

**Maria Tippett, *Emily Carr: A Biography*. Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1979. 314 pp., 118 illus., \$16.95**

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[See table of contents](#)

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Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, au Cap de la Madeleine, à Sainte-Hélène-de-Kamouraska, à Laurierville, à Saint-Côme-de-Beauce et à Notre-Dame-de-Bonsecours. Il en va de même de l'iconographie. La remarque du *Bulletin* selon laquelle « la Vierge se situe à gauche de l'ange (cas relativement moins fréquent que l'inverse) » (*Ibid.*, p. 12) est infirmée ici au moins dans huit cas. Aussi nos auteurs se sont corrigés là-dessus dans leur présent ouvrage : « En Europe, il est fréquent de le voir surgir à gauche de Marie, plutôt qu'à sa droite. Dans les versions québécoises, les anges apparaissent à droite presque aussi souvent qu'à gauche » (p. 92). Seule l'idée de situer et la Vierge et l'ange sur des nuages à Saint-Maurice leur paraît plus insolite. Mais n'a-t-on pas là une variante propre à la Contre-Réforme ? « From the late 16th cent. all suggestion of an edifice was usually abandoned. Instead, the background dissolves into clouds and sky, out of which the dove descends in a dazzling light, suggesting to the spectator that heaven is an immediate presence » (J. Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, John Murray, Londres, 1974, p. 20). Même le grand manteau royal de l'Annonciation de l'Hôpital-Général de Québec pourrait avoir cette fonction. Isolant la scène de tout lieu précis, il marque la transcendance.

Quoiqu'il en soit, la comparaison de ces deux exposés faits à huit ans d'intervalle, montre déjà l'utilité de ce genre d'enquête. Elle permet de donner une base statistique à des affirmations fondées sur des impressions.

Mais ce n'est pas le seul mérite du présent ouvrage. Il permet aussi de constater que plus on avance dans le temps, plus nos Annonciations deviennent chargées de détails symboliques, s'éloignant de la sobriété qui était de mise dans l'atmosphère de la Contre-Réforme. On pourrait en voir le signe par l'apparition très tardive d'un motif dont le sens a peut-être échappé à nos auteurs, je veux parler du panier de laine et de la quenouille dans l'Annonciation de l'Ancienne-Lorette, et qui réapparaît à Saint-Germain-de-Kamouraska et à l'église du Saint-Esprit à Québec. Ce motif paraissait déjà dans l'An-

nonciation peinte par Joseph L'égaré pour l'Hôpital-Général de Québec, d'après une gravure d'un tableau de Louis de Boulogne. On y voit près du prie-Dieu de la Vierge, une corbeille d'où s'échappe une pièce d'étoffe. Comme l'explique James Hall : « ...a distaff or a basket of wool, seen in some medieval examples, alludes to the legend of the Virgin's upbringing in the Temple at Jerusalem where she would spin and weave the priests' vestments. » [*op. cit.*, p. 19] (plutôt que le « voile du temple », j'imagine).

Ce qui est remarquable ici, c'est que nous n'avons pas affaire à des « exemples médiévaux », mais à de l'imagerie contemporaine importée d'Europe (l'Union artistique de Vaucouleurs qui se méritait dans le temps les foudres des pères A.-M. Couturier et P.-R. Régamey à la revue *L'Art sacré*). Cette circonstance suggère que l'imagerie populaire peut être « savante » ou au moins livresque. Paradoxalement dans le cas qui nous occupe, c'est l'imagerie de la Contre-Réforme qui était plus sobre sinon plus spontanée, parce qu'unifiée autour d'une seule idée.

Qu'on permette enfin à l'ex-théologien que je suis de faire remarquer aux auteurs que l'annonciation se rattache au mystère de l'incarnation plutôt qu'à celui de la rédemption et que parler de « culte » marial au XVII<sup>e</sup> et au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles est probablement anachronique.

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MARIA TIPPETT *Emily Carr: A Biography*. Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1979. 314 pp., 118 illus., \$16.95.

This work significantly contributes to the Carr literature. Methodically sound, meticulously documented, and clearly presented, it represents the first serious biography of Emily Carr (1871-1945) and coincides with a growing scholarly interest in Carr. The product of five years of exhaustive research, the Tippet book will undoubtedly serve as a valuable reference work and point of departure for further Carr scholarship.

