 4.

⁷¹ Thoreau, "A Yankee in Canada," 34.

in *Snow Clouds*, resolves the play between the monumental clouds, shadow and light in order to illuminate the unity intrinsic to the Canadian landscape.

Carmichael's fascination with the sky is not limited to his paintings: amidst flower and tree studies in his sketchbooks appear quick drawings of cloudy skies and storm clouds. *Cloud Study* (1930-39, fig. 11), for example, both acknowledges the forms and immensity of the clouds while also emphasizing the highlights and shadows of each. Likewise, above the topographically detailed mountain in the sketch for *Cranberry Lake* (1934, fig. 12), clouds actively billow across the sky in various states of illumination, affecting the light and shadow on the land below. In his preparatory notes for a lecture at the Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour, Carmichael declared "brilliant light" to be a chief characteristic of Canadian art and landscape.⁷² Likewise, Carmichael's use of light and thickly applied contours of color enraptured his viewers: in 1927 an admirer, L. V. Heaber, wrote to the artist saying, "Without understanding or attempting to understand the pictures, one is immediately fascinated by the presentation of color and the subtle use of light."⁷³ For Carmichael, light characteristically defined the Canadian wilderness as much as it evoked a sense of clarity or transparency of higher laws, acting as a vehicle through which one recognized an evident unison between the natural and the spiritual.⁷⁴ Thus, Carmichael's exploration of light as the divine illumination of nature echoed and reaffirmed Emerson's belief that the soul of man "is not an organ . . . not a faculty, but light. . . . From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is

⁷² Typescript of notes for lecture entitled "Brief History of the Water Colour Society" to Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour by Franklin Carmichael, n.d., MG30-D293, vol. 5, File 26, Franklin Carmichael fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

⁷³ Letter sent Jan. 24, 1927 to Franklin Carmichael from L. V. Heaber, vol. 5, file 33, Estate of the Artist, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

⁷⁴ Davis, *Logic of Ecstasy*, 62.

all."⁷⁵ Like Emerson, Carmichael saw that the landscape, with its light and grandeur, was both an “emotive and visual stimulus” and a spiritual experience.⁷⁶

Whereas his explorations of light evinced the spiritual in nature, Carmichael’s light of faith originally emanated from his mother’s Anglican beliefs.⁷⁷ A contemplative and spiritual man, Carmichael wrote very little about his spiritual beliefs but his library included books on Transcendentalism, cosmology, astrology, reincarnation, Christian history, and Christian societies from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; he also owned a copy of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*.⁷⁸ The variety and number of books in his possession reveal not only his interest in spirituality as a whole but also that “one could evolve to a higher purpose by embracing a broader vision of the world.”⁷⁹ His daughter Mary recalled that Sunday dinners included discussions on “everything from Christian Science to Anglicanism, to Presbyterianism, to Theosophy.”⁸⁰

However, Carmichael’s friends in the Group of Seven, particularly J. E. H. MacDonald and Lawren Harris, also played a significantly influential role proselytizing Transcendentalism. Apart from their daily interactions, the friends traveled together on camping and “sketching tours” of Algoma and other national parks where they discussed nature and spirituality.⁸¹ MacDonald quoted his hero, Walt Whitman, and the nightly discussion topics ranged “from

⁷⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Over-Soul,” in *The Spiritual Emerson: Essential Writings*, ed. David M. Robinson (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 135.

⁷⁶ Bice, *Light and Shadow*, 48.

⁷⁷ Bice, *Light and Shadow*, 10; Mastin, *Portrait of a Spiritualist*, n.p.

⁷⁸ “Franklin Carmichael Library Part I Finding Aid,” compiled by Jo Beglo and Lisa Di Noble for the National Gallery of Canada Library, Ottawa, Ontario.

⁷⁹ Mastin, *Portrait of a Spiritualist*, n.p.

⁸⁰ Bice, *Light and Shadow*, 48, in conversation with Carmichael’s daughter, Mary Mastin.

⁸¹ Jeremy Adamson, “Lawren Stewart Harris: Toward an Art of the Spiritual,” in *Canadian Art*, 69-87 (Ontario: Skylet Publishing/Art Gallery of Ontario, 2008), 74-77.

Plato to Picasso, to Madam Blavatsky and Mary Baker Eddy.”⁸² However, even though many artists of the Group of Seven experimented with ideas of the divine beyond nature through Theosophy and Christian Science, Carmichael consistently reaffirmed the centrality of nature through his artistic fidelity to the landscape and never considered himself a Theosophist.⁸³ That being said, Carmichael’s friendships with MacDonald and Harris allowed him to explore both Transcendentalism and Theosophy, particularly the latter between 1908 and 1916; his friendship with Harris formed an important element of his “quest for spiritual enlightenment,” specifically in their discussions on spirituality during the Algoma and Lake Superior sketching tours.⁸⁴

As evidenced by Carmichael’s library, Harris loaned and gifted several books on spirituality and Theosophy to Carmichael.⁸⁵ Moreover, both stylistically struggled to balance abstraction “as a vehicle for creative and spiritual expression” with their respective ideologies: Harris with Theosophical higher truth and the “illusion” of nature, Carmichael with the omnipresence and tangibility of Transcendentalist nature.⁸⁶ However, while both Harris’s *North Shore, Lake Superior* (1926, fig. 13) and Carmichael’s *North Shore, Lake Superior* (1927, fig. 14) emphasize abstraction and color, Harris’s composition reflects his Theosophical views of a higher truth *beyond* nature through his subordination of detail and his emphasis on the tree trunk jutting skyward toward heavenly rays of light. In contrast, Carmichael’s complementary colors, hue variation, undulating lines, vastness of space, implied human experience through the

⁸² Ibid., 74.

⁸³ Davis, *Logic of Ecstasy*, 163; Mastin, *Portrait of a Spiritualist*, n.p.

⁸⁴ Mastin, *Portrait of a Spiritualist*, n.p.

⁸⁵ “Franklin Carmichael Library Part I Finding Aid,” compiled by Jo Beglo and Lisa Di Noble for the National Gallery of Canada Library, Ottawa, Ontario. Harris gifted Carmichael several books, including the Theosophical tome by Mabel Collins, *A Cry from Afar; To Students of “Light on the Path”* and William Quan Judge’s *Notes on the Bhagavad-gita*. Both feature annotations probably from both readers.

⁸⁶ Adamson, “Lawren Stewart Harris: Toward an Art of the Spiritual,” 77-78.

verticality of the trees, and the surrounding effect of the landscape and sky all work together to evoke spiritual contemplation of and communion *with* nature. Visually, Carmichael's artistic philosophy melds with his compositional and stylistic choices, inherently intertwining nature and spirituality and reflecting the Transcendentalist attitude present in Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Essays and Other Writings*, which Carmichael acquired in 1908. As one of the "most thumbed-through books in in his library," his copy contains drawings and watercolors, underlining and notes, evidence of Carmichael's contemplative introspection and Emerson's influence on his views of nature and spirituality.⁸⁷ Notably, Emerson's essay on "The Over-Soul" featured copious amounts of underscoring, particularly Emerson's claim that "we see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul."⁸⁸ Furthermore, his intimate relationship with nature is reflected in his diary: Carmichael wrote on occasion that he was "out sketching by moonlight," or that he was compelled to go "for a walk at 5:15 in the morning and found a good subject in the pines."⁸⁹ His Emersonian fascination with the microcosm of nature, its spiritual potency, and the omnipresence of its wonders, especially those found in the intricacies of nature's patterns, persisted throughout his works.⁹⁰

As indicated by his early artistic habits, Carmichael did not derive Transcendental ideas of the sublimity of nature or of one's relative smallness in relation to the power of the wilderness from the safety of his studio window. Rather, Carmichael and the Group of Seven artists, including Lawren Harris, J.E.H. MacDonald, and Tom Thomson, all practiced the modernist

⁸⁷ Mastin, *Portrait of a Spiritualist*, n.p.

⁸⁸ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Over-Soul," *Emerson Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1983), 386.

⁸⁹ Bice, *Light and Shadow*, 11.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

technique of painting *en plein air* and *sur le motif* as earnestly as the European Impressionists. In a photograph from Carmichael's estate (fig. 15) the hooded artist, bundled against the cold, paints *en plein air* above Grace Lake in October 1935. With his traveling backpack resting alongside him, Carmichael perches on a rock overlooking the lake as he paints from his paint box, his painting resting upright on the lid. The photograph commemorates a two-week sketching trip at Grace Lake in 1935 where Carmichael and his friend "of course lived in a tent" and "climbed all over these hills like two mountain goats."⁹¹ This image of Carmichael painting in the mountains brings to mind Winslow Homer's earlier *Artists Sketching in the White Mountains* (1868, fig. 16) in which three artists paint a landscape upon a hillside in the *plein air* tradition. Like Carmichael, the mustachioed Homer on the far left sits in the foreground with his back to the viewer, his paintbrush extended in mid-stroke while his left hand holds his paint box open at the ready. If common impressionistic techniques, such as painting *en plein air*, acted as a defining attribute for the modern artist, a photograph (fig. 17) in which Carmichael pauses to grin at the camera with cigarette in his mouth and brushes in his hand suggests his utter satisfaction with the practice. While the mid- to late-nineteenth-century modern artists generally conceived of themselves as artists of leisure, the type most notably embodied by John Singer Sargent and Winslow Homer, the post-World War I Canadian artist, especially those of the Group of Seven, embraced the roughness of the Northern wilderness, preferring to camp, hike, fish, and canoe in the nearby Algonquin Park or even further abroad.

