



# Canoe Lake

*Roy MacGregor*

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A troubled American woman travels to a small Ontario town, determined to find the mother she has never known. As she searches through dusty records and stirs up old memories among those around her, three young people emerge from the mists of the past...a beautiful woman named Jenny, a shy local boy named Russell, and a dark-eyed painter named Tom, who changes the course of Jenny and Russell's lives. Historical reality and conjecture are skilfully interwoven with intrigue and suspense as these three move unwittingly toward tragedy.

## Canoe Lake Details

Date : Published March 12th 2002 by McClelland & Stewart

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Author : Roy MacGregor

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## From Reader Review Canoe Lake for online ebook

### Liz Carr says

I have really enjoyed Mr. MacGregor's books but it wasn't all that difficult to tell this was an early work. A very evocative work of fiction and since no one who knows the answers to the questions, the true story really has no ending.

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### Alex says

At least its was about places in Ontario.

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### Cameron Forde says

This is a good book. It captures the heart and soul of the area quite well. Canoe lake is close to Parry Sound which is where I grew up and it is nice to see the beauty of the area captured correctly. The book did a good job at capturing the human elements of Tom Thompson's life and death. A history textbook couldn't do this as well because it takes a real author's creativity to bring the past to life in this way. A little truth of life I got from this novel is that everyone's life has a beginning, middle, and end. In this way everyone could have a story written about them, but you have to do something special with the beginning, middle, and end for it to matter in the long run. Tom's life was extremely interesting in the beginning and middle, but everyone prefers to focus on the end because of the mystery it is surrounded by. I really liked the little details in this book. It's like the author had a picture of that exact period of time and just wrote exactly what he saw. I like how the book perfectly mixes fact with fiction. If someone told you that this book was one hundred percent fact you had no reason to not believe them. I didn't like how fluffy the book was. A lot of the story didn't need to be told as it didn't have any pay off in the end. The book realistically could have been 50 pages shorter. This is the only glaring issue with the novel and that is why it gets a score of four out of five. I would highly recommend this to anyone who likes mysteries or is interested in the setting of the novel.

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### Pam says

Makes you think! A puzzle and yet another version of the mysterious death of Tom Thomson. Living in the near North I can feel and smell the beautifully descriptive vistas presented. Great book! Glad it fell into my lap!

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### Marita says

**"Whereas, Eleanor reminded herself, she was forty-three, had blown her life, and was right now looking for the link that might allow her to go back and adjust her past. She thought about that a moment. The present, obviously, is the final measure of the past. If**

**she then goes and alters her past, would it also change her present? She hoped so.”(p88)**

This novel is based on the true story of famous Canadian painter Tom Thomson's mysterious death in 1917 at Canoe Lake, Ontario, Canada. Having read Roy MacGregor's non-fiction account of Tom Thomson's death and the continuing mysteries and unanswered questions in his book Northern Light: The Enduring Mystery of Tom Thomson and the Woman Who Loved Him\*, I can confirm that much of what he has written in this novel is fact. However, it is a work of fiction and what he has done is explore some of the unanswered questions of the case.

At the time of Tom's death it was rumoured that he was engaged to Winnifred Trainor. After his death she went to Philadelphia for a period of time. Could she possibly have had a baby? The premise of this novel is that a fictional character, Eleanor Philpot takes time off work to travel to Vernon, Ontario, to find the mother she has never known. The person whom she thinks might know who her mother is, or might be her mother, is Miss Janet Turner, an elderly spinster living in Vernon. Miss Turner is modelled on Winnifred Trainor. Whether Eleanor will meet or learn much from the enigmatic Miss Turner, well... There is however Russell Pemberton, staunch friend of Miss Turner, and he knows what happened but will he tell? He might not be as forthcoming to Eleanor as she might like, but he allows us, the readers, to share his thoughts and memories and so we get to know what happened to Tom in this story, even though it is only a fictional supposition of what happened to the real Tom Thomson.

For the most part, the other characters in the novel were real people, much of what was said and details of Tom's disappearance and the subsequent discovery of his body are factual. In exploring the case, the author fleshes out the characters very nicely. There is Eleanor with her hangups and identity crisis, as well as old Russell Pemberton who has an inflated sense of his own importance. As a young man (when we share his memories) he comes across as singularly unimaginative and dull as dishwater. We also get a glimpse of Tom himself.

There are some lovely descriptions of nature, and even Russell gets fired up by what he sees when he first visits Canoe Lake (p110). Tom's death was during WWI, and mention is made of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. So the tragedy of Tom and of his lady friend take place against the backdrop of a much larger tragedy.

Roy MacGregor grew up in the area near Canoe Lake where Tom's body was found, and he was distantly related to the deceased Winnifred Trainor. He has done an incredible amount of research into the mystery as evidenced by his book Northern Light: The Enduring Mystery of Tom Thomson and the Woman Who Loved Him. At the end of Canoe Lake he includes some of the facts known at the time of writing. This was his debut novel, originally published as "Shorelines".

\*<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

**Tom Thomson fishing in Algonquin Park, Ontario, Canada**

**Tom Thomson's "April in Algonquin Park", 1917**

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### **Samantha says**

I loved this book. I know it was a fictional retelling of the story but I fell like the author did a great job on intertwining the fact and the fiction. While I would have loved a different end I feel that this one brought some really good closer to the story. At first I had some struggles getting it but once the story began to jump back to times and places it became much more interesting! I would highly recommend this book to any one who likes a good mystery and any Thompson enthusiasts!