The need to separate fact from

fiction has long been recognized, for, like Canada's other artistic legend, Tom Thomson, Emily Carr has been mythologized. This process, begun during her lifetime, gained momentum in the years following her death. The greatest culprit in the perpetuation of these fanciful embellishments was Carr herself. As Maria Tippet makes clear, Carr's posthumously published autobiography, *Growing Pains* (1946), is replete with a distortion of fact and self-aggrandizement with Carr casting herself in the role of the long-abused artist and rebel, spurned by bourgeois society; while other literary portraits of Emily Carr are sentimental reminiscences recorded by personal friends. One notable exception is the controversial *Emily Carr: The Untold Story* (Saanichton, B.C., 1978) written by Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher, who maintained a close friendship with Carr during the 'thirties. While Hembroff-Schleicher has disclosed many biographical facts of art-historical interest, her book is marred by a contentious attitude towards earlier studies.

Tippet's critical detachment and objectivity are not antithetical to the human element inherent in the subject. The book is a moving document by virtue of the extraordinary life it portrays. Its greatest merit lies in a thoroughly convincing evocation of character. Selected excerpts from Carr's writings, both published and unpublished, are used to advantage. Unfortunately, the only major primary source not satisfactorily treated is the art. The author's discussion of the works of art tend for the most part to be generalizations which do little to further understanding of the complex artist who created them. In fairness to Tippet's considerable achievement as a biographer, however, it should be stressed that the reader does emerge with a sense of Emily Carr as a three-dimensional character who is not always likeable, but remains believable. As a biography, the book succeeds admirably; as art history it merits only qualified endorsement.

Many well-chosen historical photographs enrich the text. Carr is pictured at various stages of her life (Fig. 2) — even as a surprisingly beautiful twenty-year old. Places



FIGURE 2. *Mom and Family* (Emily Carr and pets), mid 1930s. Tippet, p. 197.

familiar to readers of *Growing Pains* are illustrated in period photographs; individuals featured in Carr's writings under fictitious names are now assigned real identities and faces. The black-and-white photographs and reproductions of Carr's work (ten of which, of varying quality, are in colour) are scattered throughout the book and truly complement the text. Format and design are excellent. In sum, the book is eminently readable and, at the same time, useful as a research tool. The index is a welcome contribution, but a bibliography would have been helpful.

The biography is structured chronologically, with chapters defined by the major turning points in Carr's life. However, especially in the first two chapters, Tippet is rather trite in descriptive passages of the like of: 'If there was a rare snowfall, sleighbells could be heard in the distance.' She often interjects irrelevant and distracting details such as a reference to Carr's guardian as 'the red-bearded employee of the Hudson's Bay Company.' Happily, this penchant for local colour is suppressed in later chapters and the rest of the book reads smoothly.

It is fascinating to learn about the books Carr was reading at different points in her life, the philosophy lectures she attended, her contact with contemporary artists, and her exposure to art at home and abroad. In many instances, facts vaguely alluded to in *Growing Pains* are clarified and expanded by Tippet. For example, we know from Carr's autobiography that she met the American artist Georgia O'Keeffe on a two-week trip to New York in 1930. Tippet adds that Carr saw O'Keeffe's *Lawrence Tree* (1929) and was later moved to copy into her notebook the poem by

D.H. Lawrence which inspired it.

Maria Tippet makes her most significant contribution in a discussion of the role played by Northwest Coast Indians in Carr's life and work. In previous Carr literature, references to the Indians are never specific, but Tippet distinguishes between the various Indian nations – Kwakiutl, Haida, Coast Salish – and their respective villages. She also explains the stylistic and iconographical elements which characterize the totem poles of the different tribes. The routes Carr travelled to remote Indian villages are retraced as Tippet recreates the arduous physical conditions of the momentous trips of 1912 and 1928 in particular.

