First published in Literary Review of Canada, 1994; I sent a copy of this article and Joan Murray's book to Stan Brakhage; not long after he send me his film, Spring Cycle, telling me it was inspired by Thomson's paintings from his last spring and my commentary on it.

Peter Larisey, *Light for a Cold Land: Lawren Harris's Work and Life—An Interpretation*. (Toronto and Oxford: Dundurn Press, 1993) 199 pp + illus.

Joan Murray, *Tom Thomson: The Last Spring*. (Toronto and Oxford: Dundurn Press, 1994) p. 199.

Among Canadian painters, Lawren Harris has attracted more praise and condemnation than most. Besides the indisputable merits of his paintings, his privileged social position, his willingness—even eagerness—to play leadership roles in the struggle for a national art, his abilities to formulate theories about his art making generally and, more particularly, the art of his contemporary compatriots, and his adventurousness in embracing radical art forms all help to account for the extraordinary interest his life and works have elicited. Nonetheless *Light for a Cold Country: Lawren Harris's Work and Life* is the first volume that really gets down to the business of examining comprehensively the factors affecting the development of the complete range of his painting styles, from his early cityscapes to the late abstractions in a nearly post-painterly mould, and to analyzing an adequate sampling from the work of each period. Peter Larisey's scrupulous attention to detail in describing many of Harris' paintings makes the book essential reading for anyone with an interest in the history of painting in Canada. More than that, it is essential reading for anyone interested in our struggle for a progressive, distinctive, national art that grows out of experience of the place where we live. Furthermore, Larisey's descriptions of the emotional turmoil that Harris experienced, of the condemnation that greeted his early efforts, when he was accused of being an exponent of the "Hot Mush school of painting" and a "[p]aint [s]linger" whose art spread the belief that Canada is a land of ugliness and reflects "a crude and tasteless native intelligence," and—still more typically Canadian—the vilification he experienced when, after decades of experience in following his inspiration to wherever it carried him and in that quest producing stunning paintings in a variety of forms , he assumed a well-justified place as a leader of the movement for new art in Vancouver, make this study a moving tale of an artist's resolute courage and unshakeable commitment in face of the academic criticism that was no less hoary and the silly promotional writing of the art-mags that was no less feeble-minded in his time than it is in our own.

However, the book does not come by all these virtues by design. One of the more analytic passages in *Light for a Cold Country* captures as well as any the spirit of Larisey's study:

> It is significant that Harris's paintings of the Hanover period do not very much resemble the works that he was seeing in New York. The probable explanation is that Harris did not conceive space in a way that allowed such influences to enter his art . . . It is as though Harris in the 1930s had not yet assimilated Cubist space. Space in most of Harris's early abstractions is not an independent, flattened field of vision. No matter what forms are presented, it is rather like a window opening into natural spaces. . . . Harris's paintings do not have the pictorial independence that is associated with the Cubist concept of space. It is as though he had a vocabulary for geometric abstractions, but was unfamiliar with the spatial syntax.
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> I speculate that Harris was unfamiliar with Cubism because he had been

> isolated from both New York and Europe by his nationalist ideology during the two decades after the Armory Show of 1913. During this period, his modernist American contemporaries had developed an intense awareness of Cubism. They had assimilated Cubist notions of space and were able, in their geometric abstractions, to organize the space as though it approached two-dimensionality and to distribute their pictorial elements with a sense of its integrity and importance. (135)

The commentary troubles for many reasons. Not the least of them is that it turns the Cubist notion of space into a norm for abstraction. What is worse, it does so without disentangling the historically specific conceptions that produced the spatial features of analytic Cubism from the more universal truths towards which those conceptions point. The spatial practises of the Cubist painters drew on their ideas

about the mechanics of perception—about how when we look at an object, we see not only the peculiar aspects it presents to our vantage point but, almost as forcefully, aspects that our memory and our understanding of variations in space provide to the manifold of sensation. It was the collocation on a flat surface of various vantage-points, motivated by this understanding of perception and the desire to re-create perception in all its complexity, that first produced the flattened space of Cubism (though, one must acknowledge that the early Cubists were sharp enough to see the aesthetic merits of the flattening of pictorial space—namely, that it enables more elements to enter push-pull relations as equal forces). Even Larisey's formulation of the problem, in terms of Harris' lacking awareness of spatial syntax, implies a sadly academic approach to artmaking, quite divorced from the actual creative energies that are the impetus for making art and that formulate a new grammar from scratch—that establish a new lexicon, a new syntax and a new semantics—each time an artist makes a work or art, and never allow themselves, if the artist is truly creative, to be dominated by an alien grammar.

