

READING AND WRITING EMILY CARR

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By

EDWARD JOHN PARKINSON, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Edward John Parkinson, B.A. (University of Toronto)

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#### ABSTRACT

Emily Carr is a critically neglected figure in Canadian literature. Our current perception of her is defined almost totally by biographies and myth. This thesis attempts to demonstrate the sorts of strategies of truth which permeate the discourses of biography and autobiography. I confront the question of identity by examining how Emily Carr's writing about herself differs from that of her biographers. Where does the self that is allegedly carried by and through language find itself to be? Writing is treated as a representational medium; the page is the canvas painted by the grapheme. While I believe that we cannot avoid defining Carr in traditional terms of family, society, geography etc., I hope that this thesis provides an alternate reading of familiar concepts. I wish to represent Emily Carr as a Western writer but one with a "difference."

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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter I The Biographical Other.....	8
Chapter II The Autobiographical Other.....	29
Chapter III The Fragmented Self.....	50
Chapter IV The Difference in Travelling.....	68

## Introduction

Over four decades after her first published work won a Governor General's award for non-fiction Emily Carr remains an undeservedly neglected figure in Canadian literature. The reverse is true in the art world; as the backs of her Irwin Publishing paperbacks state (with only a hint of condescension), Emily Carr is "generally considered Canada's most famous woman painter." Any consideration of her writing must inevitably come to terms with her fame as painter and Canadian cultural icon. Most of the writing that has addressed Emily Carr has been biographical and this is where I begin my own investigation.

To begin with, we should state some of the theoretical ground of our inquiry. The OED's definition for "biography" states:

This word and its numerous conexions are recent. No compounds of the group existed in Old Greek. But *Bioῤῗpasos* 'writing of lives' (f. *Bio-s* 'life' + *ῗpas-Siv* 'to write' *ῗpasos* 'writer'), is quoted from Damascius C 500, and *Bioῤῗpasos* 'writer of lives' is cited by Du Cange [Du Cange, Charles Dufresne, Sieür *Glossiarium mediæ et infimæ Latinitatus*] as Med. Gr.

The etymology of the modern word "biography" points in two directions: *Bio-s*, the organic mechanism itself (the material embodi-

ment of the life force); and *paß- lv*, 'to write,' to represent graphically--and necessarily from a distance--the actions, operations or manifestations of this biological organism. The relationship between the organism and its graphic representation is extremely problematic and its attempted solution has led to various theories of language. It is a formulation of these two systems to which Freud refers when he states, "becoming conscious and leaving behind a memory trace are processes incompatible with each other within one and the same system" ("Beyond the Pleasure Principle" 296). Throughout much of my thesis I will stress the effects derived from the graphic elements of writing. Writing will be seen as 1. a necessary vehicle for the carrying forth of representation 2. always "Othered" and exterior to the content which it carries.

Biography as "The history of the lives of individual men as a branch of literature" (OED) tends to ignore its own contradictions by privileging its authority over the lives it articulates. That is, most biographers write as if they were bringing their subjects to life on the page. This is not to suggest that every biographer proclaims "here is the truth of the subject," yet each makes certain claims, within certain limits. I mean to imply that certainty is itself always a product of knowing or defining a limit. We will see that the direction of biographies are determined more by the interests (or strategies) of the biographers than by the immutable truth of the subject.

Whether or not biographical discourse seeks the truth of the subject determines if a boundary exists between the discourses of



fiction and history. The manner in which this truth is represented will determine the limit of our knowledge about the subject. While not specifically demarcating biography's boundary I will demonstrate how its constitution depends on a multiplicity of discourses and utilizes others' resources. The subject's space is made available by textual play, by the impossibility of the subject ever staying in one place.

Derrida discusses the exteriority of the signifier and Lacan the chain of desire (the signifier's insistence on signifying). For our own purposes we can say that these are both explanations for writing's ability to represent subjectivity. This thesis concentrates on how representation is realized through the graphic and metaphoric effects of language. The grapheme produces writing's exteriority and its ability to transmit information and although linguistics has largely ignored the grapheme in favour of the phoneme it provides us with a valuable measure of the space of representation; it contains its own limit. That is, the grapheme is an undeniable sign of writing.

Metaphor is the necessary route through which life is (allegedly) breathed into the [written] word. Metaphor venerates language by referring to an essential similarity underneath the difference achieved by written language. In the chapter "The Turns of Metaphor" Jonathan Culler discusses the reason metaphor has achieved a privileged position in much recent literary criticism:

In privileging metaphor and making it the heading under which to discuss figurality in general, one thus asserts the responsibility and authenticity of rhetoric; one grounds it in the perception of resem-

blances in experience, in intimations of essential qualities. One represses or sets aside as a non-referential play of forms by taking as representative of rhetoric or figure in general a figure whose referentiality can be defended . . . . (Culler 191)

While Culler is discussing metaphor's privileging as an analytical tool his discussion touches directly on our own concerns. Metaphor intimates it contains an essential connection with what it is describing while at the same time being able to defend itself through language's own [logocentric] logic. To quote Jacques Derrida, "all that functions as metaphor . . . confirms the privilege of the logos and founds the literal meaning . . . given to writing" (*Grammatology* 15). Biography's ability to represent the "essential qualities" (its logocentric privilege) originates from a belief in its connection with the life of the subject. On the other hand, its logical defence of its representation is brought about by referring to a verifiable history./1/

In "The Autobiographical Other" I show how Emily Carr regards the writing of one's self as an act of propriety over the self (the self as property, commodity). Again, the question of autobiography and fiction arises since some of Carr's writing claims to be "true to her life," while other works mute her personal voice. Taken in its entirety, Emily Carr's writing methodically sets out her life on the page; it aims towards revealing

1 I will refer to history's exterior as an archival discourse. Archive is from the Greek meaning "magisterial residence, public office, government." Its current English meaning is "A place in which public records or other important historic documents are kept." An archive, then, is open to the public; it publicizes its exteriority. It is also an official institution of the government so it is always ideological.

a "definite pattern." In order to assess the nature of her patterning we will also discuss the issue of just what an autobiography is supposed to be. We will see how Emily Carr describes certain moments in the formulation of her own identity and how she is bound within the familial order. The predominance of the family in Carr's writing will lead into the whole area of "domestic" fiction and women's writing.

*Growing Pains* is Emily Carr's autobiography and it is the main text discussed in chapter two. We will see how, as a formal autobiography, it attempts to reveal the structure of the developing artist. Often, however, *Growing Pains* is more interesting for what it leaves out. A natural and inevitable result of what psychoanalysis terms "condensation" is omission (of events, explanations, history, motivations...). In this sense any form of representation is primarily a process of exclusion; writing must necessarily leave out more than it includes. There is an excess before writing, an excess of experience which overdetermines any subsequent narrative. Chapters two and three examine different absences at the centre of Carr's writing, often in places where it seems most full, most descriptive. Overdetermination gives language a density at the same time that language retains an inadequacy. Psychoanalysis can be profitably employed to describe how absence formulates desire in the text. Of course the most important absence--and the most important object of desire--is Carr herself. Perhaps all of her writings may do nothing more than make us desire an unapproachable subject. Inevitably, Emily Carr stands beyond the text and our distance from her creates the text.

In chapter four we find that if we cannot ever approach the subject at least we can outline some of the methods the subject uses to approach herself. The travel motif demonstrates both difference and deferral. *The Book of Small and Klee Wyck* are this chapter's primary texts; they contrast Emily Carr at home among her family and out on her own among the Indians. At this point the space of difference, which I earlier said appeared graphically, is created inside the text by the invaginated traveller. We must be aware of the many characters who all contribute their voices to the text: the absent painter (always absented by the medium and often by the narrative); the authorial voice of the older writer (one who, the myth goes, is too old to paint); the fifteen year old school girl (who history tells us was in her late twenties). The writer who travels does so out of a desire for the self, a desire to know the self through self-expression.

Ultimately we are left with Emily Carr as author (the writer who travels within her own text in an attempt to create meaning). My project is not to determine truth from fiction or autobiography from fantasy, it is to examine how certain elements of the text create difference among themselves. Our own metaphors of the travel book and the discourse of geography give us signposts by which to measure the progress of the subject. And so, while we never arrive at the truth of the matter, we may at least glimpse some of Emily Carr's destinations. And then we know that we are heading in the right direction.



## Chapter One

### The Biographical Other

Writing in the common sense is the dead letter, it is the carrier of death. It exhausts life. On the other hand . . . writing in the metaphoric sense, natural, divine, and living writing, is venerated; it is equal in dignity to the origin of value, to the voice of conscience as divine law, to the heart, to sentiment, and so forth.

(Jacques Derrida)

Emily Carr's lengthy, unconventional life has provided a fertile ground for biographers. The story of the struggling, eccentric artist who grew up in Canada's West at the turn of the century, studied in the United States, England and France, and who eventually achieved recognition and acclaim late in her life, is a sort of romantic ideal containing all the ingredients for a spectacular novel. Numerous biographical and anecdotal articles on Emily Carr have appeared in print and they have been engendered, no doubt, by the appropriateness of the subject matter. In addition, at present (1988) there exist at least five book-length biographical studies of differing literary intent and value. All of these attest to the desirability of Emily Carr as a subject for biography.

The first attempt to put Emily Carr's life into words was Carol Pearson's *Emily Carr As I Knew Her*. Pearson's title effec-

tively summarizes both the position and the limits of the biographer: by writing in the "I" of her own inscribing subjectivity Pearson admits to the reader her partial and biased authorhood. Furthermore, by inserting the provisional "as I knew her" she admits to the limits of her work (and therefore to the limits of the knowledge which can come out of it). The title deliberately presumes an anecdotal nature. Paradoxically, by proclaiming its own limit--its certain provisional nature--Pearson's title implies the book knows its own limit, that it knows Emily Carr. By enunciating its own conditional status the book's title engages in a doubleness: the provisional "as I knew her" becomes a guarantee for a certain [limited] amount of veracity.

Another biography is Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher's *Emily Carr: The Untold Story*. Hembroff-Schleicher's title suggests possible intrigue and the unraveling of a mystery: it hints at some of the sensationalism of pulp detective fiction. The book itself contains much archival chronologizing, including a hundred pages documenting the "History of Emily Carr's Exhibiting Career." While the detective motif might seem to lack the solemnity of the archives, Hembroff-Schleicher mingles them productively. Her title suggests many other stories have already been told and that now her story will provide the necessary correction. The untold story means the true story. For instance, the chapter "Emily Exonerated" begins:

The last place one would expect to find a fairy tale is surely in the learned *Bulletin of The National Gallery of Canada*; and yet such a tale appeared in its pages not too long ago. The heroine is Emily Carr, whose early arduous travels to British Columbia's forbidding northland to sketch the native Indians, their

boats, their painted house fronts and, above all, their totem poles, have become a part of her legend. (*The Untold Story* p. 235)

Hembroff-Schleicher is using the genre of the fairy tale to parody the "truth" we expect from institutional journals. Her satire is productive since the inaccuracies she documents are real. Although the learned *Bulletin of The National Gallery of Canada* is compared to a fairy tale and Hembroff-Schleicher's description of her own research resembles detective fiction--"mounds of material have had to be gathered and sorted to get at the truth"--she augments these stereotypes by providing much solid archival material. The subject of "Emily Exonerated" is the assertion by some historians that Emily Carr "had begun to take her own photographs in 1912 on her excursion to the Queen Charlotte Islands and the Naas and Skeena Rivers."/2/ The dispute hinges upon whether all of Carr's paintings were the product of the artist's unmediated vision of nature, or if some were painted from photographs. What is at stake is our own (or perhaps only Hembroff-Schleicher's) vision of artistic integrity. Hembroff-Schleicher depends upon history for the reification of issues like integrity, issues that extend beyond the purely archival and into areas of truth and morality.

*Emily Carr: The Untold Story* demonstrates how the writing of history is composed of multiple discourses, many of them resem-

2 This is quoted by Hembroff-Schleicher from the *Bulletin of The National Gallery*. Her reading of this dryly discursive statement as a "fairy tale" demonstrates that any statement, no matter how overtly factual, is available for re-interpretation, for contextual restatements.



bling genres of fiction. When discourses are placed beside one another their interrelationship creates an ironic distance; the resulting perspective can be criticizing at the same time it is mocking. By indirectly referring to the many other stories which have already been told, the title places itself inside a densely packed structure of myths, legends, speculations and fairy tales concerning Emily Carr.<sup>3/</sup> And all of these stories relate to each other dialogically<sup>4/</sup>: each attempts to construct a certain, definitive reading; each calls itself historical. Historical discourse contains within itself a plurality of meaning--parodic and factual--which pulls away from any unified formulation of truth.

3 It is certainly no revelation that biography in general seeks to arrive at a higher or more precise truth than previously existed. This is the goal of most "scientific" discourses, and History, particularly when it confines itself to museums and archives, attempts to be scientific. However, Carr's identity is so overdetermined by the condensations of prior historical speculations, any assumption of "truth" by the biographer must be treated somewhat skeptically. The title of Doris Shadbolt's 1971 article ("Emily Carr: Legend and Reality") reaffirms the enduring notion that the biographical truth of Emily Carr may be sifted out.

4 From the Glossary provided in Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* we read that "Dialogism" is "the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole--there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. Which will affect the other, how it will do so and in what degree is what is actually settled at the moment of utterance" (426). Heteroglossia is "The base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance . . . . At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions--social, historical, meteorological, physiological--that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions" (428). In the case of Emily Carr's biographers, the historical moment of their biographical utterance (i.e. the currency of their specific study) determines their authority over Carr's identity.

Fiction is necessary in order to force history to achieve a perspective upon itself. The force of any specific archival or chronological fact results from the way in which it interacts with the other--already told--stories. We will see that no matter how true a discourse is, it always contains its Other within itself (that is, it always comes to know itself through the language of the Other). We will also examine how the necessity of fiction is determined even before language (before fiction itself) can occur.

There is another element of biographical representation which the titles of Hembroff-Schleicher's oeuvre demonstrate. In 1969, nine years before *Emily Carr: The Untold Story* was published, Hembroff-Schleicher wrote a book titled *M.E. A Portrayal of Emily Carr*. Both books attempt to reproduce portions of Emily Carr's signature on their covers and title pages. The graphemes *M.E.* and *Emily Carr* are printed as if they were painted with the same bold brush strokes Carr used to sign her name. This graphic attempt to inscribe a seminal portion of Carr's identity within the printed text's representational limit reveals several aspects of textual play. To begin with, these two titles clearly point to Hembroff-Schleicher's identity as an artist. In fact, *Emily Carr: The Untold Story* contains many of Hembroff-Schleicher's own sketches and under her name the title page states, "Her Only Sketching Partner." However, beyond the obvious attempt at representing a "painterly" discourse,<sup>5</sup> Hembroff-Schleicher's titles directly confront Carr's own representing of her identity.

<sup>5</sup> I place this term in apposition to Barthes' "readerly" and "writerly" texts.