Many writers have speculated as to reasons for Carr's attraction to the Indians. Tippet has uncovered a small book dating from the 1890s in which Carr recorded verses related to the Indian, including an excerpt from Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* which celebrated 'the Indian's "untutored mind," his "contentment," lack of greed, his inherent goodness, and his superiority to the avaricious, over-civilized, discontented, sinful European' (p. 29). Nurtured by such idyllic concepts of the 'noble savage,' Carr's early interest seems to have been reinforced by her father's tales of adventure among the Indian people and his benevolent attitude towards them. Many writers on Carr have further pointed out that Indian culture operated independently of the rigid social and moral conventions which were so oppressive to her. Carr, an 'outsider' in her own way, accordingly identified with the Indians. Tippet suggests that escape was a major factor in leading Carr to them. Whenever lonely and depressed, she 'turned to Indians and animals and convinced herself that she preferred them' (p. 78). While this type of negative motivation may have initially directed her to the Indians, her interest and involvement in Indian culture was sustained over the years by more positive factors. As Tippet points out, Emily educated herself in the fields of ethnology and anthropology by reading books borrowed from the public library, which suggests anything but escapism as a motivating force. Indeed, Carr rec-

ognizes and deplored the rapid acculturation of the native people of British Columbia. In 1907, inspired by the American artist Theodore J. Richardson, she resolved to make as complete a visual record as possible of the remaining totem poles. In her tireless and systematic effort to salvage the remnants of a dying culture, she became, as it were, a missionary in reverse.

Tippet also observes that Carr's self-imposed goal of accuracy in depicting totems was often at variance with her need for artistic expression. This was particularly true when she returned from a period of study in France, armed with her newly-acquired Fauve palette. Many of the Indian sketches of 1912 were unsatisfactorily resolved and are characterized by a discordant juxtaposition of two unrelated stylistic traditions: foreground elements vigorously handed in high-keyed colour are set against hazy, muted backgrounds of the English landscape tradition. Tippet makes passing mention that Carr actually repainted Indian sketches while she was in France; this previously unknown fact is not further developed and leads one to surmise that, in some paintings, the foreground elements were overpainted in France. For art historians struggling with the problematical dating of Carr's works, this kind of information is very helpful.

Tippet notes correctly that many of the Indian watercolours executed before 1913 served as the basis of later oils done after the crucial meeting with the Group of Seven in 1927. (Comparison of Carr's earlier and later interpretations of the same motifs would have been illuminating.) Tippet suggests that Carr's prior involvement with Indian culture facilitated her physical entry into the forest after 1930 and that belief in the Indians' spiritual response to the forest enabled her to overcome her own fear of it. Actually long exposure to Indian art may have conditioned her way of seeing: an area which needs to be explored by art historians is the extent to which Indian stylistic motifs, once completely absorbed, re-emerged, translated into the formal vocabulary of Carr's later landscapes.

The major weakness of Tippet's biographical method may lie in her observations about art. Written by a cultural historian, analyses of paintings are so skillfully integrated into the overall flow of the text that possible discrepancies are not immediately apparent. One comes away with a comfortable sense of having completely understood Carr's artistic development, yet it was precisely this disturbing feeling of complacency which prompted me to re-read several passages. Certainly Tippet's references to the specific art books which Carr was reading during the early 1930s are very helpful, yet selected Carr paintings are seemingly used as illustrations of concepts propounded in books. An unstated and very misleading implication results: there would be an immediate transferral from theory to practice. In acknowledging the value of Tippet's discussion of the pedagogical methods and artistic styles of the different artists with whom Carr studied we need not infer their direct or necessary impact on her art. A case in point concerns the influence of New Zealand artist Frances Hodgkins on Carr's work in *Concarneau* in 1911: 'And with Hodgkins' brilliant colours, unifying outline, unorthodox composition and lucid style in mind – Emily painted *Brittany Coast*' (p. 96), which is reproduced in black and white. I am baffled by this type of observation. Even a cursory glance at *Brittany Coast* reveals that its centralized composition is absolutely conventional and that, in fact, it is the absence of 'unifying outline' which strengthens the work. Did Tippet really look at the paintings which she selected as examples?

Another instance of seeming inattentiveness to art matters is Tippet's analysis of the National Gallery's *Blunden Harbour*, ca. 1930-31. The painting is given as proof of the influence of American artist Mark Tobey, who led a three-week study session in Carr's Victoria studio in 1928. Tippet states that the quality of light, which mysteriously emanates from behind the distant mountains, with its bluish tonality and 'marvellous luminosity' is indicative of 'mastery of another skill which Tobey taught her' (p. 165). It is rather odd that Tippet would single out *Blunden Harbour* in

this connection, since she herself discovered that this work was *copied* from a 1901 photograph, both of which are reproduced. If a stylistic source is to be cited, then surely *Blunden Harbour* has far stronger affinities with the work of Lawren Harris than that of Mark Tobey since Harris was Carr's spiritual mentor in those years. Tippet affirms that the assistance which Carr received from Tobey 'cannot be overestimated,' but it can be and is. The tendency to make too much of Tobey and not enough of Harris is shared by most recent writers on Carr's work.