The proximate reason for Larisey's failure to disentangle the historically specific features of Cubism from the more general truths towards which that movement strove, and for his consequent tendency to treat Cubist spatial features as a norm, is that he lacks (or, at least, based on the evidence that *Light for Cold Country* presents, appears to lack) any understanding of the importance of the aesthetic notion of tension. To make a slogan of the idea, any work of art is a construction that elicits and reconciles tension, and the primary task of a critic is the analysis of the ways that an artwork provokes and harmonizes tension. Larisey writes as though making an artwork were a task similar to installing furniture and accessories in a living-room (or any other comparable design chore); this explains why, in the first third of *Light for Cold Country* he frequently—and quite preposterously—proposes that the purpose of Harris' impasto brushwork in his earlier painting was to create a decorative surface. What distinguishes a well-designed living-room from a life-sustaining work of art, apart from their differing degrees of originality, is that the tension that the work of art provokes is vastly more threatening, more risky, more troubling, more off-putting, more vertiginous, more eery, more dynamic and unsettling than what we experience when sitting in a well-designed sitting-room, where a much simpler, and vastly more pacifying, form of harmony prevails.

Larisey's failure to grasp the importance of this simple, but fundamental, principle—one that increases in importance with diminshing proximity to the modernist period of the subject a critic deals with—is unfortunate because the notion of dynamic equilibrium that was so important in the first decade of this century offers what is tantamount to a proposal concerning aesthetic tension. Dynamic equilibrium is a term from mechanics, and it refers to that state in which an object is at rest because the forces operating on it balance one another other; but it

suggests, more generally, that state of arrested motion, when all the inertial vectors emanating from an object balance each other perfectly. The paradigm image for the aesthetic state of dynamic equilibrium comes from the dance—it is the moment when a dancer's energy carries her into states in which the dynamic forces balance one another and she is, for a moment, in a state of rest-within-change. The virtuoso examples are the most famous—and Nureyev's leaps the most famous of all, for at the apogee of a leap, Nureyev seemed to have reached a point where he had become motionless —but the same sort of dynamic equilibrium is commonplace in the dance: the dancer extends or lifts herself, projecting a vector of action upwards and outwards and for a moment reaches a culminating point that seems to hold itself motionless, only to descend from that momentarily ideal realm into the real world of change. What applies to the dance applies to the other arts as well; and so the modernists in several disciplines—who with a degree of self-awareness unprecedented in the history of Western Art turned their attention to highlighting the essential structures of aesthetic tensions—became interested in exploring the idea of dynamic equilibrium.

Thus, as Harris framed the idea in his 1933 article, "Theosophy and Art," the arts are important in human life for their reflection of "the essential order, the dynamic harmony, the ultimate beauty, that we are all in search of, whether consciously or not." And whenever Harris wrote of beauty, or of the Divine (of which beauty is a material perceptible expression), he referred to it as an energy or power that holds elements together in the unity of a dynamic equilibrium. A work of art, as he understood it, holds its elements together in a dynamic equilibrium in much the same way as the unity of the divine creation holds all existents together in a similar equilibrium; the latter's mode of integration differs from the former only in being vastly broader and more complex in its unifying nexus of relations. The aesthetic attitude, which Harris also extolled, has related features, for just as an artwork is characterized by an equilibrium which resolves discordant elements in a dynamic unity, the aesthetic experience involves a peculiar combination of activity (in responding to the work with a lively percipience and animated awareness) and surrender (in allowing the work to overwhelm one's sensorium totally, so that the work is all that one is aware of, and one responds to every slight variation that it presents); it arises from a form of contemplation that, paradoxically, is none the less active for being fascinated. The correspondence between the radical propositions taken by the early modernists and "the secret doctrines" of the various hermetic sects that were much in vogue in the same period reaches down as far as the modernists' contention that aesthetic experience plays a central role in the life of some developed sensibilities, but is not available to all humans, and those ideas' relations to occultists' propositions concerning the elect.

There has been much writing in the past three or four years on the role of the occult in the early modernist period. What writers working on this topic have not remarked on—and Larisey's book continues the oversight—is the clear alliance between the founding ideas of the modernist aesthetic theory and the key concepts of the occult. This alliance has two implications: first, that writers and painters could apprehend the force of key aesthetic propositions through the medium of religious language (even though the notions they framed were, admittedly distorted by the refractions of the medium in which they were formlated) and, second, they could defend their radical aesthetic propositions with the bland syncreticist and obscurantist vocabulary of universal spirituality and, by so doing, could make them seem so much more acceptable.