In her preface to *M.E. A Portrayal of Emily Carr Hembroff-Schleicher* states:

When, as a fledgling artist, I first met Emily Carr, it never occurred to me to call her by her given name. She sometimes objected to this and in one of her letters to me she added a P.S.: "Why don't you and Fred call me other than 'Miss.' Any of my epithets you fancy."

I had a wide choice; at various times she called herself "Emily," "Millie," "Mom," or "M.E." She also signed her pictures in three different ways: "Emily Carr," "M.E. Carr," or "M. Emily Carr."

I asked her once, "What does the 'M' stand for?"

"It doesn't stand for anything," she answered. "I was born just plain Emily. But because I had two older sisters who were both 'E's' [Edith and Elizabeth] I added the 'M' to distinguish myself from them." She didn't say so, but I imagine she took the "M" from her old childhood nickname of "Millie."

The signatures on Emily's painting varied at different times of her life. In early life she used her given name alone. Later she added the "M" and after the death of her sister Lizzie she returned to the unadorned "Emily" again. (*M.E.* p. iii)

Hembroff-Schleicher portrays Emily Carr as a complete "original" and to call her by her given name would constitute a sort of fraud; a preference for what is given rather than for what is earned negates the whole artistic project. Yet the name Hembroff-Schleicher chooses also negates Carr's own identity (her earned selfhood) since "Miss" is a name society calls those women who refuse to be "normal," who refuse to marry and procreate. "Miss" indicates the lack of a future (the inability to represent--through reproduction--the image of one's self into the future) and in the present it represents a sterile absence, an always present inadequacy. And so Emily Carr urges Hembroff-Schleicher to call her "other than" the "just plain Emily" she was given by her parents and the "Miss" she has been given by society; she urges her to choose "any of my epithets you fancy." (emphasis

mine) According to the *OED* an "epithet" is "an adjective indicating some quality or attribute which the speaker or writer regards as characteristic of the person or thing described." Carr asks to be called what she is, to be named by her own, cultivated characteristics.

That Hembroff-Schleicher has a "wide choice" of epithets indicates Carr had always been very concerned about how she represented herself. All directly related to the proper name, her epithets provide insight into the possibilities of identity.<sup>6/</sup> It is paradoxical that at the centre of Emily Carr's identity is an absence: the letter "M" which "doesn't stand for anything." Yet we find that Carr has added this letter "M" to her proper name to distinguish herself from her two older sisters (who were "E's") and so this letter which "doesn't stand for anything" in fact creates a difference: it is a pure mark of identity. The epithet "M" is truly a proper name since it is purely the property of Carr herself. And then the historian Hembroff-Schleicher attempts to

6 It is in the proper name where identity is most arbitrary and this results in both condensation and abstraction. Condensation because, historically, the proper name may be the product of generations of repetitions as names are passed from father to son to daughter etc. And of course each proper name stands for all the actions, intimations, myths etc. that have created the identity of the subject to which it refers. Abstraction occurs because, unlike nominatives, the proper name frequently can not be made to refer to any thing (like a "tree"). "Emily Carr" is merely a collection of stories and photographs (and the photographs may be no more than another way of representing those same stories). In the sense of a strict nominative reference the proper name is always composed of dead letters because the life to which it refers has always been exhausted. There is the possibility that the subject is still alive but, as Carr states in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, that would be in "bad taste."

go beyond the simplicity of Carr's chosen appellation by ascribing to it an origin: "She didn't say so, but I imagine she took the "M" from her old childhood nickname of 'Millie.'" This historiographic maneuver attempts to place Emily's "M" within an archival continuity. If an historian can know an object's origin, then they have included it within a scientific discourse. But the "M" which separates, which creates difference, which has been chosen by Emily Carr as an epithet, cannot originate from "her old childhood nickname of 'Millie'" since she did not choose that name. The "M" which travels through her epithets, which shifts through her signatures, is a personal mark engendering Carr's identity. Unlike the sterile "Miss", Emily Carr's various signatures will survive into the future; they will continue to represent her, to mark her place, graphically, in the historical scene. But they will represent her as difference and not as a result of an origin in childhood./7/

Returning to our discussion of Hembroff-Schleicher's titles we can see that they are merely another way of attempting to capture, through representation, an identifiable portion of Carr's person: her artistic property. While both Carol Pearson and Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher admit that much of their knowledge of

7 By using the phrase "the historical scene" rather than simply saying "history," I mean to imply the play of history. That is, both the representation--through specific dramas--of certain historical events, and the ambivalence of historical discourse. As drama needs the space of its stage, so does history--specifically its graphic face--need a scene for its discourses to articulate themselves. Pushing this formulation a little further I will point out that it is the space which allows the play (the movement, the motion) in any mechanism.

Carr is personal, their discourses reveal an essential belief in their own veracity, their ability to speak truthfully to the limits of their knowledge. Ironically, Hembroff-Schleicher's titles display their own inadequacy since we know they cannot be Emily Carr's signature. This irony is largely visual; it contrasts the surface of the [biographical] text with the surface of the painter's canvas to demonstrate the former's inadequacy. Emily Carr's own M, the letter that differs from the "nickname" she had been given--the grapheme that doesn't stand for anything and is therefore difference itself--metaphorizes the signature on the canvas (the signature which cannot be duplicated away from the canvas--in other words, the signature which must be signed rather than printed).

Of course the notion that biography--or writing itself--is always inadequate to the task of representing "real life" is certainly not new. Yet there lingers a belief that there is a truth in writing, that writing sometimes captures a true image of its subject. As we have seen from Carol Pearson's title, veracity is often inferred if an utterance claims to know the limits of its knowledge (if it speaks its own [proper] limit).<sup>8</sup> We can see how this notion is given credence if we examine the historical scene; the place where the corpus of history is articulated. George Woodcock implies this scene in his review of Doris Shad-

<sup>8</sup> "Philosophy has always insisted upon this: thinking its other. Its other: that which limits it, and from which it derives its essence, its definition, its production" (Derrida *Margins* x)

bolt's *The Art of Emily Carr* and Maria Tippett's *Emily Carr, A Biography*. Towards the end of his article he writes:

. . . it is fortunate that the other book to appear at the same time as Doris Shadbolt's *The Art of Emily Carr* should be a serious work that in many ways complements it. This is Maria Tippett's *Emily Carr, A Biography*. Tippett does not generate the extraordinary empathy for Emily Carr as painter that infuses the Shadbolt book, nor does she write so supplely . . . . But as a Life her book is formidably researched, dense in detail, and provided with an abundance of interesting documentary illustrations, so that whatever comparisons of quality one may make between the two books, they do in a sense support each other. After them there will be no need for another book on Emily Carr for a long time to come. ("Carr: More Than Meets the Eye" p. 108)

Woodcock compliments Tippett by showing how she excels in all the standard nuances of biographical writing: formidably researched (the archivist as detective); dense in detail (implying the mass and space--the physics--of history); abundant documentary illustrations (the archival representation of history). He concludes by stating that the books' complementarities overcome any contrasts or stylistic deficiencies ("comparisons of quality"): "they do in a sense support each other."

And where does this support lead? In what do they support each other? The simple answer is: the project of biography, the writing of lives. The statement "as a Life her book is formidably researched" demonstrates how Woodcock is reading the books as metaphors for Carr's life. The writing of a life is being interpreted metaphorically as a life./9/ Tippett does not write "sup-

9 "Writing in the metaphoric sense, natural, divine, and living writing, is venerated; it is equal in dignity to the origin of value, to the voice of conscience as divine law, to the heart, to sentiment, and so forth." Jacques Derrida, "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing" in *Of Grammatology* p. 17. In biographical writing it must be the individual's life which is seen as the "origin of value."

plely." Her work differs in "quality" from Shadbolt's, her writing does not contain Shadbolt's "extraordinary empathy for Emily Carr as painter," and yet, as a *Life*, it is complementary (it supports its painterly "other").

Woodcock's final statement uses the books' complementarity to invoke a closure over the whole project. By stating that "there will be no need for another book on Emily Carr for a long time to come" he infers that Emily Carr's historical scene has been adequately represented. The books support each other in their completion of Emily Carr's life. Shadbolt's and Tippett's books are complementary because each addresses a different aspect of Emily Carr. Shadbolt writes about the painter and Tippett about the person. This arrangement may remind us of Hembroff-Schleicher's complementary binding of the archival/historical discourse and the "untold" discourse. In biographic writing all complementarities seek to support the notion of a unified subject: biography aims to complete the writing of a life.

Paula Blanchard, in the introduction to her *The Life of Emily Carr*, places the previous biographical efforts in a context which leaves a space for her own book:

Recently two Canadian writers, Doris Shadbolt and Maria Tippett, have contributed to a new understanding of Carr's life and work, one as an art historian and the other as a biographer. We also have two personal records written by a friend, Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher, who added to her own memories a definitive history of Carr's exhibiting career. But there remains room for a biography that focuses primarily on the inner conflicts of a woman painter of Emily Carr's time and place and tries to answer once more the nagging,



familiar question of why one woman transcended them and others did not. This book is one attempt to fill that space. (*The Life of Emily Carr* pp. 9-10)

Blanchard's quotation re-phrases many of the issues we have been discussing; indeed, it seems like a direct reply to Woodcock's assertion that "there will be no need for another book on Emily Carr for a long time to come." Blanchard must, in the face of the existent biographical corpus, demonstrate some reason why her book should exist at all. And she is careful to avoid the polemic of declaring a need for another book since Woodcock has stated there is no need. Instead, she sidesteps his assertion by simply declaring that there "remains room" for her biography. But where is this "room"? Where is the "space" that her book attempts to fill? In psychoanalytic terms, a space creates a lack, a gap, an inadequacy in the system in which it occurs, yet we are told that there is no inadequacy in the present state of Emily Carr biographies. We have already encountered the space of the historical-biographical scene and at this point a more detailed explication is appropriate. In order to discuss this scene adequately we should work through a specific formulation of representation.

In the prefatory notes to his translation of Lacan's *Ecrits* Alan Sheridan discusses desire:

The human individual sets out with a particular organism, with certain biological needs, which are satisfied by certain objects. What effect does the acquisition of language have on these needs? All speech is demand; it presupposes the Other to whom it is addressed, whose very signifiers it takes over in its formulation. . . . that which comes from the Other is treated not . . . as a particular satisfaction of a need, but rather as a response to an appeal, a gift, a token of love. There is no adequation between the need

and the demand that conveys it; indeed, it is the gap between them that constitutes desire . . . . (viii)

For Lacan the basis of the subject's desire occurs before language at the mirror stage:

We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification . . . namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image. . . . This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage . . . would seem to exhibit . . . the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.

This form would have to be called the Ideal-I . . . . But the important point is that this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the coming-into-being (*le devinir*) of the subject asymptotically, whatever the success of the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve as *I* his discordance with his own reality. (*Ecrits* p. 2)

Before language (i.e. "social determination"), then, there is a "primordial form," a "precipitation" which ensures that all subsequent projections, manifestations, representations of the subject's reality will be projected in a fictional direction, will "remain irreducible for the individual alone." This formulation of "the agency of the ego", contains a myriad of consequences for the representation of the self. We can see, however, that Woodcock's statement about there being no need for more biographies is apparently based on the fallacy that Shadbolt and Tippett's works have satisfied, in some way, a previous need. And if we can learn anything from Lacan, it is that language is never capable of satisfying, of adequately representing, of completing the subject.

And so Blanchard accepts Woodcock's premise and maneuvers around the issue of need; rather than saying "there is a need for"

another biography, she says "there is room for" one. But we still have not determined where this room is. To do that we should look at the manner in which Lacan describes the subject's coming-into-being: asymptotically. An "asymptote" is "a line which approaches nearer and nearer to a given curve but does not meet it within a finite distance." And so, the coming-into-being of the subject (Emily Carr), is never achievable; that representation is asymptotic explains the "irreducibility" of the "individual alone." Thus, the self can never really "know" itself, can never fully explain itself since this process is always mediated by language itself. This irreducibility is a formulation of the basic incompatibility between the biological organism and the graphic system of representation I described in the introduction. For Lacan, the biological organism functions in the order of the "Real,"<sup>10</sup> while it is represented in the order of the Imaginary (it is here where the specular identification of the mirror stage occurs). It is within language, then, that the subject asymptotically approaches the Imaginary's illusion of a total identification. The gap is created by the Real and ensures that there will always be room left for another biography, another attempt at representation or merely another anecdote. In a sense, Woodcock is correct to say that there is no need for another biography since need need not be that specific. In other words, the desire to

<sup>10</sup> The Real is that which is always absent, always already before us (i.e. "given") and therefore unknowable. It is not to be confused with "reality" which is articulated in the register of the symbolic (i.e. language) and is, if not perfectly knowable, at least accessible.

represent Emily Carr (a desire shared by the biographers and the readers), is merely a specific articulation of language's more general need to signify.

An important consequence of Lacan's model is an illusion of progress which is sustained, not by the "content" of the line approaching the curve/<sup>11</sup>/, but by the finiteness of the system as a whole. Our feeling that we are coming to know Emily Carr is made possible by two circumstances. 1. Knowing that the system of our perception is finite we believe that we know the limit of this finiteness and can therefore come into a certain amount of knowledge; 2. To accomplish this we must place our knowledge that the lines will never meet (that the portrait will never be complete) in a sort of mental reserve. We usually desire to sustain our illusion that we are coming to know the subject./<sup>12</sup>/ For instance, when Blanchard states that "there remains room for a biography that focuses primarily on the inner conflicts of a woman painter of Emily Carr's time and place and tries to answer once more the nagging, familiar question," we can see how she is staking out the ground (and the limit) of her sphere of knowledge (the historical scene upon which she will inscribe Emily Carr).

In an abstract sense Blanchard's "nagging familiar question" stands for all the nagging questions of identity; it stands for our familiarity with the subject in question. It is the

<sup>11</sup> i.e. Biographical discourse approaching the truth of the subject.

<sup>12</sup> Our previous discussion of Pearson's *Emily Carr As I Knew Her* demonstrates this point. Pearson's title states her certainty that she did know Emily Carr.

finiteness of our own vision that gives us hope (and this hope is a function of desire). We can see how there is (and always will be) room for another vision of Emily Carr. This "room", then, (the space in which biography resides), is the gap between the fictional *coming-into-being*, and the "Ideal I." The force behind biography is our desire to close that gap; to know Emily Carr as we are writing her (Barthes' "writerly" text: to know her is to write her).

In Lacanian terms the "Ideal I" is constructed by the subject; it is an a priori agency of subjectivity and may seem more applicable to autobiography than biography. Yet biography is, in its most scientific configurations, attempting to write the ideal life of the subject. Both biography and autobiography attempt to represent idealizations: biography does so from the position of the Other, while autobiography does so through the language of the Other. While they come from different positions they are both motivated by their desire to unify the subject, to explain the individual.

And so Blanchard continues:

This book is one attempt to fill that space. It also brings the perspective of a foreigner, who assumes no more previous acquaintance with Emily Carr than the author herself had in the beginning. (*The Life of Emily Carr* p. 10)

Some degree of perspective is unavoidable since the representative structure is necessarily distanced from the object it seeks to articulate, but Paula Blanchard willfully chooses "the perspective of a foreigner" in an attempt to re-write a fresh or a new Emily Carr. Blanchard is really re-writing herself: the perspective the

book chooses is the perspective of the author prior to the writing of the book. The book is itself a process of the *coming-into-being* of its author. And Blanchard's writing represents the author as a fractured subject, as deliberately writing herself into a position she occupied before the book was started.