Carmichael shared a studio with the acknowledged outdoorsman of the group, Tom Thomson (1877-1917), during the winter of 1914. Considered to be the fledgling Group's

⁹¹ Correspondence from Jo. Gauthier to Robert McMichael, August 28, 1967, Franklin Carmichael fonds, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.

connection to “the new landscape” of the North when the artists first began to explore in 1912, Thomson, an avid angler, hiker, and canoeist, spent the majority of the year (or as much time as he could) in lakeside shacks in the wilderness fishing, canoeing, and reading Izaak Walton’s *The Compleat Angler*.⁹² Thomson became a legend of Canadian-ness, as Joan Murray notes: “[Thomson’s] “inherent honesty” and lack of interest in money...were key to his aura of spiritual commitment. He was a true Canadian, of pioneer ancestry, who learned his lessons not from school or the academy but from the land.”⁹³ His paintings such as *Canoe Lake* (1913, fig. 18) and *Autumn Foliage* (1916, fig. 19) express his intimacy with the land; his untrained, instinctual ability to capture the color and physical features of the landscape as well as its forceful and lively spirit. *Canoe Lake*, a presage of Carmichael’s *Lake Wabagishik*, captures the feeling and the experience of a fast approaching storm. Torrential rain pours down from impenetrable clouds thick with layers of navy, grey, light blue, and cream as the terracotta gesso peaks through with warm visual strength. The lake’s restless waves attest to the wind and rain, undulating with short lines of white, black, and royal blue. A terracotta and grey-blue mountain range made from fast horizontal brushstrokes rests on the horizon as quick vertical lines in black and forest green create the lakeside forest’s edge.

While *Canoe Lake* captures the sublime experience of a lakeside storm in a masterpiece of monochromatic colors, *Autumn Foliage*, like Carmichael’s *Autumn: Orillia* (1924, fig. 20), is a cornucopia of colors and flora. While Carmichael’s *Autumn: Orillia* is more decoratively detailed with bare trunks and foliated trees identifiable by shape and color, Thomson’s *Autumn*

⁹² Andrew Hunter, “Mapping Tom,” in *Tom Thomson*, ed. Dennis Reid (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario and National Gallery of Canada, 2002), 26.

⁹³ Joan Murray, *The Best of the Group of Seven* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993), 9; Andrew Hunter, “Mapping Tom,” 6, 36.

Foliage is abstract with descriptive brushstrokes of greens, reds, yellow, brown, and white which create the copse of trees in the foreground and a calm lake resting behind. The background mountain is topographically described with curvilinear strokes of orange and yellow, creating a base from which the blue sky and light pink clouds erupt. Through color, line, and composition, Thomson initiated a style that both captured the national identity of the land and enthralled the viewer.

Particularly after his mysterious death in 1917, Thomson became synonymous with the Canadian wilderness, becoming, as Blodwen Davies wrote, “priest and prophet of the North.”⁹⁴ Thomson’s memorial cairn, designed and erected by J. E. H. MacDonald alongside Canoe Lake, reads: “To the memory of Tom Thomson, artist, woodsman, and guide.”⁹⁵ Thomson’s presence looms large in the annals of Canadian art history. As Davies eloquently states, “Through the story of painting in Canada there stalks a tall, lean trailsman, with his sketch box and paddle, an artist and dreamer who made the wilderness his cloister and there worshipped nature in her secret moods.”⁹⁶ This description aptly applied to the spiritually and naturally dedicated Group of Seven artists, an equivalence they continued to emphasize even after Thomson’s death by recognizing his influence in each of their styles. Carmichael himself considered Thomson one of his closest friends and valued his friendship and artistic advice greatly. After Thomson offered Carmichael any of his “wall decorations” as wedding presents in 1915, Carmichael wrote to his wife saying, “It may sound hoggish, but I have such deep admiration for his work, I would like to clear the place out . . . we shall be very happy with one or maybe two and these we shall value,

⁹⁴ Blodwen Davies, *Paddle and Palette: The Story of Tom Thomson* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1930), 7.

⁹⁵ Hunter, “Mapping Tom,” 42.

⁹⁶ Davies, *Paddle and Palette: The Story of Tom Thomson*, 36.

always.”⁹⁷ In his art, Carmichael’s rich color and descriptive line reveals Thomson’s influence, just as the artists’ preferences for outdoor recreations and lakeside cabins testify to their comradeship.

Thomson, Carmichael, and the Group of Seven artists were actively identified as outdoorsmen and dedicated to painting nature from experience. Beginning between 1912 and 1918, the Group traveled together on sketching excursions around Toronto and into Algonquin Park in order to renew “their [artistic] commitment to depicting the Canadian wilderness in strong colors and bold, simplified designs,” which they continued to practice throughout their careers.⁹⁸ For their 1918 trip, organized by Harris and MacDonald, Carmichael and the other artists traveled for three weeks in an Algoma Central Railway boxcar so that they might “biff the landscape into a cocked hat at our sweet will.”⁹⁹ Harris jauntily wrote to MacDonald that their “only real essentials” would be “blankets (lots of them), warm clothes and sketching outfit” as well as “a rig that will enable you to keep dry and sketch in the rain.”¹⁰⁰ He then urged MacDonald to “Tell Frank [Carmichael] the ‘Noos’ and warn him [to bring] blankets and sufficient paints—warm clothes.”¹⁰¹ As arranged, the “comfortable” boxcar would be equipped with bunks, a table and chairs, and a stove for a campsite while the train would leave the boxcar in an unused and “auspicious” sidings, returning later to move them along or deliver “supplies and mail, etc.”¹⁰² Travelling first to Agawa Canyon Station, then Hubert and Batchewanna, the

⁹⁷ Correspondence from Franklin Carmichael to his wife Ada, May 25, 1915, Franklin Carmichael fonds, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.

⁹⁸ Adamson, "Lawren Stewart Harris: Toward an Art of the Spiritual," 75.

⁹⁹ Correspondence from Lawren Harris to J. E. H. MacDonald, 1919, Franklin Carmichael fonds, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

artists, including Carmichael, adventured into the wilderness in pairs, using a red canoe or railroad handcar to travel greater distances.¹⁰³

Even without all of his Group of Seven comrades, Carmichael camped, hiked, and painted in the wilderness with his close friends.¹⁰⁴ His photographs record several camping expeditions, including an excursion to Port Coldwell on the northern coast of Lake Superior with A. J. Casson, a later member of the Group of Seven and fellow watercolorist, probably in the 1920s (see figs. 21-22). Evidence of these excursions, camping adventures, and sketching tours in photographs and his sketchbooks reaffirm Carmichael's intimacy with nature, a quality evident throughout his paintings. His use of color and linear topographical descriptions in his landscapes, such as in *Bisset Farm* (fig. 1), confirm Carmichael's familiar relationship with the land and his artistic observational skills honed by his sketching tours and camping trips.

Carmichael's comprehensive awareness of the minutiae of the landscape is evidenced in his conscientious, albeit abstracted, treatment of the land through expressive color variation and line. Topographically descriptive, the variety of color and line also suggests the diversity of flora thriving in the Canadian wilderness without distracting details.¹⁰⁵ Just as Transcendentalists honored the basic unity underlying all natural phenomena and their source in the Universal Spirit, Carmichael represented the largeness and omnipresence of nature in his compositions alongside abstracted patterns of intricate natural details and the diversity of plant life delineated through color and line. Emerson's belief that "God reappears with all his parts in every moss and cobweb" finds its artistic equivalent in Carmichael's attentive use of intense hues, radiating light,

¹⁰³ Adamson, "Lawren Stewart Harris: Toward an Art of the Spiritual," 74.

¹⁰⁴ Brice, *Light and Shadow*, 24.

¹⁰⁵ Carmichael's landscapes were famously identifiable, despite their abstraction. See *In the Footsteps of the Group of Seven* by Jim and Sue Waddington on identifying the locations of his paintings in the Canadian wilderness.

and provocative shadows to convey the topography of the landscape throughout his *oeuvre*, including in *Snow Clouds* (fig. 6).¹⁰⁶ The light greys and whites emanate light, brilliantly illuminating the mountain peak in the center middle ground while the inky violets and forest greens absorb light and reflect the darkness enforced by the equally dark clouds. Yet these colors also delineate the registers of each mountain and describe the intricacies of a terrain divided by natural fractures, soil compositions, and species of flora. Consequently, Carmichael's colorful exploration of light and shadow as it falls across the landscape equally reverences the transcendence of nature and the distinctiveness of the land itself; his abstracted, yet colorfully detailed, landscapes esteem nature as a vehicle for introspection. Carmichael's explorations of light, dynamic skies, and color-filled terrains provoke an intimate, sublime experience that cannot but be described as a Transcendental reverence for nature.

Moreover, Carmichael's linear abstraction of the land defined by large swaths of color echoed the philosophical aims of Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau, who thought that art should be simple and unified; "the art of art . . . is simplicity," Whitman said.¹⁰⁷ In *Leaves of Grass* Whitman proclaimed, "My poems, when complete, should be in unity in the same sense the earth is."¹⁰⁸ Just as Whitman sought unity, Carmichael's rich striations create a cohesive quilt of color. Artist, manager at Grip Ltd., gallery owner, and art critic Albert Robson attested to Carmichael's compelling and intimate use of color: "In the work of Carmichael, there is a refinement of color . . . and a decidedly personal quality in the direct and interesting method of applying the

¹⁰⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Compensation," in *Emerson Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1983), 289.