Thus Mondrian could set out his ideas about dynamic equilibrium without making clear the filiations between his ideas and the notion of the *conincidentia oppositorum.* Similarly, Clive Bell (who shared with most early modernists the belief that the experience of art is akin to the religious experience) and the artists who took up the cause of aesthetic modernism could propose that the special importance of art in the life of humans depends on art's capacity to

engender a unique type of contemplative experience that defies being caught in the categories of language and could do so without tracing the connections these ideas have with the religious concepts of exultation, metanoia, and the ineffable. And, approaching the domain of coincidence from the opposite side, artists like Lawren S. Harris (along with critics such as Cleanth Brooks, William Empson, and Kenneth Burke) could offer the radical Kantian assertion that artworks transform both their physical and their conceptual material and, by that transformation, endow them with aspects of infinitude, through the medium of the bland occultist proposition about artworks reflecting the transformations involved in spiritual evolution, and could do so without seeming to offer anything too dangerously extreme.

It might be that the cultist encrustations that the occultists form around what would otherwise be marvellously limpid aesthetic propositions deprive them of some of their lustre; nonetheless, we must allow that the profound spiritual commitments they embody lend them greater urgency. But whatever their effects, it is unfortunate that Larisey fails to see the connections between occult doctrines and modernist aesthetic theory. It is unfortunate because it means that he fails to tie his commentary on Harris' writings on art together with his analysis of Harris' painting.

There is a more general, if somewhat more remote, reason for Larisey's remarks about the failures of Harris' early abstractions. Larisey's analysis of the reasons for Harris' early abstractions being only modestly satisfying derives from his basic approach, which is to trace the strengths of Harris' paintings back to antecedent examples which, often on the thinnest evidence, Larisey claims influenced Harris. The trouble with this approach, as I see it, does not arise from any belief that great paintings have no precedents but are unique onto themselves - obviously any work of art is a product of its times and an important aspect of the times of which it is part is the art of the past and, especially, the recent past which the culture has just assimilated (and even then only in part). No, the trouble is rather that this approach usually ends up making inexplicable all that is original in a great artist's work. To account for an artist's original contributions, one needs to identify the formal issues that lie at the heart of the artist's *oeuvre* and to trace the evolution of increasingly richer ways of working through the formal problematic the artist defines for him- or herself. In Harris' case, surely this problematic has partly do with effort to discover painterly equivalents for the dialectical relation between the ideal and the real which pervades the realm of existence and which maintains beings in relations of dynamic tension—a dialectic relation which, understandably, Harris often suggested by balancing two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms (or sometimes, more brilliantly, the relying on capacity of a single form that invites us to view it both as a two-dimensional and as a three-dimensional construction.)

While I concur that Harris' early abstractions were something less than a complete success, I should want to give other reasons for this—reasons that concern Harris' having committed himself to evolving a type of abstraction out of the central issues of his earlier painting (that is, a type of abstraction for which there were no models). Such an account makes clear why one should not wonder (or cavil over the fact) that it took plenty of failures, to find the way. Larisey's analysis, on the other hand, converts what should be a story of persistence and eventual triumph (if one cares to fabricate a narrative) through being true to oneself, one's tradition and one's culture into a tale of ignorance arising from national commitments. And it must be said that this analysis of the reason for the unsatisfying quality of Harris' early abstractions does not provide an isolated example—Larisey's general approach is to disparage Harris' national commitments to the end of highlighting Harris' relation with international painting styles.

Compounding this difficulty, Larisey frequently misrepresents or misunderstands the influences that Harris might have been exposed to during the years he studied in Berlin and

travelled in Europe. Among Harris' early works are such narrative pieces as *The Return from Town* (1911), *The Drive* (1912, N.G.C) and (with decidedly less narrative import), *A Load of Fence Posts* (1911, McMichael Collection). Larisey's commentary on these works suggests that they were influenced by von Wille, one of Harris' German teachers who, as Larisey points out, studied at Düsseldorf; however Larisey fails to note that these works are fairly typical pieces of genre painting, which flourished at the Düsseldorf Academy when von Wille was a student there. (In fact, one quotation Larisey gives from a contemporary source describes von Wille's work as avoiding the conventionality of genre painting, but Larisey simply passes over the remark without giving it any consideration.)