Returning to Hembroff-Schleicher's graphic attempts to represent Carr's painterly image within her titles we can see how emphatically they signify her own desire to represent Emily Carr. In fact, opposite the title page is a photograph with a caption that reads, "The author with one of several portraits she painted of Emily Carr."/13/ The photograph of Emily's portrait facing Emily's signature embedded in the title creates a circularity of address (these two reproduced aspects of her identity address each other). But both are really aspects of Hembroff-Schleicher's subjectivity: her hand has, in effect, signed the portrait and the title with the same biographic stroke.

The many biographical portraits of Emily Carr help us achieve a perspective on her own writings since she was, in effect, writing herself long before any of the biographers. We can now turn from the words of others to see how she articulates herself in her own words. In her autobiography *Growing Pains* she states:

13 Dorothy Livesay, in her article "Carr and Livesay," adds a further complication to this representational matrix. Referring to this portrait Livesay states, "But actually that is only a copy of a famous photograph of Emily, taken by Mortimer Lamb!" This is truly ironic given the determination with which Hembroff-Schleicher has defended Carr's non-use of photographs in the "Emily Exonerated" chapter.

. . . I sat before the woods and stared, lost, frustrated. I had let myself be bound. It was not handling of paint but handling of thoughts which overwhelmed me. Trying to get around this problem, I took always in my sketch-sack a little note book. When I had discovered my subject, I sat before it for some while before I touched a brush, feeling my way into it, asking myself these questions, "What attracted you to this particular subject? Why do you want to paint it? What is its core, the thing you are trying to express?"

Clearly, and in as few words as possible, I had answered these questions from myself to myself, wording them in my little note book, presenting essentials only, discarding everything of minor importance. I had found this method very helpful. This saying in words as well as in colour and form gave me double approach. I knew nothing about the rules of writing. (*Growing Pains* pp. 264-65)

We will see how much of Emily Carr's writing was an attempt to come to an understanding of her self in relation to "others" (the environment, her family, society etc.). Although Carr usually maintained her distance from much of society (including her own family), her fiction often presents us with an intricate examination of those relationships. We can see from this quotation that the "handling of paint" cannot produce the same sort of knowledge as the "handling of thoughts" and so writing is used as a medium for the working-through of [self] knowledge. Although she is ostensibly attempting to come to terms with the woods, her writing about them is always necessarily in terms of herself. The questions she asks--concerning attraction, desire and expression--are really questions about capturing (i.e. possessing) the objects through her art. Her statement that she "sat before the woods and stared, lost, frustrated" demonstrates a loss of the self in the face of the Other. That is, her position or relationship towards the Other is unclear and the only way to clarify it is to control it, to work through it with her hands: both with writing and

painting (and, most importantly, realizing that writing comes before painting).

Perhaps most intriguing is her statement, "I had answered these questions from myself to myself." Her control over the environment is achieved hermeneutically in an entirely self-reflexive manner. Carr's question is a demand from the self, to the self, a demand to yield forth the truth of one's desire ("What is its core, the thing you are trying to express?").<sup>14</sup> In a sense, all of Carr's autobiographical fictions can be read as questions from herself to herself. Before the biographers, then, Emily Carr was engaged in a long term project of writing which had many of biography's goals: the writing of a life.

We can now enunciate some of the issues that will infuse our ensuing discussion. Many statements about writing betray how we frequently think of language as a living, breathing organism even though we would admit that it is not--literally--true (e.g. writing has "taken on a life of its own," or characters "came alive on the page"). As I have stated above, the writing of a life is often seen, metaphorically, as a life. In *Of Grammatology* Jacques Derrida discusses phonocentrism, essentially the notion that "the writing of truth [is] in the soul, opposed by *Phaedrus* (278a) to

14 In his book *The Tain of the Mirror*, Rodolphe Gasché explains the Cartesian basis for achieving knowledge from self-reflexivity. "Through self-reflection, the self--the ego, the subject--is put on its own feet, set free from all unmediated relation to being. In giving priority to the human being's determination as a thinking being, self-reflection marks the human being's rise to the rank of a subject." (13-14) Of course the central irony is that the self's "relation to being" is mediated through (in fact, predicated upon) language. The self comes to know itself only through the medium of the Other.



bad writing (writing in the "literal" [propre] and ordinary sense, "sensible" writing, "in space")" (15). Derrida states that, conversely, there is "the book of Nature and God's writing . . . all that functions as metaphor in these discourses confirms the privilege of the logos and founds the literal meaning then given to writing: a sign signifying a signifier itself signifying an eternal verity, eternally thought and spoken in the proximity of a present logos" (15). In its context this is a philosophical discussion of the founding truths of western metaphysics. However, for our purposes, the most interesting consequence of Derrida's critique is his analysis of the construction of presence ("the proximity of a present logos") in the "literal" word. Presence is brought into literal writing by way of the metaphor and "there remains to be written a history of the metaphor, a metaphor that contrasts divine or natural writing and the human or the laborious." Art has always tried to partake of metaphor's divinity through its appeal to muses, truth etc. But in our study of the writing of lives it becomes clear that the metaphoric nature of language, that which formulates "presence" in the word, weaves itself in and around the [auto]biographical discourse[s].

The exteriority of the signifier is the exteriority of writing in general and . . . there is no linguistic sign before writing. Without that exteriority, the very idea of the sign falls into decay . . . the signified has at any rate an immediate relationship with the logos in general (finite or infinite), and a mediated one with the signifier, that is to say with the exteriority of writing. When it seems to go otherwise, it is because a metaphoric mediation has insinuated itself into the relationship and has simulated immediacy . . . The paradox to which attention must be paid is this: natural and universal writing, intelligible and nontemporal writing, is thus named by metaphor. (*Of Grammatology* p. 14-15)

The notion that "the signified" has "an immediate relationship with the logos in general" refers to "logocentrism." It reappears in biography as an expectation that the "truth" of the subject will be revealed by the presence within the word. As we have seen with Emily Carr's interrogation of herself, this process is not so straightforward. The belief in presence, in a natural and universal writing yielding forth the subject in question, will be examined in more detail in the following chapters.

We have seen how biographers must all find or make their own space in which to delineate the historical scene of the subject. This scene is a drama between the dead person and the living, venerated words which attempt their own form of resurrection. Perhaps biography is partially a form of elegy, an attempt to compensate for the loss of a life. Yet biographies go beyond this by taking on a life of their own, by developing their own goals, their own strategies on the way to their writing of lives.

## Chapter Two

### The Autobiographical Other

"Personally I think it very bad taste to publish an  
autobiog till you're dead."  
(Emily Carr)

". . . becoming conscious and leaving behind a memory  
trace are processes incompatible with each other within  
one and the same systems."  
(Sigmund Freud)

Emily Carr's fiction is largely autobiographical. Although obvious, this statement has to be made if only to provide context for a more profound examination. While Carr's book *Growing Pains: An Autobiography* deliberately calls itself an autobiography many of her other books which describe portions of her life adopt strategies to disguise or erase that premise. Regardless of whether or not each narrative claims to be autobiographical, we find that when we take Emily Carr's fiction as a discursive totality it tends to avoid repetition of any periods or events in her life. Given that our access to Carr's "life" is purely textual the whole concept of avoidance is rather tenuous; nevertheless, we can say that the chronology of Carr's lived experience effects its representation in writing. It might be argued that an absence of repetition is not a link at all, yet we will see how absences effect the linearity and discontinuity of the narrative (just as Emily's M "doesn't stand for anything" yet creates her difference from sisters, society etc.).

Let us examine some specific absences and their narrative function. In *Growing Pains* Carr's entire childhood lasts approximately ten pages, the fifteen years Carr spent as a landlady are condensed into three pages/15/, and her experiences with Indians fit into five pages in the chapter "Vancouver." These absent, excluded events form the basis of, respectively, *The Book of Small*, *The House of All Sorts* and *Klee Wyck*. Not only is the repetition of specific events avoided but so too are large portions of her life. A partial explanation for the avoidance of repetition (of the same time periods as much as the same events) is that *Growing Pains* is the "official" autobiography and, as such, it must contain the story of Carr's growth as an artist. Just as each biography takes its own path towards writing the subject so does each of Carr's works form its own portion of the subject. *Growing Pains* mainly concerns itself with the formation of Carr's artistic self; most of the book tells of her early years struggling to perfect her craft largely outside Canada. While each of Carr's works has its ostensible purpose or theme it is always overdetermined by a complex of prior relationships. That is, a piece of writing, by calling itself autobiography, deliberately brings the past into play (the past is necessarily contained in the autobiography's present). In fiction we can say that the story simply is, it exists now. But autobiography, by

15 pp. 230-33 At the end of which she is "discovered" by Eric Brown. We will later discuss how this brevity is itself a discursive strategy which Carr uses to mold her life-as-artist.

being now, always automatically refers to the past./16/ Even when Carr does not refer to herself (as painter, celebrity etc.), does not make herself the subject of the narrative, she is still writing out of herself.

Self-representation was obviously important to Emily Carr and we have mentioned above her preoccupation with writing her own identity. In her article "Carr and Livesay," Dorothy Livesay gives us an indication of Carr's feelings towards her "self" as an item of property:

I was nervous, however, about raising the topic of doing a series of interviews with her, an introductory step towards a biography; but somehow, towards the end of the visit, I managed to ask her the question. She answered, ever so bluntly: "I don't need anyone to do that for me. I am writing it myself!" ("Carr and Livesay" 146)

Since Carr was possessive about her identity it is possible to infer each narrative was a well-crafted representation of some portion of herself. It seems improbable that she would give herself up to the contingencies of mere fiction. However, Carr's own attitude towards autobiography creates an interesting paradox. In a letter to Humphrey Toms she writes about the manuscript that

16 Perhaps the single overt repetition is the period in which Carr was confined to a sanatorium while studying art in England. There are two chapters (eleven pages) devoted to this in *Growing Pains*, and in 1953 *Pause: A Sketch Book* was published. It details Carr's eighteen months in the sanatorium, combining poetry and sketches completed in 1903-4 with stories written in 1938. A biographical explanation for this repetition of material could point to this being a fairly traumatic time for Carr (Blanchard calls it a "breakdown" and names a chapter after it) and the writing and re-writing through of her experience must have had a therapeutic effect. Although some events are repeated this repetition does not detract from my basic argument since I am speaking of an overall tendency in Carr's narrative.

would become *Growing Pains*: "It should be my very best thing to be published. Personally, I think it very bad taste to publish an autobiog till you're dead." (*The Untold Story* p. 296) Since Emily Carr died in March of 1945 and *Growing Pains* come out in 1946 its publishing was not in "bad taste." However, Carr's statement implies that she did not consider her other writing that was published before her death to be autobiographical yet much of it clearly is. Without falling prey to the "intentional fallacy" we can see that there is some confusion over the constitution of autobiography. While it is not the intent of this thesis to determine what is or is not autobiography, I think that part of the confusion lies in the varied perceptions of the subject matter being represented.

Estelle C. Jelinek's introduction to *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* provides some perspective for some of *Growing Pains*'s notable features:

. . . we shall . . . compare the content of women's and men's life studies before contrasting their stylistic differences . . . . The consensus among critics is that a good autobiography not only focuses on its author but also reveals his connectedness to the rest of society; it is representative of his times, a mirror of his era . . . . Women's autobiographies rarely mirror the establishment history of their times. They emphasize to a much lesser extent the public aspects of their lives, the affairs of the world, or even their careers, and concentrate instead on their personal lives-- domestic details, family difficulties, close friends, and especially people who influenced them . . . . Even in the autobiographies by women whose professional work is their claim to fame, we find them omitting their work life, referring obliquely to their careers, of camouflaging them behind the personal aspects of their lives. (Jelinek pp. 7-8)

Indeed, even in *Growing Pains*, the "official" autobiography that ostensibly relates the process of Carr's maturation as an artist,

the majority of the book describes Carr's social and personal relationships with students, teachers and family. While these relationships are certainly essential in defining Carr's identity they somehow fail to present us with what we might expect in the story of a "great artist." Jelinek points out an "autobiographical fallacy of the first order":

This is the stipulation that the autobiographical mode is an introspective and intimate one and that autobiographers write about their inner or emotional life. The emphasis on an ideal of self-revelation that informs the mass of critical efforts to define autobiography derives from an urgency to legitimize autobiography as an aesthetic genre in order to distinguish it from mere historical document. (Jelinek p. 10)

Jelinek's analysis of autobiographical criticism's concern for legitimacy is helpful in determining not only the structure of critical polemics but many commonplace assumptions that have since resulted. But what Jelinek describes as the "ideal of self-revelation" is based on her specific polemical needs in demonstrating a blind spot in the existing critical community. In fact, the whole notion of the "ideal" goes back much further.

As I have explained above (with reference to Gasché's *The Tain of the Mirror*) the idea that true knowledge is attainable through self-reflection has been an underlying concept of modern philosophy since Descartes. The yielding forth of truth from the self is still perceived as a goal since historical (i.e. "scientific") writing assumes it has access to the truth./17/ It

17 As I have mentioned above, Derrida articulates the structure of this belief when he says, "the signified has at any rate an immediate relationship with the logos in general (finite or infinite), and a mediated one with the signifier, that is to say with the exteriority of writing." In other words, the only thing in the way of the truth is the "exteriority of writing." And yet, there is writing--or should I say, there persists a belief in a

would be misleading to state, for example, that fictional and historical discourses intermingle in autobiographical writing so that one is seldom sure what is true and what is imagined. This posits a dichotomy with competing formulations of desire (do we desire a "good story" or the "truth of the matter"?). The dichotomy separates the terms dialectically, positioning them in a struggle which can only result in a singular triumph--for truth or for imagination. But as we have seen in Hembroff-Schleicher's "historical" work, fiction (parody, satire, genrefication) can be responsible for the rhetorical power behind the revelation of truth. And we might well ask that if fictive discourse shares in the responsibility for truth then does it not also share in the revelation?

On the other hand, Jelinek is too quick to dismiss archival discourse as "mere historical document" since history, through its scientific veracity, seeks to reveal the truth in much the same way as does philosophy. History relies on the externality of the signifier (names, dates, Hembroff-Schleicher's "mounds of material"...) to try and determine the general truths of a specific existence./18/ Fiction, history, truth, reveal themselves in each other: they partake of and from each other dialogi-

writing-- which "is venerated; it is equal in dignity to the origin of value." This is "writing in the metaphoric sense, natural, divine, and living writing."

18 For instance, the title "Emily Exonerated" contains religious connotations that extend history into the realm of the other-worldly. Hembroff-Schleicher is being only partially ironic.



cally. Each needs the other (there "remains room for" each within the other).