¹⁰⁷ Walt Whitman, "Whitman's Introduction," in *Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition*, ed. Malcom Cowley (New York: Penguin Group, 1961), 12; Originally found in the Preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

¹⁰⁸ Walt Whitman, *The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman*, ed. Richard M. Bucke. Vol. 9, *Notes and Fragments Left by Walt Whitman* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1902), 3.

washes."¹⁰⁹ Carmichael's alluring hues may have described the land but they also intoxicated his viewers, guiding their eyes across the landscape until colors became meaningful and enthralling. In correspondence from L. V. Heaber in 1927, for example, Carmichael's admirer wrote, "as in great poetry, so in great pictures the rhythm of form and color appeals to me....I have stood before your pictures drinking in their abstract beauty."¹¹⁰ Art critic Augustus Bridle publicly recognized Carmichael's prowess with color:

In 25 years of shifting his easel-base, Frank never changed his pristine quality as a colorist. Something about his color-harmonics, as idiomatic as Debussy's music, get back to chromatic design. This son of a rainbow was never just a prodigal in colors, but an apostle of r-o-y-g-b-i-v as primal in the spectrum as do re mi fa so la in the diatonic scale.¹¹¹

Carmichael's mastery of color can be seen clearly in the variety of colors that topographically describe the forested hillside in *October Gold* (1922, fig. 23). Ranging from violet to emerald to gold, the colorfully abstracted trees of the middle and backgrounds create an ambiance of autumnal warmth and comfortable solitude. The sage greens of the trees lining the river's edge at the center of the composition complement the swampy greens and blues that dapple the water's surface while contrasting the oranges of various foliage clusters. The decorative aspen, identifiable by its trunk and quick strokes of autumnal yellow foliage, complements the irregularly scalloped abstracted forms of distant trees. Carmichael unites countless colors to create a harmonious composition that indulges the senses and invites the viewer to relish the vibrant tapestry of the autumn hillside. The hills are each a demonstration of rich and expressionistic color as much as they are a confirmation of Carmichael's fascination

¹⁰⁹ Albert H. Robson, *Canadian Landscape Painters* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1932), 202.

¹¹⁰ Letter sent Jan. 24, 1927 to Franklin Carmichael from L. V. Heaber, MG30-D293, vol. 5, file 33, Franklin Carmichael fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

¹¹¹ Augustus Bridle, "Music, Art, Drama," *The Toronto Star*, Ontario, November 3, 1945.

with shades of color and color theory. Thus, through elegant and precise compositions vivified through a keen command of color, Carmichael created captivating paintings and watercolors in which he paralleled Whitman's expectation of simplicity and "eliminated what was unneeded and emphasized those aspects which clarified and simplified design"—such as color.¹¹²

Color remained an important aspect of Carmichael's spiritual expression of the landscape throughout his career, with shades and varieties of hues recreating relatable and inspiring landscapes. *October Gold* (1922) is an early example of how Carmichael's expressionistic color and simple abstraction, descriptive brushstrokes, and light and shadow move the viewer into experiencing the liminality of nature. *Cranberry Lake* (1938, fig. 24) is a later example of Carmichael's style as it, to some extent, became more simplified and abstract. The barren and uncomplicated forms of the leafless trees brutally contrast with the autumnal fecundity of *October Gold*. However, these striking and disturbing forms impede access to—and therefore reemphasize—the detailed ripples of light across the surface of the water and the rich color of the coastal lands as they rest as a muted and undulating rainbow in the background. The gentle colors in the background mountains are calming and alluring compared to the jarring greens, yellows, and oranges of the foreground flora punctuated by the trunks and shadows of the visually lively but ultimately lifeless trees. The painting simultaneously speaks to the multiplicity of flora in the diverse and numerous shades of color while the luminosity of light and clear blue sky reverence the grandeur of nature and the divine.

In contrast, *Gambit No. 1* (1945, fig. 25), Carmichael's final painting before his untimely death in 1945 at the age of fifty-five, significantly abstracts the landscape. However, its origins are perhaps recognizable in Carmichael's increasingly simplified and abstracted compositions as

¹¹² Thom, "Introduction," n.p.

well as his interest in the elements of color, light, and shape. At the focal point of the canvas, a distant and partially hidden white circle houses four red-orange, light blue, royal blue, and teal triangular shapes, from which geometric variations of squares in shades of white explode toward the viewer. However abstract *Gambit No. 1* may seem, the natural red, yellow, and orange tones of a sunset above the deep purples, reds, greens, and browns of the earth and the pastel violet, rose, light blue, and white of reflective water suggestively delineate the forms of sky, earth, and sea. The white shapes emanating from the white circle become shards of light which illuminate the land and reflect upon the surface of the water, implicitly referencing the symbolic and spiritual meaning of light discussed previously. However, more than an abstraction of landscape, this painting is a visual exploration into the spiritual experience of nature in which color and form act as vehicles toward spiritual enlightenment. On the power of abstraction, Carmichael's friend, Lawren Harris, wrote, "It can be said that the very essence, the very spirit of all great art transcends personality. It is the impersonal, the universal spirit in all great art which makes it possible for all humanity to participate in the one great experience."¹¹³

Similarly, Carmichael assigned meaning to his shapes in order to facilitate a shared experience of his work: the circle, "being without beginning or end is also a sign of God or of Eternity" while its inner triangles are "an ancient Egyptian emblem of the Godhead . . . in Christianity it is looked upon as the sign of the triple personality of God."¹¹⁴ Moreover, the two triangles standing on their apex symbolize the male element "which is by nature celestial, and strives after truth" while its opposite represents the female element that is "terrestrial, yet yearns

¹¹³ Typescript of notes entitled "Abstract Painting" by Lawren Harris, MG30 D208, vol. 4, Lawren Harris fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

¹¹⁴ Typescript and illustrations of unpublished manuscript entitled, *History of Signs*, undated, MG30-D293, vol. 2, file 32, Franklin Carmichael fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

for higher things;” the four, as they converge, have the capacity to create a star which represents “the five senses . . . the sign of the Godhead . . . the five Mosaic books . . . a symbol of safety . . .”¹¹⁵ While such symbolism might be implicitly understood, the interpretation of symbols is just as multivalent as the title: *Gambit No. 1*. In true Transcendentalist form, which appreciated the complexity of language, the title denotes both an experimentation with a new style and Carmichael’s psychological state. Hence, demarcating this painting as “No. 1” is an intimation of the unrealized series in a new style that may have followed while “Gambit” testifies to the painting being a “risk.”¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, just as in the rest of his oeuvre, the symbolic and geometric unity of humankind and the divine surrounded by natural colors, land, and light visually manifests the unity between the divine, nature, and the viewer which Emerson’s famous quote makes clear: ‘I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.’¹¹⁷

Through stylistic color and consequent spiritual meaning, *Gambit No. 1* is recognizably similar to *Cranberry Lake* and *October Gold*. The composition of *Gambit No. 1* is comparable to *Cranberry Lake* as characteristically Canadian brilliant light rushes into the center of the painting, reflecting off of the land and water. While *Gambit No. 1* demonstrates the spiritual experience of light on the viewer as physical shards, the light immaterially surging into the landscape in *Cranberry Lake* and *October Gold* recollects an awareness that speaks to the spiritual potency and profundity of the Canadian landscape. Further, the vibrant luminosity of the landscape and the radiating shades of colors within the autumnal forest in *October Gold* or the

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Although most of Carmichael’s paintings are geographically linked, an important factor when discussing a singularly Canadian spiritual experience of the land, *Gambit No. 1* represents Carmichael’s psychological and spiritual location or state in relation to the wilderness.

¹¹⁷ Emerson, “Nature,” 10.

gentle rainbow in the rolling hills and mountains of *Cranberry Lake* are not dissimilar to the multitude of reds, greens, blues, and golds thickly layered within the “earth” field of *Gambit No. 1*. Color and form unite all the paintings and their spiritual efficacy within Carmichael’s oeuvre; his representations of the land through color, light, and line ultimately epitomize his passion for color as well as his reverence for the micro and macrocosms of the Canadian landscape.

Carmichael’s detailed and undulating patterns of color across his landscapes implicate something of the grandeur and the vastness of space of the rugged Canadian wilderness, bridging the gap between the material and spiritual.¹¹⁸ For example, *Bisset Farm*’s (fig. 1) implicit spiritual and transcendental qualities embodied in color and light materially invoke the immaterial and draw attention to the human experience of and relation to nature. *Bisset Farm*’s mountains dwarf the farm, an institution literally and seasonally connected with the land, yet the farm nestled in a valley exists in harmony with nature. The human presence is muted, only recognized by the icy blue tire tracks and the buildings themselves. The earth-toned color palette of the buildings unifies humans and nature and causes the human effects to be enveloped by the landscape. Even the human impact on nature represented by farming is covered by snow—nature herself. However, nature’s benevolence is evidenced as snow begins to melt and spring appears. Just as Thoreau’s *A Yankee in Canada* and Emerson’s “Nature” attempt to “tease out various aspects, purposes, and uses of nature as they relate to humanity and with the divine–human relationship,” Carmichael’s *Bisset Farm* explores the immensity of nature in union with or in contrast to man.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Mastin, *Portrait of a Spiritualist*, n.p.