Too, Larisey points out, time and again, that Harris used low angle views for many of his cityscapes and landscapes. However, he contents himself with tracing these low vantage-points back to the German painters who taught Harris. This analysis by identification of purported influences is as destructive of genuine insight as Gaile MacGregor's inclination to treat Canadian painters' frequent choice of that vantage-point thematically. What is surely of overriding importance is that a low view often brings the represented objects up almost to the picture plane (instead of looking over them and off into the horizon) and this is what they almost always do in Harris paintings. Bringing objects up to the picture plane in this way has two effects: first, it draws attention to the surface of the picture and so gives weight and palpability to the work's two-dimensionality; second, and almost paradoxically, it adds weight to the represented object itself. Harris took an interest in both these features and in the tension between them. Hence, quite often, as in such works as *The Pine Tree* (1917, priv. coll.), *The Grand Trunk* (1925, priv. coll.), *North Shore, Lake Superior* (1926, N.G.C), *Wood Interior, Algoma* (priv. coll.1918), *Algoma Sketch* (1918, priv. coll.), *Montreal River* (ca. 1920, McMichael Collection) and *North Shore, Lake Superior, Pic Island* (1925, priv. coll.). Harris would either bring a central object up to the picture plane (as he does in the former three works) or a series of objects spread out at intervals across the picture plane (as he does in the latter four) and then to create a tension between these surface-affirming forms and a deep, illusory space—but significantly, one that is not focally organized—in which they are embedded. This is just what he did in his early abstractions, against which Larisey alleges that Harris' use of three-dimensional forms reflects his ignorance of the spatial syntax of Cubism; I believe, rather, that such use of space rather reflects, Harris' desire to remain true to his preoccupations and so to evolve abstract forms out of the issues that for years had been central to his work, and not simply to pick up the international style that was handy.

As well, bringing the central subject up to the picture plane gives weight to the represented object's material condition. Thus forms that incorporate a central focusing device placed near the picture surface share an effect with one of the affinities of the photograph, which it acquires by virtue of its tendency, recognized as early as the f22 school and such *Neue Sachlichkeit* photographers as Albert Renger Patzsch and Hans Finsler, to present clear, sharp recordings. So it should not be surprising that photographic representation influenced Harris' work, just as it influenced that of Tom Thomson and Harris' cofactionalists in the Group of Seven. Compare Harris's *Houses, Chesnut Street* (1919, Robert McLaughlin Gallery) with Augustus Bridle's photograph The *Rough-cast, Two Story House* (reproduced on p. 24) and you get some inkling of the effect the photograph might have had on their work, exactly because its sharp recording makes tangible the materiality of the objects it represents. Yet, Larisey downplays Harris' interest in what is near to hand, so as to stress their relations with European precedents, of works as "documentary" as some of Harris' cityscapes.

Interest in the dialectical relation between the material real that is near to hand and the spiritual form that gives it being is a constant in Harris' art as it is in Hegel's philosophy. However, despite so evident a similarity as this, Larisey contents himself with noting that

Lawren Harris' second wife, Bess, stated that Harris had not read any Hegel—or, rather, he almost contents himself with that, but goes on to append the remark that Harris' nationalist commitments isolated him from involvement with foreign thinkers. I cannot write of the many, and deep, Hegelian resonances in Harris' writings and paintings. I must content myself with remarking that by failing to confront the spirit of Hegel, Larisey missed an opportunity to understand the triangular relation among the Theosophical cast of Harris' thought, his nationalist leanings and his artistic practice, which more than any other Canadian painters', attempts to integrate the real and the ideal. I believe that what Harris took from Theosophy was really just Hegelianism diluted into a thin gruel, but that poor meal gave life enough to thoughts that united him with a grand tradition in Canadian thought, one that forms a principal determinant of our landscape tradition. Larisey makes nothing of this. He overlooks Hegel's importance, and so fails to discern the most profound link between such late German Romantic movements as *Naturlyrismus* and Harris' attempt to create a perfect balance between the ideal and real, or between the self and world (which was so much a theme of the *Heimat* paintings that Larisey often mentions, but whose primary significance he passes over).