Perhaps what Emily Carr means by "bad taste" is the competition over truth between the grapheme and the living organism. The grapheme, as a part of the Symbolic order, is always the Other and after it is published it becomes solidified in its exteriority. Before publication the grapheme exists only as a part of Carr's private demand for identity (from herself to herself). The books that Carr published in her lifetime reveal carefully chosen elements of her persona; nothing is given away. *Growing Pains* is different in that by calling itself autobiographical it displays itself as a revelation of the self. Publication and publicity force identity to the farthest point of its exteriority and for any Carr this would be in bad taste.

The first two chapters of *Growing Pains* demonstrate how Emily demarcates herself from her family through opposition. The first chapter ("Baptism") portrays the formal, religious, *naming* of Emily. Knowing something about Carr's own sense of self we can read the chapter ironically. The first sentence of the book sets the tone for Carr's relationship with her family by stating, "My Baptism is an unpleasant memory." One of *Growing Pains'* fundamental themes is the overcoming of the given identity of family and religion, and the creation of Carr's own individuality as an art-

ist./19/ However, there is an essentially dialogic tension since here, as in much of Carr's writing, it remains impossible for her to achieve identity except in relation to her family.

From the beginning, writes Carr in her myth about herself, she was rebellious:

Mother came into the room with water in her best china bowl. While she lighted the lamp my big sister caught me, dragged me to the kitchen pump and scrubbed my face to smarting. I was then given to Dr. Reid who presented me kicking furiously to God. (*Growing Pains* p. 3)

Carr is rebelling against family and religion who would scrub her pure (and, as we learn throughout *Growing Pains* and *The Book of Small*, purity was not her natural state):

I would have been quite content to sit on Dr. Reid's knee, but his tipping me flat like a baby infuriated me. I tried to bolt. Dr. Reid hung on to a curl and a button long enough to splash water on my hair ribbon and tell God I was Emily; then the button burst off and I wrenched the curl from his hand and ran to mother. Dr. Reid and Mother exchanged button for baby. Dick gurgled sweetly when the water splashed on him. (*Growing Pains* p. 3)

The paragraph begins and ends calmly but in the middle is rebellion. The violence of the episode--indicated by words such as "wrenched," "bolt," and "burst"--is contained within the paragraph by Carr's common-sensical assertion that she "would have been quite content" and the happy ending: "Dick gurgled sweetly." "Would" implies the possibility of acquiescence given the proper

19 Indeed, "Baptism" parallels "Sunday," the first chapter of *The Book of Small*. The identity of the family is solidified by the first sentence's assertion that, "All our Sundays were exactly alike." The rest of the chapter describes the rituals of food and religion that determine the relationships within the family unit. For instance, the patriarchal voice begins the day: "At seven o'clock Father stood beside our bed and said, 'Rise up! Rise up! It's Sunday children.'"

conditions: that Carr be treated like a young lady rather than as a baby. For Dick the conditions are proper and so he gurgles sweetly.

Although it seems as if Carr has been baptized we read that the water is splashed solely on her hair ribbon. Dr. Reid is able to restrain her only by hanging onto a curl and a button and then the button bursts and she wrenches away the curl. Dr. Reid's baptizing of Emily's curl differs with Dick's baptism since it is stated quite clearly that "the water splashed on him." (emphasis mine) The exacting description reveals how Carr's clothes--a symbol of social order--are used to restrain her./20/ Although her clothes symbolize her restraint Carr is able to shed them and run to her mother. The clothes mediate between the social and the personal; it is against them the violence is directed. The ritualistic exchange of "button for baby" results in a dual transference: Dr. Reid gives up an exteriority--an object which has deferred the acquisition of a spirit--in the hope of receiving another soul. As for the mother, I will risk fictionalizing and undue sentimentality by suggesting she accepts the button in the hope that she will, one day, be able to sew it back on and thus restore Emily's social position. Ironically, the hair ribbon, the button, and the curl--all items which Carr has rejected--would

20 Again, there is a parallel with this story and "Sunday" where clothes are used as a symbol of familial identity. "Lizzie, Alice and I were always dressed exactly alike . . . . Father thought we looked like orphans if we were clothed differently." (*The Book of Small* p. 4) Here, the clothes represent the will of the father while in "Baptism" the will of the father is mixed with that of Dr. Reid who represents the holy father.

allow her to at least look the part of the "young lady" Dr. Reid would not let her be.

The story of the baptism contains two parts: the immediate event where the physical body is introduced to the water, and the subsequent naming, where the baptized identity is solidified in language:/21/

Father sat at the table with the fat family Bible open at the page on which the names of his seven other children were written. He added ours, Richard and Emily, which as well as being ours were his own and Mother's. The covers of the Bible banged, shutting us all in. The Bible says that I was born on the thirteenth day of December, 1871. (Growing Pains p. 3)

In this paragraph the Bible confines Emily violently by banging shut on her (again, the violence is contained in the medium of mediation). Language's authority and right to demarcate identity through the proper name is not directly questioned: Carr's passivity here is in strong contrast to the previous section. It is impossible to wrench free from language (after all, the story is in her own words) and Carr's point of view is subdued. Yet there is a slight refusal to comply: by writing the last sentence passively Carr neither confirms nor denies the truth of the Bible's

21 There seems to be a slight parallel between the two moments when Carr's identity is *performed* and *named* and the two accounts of creation in the Bible. Genesis 1.1--2.4 details God's physical creation of the world: "Order evolves from chaos by divine command, followed by God's resting, in example, on the Sabbath" (New English Bible 1) Genesis 2.5--3.24 is a second account which demonstrates man's first use of language as a form of mastery over the creatures he names. "This account is generally regarded as more ancient than 1.1--2.4. Man does not accept the limits placed on his existence and disrupts God's intended harmony" (New English Bible 2) Even "in the beginning," then, identity is formed from a complex and disruptive set of relationships.

statement; it just is. This strategy allows Carr to live her own life in spite of her ascribed life./22/

Ironically, then, although the first chapter is titled "Baptism" (meaning "to give a name to, name, denominate") we are unsure whether Emily Carr has really been baptized. Emily Carr's own position in relation to her identity remains ironic and unspoken. The passages in which Carr is named read: "Dr. Reid . . . [told] God I was Emily" and "The Bible says that I was born on the thirteenth day of December, 1871." Beside these documented facts Carr herself is silent. In fact, the doctor seems appropriately named: as if by rote Dr. Reid reads out Emily's date of birth and later Father will write it. The pun on Reid and reading reinforces the notion that the whole baptism is superficial--a lot of sound and fury without content.

Richard and Emily's inscription into the Bible enters them into a chain of familial signification extending beyond the here and now (some of Richard Carr's "seven other children" are already dead yet their "presence" will always be named)./23/ Richard and

22 We will return to this theme below in our discussion of how the Indians in Klee Wyck name their dead. In both examples language is not overcome, it is sidestepped; complicity is reserved. That is, Carr does not speak out against the Bible, she merely exists, as her own self, alongside it. In Hegelian terms we might say that instead of a sublation (Aufhebung) there is a Versöhnung: a perspective which gains you a vantage point where the contradictions do not matter.

23 "In the middle of the Bible, between the "old" and the "new," were some blank pages, and all of us were written there. Sometimes father let us look at ourselves and at William, John and Thomas who were each written there twice, once for being born, and once for dying. That was the only time that John, Thomas and William seemed to be real and take part in the family's doings." (12)

Emily's names repeating the names of their mother and father is a manner in which families ensure that their collective identity will be engendered into the future. There will always be a sense in which Emily Carr is defined by her mother since her proper name is a reflection of her mother's. Identity within the family is based upon a series of correspondences which can be engendered into future generations. Again, we have a biological identity and a written identity traveling beside one another. We have seen above how Emily introduced a mark (the M) to insert difference between herself and her sisters. In chapter two of *Growing Pains* ("Mother") Carr shows how her mother achieves her own identity within her father's:

To show Mother I must picture Father, because Mother was Father's reflection--smooth, liquid reflecting of definite, steel-cold reality . . . . But somehow Mother's reflecting was stronger than Father's reality, for, after her death, it lived on in our memories and strengthened, while Father's tyrannical reality shrivelled up and was submerged under our own development. (*Growing Pains* p. 4)

We have already discussed a formulation of identity based on difference but here we have what appears to be identity based on a similarity achieved through "reflection." Yet how can a reflection be stronger than a "reality"? And how can difference arise out of similarity? It is important to note the progression of thought here: *before Carr can show her mother she must picture her father.* The father, then, is the first of the family: the primogenitor. And yet, in order for there to be a first there must also exist a second, a supplement which--through its supplementarity--allows the first to be first. In other words,

that which is first can only be itself through its association with something other than itself. In a social sense, the patriarchal marriage--the union of two people--is what allows the father to be the first of the family. By agreeing to take his name the mother places herself behind him (she places her own identity under a form of erasure). However, the second, by aiding the first in achieving its identity, at the same time exposes a defect, a weakness. The first is seen to rely upon--to be obligated to--the second for its meaning.

Biologically speaking, the father, the primogenitor, ensures his identity through procreation; the various "reflections" (or "engenderings") of his image represent him in the future. Carr's statement that "somehow Mother's reflecting was stronger than Father's reality" exposes the basis (the "secondariness") upon which the image of the father and the patriarchy depend. The father depends on the mother to bear the children even though they will gradually efface her identity by bearing his name. Emily's father's dependency is further exposed when the mother dies and memory turns his "definite, steel-cold reality" into a "tyrannical reality" which shrivels up. Naturally, this picture of Richard Carr is his daughter's biased account (an account about which Emily's sister Alice was very angry ["Carr and Livesay" 146]) but since he left no male heir to continue his name,<sup>24</sup> the only familial image left is within his daughter's word. And so the

<sup>24</sup> Emily's brother Dick died of tuberculosis on September 5, 1899.

Carr's identity is engendered by the grapheme and not by the biological organism.

There is another paradox to this formulation that must be recalled. Initially, Carr was "showing" us her mother and in order to do that she needed to "picture" her father. Mother and father, then, are dependent on each other for identity; they can only come into themselves through the medium of each other. /25/ What we might assume to be a similarity is, in fact, a form of reciprocity. The mechanism of this reciprocity contains at its centre a difference created by a lack which needs the other as compensation.

The beginning of *Growing Pains* sets out Carr's contrariness in the face of family and religion. Then, by describing the warmth of her mother, she paints a strict and severe picture of her father. As the story of an artist's formative years we could interpret these events as symbolizing the social conditions that inspired Emily Carr to break out on her own path. And yet, recalling Jelinek's comments, it might be argued that Carr, like many women autobiographers before and after her, has written about the domestic details of her life rather than the public aspects of her life in the world. At least on a surface level much of *Growing Pains* is unarguably domestic. Whatever thematic or polemical use to which we put the opening chapters of *Growing Pains* we must

25 "The Other is the locus in which is situated the chain of the signifier that governs whatever may be made present of the subject--it is the field of that living being in which the subject has to appear." (Lacan "The Subject and the Other: Alienation." *Four Concepts* 203)



bear in mind that behind it always lies the notion of autobiography as an "ideal of self-revelation." But in the text we have examined, Emily Carr's "self" remains hidden. In "Baptism" it is hidden behind the actions, words and writings of Dr. Reid and Father: two men who attempt to tell Emily who she is.

As I have stated above, much of the subject matter of "Mother" is, in fact, Father. The figure of Mother provides perspective when Emily comes to think for herself and refuses the hand of her father:

I held his hand during the walk to and from church. This all seemed to me fine until I began to think for myself--then I saw that I was being used as soother for Father's tantrums; like a bone to a dog, I was being flung to quiet Father's temper . . . .

"Mother," I begged, "need I be sent to town any more to walk home with Father?"

Mother looked at me hard. "Child," she cried, "what ails you? You have always loved to be with your father. He adores you. What is the matter?"

"He is cross, he thinks he is as important as God."  
(*Growing Pains* p. 7)

Carr consistently represents her father as existing alongside the word of God. In "Baptism" only he is allowed to write in the Bible and in "Mother" Carr writes that her mother "had brought her family up under the English tradition that the men of a woman's family were created to be worshiped." "Mother" is the story of Emily's refusal to be constrained by her father's "steel reality."/26/ One of the most significant phrases is Carr's remark that "Father's tyrannical reality shrivelled up and was submerged under our own development." Essentially, Carr is saying

26 Allegorically, Emily refuses the hand that her mother, in marriage, accepted.

that as she and her sisters developed their own personalities, came into the world as themselves, the older "patriarchal" reality was overcome. Carr is referring to an organic development yet it only comes into being as a purveyor of identity through her own writing.

Generally speaking, *Growing Pains* does not present us with the sort of thematized formation of the public self we might expect from male autobiography; to borrow Jelinek's phrase, it consistently fails to mirror the "establishment history" of her times. We might reasonably expect that the portions of *Growing Pains* dealing with the periods Carr spent studying abroad might inform us about her artistic formation. In fact, more than anything else, these sections document her increasing frustration. Specifically, *Growing Pains* focuses on Emily Carr's the social interactions with her fellow students, her relationships with her lodgers, and the social obligations placed on Emily by her family even *in absentia*.

An example of how *Growing Pains* often fails to deliver forth Carr's artistic self is the chapter "Difference Between Nude and Naked." This is as close as Carr comes to discussing aesthetics (a topic about which one might expect most students of Art to be at least partially interested). Yet the subject of this chapter is more Emily's and her fellow student Adda's prudery than it is Art. The chapter begins:

Adda was of Puritan stock. I was Early Victorian. We were a couple of prim prudes by education . . . . The modesty of our families was so great it almost amounted to wearing a bathing suit when you took a bath in a dark room. Their idea of beauty was the clothes that

draped you, not the live body underneath. (*Growing Pains* 29)/27/

Mid-way through the chapter Emily engages in conversation with a "woman of mature years and of great ability" who introduces her to aesthetics, "Child, you've got things wrong, surface vision is not Art. Beauty lies deep, deep; it has power to absorb, make you part of itself" (30). However, although Emily comes to accept the woman's aesthetic point of view the resolution of the chapter is profoundly moral: "Her talk showed me the difference between the words nude and naked. So convinced was I of the rightness of nude and the wrongness of naked in Art that I said nothing to Adda." (31) The "difference," then, is not artistic but absolutely moral: one is right, the other wrong. It may also be argued that Emily's new knowledge is confined to the surface level of language since she only articulates the difference between the words nude and naked. Furthermore, nothing comes out of this knowledge since Carr decides to say "nothing" to Adda, preferring instead to keep the difference to herself.

Most of *Growing Pains* details Carr's earlier, struggling years; of its 281 pages only the last fifty address her eventual discovery and success. This pronounced division will help us to develop further insight into the notion of autobiography and how it functions as a guiding force within Emily Carr's overall discursive corpus.