¹¹⁹ Higgins, 163; Nina Baym, “English Nature, New York Nature, and *Walden*’s New England Nature,” in *Transient and Permanent: The Transcendentalist Movement and its Contexts*, eds. Charles Capper and Conrad E. Wright (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1999), 169.

Likewise, Carmichael's *Farm, Haliburton* (1940, fig. 26) depicts another farm nestled into the landscape surrounded by the large hills of the background and foreground and an overwhelmingly large tree that dominates the middle ground. While the farm house blends into the brightly colored and fecund landscape, the tree overwhelms the composition, looming darkly over the buildings with a sublime and sinister quality intensified by its diagonally leaning trunk and colossal leaves. Hence, nature—or more aptly referred to as the Canadian wilderness—is sublimely powerful and the farmer (or hunter, or fisherman) is subject to its whims: its seasons. For Canadians, enduring the unpredictability and harshness of the seasons was also a statement of nationalism and a proud national identity rooted in the myth of the Northmen and the Canadian survival of their sublime and terrifyingly powerful wilderness.

The authority of nature has both been represented by Carmichael in previous paintings and made literarily manifest five years earlier in a play entitled *The Haliburton Farmer* by Mona Kenney Canon. Given Carmichael's and the Group of Seven's penchant for reading literature published by colleagues and friends, Carmichael no doubt read the first and only edition of *The Disk* (ca. 1935), "a magazine for experimental ideas," in which *The Haliburton Farmer* appeared after the first chapter of Frederick B. Housser's unpublished manuscript entitled "The Whitmanic Attitude And The Creative Life." *The Haliburton Farmer* reenacts the harrowing life of farmers in the northern wilderness of Haliburton County. The play testifies to Canadian national identity in its representation of life in northern Canada and its setting, Haliburton County, which was named after Thomas Chandler Haliburton, the father to Robert Grant Haliburton, a founding member of the Canada First nationalist movement. Moreover, it is a potent story whose tragic ending probably reminded Carmichael of the death of his close friend and fellow artist, Tom

Thomson, who drowned in 1917 despite being an expert fisherman, paddler, and tour guide very familiar with Algonquin Park (part of which is in Haliburton County).¹²⁰

In the “The Haliburton Farmer,” an overworked mother is pushed toward a nervous breakdown by unforgiving work while her taciturn husband works his family’s farm out of unwavering preference for the land.¹²¹ Unlike their mother, her two sons maintain a deep affection for the land, saying, “we like this place—it is our home—we like it here—we couldn’t leave the lake and the woods, the things we know, the things we understand.”¹²² The two sons declare an intimacy with the land, the waters and forests of which they can navigate without difficulty, hunt and fish to provide for their families, and act as guides for tourists seeking the sublime experience of hunting and fishing in the Canadian wilderness.¹²³ However, ignoring the lashing storm outside and the overwhelming power of nature, they set out in their boat in search of their mother who they believe has committed suicide on the lake. Rowing against the currents, the wind, and the rain, they meet an icy fate as the wind whipped away their cries. In “Haliburton Farmer,” as in Carmichael’s *Bisset Farm* and *Farm, Haliburton*, nature is omnipresent and ever powerful, a threat to those who try to disregard its authority and beneficent to those who understand and revere the wilderness. As in *Farm, Haliburton* and *Bisset Farm*, unity between nature and the Canadian Northmen is found when one respects the dominance of nature, working *with* the land and *around* its mountains and foothills.

In contrast, *A Northern Silver Mine* (1930, fig. 27) depicts the disparity between a Transcendental reverence for nature and the violation of nature. Here, a village settles into the

¹²⁰ Mellen, *The Group of Seven*, 49

¹²¹ Mona Kenney Cannon, “The Haliburton Farmer,” *The Disk* (1935): 12-13.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 6, 14.

crevices of the mountain landscape, an example of harmonious respect for nature, whereas the blue-black and grey of the deadened and mined foreground depicts discordant destruction. *Bisset Farm*'s snow benevolently melts to reveal fecund land beneath but *A Northern Silver Mine*'s infertile land features the residual tailings and slag heaps from the mine which art historian Joan Murray categorizes as a "harbinger of the future."¹²⁴ While no threat of natural retribution fills the horizon with an ominous storm, the verdant green hillside illuminated by a nonthreatening sky starkly contrasts the blues and greys of barren land lying in shadow. In her 1987 exhibition *Industrial Images*, curator Rosemary Donegan optimistically interprets the industrial subject as the "opening of the last frontier" and the embodiment of the "spirit of the frontier life" which Carmichael would have undoubtedly applauded.¹²⁵ True, Carmichael did artistically support Canadian progress such as the Canadian National Railways which provided national connectivity and access to the landscape; however, *A Northern Silver Mine*'s slag heaps, tailings, and implicitly barren land in comparison to the painting's (and the rest of his oeuvre's) fecundity also reveals the consequences of industrial progress. For example, whereas *Bisset Farm*'s compositional serenity and spring colors beneath the snow imply a healthy and respectful relationship with the land, a quality inherently tied to farming, *A Northern Silver Mine* exposes a destruction of nature tied to the plundering of natural resources. In this way, Carmichael's farms reveal a Transcendentalist awe for nature's supremacy where man does not dominate but, rather, works with nature and at its mercy.

Not limited to his paintings and watercolors, Carmichael's profound insight into the Canadian wilderness and his identification as a Northman in harmony with the wilderness

¹²⁴ Joan Murray, *Canadian Art in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1999), 67.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

pervaded every aspect of Carmichael's life, inspiring him to build a cabin on Grace Lake in 1935 and professionally guiding even his illustrative work throughout his career. Ranging from woodcuts to reproduced drawings via engravings, his nature-inspired illustrations appeared in books, magazines, and political journals. Sourced through photographs and his own travel experience to Jasper National Park, his drawing of *The Ramparts* (fig. 28), a mountain range in the Canadian Rockies spanning Jasper National Park in Alberta and Mount Robson Provincial Park in British Columbia, appropriately appeared in the *Canadian National Railways Magazine* in 1932. As Canada's largest and only transcontinental railroad company, the Canada National Railways (CNR) emblemized national pride and supported the uniqueness of the Canadian wilderness—two ideas the Group of Seven adamantly supported. While Carmichael struggled against the unavoidable fact of increased industrialization, particularly represented by mining, the CNR offered its passengers an opportunity to experience and appreciate the wilderness, perhaps inspiring a sense of ownership and protectiveness. In fact, the accompanying article to Carmichael's illustration concludes with a passionate appeal:

Many a time we looked back at the Ramparts—we could see them for miles—so remote, so huge and so absolutely beautiful! Little did the passage of time or mere humans disturb their serenity, but those who gazed thereon came away bewitched, under an everlasting enchantment. You felt your heart cry out, "I could stay here forever and be happy!"¹²⁶

Carmichael undoubtedly echoed this sentiment in his own experiences while recognizing that contentment with nature equally entailed hardship.

¹²⁶ R. M. Dingle, "Through the Tonquin With Pen and Pencil," *Canadian National Railways Magazine*, Vol. XVIII No. 8 (Aug. 1932), 20. Carmichael also worked on their "Dots and Dashes" newsletter as well as CNR tourism booklets for "Jasper National Park, Canadian Rockies" from 1928. Magazine Clipping of "Through the Tonquin With Pen and Pencil" by R. M. Dingle from *Canadian National Railways Magazine*, 1932, MG30-D293, vol. 1, file 5, Franklin Carmichael fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

The themes of wilderness, survival, and human frailty in the face of nature's more powerful forces also appeared in the several books Carmichael illustrated. As a tribute to his friend, Tom Thomson, Carmichael illustrated John D. Robin's *The Incomplete Angler* (1942-43, fig. 29). A humorous and somewhat farcical response to Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler*, *The Incomplete Angler* is a semi-fictional account recalling the author's hilariously tragic fishing experiences. Relishing the inherently Canadian capacity to survive the tumults of Northern wilderness, the book cover read, "The man who won't relish this thoroughly entertaining narrative of two 'common and inadequate' fishermen on a trip through Ontario's moderately Northern lakes doesn't live. He may exist, but he doesn't live." While Thomson's favorite book, *The Compleat Angler*, advised its readers on skills and expertise, *The Incomplete Anglers* and Carmichael's jovial illustrations mirthfully convey the experiences of those who have none. Amusing and diverting, the novel also signifies a fact of Canadian life: expertise and practice allow for survival in the midst of omnipresent and forceful nature.

Less humorous, but equally engaged with the nature, Grace Campbell's *Thorn-Apple Tree* (1942) explores the themes of nature's power and Canadian survival. A fictional account of a husband's and wife's experiences farming, logging, and fur-trading in Canada alongside the St. Lawrence River in Ontario during the 1830s, "the novel deals with the hardships and joys of working the land, and the precarious nature of existence in early Canada."¹²⁷ Originally commissioned only as a consultant and illustrator for each of the fifteen chapters, Carmichael, chose to additionally plan the layout, set the typography, and design the dust jacket.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Press Release of "*Thorn Apple Tree*: Book illustrations by Franklin Carmichael," 1943, MG30-D293, vol. "Robert Stacy fonds," file 14, Franklin Carmichael fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

¹²⁸ Ibid.; William Arthur Deacon, "Idyll of Glengarry Pioneers is Scottish-Canadian Classic," *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, Sat., October 17, 1942.