In his preface Larisey makes what one can read only as a sniggering reference to those who treat Harris "reverentially," within the nationalist myth he constructed for himself, and implores readers to broaden their domain of reference and to interpret Harris' writings and paintings in a wider context (which seems to be German painting from around the turn of the century). One could turn this accusation against Larisey himself, as his ideas about German art are really hidebound. The clearest evidence of this is that he hardly mentions the German expressionists. Surely, the mystical intensity with which some German expressionists painted the landscape, their post-impressionist brushwork and colour practices, including eschewing underpainting and juxtaposing patches of complementary colours, often applied with a fully laden brush or with a palette knife—all of which serve to create vibrancy rather than the impression of melancholy brooding, evoked through an otherworldly precisionism, of Caspar David Friedrich—are closer to Thomson, Harris and others in the Group of Seven then later German Romantics, of whom he makes so much. I think in particular of Christian Rohlfs: Compare Rohlfs' *Birch Woods* (1904) with Thomson's Spring Breakup (1917, priv. coll.) or with Harris' *Algoma Sketch CXIX* (1919). And if these painters are believed to be too young for it to be likely that Harris became acquainted with their works while studying in Germany, one could point out that Larisey similarly underplays the tremendous impact that the Berlin Secession had and the importance of its members' paintings. Indeed, among the better-known German painters of the Berlin Secession, Larisey mentions only Max Slevogt— and he is only mentioned, for Larisey does not give any consideration whatsoever to the significant similarilities his work bears to Harris' (for example, his use of radically simplified compositions, of compressed picture space, of a limited palette, and of separate strokes clearly demarcated daubs of closely related hues that display a progression of values and, above all, his animated brushwork)—and Max Liebermann (whose palette-knife techniques may have made some impression on Harris, another possibility he seems to have ignored). Only a relatively minor figure, Walter Lestikow, is deal with at any length, and even he is discussed in terms of his continuing older traditions of German painting, and not as a member of the avant-garde, as the Secessions claimed to be.

As odd—especially given his interest in the Romantic precursors to modern painting—is that Larisey does not consider Robert Rosenblum's well-known *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko*, the key text expounding the argument that the German Romantic tradition is as important to some twentieth-centuries painters and to some movements in twentieth-century painting as is the School of Paris. If he read it, there he would have come across a treatment of the great Hegelian theme of dialectical synthesis of the realms

of the material and ideal that proceeds more concretely than the Master's ever did (and, to boot, might have found out how Harris, even if did not read Hegel, might have sopped up Hegelian themes in his years in Berlin). Rosenblum writes:

> It is, in fact, much rarer to find in the domain of French painting than in the domain of Northern painting that quality which Thomas Carlyle spoke of in *Sartor Resartus* as 'Natural Supernaturalism,' a phrase that has recently been used by M.H. Abrams as the title of a study in literary history which deals with many of the problems that have concerned us here: the search among Romantic writers and philosophers, especially in Protestant England and Germany, for some immanent mystery in natural experience that could replace the crumbling orthodoxies of Christianity. As Abrams put it, these Northern Romantics tended 'to naturalize the supernatural and to humanize the divine.' . . . especially if one looks outside Paris, the usual locus for the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century painting, one discovers that the Romantic pursuit of natural supernaturalism, of divinity in nature, did not expire in the mid-nineteenth century, but in fact continued with renewed passion in the later nineteenth century and then into our own. (71)

The tendency "to naturalize the supernatural and to humanize the divine," and to embark on a quest for the "immanent mystery in natural experience that could replace the crumbling orthodoxies of Christianity" are motivations that lead to an interest in the occult, too; and so Rosenblum's thesis goes a long way towards explaining modern artists' attraction to esoteric, mystery cults. It is a pity that Larisey, who might have made a contribution to the study of Canadian art history as important as Nasgaard's *The Mystic North* by throughly examining an underestimated aspect of Harris' *oeuvre*, did not avail himself of arguments of Rosenblum's key insights: Rosenblum's thesis would have provided a good general framework within which the particularities of Harris' career might have been examined.

Joan Murray's *Tom Thomson: The Last Spring* gives evidence of a writer who increasingly recognizes the distinctive features of our landscape tradition. While in earlier writings on Thomson she, like Harold Town, suggested that their importance derived from the lyrical, semi-abstract character of his paintings and cast Thomson as a transitional figure in Canadian painting's development from the landscape tradition represented by, say, Lucius R. O'Brien and Homer Watson to the work of the Painters Eleven, she now stresses that Thomson's painting are records (as he himself referred to them) and derive their strength from a close observation and intimate communication with nature; she also draws an interesting connection between the character as records and the work of the self-taught naturalist and Thomson's uncle, William Brodie. She offers as well some suggestive observations on the continuities between Thomson's photographs and provides some telling visual comparisons around the same theme in her choice of illustrations. The importance of Thomson's photographs is a point that Dennis Reid first brought to the country's attention, and I wish Murray had elaborated upon it (though, as *Image & Identity* shows, the topic, and especially its Romantic roots, is a passion of mine). Murray's commentary as well is richly suggestive concerning the role that Thomson's work in commercial illustration, in Seattle and, famously, with the Grip firm in Toronto, played in forming the style he forged in his later thirties. While I have read previous arguments concerning the influence of Art Nouveau on Thomson and the Group of Seven, I admit I was never convinced (probably because I generally detest Art Nouveau painting for much the same reasons that I detest Pre-Raphaelite painting). However, Murray's commentary and choice of illustrations put the matter beyond dispute or objection. The importance of