27 This [puritan] notion of beauty makes aesthetic what I referred to above as the social order of clothes.

Ruth Gowers, in her book *Emily Carr*, provides a good summary of Carr's story of her later life:

According to Emily's autobiography, the story of the fifteen years after her return from France is very simply told. She came home to find that her new work was reviled and ridiculed. She could neither find pupils nor sell her paintings so she had to search for other means of earning a livelihood--she states categorically that for fifteen years she did no painting at all. She made her living by letting apartments, making pottery and breeding sheepdogs. At the end of this time she suddenly received a telephone call from the director of the National Gallery in Ottawa who wanted to show fifty of her pictures at an exhibition of west coast art. She went to eastern Canada to see the exhibition, and met other painters who inspired her to 'surmount the housekeeping humdrum' and return to her work. This whole period, from her return from France till the West Coast exhibition, which was held in 1927, occupies no more than half a dozen pages of *Growing Pains*. It is as neatly written as a fairy tale, with a suitable fairy-tale ending, but naturally the real course of events in these years was much more complex. (48)

Gowers states that it is natural for reality to be "much more complex" than Carr's representation of it so that any narrative, be it fairy tale or documentary, is always already naturally overdetermined.<sup>28/</sup> Adopting psychoanalytic terminology, we can say that the agencies of overdetermination are condensation and displacement. These terms can be used to explain, narratologically, what we above called an absence of repetition. If an event--like rejection--has occurred many times but is only represented once, then that one event is said to be a condensation of all the

28 By resembling a fairy tale, Carr's narrative emphasizes its own simplicity. Of course this fairy-tale simplicity is not so simple. 1. Carr's narrative of her later years is a simplified account since it eliminates many events. 2. Gower characterizes this simplicity by stating that it resembles a fairy tale. We must be careful to keep in mind whose reading of the text we are discussing, Emily Carr's, Ruth Gower's, Mine or Yours.

others. The events of this fairy tale, then, represent an extreme condensation of a fifteen year span. Taking into account the totality of Emily Carr's corpus we can see that many of the absent events have been displaced into other narratives (for instance, *The House of All Sorts* and parts of *Klee Wyck*).

In tacitly accepting Gowers' premise that reality is complex while Emily Carr's representation of it resembles a fairy tale, we risk believing in a reality. We risk assuming that everyone has the same "natural" conception of reality. Obviously, Lacan's distinction between the "real" and "reality" is specialized and Gowers may not have had it in mind when she wrote her statement about "the real course of events" being complex.<sup>29/</sup> Yet if we are to deal adequately with Emily Carr's writings--some of which may be autobiographical--we must adopt a mechanism for explaining the absence of parts of her life and the presence of others. We need some formulation of textuality that would, for instance, allow us to posit an author without succumbing to an intentional fallacy which states that writing is subservient to the author's existential choice. Lacan states, "if psychoanalysis is to be constituted as the science of the unconscious, one must set out from the notion that the unconscious is structured like a language" (*Four Concepts* p. 203). If we were to assume that all absences from the text were equivalent to Lacan's unconscious--which, since it is structured like a language, operates in the register of the Symbolic--then we would be admitting their reality

29 See fn. 10

and, therefore, their availability, through operations of condensation and displacement, to our analysis. In chapter one, however, I developed a formulation where the gap, between the fictional (constituted by the Symbolic) and the Ideal I (constituted in the Imaginary), was placed in the order of the Real. For Lacan the real is the given before reality and it is therefore unavailable to us. Everything that is missing from a text is also unavailable: we accept the text that is given to us (the givenness of textuality) and work from there./30/ For instance, Emily Carr writes:

I raised some three hundred and fifty Bobtail puppies. A large percentage of the pups went to soldiers. Clay and Bobtails paid my taxes--clay and Bobtails freed me from the torture of Landladying.

"Eric Brown, Canadian National Gallery, speaking... I should like to call upon Miss Emily Carr to see her Indian pictures." (233)

Between these two paragraphs lies a gap, an absence which draws our attention to the disjuncture between "clay and bobtails" and the "Canadian National Gallery." This gap need not even be the history of the fifteen years since everything within the text itself points towards it: the style, the subject matter, even the quotation marks--indicators of reported, secondhand, discourse--accentuate the disjuncture. Emily Carr has even disappeared; it is Eric Brown who announces himself. Certainly the gap is

30 Well of course this is true only to a point. Some of us approach the text from within a set of historical principles. Others will only approach a text when they feel it "affirms" something about the human condition. Perhaps all we can say for certain is that, at some point, the text itself has to be given.

unrecoverable; we can never know what the absent Emily was doing just before the phone rang.

However, at the same time that the absence is unrecoverable we admit that we have been thinking about the gap, thinking through its place between Landladying and Eric Brown. Certainly the force of the telephone call comes from its disjuncture. The phone call is sudden; it interrupts our reading during the reading itself. We may accept the givenness of the text but its discontinuities are something we have to think through ourselves precisely because they are not given; their absence creates a question. I stated above that the force of many historical truths is made through fictional means and in the same way the force of narrative disjuncture is created by an absence. It is impossible to state precisely where the work of this absence ends; if it perhaps lies under the rest of the book (the rest of language?).

Even if we adopt the terms of psychoanalysis the text's unconscious can only be formulated as an always unrecoverable absence. We can only speculate upon what has not been given to us. Condensation and displacement are always aids in this speculation; they help us to determine where the text is open to interpretation. In the case of autobiography the interrogation begins and ends with the author's questioning of the self.

## Chapter Three

## The Fragmented Self

Why call this manuscript *Hundreds and Thousands*? Because it is made up of scraps of nothing which, put together, made the trimming and furnished the sweetness for what might otherwise have been a drab life sucked away without a crunch. Hundreds and Thousands are minute candies made in England--round sweetnessess, all colours and so small that separately they are not worth eating. But to eat them as we ate them in childhood was a different matter. Father would take the big fat bottle off his sample shelf in his office and say, "Hold out your hands." Father tipped and poured, and down bobbed our three hands and out came our three tongues and licked in the Hundreds and Thousands, and lapped them up, lovely and sweet and crunchy.

It was these tiny things that, collectively, taught me how to live. Too insignificant to have been considered individually, but like the Hundreds and Thousands lapped up and sticking to our moist tongues, the little scraps of my life have formed a definite pattern. Only now, when the river has nearly reached the sea and small eddies gush up into the river's mouth and repulse the sluggish onflow, have they made a pattern in the mud flats, before gurgling out into the sea. Thank you, tiny Hundreds and Thousands. Thanks before you merge into the great waters. (v)

In this quotation, the preface to her book *Hundreds and Thousands*, Emily Carr gives her personal definition of the autobiographical process we have been discussing. The individual units of the autobiographer's material are "scraps of nothing" which, only after being combined, achieve meaning by creating a "definite pattern." This vision of the autobiography emphasizes its unifying power, its ability to make sense out of nothing.



Carr's preface does provide an inspired account of the way life is given form through language. As its subtitle states, *Hundreds and Thousands* is compiled from "The Journals of Emily Carr" and is therefore more fragmented than her other writing. Although *Hundreds and Thousands* is itself narratively fragmented the preface incorporates the fragmented "scraps of nothing" into a meaningful structure. By discussing the overall patterning of existence this preface hints at the "self-revelation" Jelinek mentions.

We should, however, examine the place the preface occupies in more detail. As Gayatri Spivak states, "it is clear that, as it is commonly understood, the preface harbors a lie." According to the OED the Latin "Præ-fatio" is "a saying before-hand" yet we know that Emily Carr wrote her preface after she had written many of the entries in her journal.<sup>31/</sup> The preface often summarizes the work it precedes and is necessarily written after the work has been finished. In a sense, it substitutes for the work, before the work. Following Emily Carr's preface is a note from the publisher which states: "From a notebook found among Miss Carr's papers." By stating somewhat passively that it was "found among" Carr's papers this note introduces a casualness to the whole editing enterprise, as if there were other paragraphs equally appropriate in outlining her theory of autobiography. By implying that the preface is one account among other equally valid accounts the note confers an overall unity to *Hundreds and Thousands*. In fact, we know that it was chosen by the publishers for a specific

31 Some of my general argument is taken from Spivak's "Translator's Preface" to *Of Grammatology* p. x.

purpose. This preface is a creation entirely of an editing process which has taken two paragraphs among many others and placed them in front of the others; it has forced them to determine the overall meaning, the definite pattern, of all the others.

The manner in which we read these paragraphs, whether we take them to be a product of authorial intention or a convenient outcome of the editing process, determines much of the first sentences' meaning. From its position in the preface, and as the first sentence of the book, there is no doubt that it is the reader who is being addressed when she asks, "Why call this Manuscript *Hundreds and Thousands*?" However, from its former position, "among Miss Carr's papers," the sentence could be a question from Carr to herself echoing her statement in *Growing Pains* where she describes how she works through painting a picture using words:

"What attracted you to this particular subject? Why do you want to paint it? What is its core, the thing you are trying to express?"

Clearly, and in as few words as possible, I had answered these questions from myself to myself, wording them in my little note book, presenting essentials only, discarding everything of minor importance. (264-65)

From among Miss Carr's papers the sentence functions as a sort of hermeneutic questioning of the self, a working through of the self. The publishers tell us that "From letters found among her papers we know that Emily Carr intended her journals to be published." Naturally, no written communication can be purely private, particularly when you are a public figure like Emily Carr. Yet it is plain that the primary function of the address depends

on the placement of the sentence. The disjunctive process of editing, of cutting text apart and placing it where it serves the convenience of the editor (or publisher), is disguised by the "definite pattern" that results. Autobiographical meaning, then, often obscures its own origins and it is directly out of this obstruction that the continuity of the subject arises./32/

The overall force of autobiography, with its tendency to pattern a life, obscures the essentially fragmentary nature of the majority of Carr's narratives. This is most obvious in *Hundreds and Thousands* where the dates (in Peircian terms, indexes of the passage of the subject through history), provide the continuity lacking in the narrative. In the majority of Carr's writing her chapters are short and often contain only the story of one person or event. These brief sketches frequently leave us desiring more knowledge of the individuals and the circumstances. This is a recurring pattern in Carr's fiction, another form of disjuncture. Regarding discontinuity in autobiography Jelinek writes:

Surveying quite a number of bibliographies from various countries and periods, one is struck by the number of women writing diaries, journals, and notebooks, in contrast to the many more men writing autobiographies proper. From earliest times, these discontinuous forms have been important to women because they are analogous to the fragmented, interrupted, and formless nature of their lives. But they also attest to a continuous female tradition of discontinuity in women's autobiographical writing to the present day. (Jelinek p. 19)

32 This first sentence demonstrates how the construction of the autobiographical self depends on the reader as well as the writer. Carr's "questions from myself to myself" are inevitably questions to the reader.

Women's writing, by its very nature, runs contrary to established genres (even describing it is difficult; while "continuous discontinuity" is a useful definition of women's writing the term is itself oxymoronic). Carr points us to the "definite pattern" of her life but the precise imagery she uses is equivocal: "only now, when the river has nearly reached the sea and small eddies gush up into the river's mouth and repulse the sluggish onflow, have they made a pattern in the mud flats." The mud flats seem a rather precarious and transitory area to inscribe the pattern of one's life, especially one "made up of scraps of nothing." Much of Carr's writing hints at a pervasive nothingness at the core of things: for instance, her M which means everything and nothing, and in "Difference between Nude and Naked" aesthetics comes to nothing since, after gaining the knowledge of difference, Emily says nothing to Adda. Even though autobiography and fiction both make something from "nothing," gaps or absences still remain behind [before, beneath] writing.

An intriguing demonstration of the absence which underlies much of Carr's writing is "The Orange Lily" in *The Book of Small*. Small sees the lily when she visits Henry and Anne Mitchell's nursery garden. We are told they are childless and against this sterility the lily becomes an object of desire which clearly symbolizes sexual desire. Small leans over "to look into the lily's trumpet, [and] stuck out a finger to feel the petals . . . they were cool, slippery and alive." But the centre of this seductive object of desire contains a void:

Lily rolled her petal grandly wide as sentineled doors  
roll back for royalty. The entrance to her trumpet was

guarded by a group of rust-powdered stamens--her powerful perfume pushed past these. What was in the bottom of Lily's trumpet: What was it that the stamens were so carefully guarding? Small pushed the stamens aside and looked. The trumpet was empty--the emptiness of a church after parson and people have gone, when the music is asleep in the organ and the markers dangle from the Bible on the lectern.

Anne Mitchell opened the cottage door.

"Come see my everlasting flowers, Small--my flowers never die."

With a backward look Small said, "What a lovely lily!"

"Well enough but strong-smelling, gaudy. Come see the everlastings." (56-57)

Small finds an emptiness at the centre of the lily and the whole experience ends in a pseudo religious fervor./33/ And yet, faced with this absence, her desire remains. On the other hand, Mrs. Mitchell obviously regards the lily as a mere harlot whose appeal will fade long before that of her "everlastings." The chapter ends with Small still desiring the lily:

In her heart she hugged an Orange Lily. It had burned itself there not with flaming petals, not through the hot, rich smell. Soundless, formless, white--it burned there. (58)

Although it is an Orange Lily it burns a "soundless, formless, white." (emphasis mine) The lily symbolizes an extremely pure form of desire that escapes representation. We have discussed above how desire is created by a lack; in this example the Orange

33 This scene strongly resembles one in James Joyce's "Araby" where the boy, who is also disappointed in trying to capture an object of desire (a friend's sister), enters the hall where he hoped to purchase a gift: "Nearly all the stalls were closed and the greater part of the hall was in darkness. I recognized a silence like that which pervades a church after a service." In both cases the loss is compared to a lack of religious presence, a silent absence which is made more pervasive by its "fallen" state.

lily lacks a form; a central absence which stimulates desire all the more.

Throughout Carr's fiction flowers occupy an important role, often delineating some mechanism of desire. Consistently there is something missing from each floral experience. The chapter "White Currents" from *The Book of Small* presents an almost surrealist dream vision of Small in the garden with the flowers and insects:

When you went in among the mauvy-pink and the butterflies you began to tremble too; you seemed to become a part of it--and then what do you think happened? Somebody else was there too. He was on a white horse and he had brought another white horse for me.

We flew round and round in and out among the mauvy-pink blossoms, on the white horses. I never saw the boy; he was there and I knew his name, but who gave it to him or where he came from I did not know. (54)

Emily's fantasy is broken by "a grown-up voice" that calls, "Come and gather the white currents." The flowers, with their bright colors that attract the butterflies, create a visceral plenitude symbolizing a fulfillment of a pastoral dream wish. But again, in the midst of this virtual Eden, there is an absence, this time it is the boy's name (or, perhaps more importantly, "who gave it to him").

In "The Cow Yard" (also from *The Book of Small*) Carr presents an idealized geography which suits Small better than either of her sisters:

Of the three little girls who played in the Cow Yard, Bigger tired of it soonest. Right through she was a pure, clean child, and had an enormous conscience. The garden rather than the Cow Yard suited her crisp frocks and tidy ways best, and she was a little afraid of the Cow.

Middle was a born mother, and had huge doll families. She liked equally the tidy garden and the free Cow Yard.