Recognized by many as “exquisite examples of Carmichael’s work and well planned design,” Carmichael’s woodcuts for *Thorn-Apple Tree* and for Campbell’s second book, *The Higher Hill* are more graphic than the washes of color in his paintings and watercolors. That being said, the prints are equally exemplary of his expert handling of materials as well as his linear description of the land.¹²⁹ Chapter One’s illustration *Michael Comes Home* (fig. 30) is particularly reminiscent of Carmichael’s earlier landscapes which capture the ambiance of rolling hills and sunlight dappled water. Grace Campbell agreed: in a letter to Carmichael she recognized that the illustration for Chapter Three, *The New House* (fig. 31) is “startlingly reminiscent of the very woods I had in mind and gets the exact mood and atmosphere.”¹³⁰ Campbell’s praise underscores Carmichael’s skill in capturing both the atmosphere and the details of the landscape.¹³¹ As in the illustration, his earlier paintings, such as *Autumn: Orillia* (fig. 20), capture the diversity of the Canadian forest with Emersonian detail: pines, aspens, spruces, sugar maples, sycamores, and red oaks intermingle and overlap in a heterogenous tapestry of landscape.

Unlike *Autumn: Orillia*, *The New House* and the other illustrations for *The Thorn Apple Tree* record human survival amidst the wilderness: they emerge from the dense forest of trees (*The New House*), hike through snow (*Winter*), make maple syrup (*Sugar-Weather*), or traverse a river in a storm (*River-Men*). As demonstrated in *The Thorn Apple Tree*, Carmichael’s illustrative work recognizes, if not stresses, the necessity for perseverance and a harmonious attitude toward nature. For example, in Carmichael’s banner illustration (1919, fig. 32) for

¹²⁹ Newspaper clipping of “Franklin Carmichael Show Wins Reviewer’s Plaudits” by Hazel Barker, Unknown source, May 5, 1961, MG30-D293, vol. 6, Franklin Carmichael fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

¹³⁰ Correspondence from Grace Campbell to Franklin Carmichael, October 15, 1942, MG30-D293, vol. 5, file 37, Franklin Carmichael fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

¹³¹ Carmichael would have been familiar with the forests of the novel given that he had been raised in Orillia, just north of the St. Lawrence River where the novel is set.

“Where There’s a Will,” a story of young love reliant on the tumultuous relationship between a farmer, his crops, and the unpredictable weather, a young couple stands on a central hill overlooking a vista of Canadian farmland.¹³² The young man’s crop to the left stands tall and healthy after a thunderstorm beneath one of Carmichael’s awe-inspiring skies filled with rays of light and large clouds. In contrast, the young couple looks down toward the right at the destroyed farmland belonging to the young woman’s father, his crop flattened by the same thunderstorm that nourished the neighboring farmland. Here, amidst the recognizable Canadian panorama, the indomitability of the Canadian identity can be seen in the consistent theme of a farmer’s toil in the face of capricious nature.

Similarly, Carmichael’s *Man with Scythe* (1921; fig. 33), an illustration published in one of Canada’s political magazines, *The Canadian Forum*, likewise dwells on the theme of working the land and reiterates the connection between the land and the Canadian identity.¹³³ Standing atop a lusciously foliated hillside, a farmer fills the rectangular space as he stands hunched, his sleeves rolled up, attentively sharpening his scythe as he prepares to toil in the field. As the image of the farmer intently at work, *Man with Scythe* emphatically represents Carmichael’s awareness of the demands of the land as well as the difficulty inextricably associated with surviving on the land.

Carmichael’s recognition of the difficulties synonymous with working the land or living in the wilderness is not a complaint nor a rejection of nature’s Transcendental qualities. Rather, it is a commemoration of the beauty and danger of the wilderness as well as a celebration of the strength and perseverance of the Northman living in the vast Canadian wilderness. As a result,

¹³² John Francis Slater, “Where There’s a Will,” *Canadian Courier*, September 13, 1919.

¹³³ Franklin Carmichael, “*Man With Scythe*,” *The Canadian Forum*, October 1921, 401.

Carmichael's illustrations featuring humans amidst nature honors the fortitude of those who revere the power of nature and choose to reside in it anyway. That being said, the majority of Carmichael's works are landscapes without a specific human presence. This does not negate the meaning of his illustrations, nullify the implicit harmonious collaboration between man and nature exemplified by *Bisset Farm*, nor void the viewer's experience of transcendent nature. On the contrary, Carmichael's wilderness landscapes recognize the enduring solitude enforced and encouraged by nature's monumental mountains, vast skies, and penetrating light, creating a space in which the viewer can experience the liminality of nature. As a result, art critic Augustus Bridle praised the artist's "amazing genius for painting the subtle topographies of solitude."¹³⁴ The transcendence of the wilderness, complemented as it is by insinuations of human presence, ultimately reigns supreme in Carmichael's paintings and illustrations.

In this way, all of Carmichael's works reflect the Transcendental qualities of the Canadian wilderness, commemorating the uniqueness of the land and one's experience within it. Inspired by the American Transcendentalists, Carmichael agreed with Whitman who believed that "nature is formed and informed by the spirit . . . that God not only created nature but is *in* nature as well."¹³⁵ Hence, Carmichael, as a Transcendental artist, painted landscapes to be more than a re-presentation of the vistas he knew well.¹³⁶ An outdoorsman and proud Canadian, he painted his experiences, spiritual and physical, of the Northern wilderness into every vast skyscape and each colorfully topographical detail. His artistic efforts fulfill Whitman's belief

¹³⁴ Augustus Bridle, "O.S.A Exhibit Marks 75 Years – 1872-1947," unknown source, March 7, 1947, vol. 6, Library and Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

¹³⁵ Davis, *Logic of Ecstasy*, 62.

¹³⁶ Typescript of notes for lecture entitled "Brief History of the Water Colour Society" to Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour by Franklin Carmichael, n.d., MG30-D293, vol. 5, File 26, Franklin Carmichael fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. In his notes, Carmichael wrote "not re-presentation."

that art was meant to “give ultimate vivification to facts, to science, to common lives, endow them with the glows and glories and final illustriousness which belongs to every real thing.”¹³⁷ In *Bissett Farm* and *Snow Clouds*, for example, Carmichael’s colors suffuse the landscape with delineating forms, emphasizing the rhythmic undulations and topographical intricacies of the terrain. Thus, Carmichael’s works speak of his own Transcendentally spiritual experiences just as they evoke contemplation and awe within a viewer enthralled by his use of expressionistic color, line, and light to artistically recreate the majesty of the Canadian landscape.

Inspired by Carmichael’s engaging use of color, art critic Augustus Bridle explained at the inaugural Group of Seven exhibition in 1920 that Carmichael “had a simple enchantment with colour for its own sake.”¹³⁸ I disagree; rather than for its own sake, Carmichael’s use of abstraction and color purposefully captures the specific topographical undulations of the land while also enchanting the viewer with its liminal and expressionistic qualities. His color and style unveil inherent and overlooked beauty, evidence of the divine within nature. In this way, he consciously recognized that painting was not photographic reproduction but “what [the artist] sees, thinks, and feels about his surroundings,” believing an artist should “through keener powers of observation and a natural sensitivity draw your attention to those finer aspects, moods, and the feelings attached to them of which we are surrounded.”¹³⁹ Carmichael created paintings that speak to Canadian identity rooted in the wilderness, manifest his spiritual interiority, reflect the innate transcendence of nature herself, and acknowledge nature’s powerful ability to both

¹³⁷ Davis, *Logic of Ecstasy*, 48.

¹³⁸ Augustus Bridle, “Are These New Canadian Painters Crazy?” *Canadian Courier*, May 22, 1920.

¹³⁹ Typescript of notes for lecture entitled “Brief History of the Water Colour Society” to Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour by Franklin Carmichael, n.d., MG30-D293, vol. 5, File 26, Franklin Carmichael fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

sanction and deny man's intervention.¹⁴⁰ Thus, Carmichael's abstracted contours, rich hues and shades, and manipulation of light and shadow within each of his works express the potency and profundity of transcendent Canadian nature.

¹⁴⁰ Bice, *Light and Shadow*, 65.



Figure 1. Franklin Carmichael, *Bissett Farm*, 1933, watercolor on paper, 50 x 66 cm. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Founder's Fund, VAG 33.27, Vancouver.

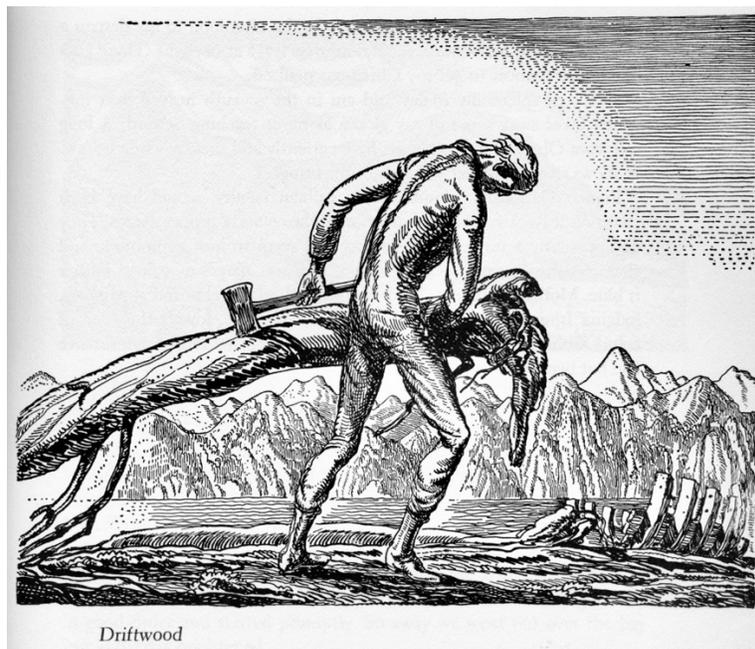


Figure 2. Rockwell Kent, *Driftwood*, illustration in *Wilderness: A Journal of Quiet Adventure in Alaska* 1920, Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.