Thomson's work in commercial illustration granted, it is equally important to note that Murray treats the question of how Thomson evolved from an unschooled young man doing lettering in a commercial illustration firm to one of the century's greatest painters as a mystery—that is, she treats it with the respect that is its due.

Murray gives sufficient weight to a simple enough point, but one I feel has been quite overlooked. That is, that the interest that Group of Seven and later artists attached to Thomson's landscapes was affected by that calamitous event that proved so fateful for the arts in the Western World, the Great War. Many commentators make a great deal of the fact that Dadaism represents a recoil from reason that many identified as the motor that drove humankind into that destructive technological whirlwind. Few make much of the affirmation in the writings of the members of the Group of Seven that nature possesses redemptive powers which developed partly through similar circumstances, even though this idea is central to Canadians' self-image. Murray does indicate the key role that the Great War had in strengthening this conception of nature (though I do wish she had mentioned in this connection Housser's early defence of the work of the painters, *A Canadian Art Movement*.)

Murray also reveals a fascinating biographical fact concerning Thomson. Several among Thomson's contemporaries had tales to tell of his remarkable powers of concentration. I was reminded of the charming talk that John Maynard Keynes gave at Cambridge. It is a remarkable talk, first because it announces to the world for the first time I am acquainted with the theme that Voegelin was later to take up, that Newton was not one of the first of the rationalists but one of the last of the magicians. But it is also remarkable for giving what I think is the most succinct and penetrating description of the distinctive capacity of genius I have ever read.

> I believe that the clue to his [Newton's] mind is to be found in his unusual powers of continuous concentrated introspection. . . . His peculiar gift was the power of holding continuously in his mind a purely mental problem until he had seen straight through it. I fancy his pre-eminence is due to his muscles of intuition being the strongest and most enduring with which a man has ever been gifted . . . I believe that Newton could hold a problem in his mind for hours and days and weeks until it surrendered to him its secret.

I am sure that most readers have experienced the difference between working on a mathematical problem, or on a philosophical proof or a literary analysis, in short spurts, a few seconds at time, and falling into a trance in which for several minutes consecutively it occupies the mind entirely, and so they will be aware of how much more progress we make towards the solution of the problem when we are so entranced. But they will also know that when we fall into such a trance (or state of contemplation) we too soo become distracted by some other thought — by worries about what we are going to tell a class tomorrow, or by reminders of tasks we must attend to, or even by such self-conscious considerations of how arduous the problem we are working is and how reluctantly it gives up its secrets under the pressure of our inquiry. The difference with genius, I believe, is just what Keynes describes: geniuses, I believe, can be entranced by a problem continuously for hours at a stretch. Murray's text suggests to me that Thomson had just such an ability. I also believe that such ability to concentrate is a primary factor in making eidetic memory possible; and so I suspect that Thomson's records are as much records as an image burned into his consciousness as they are records of the "external world" of nature. This, too, reflects the condition of a photograph, which similarly records an instant and makes it eternal, and so is a form of mnenotechnic.

The book is slender, and the period that it covers short—a mere few months at the end

of Tom Thomson's tragically brief creative life. But its effect is simply overwhelming. I hope there is no Canadian that fails to recognize something of Thomson's greatness, for his is a most wondrous part of of our country's legacy to us. However, even my fondness for Thomson work had not prepared me for the impact of the book. By focusing so sharply on a single series—depicting the coming of spring to Algonquin—the book brings into clear view the deeply felt majesty of the work. Thomson's portrayal of the mystery of nature's resurrection, of the Creative Spirit taking new life—a new incarnation in a newly vital nature --, his depiction of the radiant unity of nature disclosing itself within an ennobled soul. is one of the most moving chapters in our country's art. In cherishing it, Murray has done us a great favour.