Small was wholly a Cow Yard child. (15)

The Cow Yard is the only place on the Carr's property where Small can be free to play as herself and so she identifies with it "wholly." Of course there is tension in the chapter: "Now, the Cow yard was not Heaven, so of course bad things and sad things happened there too" (20). Death is introduced by "The Killing Tree" which is eventually burned; the chapter ends with spring and the figure of regeneration is helped out by Father's buying a horse. But hidden within the idealism of "The Cow Yard" is latent violence:

One of the seven gates of the Cow Yard opened into the Pond Place. The Pond was round and deep, and the primroses and daffodils that grew on its bank leaned so far over to peep at themselves that some of them got drowned. Lilacs and pink and white may filled the air with sweetness in Spring. Birds nested there. (16)

The narcissistic imagery ending in death contrasts with its manner of presentation. The drowning of the primroses and daffodils is quickly compensated for by the lilacs, the "sweetness in Spring" and the birds nesting. And the drowning itself is presented passively, they simply "got drowned." Yet we know that their deaths were caused by their egotism, their infatuation with their own images. Ironically, we are led away from the scene of drowning by the alluring images of the lilacs. Since Emily Carr was a landscape painter flowers seem a natural image for her to use to represent beauty. Recalling Mrs. Mitchell's statement, we can see how flowers also symbolize an opposition of transitory, surface beauty to deeper, "everlasting" beauty. Their connotations of spring and regeneration are played against vanity and surface pulchritude. Whatever their specific symbolism flowers are impli-

cated in a chain of desire which often points towards its own lack.

Carr's duplicitous language, which combines meaning with nothingness, reminds us of Derrida's statement about writing:

Writing in the common sense is the dead letter, it is the carrier of death. It exhausts life. On the other hand . . . writing in the metaphoric sense, natural, divine, and living writing, is venerated; it is equal in dignity to the origin of value, to the voice of conscience as divine law, to the heart, to sentiment, and so forth. (*Of Grammatology* p. 15)

Derrida points out that throughout the history of Western writing there has been "a good and a bad writing: the good and natural is the divine inscription the heart and soul; the perverse and artful is technique, exiled in the exteriority of the body." Derrida's explication of logocentrism can help us understand how the letter (writing's necessary exteriority) always already carries within itself both life and death. In chapters one and two we saw how the myth of a living writing venerated both biographic and autobiographic discourses. Emily Carr's letters (her graphemic envoys of writing) almost always implicate themselves in the autobiographical moment: the moment of self-reflection. In writing's "common sense" Emily Carr is dead; common sense tells us that it is a book and not Emily herself we are reading. Writing's metaphoric sense venerates our own image of Emily Carr to the point where we believe we are travelling with her downriver to the mud flats and her alluvial deposits of meaning./34/

34 Dorothy Livesay hypothesizes Emily Carr's attraction when she writes, "But people, even today, prefer legend to history; and the reason, perhaps, is that legend is symbolic and appeals to the intuitive, irrational side of our being" ("Carr and Livesay" 144).



Emily's M contains within itself life and death; by articulating the self-referential subject it chooses life in spite of its exteriority to the subject (its death). When we read either a biography or autobiography of Emily Carr we express our desire for her. We desire the chain of signification that promises to lead us to her. When Hembroff-Schleicher describes Emily's epithets she mentions only a few: "Emily," "Millie," "Mom," "M.E.," "Emily Carr," "M.E. Carr," and "M. Emily Carr." Two of the most important are missing: Small and Klee Wyck. All these proper names represent the purest condensations of Carr's identity and they take part in various strategies of *coming into being*. In chapter one we discussed biographical strategies and how every biographer chose a particular discursive path on her way to the subject. In chapter two we discussed how Emily Carr is her own biographer and how both her autobiographical and "fictional" writing contains similar discursive strategies. Autobiography attempts to reveal the self, yet in so doing it relies on a fictional means. Autobiography's strategy is always determined by the necessity of fiction.

Emily Carr writes, "Too insignificant to have been considered individually . . . the little scraps of my life have formed a definite pattern." The "definite pattern" is the continuity of lived experience which, paradoxically, can only be rendered through the exteriority of the signifier (an exteriority which only comes alive "in the metaphoric sense"). Certainly there is no doubt that the fifteen years *Growing Pains* condenses into "no more than half a dozen pages" formed a definite pattern

in lived experience, yet its textual presentation is always condensed and displaced so that it is always exterior. The coming-into-being of the subject is always prevented by its own asymptotic being in language./35/

The represented "self" is always fragmented by being in the condition of an exteriority which is always "other." And this fragmentation is necessary since the signifier is the only tool through which the self can come into knowledge. Emily Carr: "I had answered these questions from myself to myself." And concerning the writing of her biography: "I don't need anyone to do that for me. I am writing it myself!" Since this necessary fragmentation occurs in both autobiographical and fictional discourses it may well be impossible to articulate precise differences between them. Yet the belief that there is a difference has created critical prejudices that tend to obscure interesting things within the text. Autobiographies are often valued less for their writing and more for its revelation. As I stated in chapter one, biography, as a literary genre, ignores the inherent contradictions within its own etymology.

Jelinek's comment about the large number of women writing "diaries, journals, and notebooks in contrast to the many more men

35 As Lacan explains, the mirror stage occurs before the subjects' entry into language so that the agency of the ego is situated "in a fictional direction" (*Écrits* 2). The word *direction* is important here because it posits a space between the subject and his specular image. The *being in language* is reconciled, somewhat, by the "dialectic of identification with the other," (2) and it is this dialectic I imply when I say that Carr asks questions of herself in order to work through her self (e.g. "from myself to myself"). Of course the reconciliation is only an illusion made possible in the first place by the mirror stage.

writing autobiographies proper" articulates an issue that extends far beyond generic classifications. She implies a whole patriarchal tradition of autobiography that writes *properly*. And if we think through "the proper" in a Derridian sense this raises many issues concerning the metaphysics of language itself./36/ For our purposes it will be enough to point out how the fragmented nature of much women's writing places it in an inferior position in relation to the *proper* established literary canon. One of the main reasons Emily Carr's writing is still in print is her status as a painter and a Canadian cultural icon; this identity has overcome any prejudice and bad judgement against the fiction itself. Yet few critical articles have been written on Emily Carr and she is rarely taught in Canadian literature courses./37/ Superficially, much of Carr's writing may be regarded mere domestic scribblings; products of the *amateur*. An initial impulse to label the writings as "domestic" seems to have stifled any subsequent critical consideration for even when Carr's writing is addressed it is often only to demonstrate how secondary or marginal it is in comparison

36 Alan Bass' note in his translation of "Différance" is helpful in setting out some of these issues: "Throughout this book I will translate *le propre* as "the proper." Derrida most often intends all the senses of the word at once: that which is correct, as in *Le sens propre* (proper, literal meaning), and that which is one's own, that which may be owned, that which is legally, correctly owned--all the links between proper, property, and propriety." (*Margins* p. 4)

37 In comparison, consider the writer Edith Wilson. Although a minor Canadian author there exist a few journal articles and one book-length study yet many of her novels are out of print.

to her painting./38/

Whether Carr is writing in a strict autobiographical mode (as in *Hundreds and Thousands* and *Growing Pains*) or through a posited character like Small (or Klee Wyck) her narratives are almost always short sketches. Referring to Jelinek's point about the diaries, journals, and notebooks that form a large portion of women's writing we can see that the majority of Carr's narratives fit this description./39/ Fiction that does not set out to be grand or popular runs the risk of being neglected even though it may be interesting and important. Carr herself confronted this problem when she sent some of her stories to *Saturday Evening Post* and *Atlantic Monthly* and they were rejected:

They want blood and thunder, sex and crime, crooks, divorce, edgy things that keep them on the *qui vive* wondering which way the cat is going to jump and hoping it's the *risqué* way. I can't write that stuff. I don't want to learn. I won't. So I guess my little tales of creatures and things will sit in my box forever. (*Hundreds and Thousands* 159-60)

The image of the "little tales" sitting at home in a box adds pathos to the plight of what I will call domestic fiction. Of course many of her little tales did subsequently get published and Klee Wyck won the 1942 Governor General's award for non-fiction. Yet there certainly remains a critical prejudice against fiction that is not particularly *risqué*, that seems amateur.

38 For an interesting discussion of this whole issue see Margo Culley's "Women's Vernacular Literature: Teaching the Mother Tongue" in *Women's Personal Narratives: Essays in Criticism and Pedagogy* p. 9.

39 Atypically, *The Heart of a Peacock* contains some short stories written from a third person perspective. Generally they are well-crafted and maintain much of Carr's characteristic style.

I stated above that much of Carr's writing is "sketchy." The concept of sketching is an appropriate metaphor since it also applies to Emily Carr's painting. The OED states that sketch [noun] means:

A rough drawing or delineation of something, giving the outlines or prominent features without the detail, esp. one intended to serve as the basis for a more finished picture, or to be used in its composition . . . . A brief account, descriptive or narrative, giving the main or important facts, incidents etc., and not going into the details; a short or superficial essay or study. (2846)

"Sketch" as a verb, however, contains a slightly different meaning: "To describe briefly, generally, or in outline; to give the essential facts or points of, without going into details." On one hand a sketch is said to be rough, only an outline with no detail, a transitory rendering of something designed only to suffice until a fuller or more finished composition can be accomplished. The sketch, given its brevity, cannot hope to provide any real account of its subject matter. And yet, the verb form is to give "the essential facts or points of, without going into details." In this sense the sketch is fully adequate--since it gives the essentials--and, without any debilitating lack of its own, refuses to digress into more unnecessary detail. This account of sketching implies a position where further detail is not needed, when the narrative, though superficial, is adequate to its own task of representation.

We can trace the etymological basis for sketch's verbal meaning by reading its Greek root through Derrida's critique of phonocentrism. The OED states it is from the Greek *X ios*: "done or made off-hand, extempore." In order to work through some of

sketch's implications we must examine a quotation from Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. In the section, "The Signifier and Truth" he states:

All the metaphysical determinations of truth . . . are more or less immediately inseparable from the instance of the logos, or of a reason thought within the lineage of the logos, in whatever sense it is understood . . . . Within this logos, the original and essential link to the phonè has never been broken . . . . If, for Aristotle, for example, "spoken words (ta en té phoné) are the symbols of mental experience (pathémata tes psychés) and written words are the symbols of spoken words" (*De interpretatione*, 1, 16a 3) it is because the voice, producer of the first symbols, has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind. (10-11)

An extemporaneous performance would be closer "to the heart, to sentiment" (*Of Grammatology* 17) than one which is learned, memorized or written down. A sketch by its very nature implies an economy of practice which guarantees its veracity. In contrast, rhetoric is the art of persuasion and persuasion necessarily takes up a certain amount of space. The movement of dialectic (Hegelian, Marxist, Lacanian...), from thesis to antithesis, involves the taking of positions, the manufacturing of examples and the confirming of truths. On the other hand, a sketch does not set out to persuade, it merely seeks to capture the essentials, and so it cannot be accused of manipulation.

The slightness of the sketch matches the slightness of much of Carr's fiction but this need not be a disparaging comment. We have been discussing the absences from much of Carr's fiction and how they contribute to a fracturing of identity. The sketch is an example of how a form, no matter how transitory or brief, no matter how insufficient it is to carrying out any larger purpose, may

be adequate to its own content. The sketch may communicate the essentials. This premise can lead us to a more balanced criticism of domestic fiction; one that re-evaluates Emily Carr's position within her own writing.

The published response to *Klee Wyck* has been almost entirely review articles and biographical writings. But even this limited reaction provides us with suggestive statements. In *Saturday Night* magazine (November 1941) Robertson Davies wrote that Carr's style showed,

a clear, powerful, original and rigorous mind. Her writing is completely free of fripperies and self-conscious fine writing; every unnecessary word has been purged from her descriptions . . . she employs, perhaps unconsciously, nuances which have never appeared in Canadian prose before. Her pity is great, but severe; her irony is like the slash of a razor.

Maria Tippett has this to say about Carr's "Indian stories":

They have in common many characteristics--crotchetiness, alienation, exaggeration, and sentimentality--that had always been part of her personality but had become more pronounced in her old age. Though Emily attempted to be as true to places and people as she could, and did not write from anything that was not drawn from her own experience, her stories are not accurate accounts of her past. They are a mere reflection, altered and colored by literary instinct.

(Tippett p. 249)

While Davies addresses the style, and Tippett's remarks reflect Carr's personality, their criticism shares one common feature; Davies calls it her "unconscious nuances" and Tippett her "literary instinct." The unconscious, in the sense that Davies and Tippett use it, acts as a sort of alibi for the skill behind the production of fiction: literary instinct replaces literary craft.

Tippett's own language is more suggestive than she, in all probability, intended it to be. By referring to Carr's attempt to be true to places, she renews the myth of truth in writing; she implies that if Carr's memory were only better, she would have written a truer account. Tippett implies that fiction has as its goal a coming to the truth of the matter. However, she states somewhat disparagingly, *Klee Wyck* is "a mere reflection, altered and colored by literary instinct." When Tippett uses "mere" she means it in its most common, modern sense of "having no greater extent, range, value, power, or importance than the designation implies; that is barely or only what it is said to be." (OED) The reflection, then, barely qualifies as an account of the past and even then it has been "altered or coloured by literary instinct."

However, the word *mere* has other senses than the one Tippett apparently means; coupled with what we have already discussed concerning reflection these [other] meanings create a matrix from within which we can posit alternative relationships between Carr and her Indian stories. *Mere* also means, "That is what it is in the full sense of the term; nothing short of (what is expressed by the substantive); absolute, entire, sheer, perfect, downright." This meaning, which must be implicated in the other, supplies us with a more positive statement concerning the reflection (the merely reflected account of Carr's life). A mere reflection can also be an entire account, an absolute rendering of experience.

*Sketching's* applicability to both painting and writing exposes how meaning can reciprocate not only between discourses, but also between mediums. *Sketching* continues the questioning of



the self beyond autobiography, beyond the reader/text/writer relationship, and into the matter of site. The possibility that one can sketch for truth hints that the search for truth need not be ponderous or substantial, it implies a certain transitoriness, an ongoing and reciprocal process. In chapter four we will combine the sketchy, fragmented discourse of the Other with the discourse of the traveller in an attempt to articulate a geographic place of identity.

## Chapter Four

## The Difference in Travelling

Writing about village after village, all as exactly alike as they are TOTALLY DIFFERENT--sets one digging for the difference . . . . Things come to me clearly over the time--guess they sunk in O.K. Of course sketching in the places helped. . . .

(Emily Carr)

Small is an invented character whom Emily Carr uses to represent some of her own best aspects in childhood. Small is an idealized character inhabiting a space between the genres of fiction and autobiography, never becoming fully the property of either. *The Book of Small* is the book Small has enabled Emily Carr to write. But Small's book is not wholly her own; in addition to many stories with third person narration, there are several in first person. Are we to understand the "I" as Small or Emily Carr? As Paula Blanchard tells us, the ambiguity occurred in writing and in life. Discussing Carr's writing Blanchard states:

She uses all her senses. The effect is one of extraordinary immediacy; we really are absorbed in her experience. Beyond that, the lean sentences, barely enough to hold the verbs still, create an illusion of childlike candour. This is conscious art since the narrator Small, the child in Emily Carr, was a persona she evoked at will in later years and the persona she liked best. (11)

Carr later used fiction in her real life to help her achieve a "childlike candour." In *The Book of Small* the "I" shifts its reference between the fictive and the Real, between Small and Emily Carr. Small is used as a strategy to approach the I. Whether Small is used in "real life" or in fiction she functions as an agency heading in a fictional direction in order to reveal honestly some truth about the "I."