VI. EXCURSION

Figure 3. Rockwell Kent, Chapter VI illustration, *Excursion*, in *Wilderness: A Journal of Quiet Adventure in Alaska*, 1920, Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.



Figure 4. Franklin Carmichael (1890-1945), *Lake Wabagishik*, 1928, oil on canvas, 101.5 x 122 cm. Gift of Shulton of Canada Ltd. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1976.11, Kleinburg.



Figure 5. Franklin Carmichael, *Upper Ottawa, Near Mattawa*, 1924, oil on canvas, 101.5 x 123.1 cm. National Gallery of Ontario, Ottawa.



Figure 6. Franklin Carmichael, *Autumn Hillside*, 1920, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 76 cm. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Figure 7. Franklin Carmichael, *Snow Clouds*, 1938, oil on masonite, 96 x 121.4 cm. National Gallery of Ontario, Ottawa.



Figure 8. Frederic Edwin Church, *Niagara*, 1857, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 229.9 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



Figure 9. Franklin Carmichael, *Wabajisik: Drowned Land*, 1929, watercolor on paper, 51.8 x 69.8 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



Figure 10. Thomas Cole, *The Oxbow*, 1836, oil on canvas, 130.8 x 193 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 11. Franklin Carmichael, *Cloud Study*, 1930-39, graphite on cream wove paper, 21.5 x 27.7 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

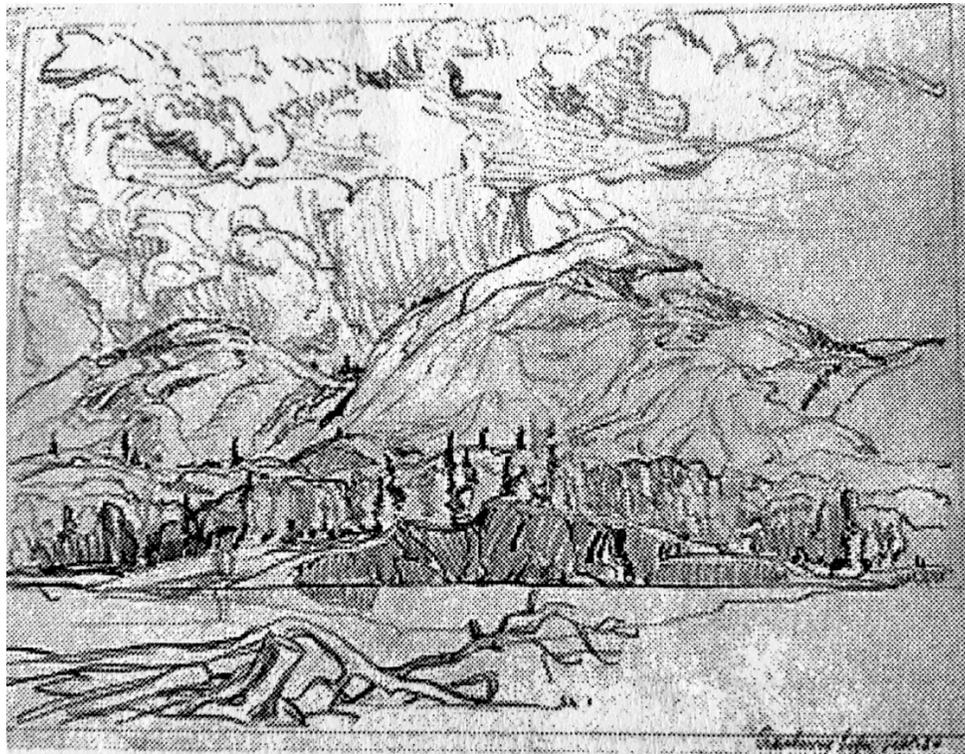


Figure 12. Franklin Carmichael, *Cranberry Lake*, 1934, graphite on cream wove paper, 21.5 x 27.7 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



Figure 13. Lawren Harris, *North Shore, Lake Superior*, 1926, oil on canvas, 102.2 x 128.3 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



Figure 14. Franklin Carmichael, *North Shore, Lake Superior*, 1927, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 121.9 cm. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Figure 15. Photograph of Franklin Carmichael sketching above Grace Lake, Ontario, October 1935. Courtesy of the Estate of Franklin Carmichael. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.



Figure 16. Winslow Homer, *Artists Sketching in the White Mountains*, 1868, oil on canvas, 21.43 x 40.16 cm. Public Domain.



Figure 17. Fred Haines, *Franklin Carmichael on the south side of Grace Lake, on a hilltop facing towards Manitoulin Island*, n.d. Courtesy of the Estate of Franklin Carmichael, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.



Figure 18. Tom Thomson, *Canoe Lake*, 1913, oil on canvas on paperboard, 25.2 x 17.2 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

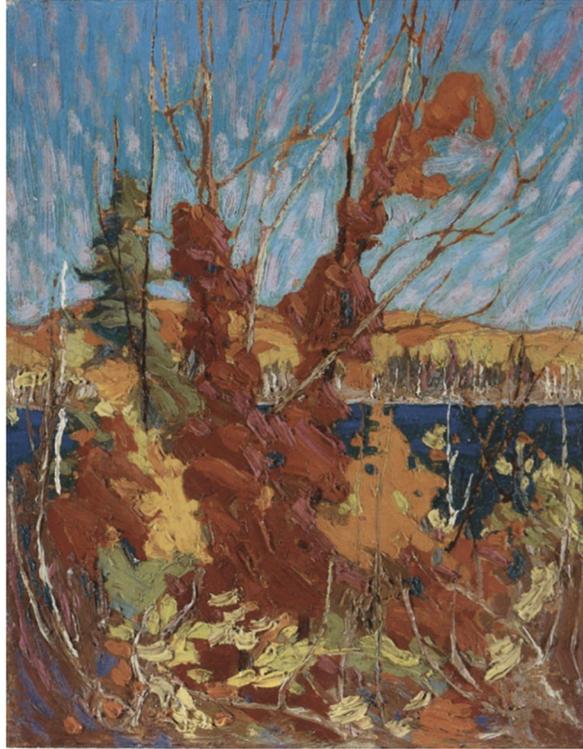


Figure 19. Tom Thomson, *Autumn Foliage*, 1916, oil on wood, 26.7 x 21.5 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

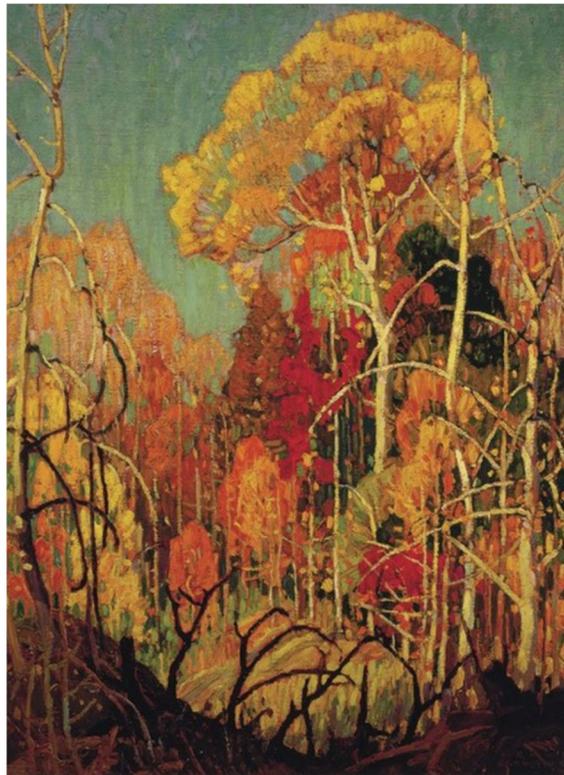


Figure 20. Franklin Carmichael, *Autumn: Orillia*, 1924, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 73.6 cm. Public Domain.