Emily Carr was as susceptible to outside influences as any artist. However, it is simplistic to assume, as Tippet does, so direct a cause-and-effect relationship. The evidence of Carr's journals and paintings points to a very different conclusion. There are passages in her writings in which one idea is repeated again and again, over several years, long before its realization in paint. In a telling entry dated 20 August 1933, Carr admits that when reading a book she must 'line and score and study and make it my very own. Just reading a thing two or three times doesn't do that. One has to go back and back to bits and points. I'm slow as snails at absorbing' (*Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr*, Toronto, 1966, p. 51). By simplifying Emily Carr's art, Tippet in effect negates any creative process.

Equally reductive is Tippet's absurd conclusion that Emily Carr turned to art as an alternative to marriage: 'Possessing a low sexual drive and realizing that a permanent liaison with Paddon or any other suitor, would end in disaster, she focused her attention on her art' (p. 45). Mayo Paddon was a serious young man who courted Emily, following her to England in 1900 where his marriage proposal was refused. Tippet claims that Emily's refusal was rooted in her abnormal fear of sexual intimacy and does not seem to think that a strong-willed artist might actually opt for her independence. Subsequent references to Carr's 'sexual frigidity with Mayo [Paddon] and others' (one would like to know their identity; p. 58) are more indicative of the morality of the 1970s than the turn of the century. There

was nothing unusual in an unmarried young woman brought up in a conservative, Victorian family, deciding not to have sexual relations with a devout suitor. These sexual problems presumably relate to an incident which occurred when Emily's father explained the facts of life to her at puberty. In a (unpublished) journal entry written fifty years later, Carr alluded to this: 'I couldn't forgive Father I just couldn't for spoiling all the loveliness of life with that bestial brutality of explanation filling me with horror instead of gently explaining the glorious beauty of reproduction the holiness and the joy of it' (*sic*; p. 13). While maintaining throughout her book that Carr is at best an unreliable source, prone to exaggeration, this particular episode is exploited by the assertion of 'a lasting effect on her sexuality, her maturation, her social development' (p. 14). In fact, Tippet alleges that this episode was the latent cause of the 'hysteria' which forced Emily Carr to spend eighteen months in an English sanatorium in 1903-04. The diagnosis of hysteria, uncovered by Tippet through verification of the hospital's records, was previously unknown. This discovery, coupled with the 'brutal telling,' is the springboard from which Tippet launches into a series of highly speculative and unconvincing arguments. She suggests, for example, that Carr may have had incestuous feelings for her father which were subconsciously repressed. We are led to believe that this unacknowledged Freudian bias is a factual assessment of the situation. The only definition of hysteria provided is from a secondary source, and is open to differing interpretations: many experts would not include revenge-seeking and attention-getting behaviour as typical of hysteria, while the paralysis and stuttering are more telling symptoms. Tippet's amateur psychology is a serious drawback in an otherwise commendable biography.

Finally, I could not fail to notice the conspicuous absence of Doris Shadbolt's name in this book, as Shadbolt is the leading authority on Carr's paintings and author of the lavish new *The Art of Emily Carr* (Toronto, 1979; reviewed below), which was released only one week

after Tippet's biography. Tippet had collaborated with Shadbolt in the preparation of the second edition of the catalogue, *Emily Carr, a Centennial Exhibition* (Vancouver, 1975). Shadbolt, for her part, excludes Tippet's book from her bibliography. Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher, author of last year's book on Carr, finds fault with Shadbolt and Tippet, both of whom, in turn, ignore her existence. How odd.

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*The book received a Governor-General's Award for Non-Fiction (English) for 1979.*

DORIS SHADBOLT *The Art of Emily Carr*. Toronto and Vancouver, Clarke Irwin/Douglas and McIntyre, 1979. 223 pp., 198 illus., \$45.00.