There is a strong element of ordinary domesticity to *The Book of Small*. One of its designs is to record a child's entry into adult society and language. Many of the stories (e.g. "British Columbia Nightingale") contain plots which revolve around Small's not knowing what specific words mean and what is socially acceptable. Ignorance of the proper language is as much a social sin as is ignorance of proper etiquette (the latter is revealed in "How Lizzie Was Shamed Right Through").

Small's stories reveal a network of social conventions which hold together the community of Victoria. There is always a tension between the society that both restrains and comforts. Since children generally exist under the arm of their parents there is an inevitable confinement to Small's scene of experience. When Small breaks away from the household, as in the pastoral "The Cow Yard," there is a contrast and relief. While Small's geographical location is prescribed by her family, her circumstances are made ironic by Carr's temporally distanced writing voice./40/ Since

40 This distance helps explain the unspoken irony of "Baptism." It is ironic that she is being named within her own writing.

many social exchanges occur within the home both *The Book of Small* and *Growing Pains* contain stories of visiting other peoples' homes (visiting the Other at home). Many of Victoria's social conventions are defined by the reciprocity of visiting; the assurance of receiving and offering hospitality binds together the frontier town. The reciprocity between homes formulates the community identity in the same manner as reciprocity between individuals formulates the family identity.

The importance of Small's social milieu for the formulation of identity becomes especially significant when contrasted with *Klee Wyck*, another of Carr's proper names which oscillates between fiction and biography. *Klee Wyck* breaks from the conventions of the autobiographical mode by never directly mentioning Carr's identity as artist. From our common knowledge that Emily Carr was an important Canadian painter we know that the reason she travels to the myriad villages on the west coast is to paint, to capture totem poles and scenic geography on her canvases. But from the information given in *Klee Wyck* we would be hard-pressed to discover this essential fact. The only forthright presentation of this information occurs in the chapter "Salt Water" where she states, "We were going to three old forsaken villages of the British Columbia Indians, going that I might sketch." (78) From our above discussion of the word sketch we can imply that Carr's purpose is double--to write and to draw. In "Salt Water," however, her casual mention of her art is ironic since no "sketching" actually occurs in this chapter. She was going to sketch and they were to be away for five days, but both of these plans are

disrupted by the weather; the subject of "Salt Water" is Carr's attempts to get back to where she started from faced with a savage sea constantly threatening to drown her.

The significance of the sketching expedition in "Salt Water" is only apparent many years later when it appears as a chapter in *Klee Wyck*. Emily did sketch on the trip in the sense that she took down in her memory a brief outline of her experience in order to relate it afterwards. Although Carr's plans are disrupted, the eventual outcome is successful. Throughout *Klee Wyck* a double invagination occurs:<sup>41/</sup> 1. In *Klee Wyck* Carr repeatedly sets out, as a painter, to sketch. Her success or failure is rarely mentioned; it is obscured behind the trip itself and Carr's interaction with the Indians. The traveller is more important than the painter. The first fold, then, is the space of the trip folding over her identity as artist. 2. The mechanism which obscures Carr's identity as painter, which covers over all her sketches, is her writing. And so, Carr's writing not only covers her painting, it sketches over the same surface--that space opened up by her travels--with its own story. It also confines the journey within its own limit, that is, the only voyage we see is the one between the covers of the book. The traveller translates her trip into

<sup>41</sup> I mean this in the sense that Carr's identity is folded inward twice. This biological term exposes the metaphoricity of writing. Since writing does not engender itself in the biological sense the metaphor of invagination is ultimately sterile. Emily Carr is enfolded within her own dead writing.

writing. The sketching trip is interrupted by foul weather and turns into a sketching trip./42/

Since the space for the articulation of Carr's identity is opened up by her voyages I will call *Klee Wyck* a travel book. Indeed, many of *Klee Wyck's* stories revolve around travelling, are based on the availability of travel or directly concern the end product of travel: the destination. Nine of the twenty chapters in *Klee Wyck* are named after destinations and those which are not (for instance, "Sophie" and "The Blouse") either involve destinations or are so fragmented that they feel like they are between destinations. By calling *Klee Wyck* a travel book, we also manage to leave the domestic scene so that Carr's fiction may have a chance to become larger than her [private] life. Conversely, Small is able to travel only within a culturally delineated space. Her dream vision in "White Currants" is an attempt to break out of this but she is called back by the voice of authority ordering her to harvest the currants. *Klee Wyck* is able, however marginally, to leave society by travelling with the Indians. The process of travel is a continuous leaving, Emily Carr is always the Other who never arrives home.

Even when not in the process of traveling Emily Carr remains very much a traveler, an outsider who is marginalized by both her own and Indian societies. The chapter titled "Sophie" presents

42 *Hundreds and Thousands* contrasts with *Klee Wyck* by presenting us with Carr generally at home (the most fragmented narrative is the most domestic). More than any of Carr's other writing, *Hundreds and Thousands* meditates on her painting and the process of self-expression.

Carr at her most domestic simply because it begins at Carr's home: Sophie knocks at her Vancouver studio door. Immediately Emily leaves her home and travels to North Vancouver:

In May, when the village was white with cherry blossom and the blue water of Burrard Inlet crept almost to Sophie's door--just a streak of grey sand and a plank walk between--and when Vancouver city was more beautiful to look at across the water than to be in,--it was then I loved to take the ferry to the North Shore and go to Sophie's. (24)

Travel is central to this chapter; Carr's ferry ride to the north shore is a defamiliarizing gesture which turns her home into an image, it is "more beautiful to look at . . . than to be in."

Carr's travelling, her movement out of her house and across Burrard Inlet, sets up a complex series of relationships. Firstly, it is her painterly identity which turns her home into an image: she would rather look at Vancouver than live in it. It is always the painter who starts each trip, who provides the *raison de s'en aller*. However, the painter is contained, invaginated, inside the discourse of the traveller/author. We are reading a written representation which, through its presence as word, obstructs the painter from painting./43/

43 There is a biographical irony to all this in that Emily Carr began writing because her health would not permit the travelling necessary for her to paint. But this is really only part truth since we know she was writing throughout her life even if not specifically for publication. This myth of her origin as writer is begun by Carr herself in *Growing Pains* with her words, "Doctor, may I write?" The doctor of medicine, of biological infirmities, gives Carr permission to turn to the grapheme. Again, the margin between biography and fiction is practically indiscernible.

Through her travelling Carr constantly crosses the border between the Indian's world and the world of civilization./44/ Since the land itself often provides the subject matter of Carr's verbal and pictorial canvases this crossing is as much geographic as it is cultural or artistic. The geography is important in establishing location and it is the specificity of location which contains both a site's individual identity (i.e. its difference from other sites) and its identity as destination. Carr's process of travelling to different locations is a process of discovering identities and her writing and painting are subsequent attempts at articulating them.

Hembroff-Schleicher reproduces a portion of one of Emily Carr's letters to Ruth Humphrey in which she discusses writing some of her Indian stories. She says, "Writing about village after village, all as exactly alike as they are TOTALLY DIFFERENT--sets one digging for the difference." (*Untold Story* 281) Carr's description gives the villages a reciprocal similitude: they are as alike as they are different. A simple explanation for what Carr might mean is that, from the point of view of a foreigner, the villages all look the same. And yet, even the most distracted tourist would admit fundamental differences amongst them. Perhaps the most fundamental is that they are all in different geographic locations and the traveller's primary indication of this difference is her own experience en route. When Carr states that one must "dig for the difference," we must realize

44 Again, this is in contrast to Small who is always within Victoria. We will return to this point later.



that this difference is, like many before it, a function of the self. In this case, the travelling self.

The discourse of the traveller is the natural discourse of the Other. By this I mean that the traveller is always "othered" by her culture and her circumstances, always a guest relying on the hospitality of others (the kindness of strangers). The traveller has little property, nothing of substance (nothing except a sketchbook). For instance, one may contrast *Klee Wyck* with *Growing Pains* or *The Book of Small* where so many of the social exchanges take place within the home. The codes of social interaction are determined by culturally solidified guest-host patterns. Each exchange implies a future reciprocity within the boundaries of the community. In *Klee Wyck* little reciprocity is possible since Carr is usually unable to give the Indians anything they would want yet it is they who constantly transport her.

In "The Blouse" Carr is able to give something although her gift only serves to emphasize the essential Otherness of the cultures:

The eyes of the dying woman were glassy and half closed. I knelt beside her and put my hand over her cold bony one. My blouse touched her and she opened her eyes wide. Turning her hand, she feebly clutched the silk of my sleeve. (41)

Carr gives the dying woman her blouse for her "grave-house." This runs contrary to all the exchanges between Canadian and English men and women in Carr's other books. The woman dies in a "hut" and the only house she will ever inhabit will be the "grave-house." Carr's gift will never be reciprocated and as a gesture it is self-less (in a "civilized" relationship the parties define

themselves through reciprocal acts of hospitality but the dying woman cannot give anything in return). Within western society self-less acts are called "charity." Carr's gift is recuperated into her identity through the story she has written about it.

In *Klee Wyck* there are many identities alongside the merely autobiographical. To begin with, *Klee Wyck* represses Carr's identity as artist. And unlike Emily Carr's epithets--those proper names which were wholly Carr's property--*Klee Wyck* is a name which has been given to her by the Indians. Metaphorically we can say that her name is her ticket for all the rides she is given. The Indian's naming Emily "Klee Wyck" is their attempt to incorporate her into their oral community. Of course this is impossible; Carr can make friends of individual Indians but her assimilation into the community is always prevented by her Otherness. For instance, in the chapter "Friends," Louisa and Jimmy invite Carr to visit only now that they have a "good house." This is their attempt to pattern themselves after Canadian and European middle class culture. But again, a reciprocity is lacking; Carr does not invite them to visit her. Emily's Indian friend Sophie refuses to introduce Carr to Mrs. Chief Joe Capilano because, as Sophie puts it, "You fliend for me, not fliend for her." Even with as close a friend as Sophie, Carr's role is often that of "object" or "possession." Carr writes, "I said to Sophie, 'You see! the others know I am your big friend. They call me "Sophie's Em'ly".' She was Happy." Both "Klee Wyck" and "Sophie's Em'ly" are different attempts by the Indians to include her by naming but they both ultimately fail since little reciprocity is possible.

The gesture of naming is duplicated and recuperated when Carr names her novel *Klee Wyck*; the cultural and geographic world of the Indians is now within the literary. The difference which separates the cultures is impossible to articulate within our language; the "Klee Wyck" that the Indians once called Emily is part of an oral language which, due to the phonic limitations of breath, has long since disappeared. What we possess now is *Klee Wyck* and the italicized graphemes denote published, copyrighted writing.

It is not Carr herself that recovers the name she has been given, it is the western (logocentric) tradition from within which she writes. Within the writing itself is the force which excludes the tribal, excludes all that has been spoken. And yet Carr depends upon the Indians to transport her and thus, they are instrumental in articulating her difference as traveller. They are the vehicle of difference and yet they are written out of the [western] book.

I stated above that the traveller contains the natural discourse of the other. Semiotically, the explanation for the self coming to know itself only through the Other is the continuous deferral of the signified. In Saussurian linguistics a sign is said to contain a signifier and a signified, the relationship between the terms being arbitrary. In "Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious" Lacan states, "The thematics of this science [Saussurian linguistics] is henceforth suspended, in effect, at the primordial position of the signifier and the signified as being distinct orders separated initially by a barrier resisting

signification" (*Écrits* 149). We are again reminded of the gap between the self in language (the Symbolic order) and the specular Ideal I (in the imaginary). Lacan states that the signifier overcomes this barrier "by reference to another signification." That is, the signifier defers the signified, defers its own inadequacy, its lack of full representative power, by referring to another signifier. This deferral constitutes the chain of the signifier which is also a chain of desire since it is created to compensate for the lack of a signified. If the signified were attainable then the self could achieve a unity with itself; but of course this is a fiction. In the same manner, and for the same reasons that the signifier defers its signified, the traveller defers her presence (i.e. continues to travel) in order to reach the destination. Yet in *Klee Wyck* the destinations are never an end in themselves; they must then be articulated (represented) in some medium.

Let us examine the movement of travel more closely. In the beginning there is the artist who is setting out to sketch. Yet in *Klee Wyck* little painting is accomplished.<sup>45/</sup> As I stated above, the author encloses the painter (what I described above as

45 In "Kitwancool" Carr writes, "For two days from dawn till dark I worked down in the old part of the village." Later, when Aleck tells her "My mother wishes to see the pictures again." Carr states, "I clambered over the back of the wagon, unpacked the wet canvases and opened the sketchbooks." I would argue that these are merely glimpses of the artist, and the only ones in the entire book. The "wet canvases" emphasize the incompleteness of the whole enterprise. Carr is only able to offer Aleck's mother a painting in the future, after she has gone away and mailed it back. The signified (the painting itself, proof of the artist's presence) is again deferred.

an invagination is also a deferral). But the author is in the present (the present of our reading). The artist's presence has been deferred, by the travelling, into our present. Yet we have already discussed how autobiographical writing merely leads us on the path to the subject; the subject is never given to us.

I discussed how the preface to *Hundreds and Thousands* appeared to give the book a unity which, under close examination, appears tenuous. Throughout this thesis we have been examining how presence--in the form of the self--is constituted and what necessary fictions lie behind this simulacrum. For instance, the Indians are necessary for Carr's identity as traveller and yet we realize they are all fictional. We said above that the self is always already headed in a fictional direction. We might wish to ask, how does writing work? Are all these fictions the same? and, if so, how do we tell one from the other?

The articulation of the self, that is, its participation in the formulation of identity, is achieved through difference. We discussed how Emily Carr's mother and father consummated their identities through the way in which they differed from each other./46/ The autobiographical self must achieve its own identity by referring to the past, and then writing against the

46 When using "difference" I am avoiding the issue of using the Derridian "differAnce." For our purposes here it is not necessary since the OED shows enough textual play. "The condition, quality or fact of being different, or not the same in quality or in essence."; "the relation of non-agreement or non-identity between two or more things."; "A discrimination or distinction viewed as conceived by the subject rather than as existing in the objects; Now only in phrase to make a difference."; and "Defer": "To put off (action, procedure) to some later time; to delay, postpone."

past. Every autobiographical discourse tells the "untold story" in the sense that every writing is a new attempt to articulate the self in the face of all that has come before, all the writing that always already exists.