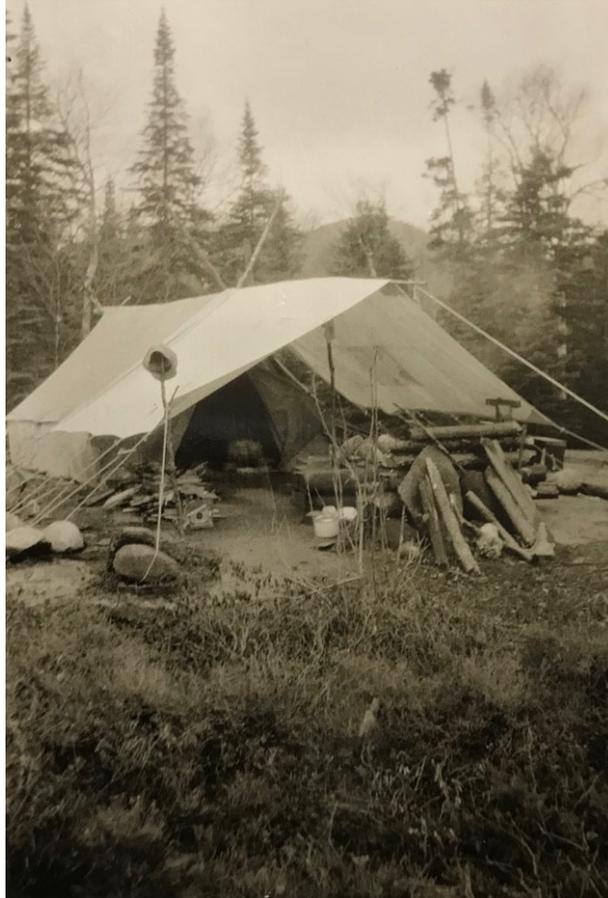


Figure 21. Photograph of Carmichael's campsite at Port Coldwell, n.d. Courtesy of the Estate of Franklin Carmichael. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.



Figure 22. Photograph of A.J. Casson at Port Coldwell campsite, n.d. Courtesy of the Estate of Franklin Carmichael. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

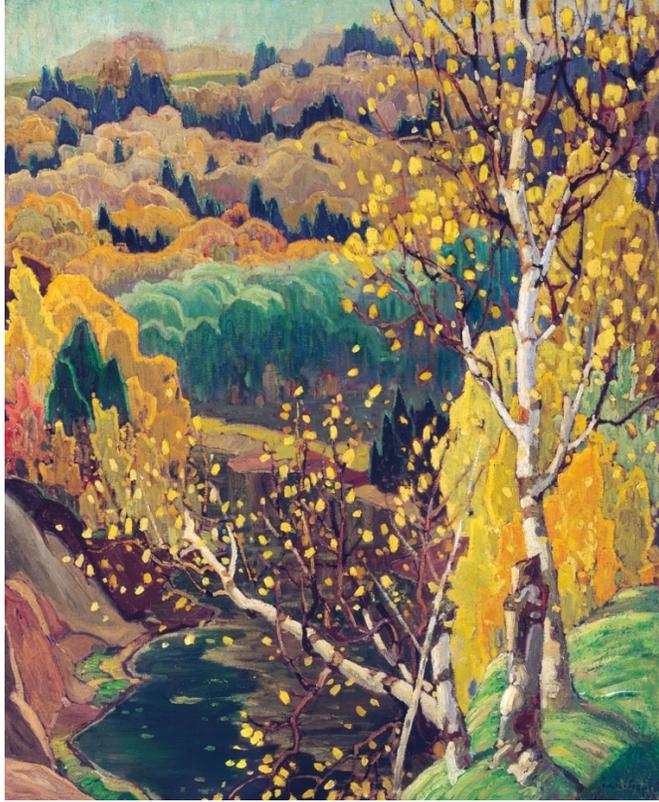


Figure 23. Franklin Carmichael (1890-1945), *October Gold*, 1922, oil on canvas, 119.5 x 98 cm.
Gift of the Founders, Robert and Signe McMichael, McMichael Canadian Art Collection,
1966.16.1, Kleinburg.

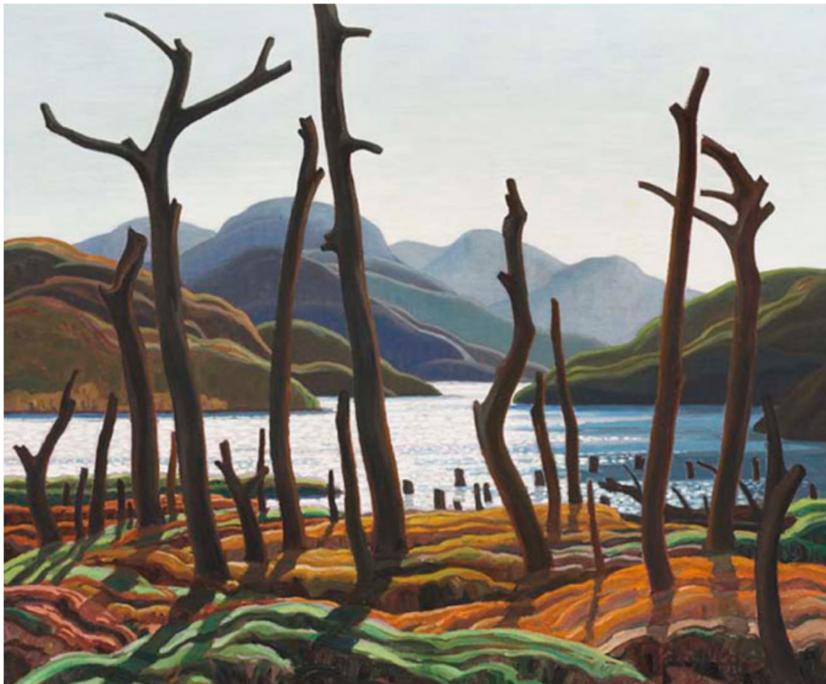


Figure 24. Franklin Carmichael, *Cranberry Lake*, 1938, oil on canvas.



Figure 25. Franklin Carmichael (1890-1945), *Gambit #1*, 1945, oil on board, 60.9 x 76.2 cm. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. R. G. Mastin, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1982.1.1, Kleinburg.



Figure 26. Franklin Carmichael (1890-1945), *Farm, Haliburton*, 1940, oil on hardboard, 96.3 x 122 cm. Given in memory of Alice and Douglas Bales by their family, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1997.2, Kleinburg.



Figure 27. Franklin Carmichael (1890-1945), *A Northern Silver Mine*, 1930, oil on canvas, 101.5 x 121.2 cm. Gift of Mrs. A. J. Latner, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1971.9, Kleinburg.

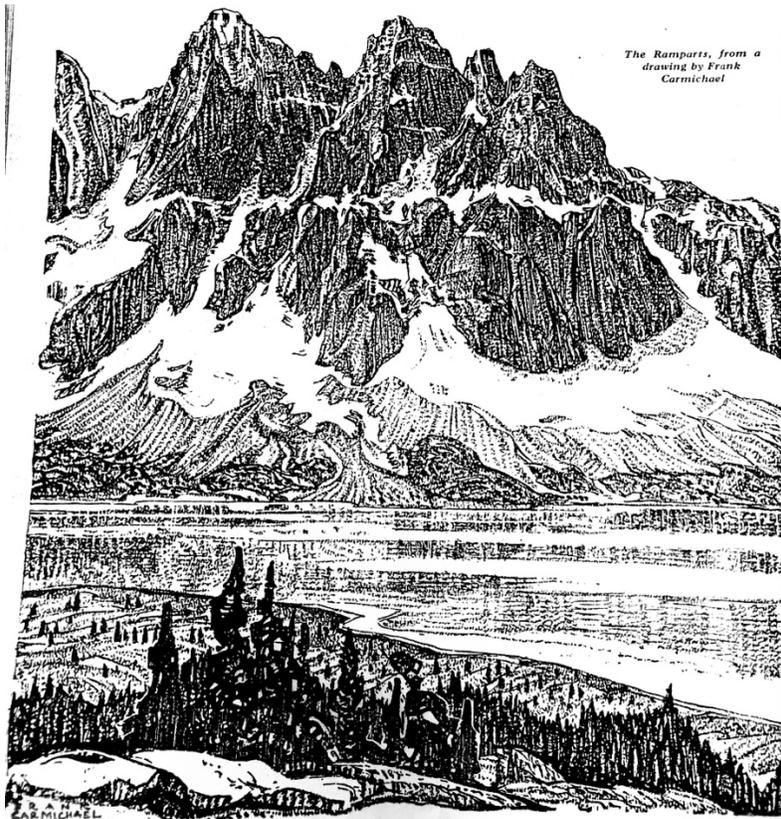


Figure 28. Franklin Carmichael, *The Ramparts*, illustration in *Canadian National Railways Magazine*, August 1932. National Gallery of Canada Archives, Ottawa.

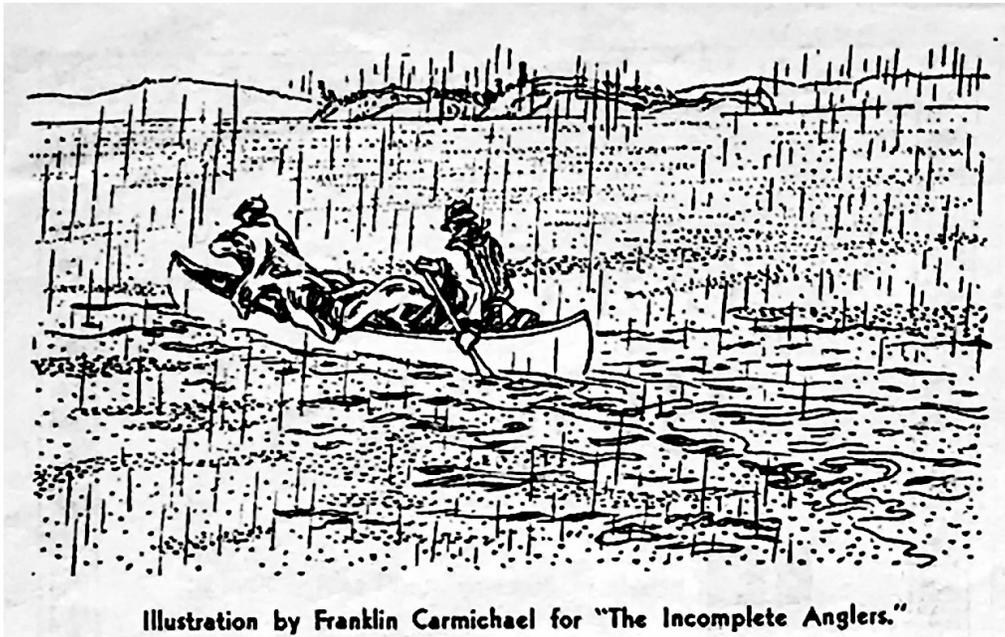


Illustration by Franklin Carmichael for "The Incomplete Anglers."