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### **Debbie Robson says**

I'm going to start at the beginning. My only criticism of Canoe Lake is the first half of the first paragraph. Maybe it's because I'm Australian but I couldn't make sense of all the details about Vernon - the curfew, the mayor, the mill whistle, Rock Hill. Just a case of too much too quickly. So many details actually stopping me from visualising the town. Soon though I got into the rhythm of the writing, especially when Eleanor Philpott is introduced. I've decided she's one of my favourite characters. She is particularly fascinating because of her past - or lack of it. Although she is thirty eight, her life really hasn't begun when we first meet her. The novel is told from two points of view - Eleanor's and Russell Pemberton's, a contemporary of the enigmatic painter Tom Thomson. As Eleanor begins to investigate what may have happened to Tom Thomson and his fiancee Janet Turner after his mysterious death, Russell remembers Vernon the way it was when he and Janet were young.

Roy MacGregor weaves the two narratives very skilfully together and towards the end I became really involved in Eleanor's cause. Hoping, particularly in the last few chapters, that she would find what she was looking for. The author's evocation of Thomson is quite masterly and I imagine it would be a bit daunting to create a character that so many people have wondered about. It seems though, because of his own history, that MacGregor was in a good position to do so.

This book is highly recommended and I would love to read another book about Eleanor Philpott. Set maybe a year or so later? There have been a few movies now about the early sixties. How about a book from the perspective of an older woman? The music! The clothes! Would love to read that! I'm sure I would enjoy it as much as this one!

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### **Teri-lynn says**

Love this mystery. Spending time in Algonquin every summer and hearing people to this day speak of the mystery is in my opinion Canada's greatest story...we may never know the truth behind that summer, but that's alright.

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### **Deborah Wellum says**

A very enjoyable read. I found that the story became more intriguing the further I got into the book. The characters were interesting and the setting in Northern Ontario was very familiar to me which added to my appreciation of the book. Tom Thomson was an amazing artist with a complexity to him that will continue to generate interest in his life and his art for many more years.

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### **Claudia says**

Thoroughly enjoyed this fact-meets-fiction glimpse of Tom Thomson (Canadian 'Group of Seven' painter)'s life. Roy MacGregor tackles the mystery of his death on Canoe Lake in 1917 in a very sensitive way and brings to life many of the minor characters involved. The book has a very compelling, dark atmosphere and he builds the story (and the tension) slowly and captivatingly.

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### **Janet says**

Absolutely great read. Picked it up yesterday and couldn't put it down. Have been fascinated with the groups of seven and Tom Thomson since I was a little Girl and sat in n archive library I found when biking by myself in Thornhill. Very plausible story told in a manner that captivates the imagination. Some say it doesn't reveal enough, but I think it respectfully tells a story of an era gone by. Great Canadian read. Now to get my ass to Algonquin park! Saw their exhibit over the holidays and their work truly peaks to the heart!

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### **Cheryl says**

Our monthly book club selection to be reviewed quite rightly at a members cottage in northern Ontario next weekend.

I had never heard of this book or for shame the mystery surrounding Tom Thomson's death. I was only aware of him as an artist from the wonderful Canadian group of seven.

I found this book narrative both compelling and fascinating. The interwoven stories of Russell the Tom Thomson contemporary and Eleanor the woman trying to find herself worked well.

Since I am reading in 2018 the author updated the story with his background which helped inform the reader about the hypothesis.

Highly recommend a good cottage read and Canadian mystery!

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### **Lisa Kelsey says**

I read this book while I was in Parry Sound, near where this book takes place. It's quite evocative of the era and the natural surroundings but the writing and story-telling is just okay. The present day mystery aspect of the narrative just doesn't hold up. I have a feeling because of the author's personal connection to the characters, the book would have been more interesting as nonfiction. Perhaps he was trying to spare descendants embarrassment, but apparently that didn't work anyway as the book caused a family feud of sorts. I would still say it's worth reading if you're interested in the Group of Seven painters of Ontario, or if you just want to read something that takes place in the Muskoka region and gives a fairly accurate (or so it seems to me) rendering of a time and place.

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### **Robert Blumenthal says**

This book was given to me by a friend many months ago, and I finally got around to reading it. It was written in 1980 and was about the Canadian painter Tom Thompson, who died mysteriously in a small town in Ontario, Canada in 1917. There have been various rumors that have swirled, everything from him being murdered to his sweetheart/fiance fathering his child and giving it up for adoption in Philadelphia, PA. In this tale, the woman who is possibly the daughter of the painter is exploring her past in 1961 after her mother dies. Right before she dies, she confesses to having adopted her and giving her some slim info that leads her to the small town in Canada where Thompson had lived. The story also is told from the perspective of Russell Pembroke, who was in love with Thompson's fiance from the get-go. The prose is lovely, the story compelling, and the ending, a bit confusing, but ultimately quite satisfying. The latest paperback version contains an afterword by the author dated 2002 that helps to explain the background information that led to his writing the novel.

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### **Kate says**

Well written and fun to read. It is an interesting speculation of the events... Interesting to find out that the author had a falling out with families related to the actual events. Seems unethical somehow to write about people under those circumstances.

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