The point where difference occurs is indescribable because it always occurs *between* terms (by "terms" we may mean graphemes, cultures, subject positions...). But if we cannot describe a difference we can at least demonstrate it. Frequently in *Klee Wyck* Carr must wait on the Indians for her boat ride; their time is determined by their domestic needs rather than by a watch. They respond to time only under Carr's direct interrogation. For instance, in the final chapter we have this exchange between Carr and the Indians:

"Are you going back to Alliford? Will you take me?"  
 "Uh huh," they were; "Uh huh," they would.  
 "How soon?"  
 "Plitty-big-hully-up-quick." (108)

The Indians do not leave quickly. They "took pails to the village tap, lit a fire, heated water; washed clothes--hung out--gathered in; set dough, made bread, baked bread; boiled jam, bottled jam; cooked meals and ate meals." Obviously some meaning has been lost between the cultures. The *between* is where the notion of the Other breaks down since it constitutes itself in a Symbolic order which the Indians are outside of. In this exchange we can catch Carr speaking for the Indians.

Let us assume that this is a representation of a conversation. If Carr had represented the exchange in the order in which it must have occurred the Indian's responses would have been adequate. The "Uh Huh's" were affirmative responses to Carr's two

questions. But Carr has eliminated the time between the two questions, the time which contains the Indians' responses (i.e. the semantic context which makes those responses perfectly adequate without explanation), by representing her two sentences as one temporally integral unit: "Are you going back to Alliford? Will you take me?" In the written representation, the Indians are literally bombarded with questions to the point where they are silenced between the questions. Their answers are reported by Carr afterwards. But even then, as if to further demonstrate the inadequacy of their responses, Carr translates their meaning: "'Uh huh,' they were; 'Uh huh,' they would." The drama between the two cultures is represented with silence and re-writing.

When asked "How soon" they will leave the Indians reply "Plitty-big-hully-up-quick." This is a portmanteau word and calling it such provides us with an example of how the two culture's difference is demonstrated through language use. In chapter six of *Through the Looking-Glass* Humpty Dumpty explicates "Jabberwocky" to Alice. He states that "well, 'slithy' means 'lithe and slimy.' 'Lithe' is the same as 'active.' You see it's like a portmanteau--there are two meanings packed up into one word." When two or more meanings are combined to form one word language is using its power of similitude; in psychoanalytic terms it is "condensing" the meanings into one articulated linguistic unit. The Indians, however, are outside Carr's language and they do the opposite: they string many words together in the hope that their [one] meaning will become clear (they will leave when they leave). Its most important elements are at the beginning and end: "plitty

quick." The words in the middle "big-hully-up" merely emphasize the idea of haste. Rather than condensing the meaning, the Indians defer (and displace) the question.

The Indians' attempts at speaking are selfless gestures which will remain unreciprocated much like Carr's gift of her silk blouse. Another example of their attempts to communicate using our western systems is in the chapter "Century Time." Carr visits an Indian graveyard and is perplexed by the "lettering" on the "crude wooden crosses" (notice the word Carr uses--it is not writing, it is just a string of letters):

SACRED OF KATIE---IPOO  
 SAM BOYAN HE DIDE---IPOO  
 RIP JULIE YECTON---IPOO  
 JOSEPH'S ROSIE DI---IPOO (95)

"IPOO" was common to almost every grave. I wrote the four-lettered word on a piece of paper and took it to a woman in the village.

"What does this mean? It is on the graves."

"Mean die time."

"Die time?"

"Uh Huh. Tell when he die."

"But all the graves tell the same."

"Uh Huh. Four this kind," (she pointed separately to each of the four letters, IPOO) "tell now time."

"But everybody did not die at the same time. Some died long ago and some die now?"

"Uh Huh. Maybe some year just one man die--one baby. Maybe influenza come--he come two time--one time long far, one time close. He make lots, lots Injun die."

"But, if it means the time people died, why do they put 'IPOO' on the old graves as well as the new?"

Difficult English thoughts furrowed her still forehead. Hard English words came from her slow tongue in abrupt jerks. Her brown finger touched the I and the P. "He know," she said, "he tell it. This one and this one" (pointing to the two O's) "small--he no matter. He change every year. Just this one and this matter" (pointing again to I and P). "He tell it."

(96)

The difference between "die time" and "now time" does not, cannot, exist within our system of writing. When we state that Emily Carr



died in 1945 we are referring to a mode of representing western experience of which the Indians are not a part. Just as they write the "9" backwards, the Indians also approach our concept of time backwards. For the Indians, while the marking of the death is important, the precise historical circumstances do not matter./47/ The woman in the village responds to Carr's questions about the letters with an oral history of "die time" so we know that the event of death is not forgotten, it is just remembered differently. The Indians' writing refuses to give us any information.

The letters IPOO have a displaced relationship with the idea of death; death is not represented or even symbolized; it is merely acknowledged (it is given a place but not a name or time). The Indians escape, even in death, being conscripted into our language's simulacrum of their existence. Their letters on the crude wooden crosses are written to avoid writing. They are required because, according to European custom, it is proper to assign proper names and dates to graves and so the Indians write what they can, they write in spite of writing. In fact, instead of creating difference their "lettering" erases it; the letters erase writing's specificity of the time, place etc.

The "backwards 9" gives us an indication of the limits of our own system of writing. Just as Hembroff-Schleicher cannot reproduce Emily Carr's signature on her title, we cannot represent

47 Due to their lack of inscribed history the Indians can show no malice for the influenza epidemic caused by Europeans. They bear their deaths silently.

the Indians' writing with any of our graphemes. By representing their character as our P we are translating it out of their culture since it is clearly not a P. To call it a "backwards 9" results in a further re-writing which completely destroys its original [native] meaning.

In sharp contrast to the Indians' graves (writing which erases identity) is the white man's inscription of his identity over the land. In "Silence and Pioneers" Carr writes:

I am not certain whether the Langfords ever actually lived in the Fort or not but they came to Victoria at the very beginning of its being. Captain Langford built a log farmhouse six or seven miles out from town. The district was named for him. (*Small* 83)

Captain Langford's name joins a long list of proper names that have become western Canadian place names, the most famous being Vancouver and Victoria. Langford's district demonstrates how society acknowledges the pioneer's actions of clearing the land and constructing property through naming. Physical labour translated into naming makes the action of clearing the land an act of writing. Therefore, one of the ways in which Western culture formulates its proper identity is by representing itself upon surfaces, spaces which it delimits./48/

48 The agency which limits something is able to achieve a mastery over it. In our case the agency is the division of the government called "Public Works." Derrida discusses the limit in relation to philosophy's mastery of its own [proper] discourse: "What is the specific resistance of philosophical discourse to deconstruction? It is the infinite mastery that the agency of Being (and of the) proper seems to assure it; this mastery permits it to interiorize every limit as being and as being its own proper." (*Margins* xix) More specifically, countries retain their historical origins (as if there were no native population before the pioneers) by naming parts of themselves, after themselves. For a discussion of the limit in relation to truth see the section on Carol Pearson's *Emily Carr As I Knew Her* in chapter one.

The representing of one's cultural self by the inscribing of proper names over a geographical surface is another form of what Emily Carr herself does when she writes or paints (i.e. represents) the landscape. In fact, it might be argued that style in art is the maintaining of a hegemony over a certain vision. Emily Carr states in *Growing Pains* that when Eric Newton ("noted art critic for the *Manchester Guardian*") came to visit her in the Hospital in Victoria he said "As I drove over the Island Highway I saw *Emily Carr* pictures in the woods no matter in which direction I looked. You have caught the western spirit" (264). Emily Carr's style has captured the western landscape to the point where parts of it may be considered her property.

Carr writes about a more personal relationship between geography and identity in "New Neighbours":

Father gave a good strip of his land to make the street wider; so the City named it Carr street after Father. Carr Street would have joined Birdcage Walk if Mrs. McConnell's cow farm had not stood in the way, and Birdcage Walk would have been Government Street if the James' Bay Bridge had not been there to get people over the mud flats. After many years Government Street swallowed them up--James' Bay Bridge, Carr Street and Birdcage Walk--and went straight out to Dallas Road.  
(*Small* 99)

The City has the power to create and efface identity by naming the streets within its [city] limits. It is ironic that the street which eventually swallows up Carr Street is named for the government that created it in the first place.

The chapter "From Carr Street to James' Bay" provides a domestic contrast to Emily Carr's travelling in *Klee Wyck*. The

chapter tells about how young Emily would walk her father to work holding his hand tightly. The chapter describes the geography between home and work, the people and their yards, the personalities who are defined by their relationships with their environment. The patriarchal hand of the father (the hand which Emily's mother accepted in marriage) replaces Klee Wyck's canoes. In a sense, Emily as daughter never leaves the house since the walk with Father is merely an extension of the domestic scene. The manner in which Carr herself describes the end of the walk contains an irony:

And now we had come to the Lindsays and James' Bay Bridge was just in front. Then Father doubled down and kissed me goodbye. Across the Bridge there was a saloon on every corner, so I was not allowed to go any farther. I waved to Father on the Bridge and then I was free. (159)

Of course Emily is really only "free" to go back home to the house which sits on the street named after Richard Carr. An indication of her constraint is given at the end of the chapter:

"Father--Father--don't you think--now that I go to school I am too big to be kissed on the street?"  
 "Who said so?"  
 "The girls at school."  
 "As long as I have to stoop you won't be too big,"  
 Father said, and he kissed me twice. (162)

While there can be no doubt that Richard Carr's kiss is a sign of true affection, it also functions as a sign of a patriarchal order which Emily can never outgrow. The kiss is not an exchange between equals but a signifier of Emily's containment within the domestic order.

We have discussed several techniques through which the subject represents her or himself. The metaphor of the travel-book demonstrates how difference is a natural outcome of the movement through space, the deferral of any absolutely defined being in favour of a *coming into being*. The space of travel may provide room for the biographical scene of which we spoke in chapter one. The metaphor of the traveller is meant to imply an eternal Otherness to the human condition necessitated by the impossibility of ever arriving home. We might say that while biography attempts to create a home for the subject, autobiography is an attempt by the subject to write her own home, her own historical place.

While it is easy to say, in the case of biography, that something is "flat" or that facts are disputable or that the biographer has failed altogether to bring the subject to life it is impossible to evaluate Carr's own writing in this manner since whatever she writes is her life, her writing of herself. It does not matter if it is wrong (i.e. if it is contradicted by the archives) or insubstantial or too domestic; it is always venerated simply by being the word of the author. It claims to be no more than what it is. But in Carr's writing it is still possible to find instances where the author erases herself. It is possible to show that the graphic writing of a life, the metaphor of a living writing, is not always able to sustain its own presence.

*The Book of Small* is really two books. The first is called *The Book of Small* and the second is called *A Little Town and a Little Girl*. While the first book confines itself mostly to the domestic scene of the household, the second relates stories of

"turn-of-the-century Victoria, with its upright matrons, its natives, Chinese and pioneers, its flower-scented streets and meandering cows" (Blanchard 279). The title *A Little Town and a Little Girl* states a parallel between the body of the girl and the body of the town. Of course we know that neither can remain little; each is involved in the formulation of identity we have termed *coming into being*. The last chapter is titled "Grown Up" indicating that an identity has been achieved. The author is, of course, already grown up and as a persona Small will always remain a "little girl" so the title refers to the "little town" of Victoria.

"Grown Up" is a demonstration of how autobiography is given up in the name of tourism: the travel book becomes the travel brochure. *A Little Town and a Little Girl* uses the metaphor of the body to show the town growing up in relation to Carr herself. It is autobiographical because it always shows the self in relation to other objects, people, social conventions etc. Yet the title indicates that all these relationships are contained literally within the city's limit. "Grown Up" begins by describing the Driard Hotel, a symbol of the past:

Victoria's top grandness was the Driard Hotel; all important visitors stayed at the Driard. To sit in Crimson plush armchairs in enormous front windows and gaze rigid and blank at the dull walls of the opposite side of View Street so close to the Driard Hotel that they squinted the gazer's eyes, to be stared at by Victoria's inhabitants as they squeezed up and down narrow View Street which had no view at all, was surely worth a visit to the capital city. (163)

We can clearly see the irony here created by the distance Carr places between herself the Driard. It is not her that sits in the

plush armchair, it is the important visitors who have succumbed to the "top grandness" of the Driard, a grandness which exists purely on the level of style.

As the subject matter of "Grown Up" concerns itself more with Victoria's development we lose the ironic viewpoint and the autobiographical voice gives itself up to the promotion of the city. The traveller who walked through the spaces she wrote about, who created difference by differing from her surroundings, has now disappeared behind the smooth facade of the brochure/49/:

Victoria's inner land being higher than her shore, every aspect is lovely. North, South, East and West--blue sea, purple hills, snow-capped Olympic mountains bounding her southern horizon, little bays and beaches heaped with storm-tossed drift, pine trees everywhere, oak and maple in plenty.

So stands tranquil Victoria in her Island setting--Western as West can be before earth's gentle rounding pulls West east again. (168)

Carr gives up writing her own life to write the life of the city, the geography of the self turns into the geography of the tourist.

At the beginning of chapter one we discussed the contradiction between the organism and its graphic representation. In the travel brochure this contradiction is erased since the entire point of the commercial enterprise is to replace the original with its image. All reference to the self and to the past is erased in favour of the attainable present; the object which is commercially available. I said earlier that the traveller creates difference through the discourse of the other by articulating her own

49 Since "brochure" comes from the French meaning "to stitch together" we might say that Emily Carr has changed discourses from sketching to sewing together narrative.

identity in relation to what she is going through. On the other hand, I will say that the function of the tourist is to live the experience of the image, the commercial representation. Difference is erased by the unity of the image: "every aspect is lovely." (emphasis mine) And at the same time, Emily Carr disappears.



Conclusion

And still they cry to me  
As in reproach--  
I, born to hear their inner storm  
Of separate man in woman's form  
I yet possess another kingdom, barred  
To them, these three, this Emily.  
I move as mother in a frame,  
My arteries  
Flow the immemorial way  
Towards the child, the man;  
And only for brief span  
Am I an Emily on mountain snows  
And one of these.

from "The Three Emily's" by Dorothy Livesay

"The Three Emily's" is a poem about artists and their visions./50/ The apostrophe in Livesay's title implies that the artistic vision is always a form of property; the written or painted artistic products are all, initially, possessions of their first owners. And this initiality is always present, always obstructing our subsequent viewings. Even though Livesay, also a woman, has been "born to hear their inner storm" she is always othered by her own "kingdom," her own frame of experience and identity. Much of Livesay's personal and artistic search for

50 The Emilys are: Emily Brontë, Emily Dickinson and Emily Carr.

Emily Carr parallels our own. This poem hints that for Livesay the only approach to Emily Carr is through her own art ("the immemorial way"). We have already discussed how Carr herself refused to allow Livesay to write her life.

For those of us who choose not to be artists, who choose merely to read, the only available approach to the subject is through the exteriority of the grapheme: the dead words that have already been written. Biographies and autobiographies lead us through the chain of desire asymptotically towards the subject. We have seen how these words are as much fiction as fact, how they conflate meaning on several levels.

And yet the path towards the subject is still open; the author beckons behind and before the text. The text is a site which is always available for us to practice our own readerly operations even if we are not so sure who the patient is.

If only for a brief span (how brief is a reading?) Emily Carr exists for us, before us, in the book. She cries out in reproach only if we turn away.

Ultimately, all conclusions are memoriums for things left unsaid; biographies are elegies for people dead.

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