Figure 29. Franklin Carmichael, publicity illustration for John D. Robin's *The Incomplete Anglers*, 1942-43. Courtesy of the Estate of Franklin Carmichael, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

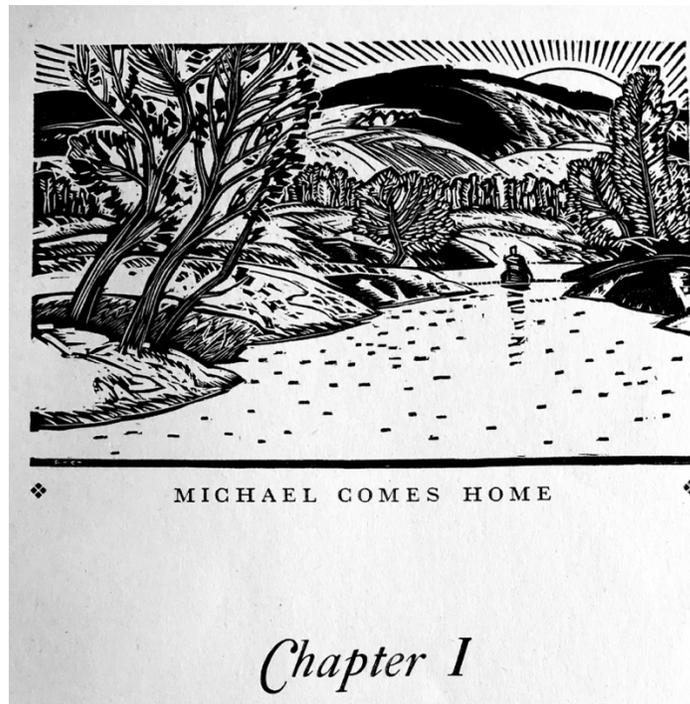


Figure 30. Franklin Carmichael, *Michael Comes Home*, Chapter I, woodcut illustration for Grace Campbell's *Thorn-Apple Tree*, 1942. Courtesy of the Estate of Franklin Carmichael, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

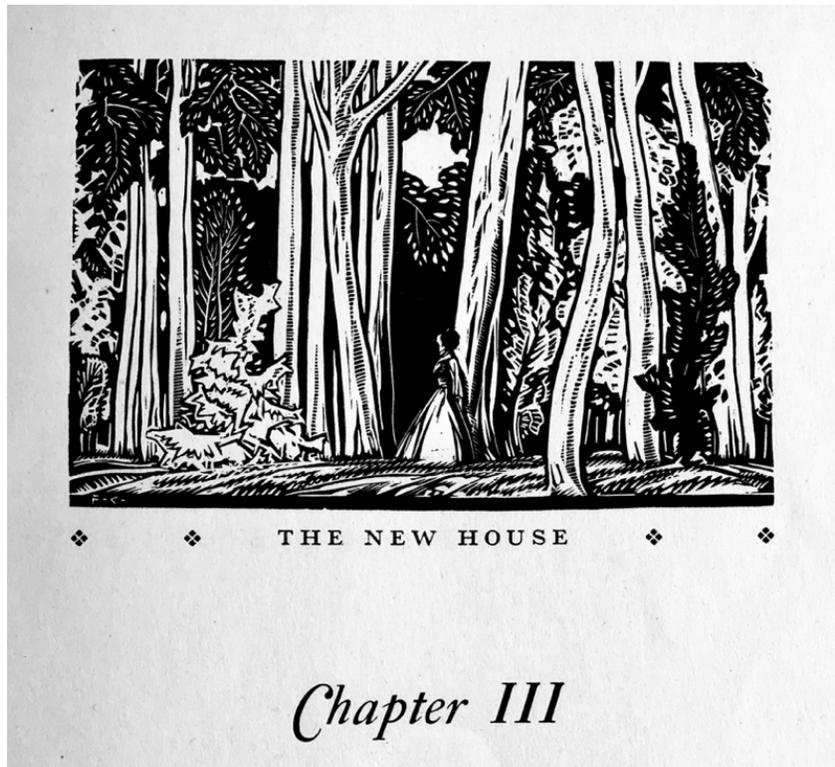


Figure 31. Franklin Carmichael, *The New House*, Chapter III, woodcut illustration for Grace Campbell's *Thorn-Apple Tree*, 1942. Courtesy of the Estate of Franklin Carmichael, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.



Figure 32. Franklin Carmichael, illustration for "Where There's a Will" in the *Canadian Courier*, 1919. National Gallery of Canada Archives, Ottawa.

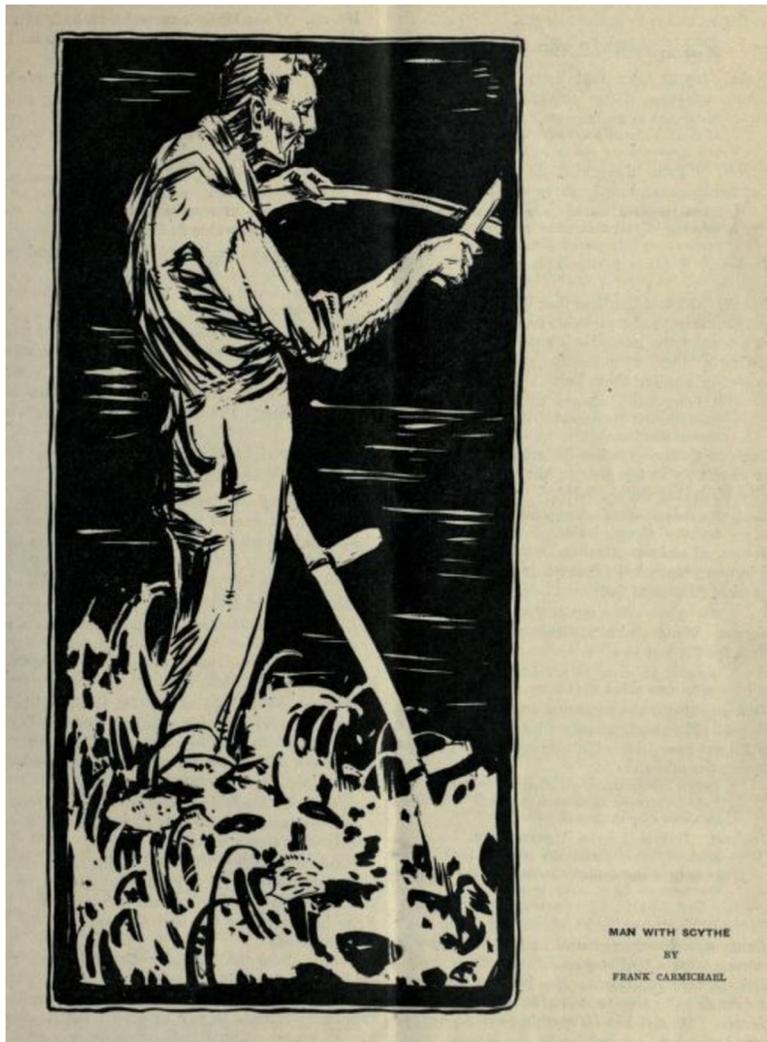


Figure 33. Franklin Carmichael, *Man with Scythe*, illustration for *The Canadian Forum*, 1921, National Gallery of Canada Archives, Ottawa.

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Abstract

Franklin Carmichael (1890-1945), a founding member of the first major Canadian art movement, the Group of Seven, believed in the uniqueness of the Canadian landscape, embracing natural and landscape elements throughout his work as a successful graphic designer and an artist working in a variety of fine art media. Carmichael's abstracted and expressionistically colored impressions of the wilderness created an intimate viewing experience while maintaining a commitment to the unique character of the Canadian landscape. He and the Group of Seven traveled throughout the Canadian wilderness, painting *en plein air* and endeavoring to break from European tradition in order to embrace the rise of national sentiment begun by the creation of the Canadian Confederation in 1867 and fueled by World War I. Inspired by the philosophic and spiritual sentiments of the American Transcendentalists in the mid-nineteenth century, Carmichael artistically explored the distinctiveness of the Canadian wilderness as well as the spiritual and Transcendental experience of nature. In the context of this transnational philosophic framework, American Transcendental ideologies complemented the Group's individual artistic philosophies and spiritualities. Carmichael's own library included books on Transcendentalism, German Romanticism, Kantian philosophy, and the works of Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau.

This thesis will demonstrate that Franklin Carmichael's distinctive use of color and space, his portrayal of the relationship between humans and nature, and his subject—the Canadian wilderness evidences his and the Group of Seven's transnational philosophic affinity for early nineteenth-century Transcendentalism as well as his enthusiastic commitment to artistically solidifying Canada's national identity.