A popular myth holds that Emily Carr (1871-1945), one of Canada's outstanding artists, was not 'discovered' until 1927. Ironically, Carr herself established the myth. In her autobiography, she recounts what follows her invitation to participate in a 1927 exhibition in Ottawa as if it were the beginning of her life. Her story has her travelling to Ottawa in 1927, at the age of fifty-six, to see her exhibition and to meet her contemporaries in Toronto – the Group of Seven – of whom she had not previously heard. To Emily, this was the first sign of recognition that her country had bestowed upon her. The Victoria-born artist had been trained in the avant-garde traditions of France in her late thirties and had already developed a style that, while completely of her own intuition, paralleled the art of the Group of Seven.

This account, along with other myths surrounding Emily Carr, has been taken for fact by countless authors since her death in 1945. An artist ahead of her time, Emily Carr was known to exaggerate the events that she held very close in her memory. Not until recently have these myths been challenged.

Doris Shadbolt discards much of the mythology in her study of Emily

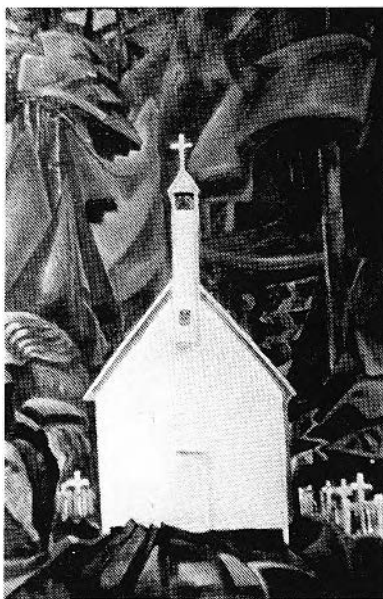


FIGURE 3. Emily Carr, *Indian Church*, ca. 1929. Shadbolt, pl. 69.

Carr's artistic career, bringing to life the real person behind the paintings. Shadbolt begins with an account of Emily Carr's childhood and family life. She then discusses the early achievements of the artist's creative expression during the years marked by Carr's journeys abroad to study, first in San Francisco (1890-93), then in England (1899-1904), and finally in France (1910-11). Although Shadbolt mentions Carr's early Indian paintings in relation to the artist's later developments of the same images, she does not refer to some of the major landscape paintings of west coast motifs, done during the years 1913-27, at which time Emily Carr's 'art had ceased to be the primary drive of her life' (p. 42). Stylistically, these works parallel the art of Tom Thomson and members of the Group of Seven. The subsequent period of Carr's life is treated as a series of intersecting themes. The problems of studying this period are laid out, but at times the text becomes very difficult to follow. The last two chapters deal with Carr's final achievements. The text is accompanied by precise footnotes, and it is especially interesting to view the illustrations alongside of the quotations which the author has judiciously selected from Carr's writings.

Shadbolt details Emily Carr's student years to show that not only

did they introduce the artist to the elements of style and expression, but that they also placed her deep in the realms of the Post-Impressionists and the Fauves. During her year in France, Carr had proven her merits as an artist in a cosmopolitan environment, exhibiting beside the early-twentieth-century masters at the Salon d'Automne. On her return to Victoria in 1912, Carr's artistic ability was more than the people of Victoria could comprehend.

The years 1912 and 1913 are distinguished in Carr's career by many watercolours of Indian totems. Already in her forties, Carr visited the remote Indian villages of British Columbia where she sketched under all kinds of difficult circumstances. Because of the conditions under which many of these paintings were realized, a precise stylistic analysis would serve no purpose. Their importance stems from Carr's ethnological intent to record the fast decaying culture of these peoples. During the same period she did many finished studio paintings which clearly indicate her continued use of the Post-Impressionist style. These paintings mark an important contribution to Canadian art.

Shadbolt's approach to the biography of Emily Carr is different from traditional ones. To gain an overview of Carr's entire artistic career is no easy task, for she left no real chronology of her development. Although at the beginning of her book Shadbolt appears to be treating her subject chronologically, the sense of strict sequence fades rapidly, following the turning point of 1927 which witnesses the opening of the artist's heart and mind in her quest for her inner-self and her supreme God. Two themes appear and intermingle – the old theme of the Indians now finds its complement in Carr's lifelong love of the British Columbia forests. An artist of the immediate moment and its relevant experience, Emily Carr was, at this time, particularly lax with regard to dates and places. As a result, the identity of the motifs in her paintings often becomes obscure and requires extensive study.

Emily Carr's 'Indian Church' (Fig. 3) is a fine example of the transitional nature of this period.