

Finding Emily

CATRIONA MORTIMER-SANDILANDS

Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands is the Canada Research Chair in Sustainability and Culture in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University.



At one stage in my Victoria, B.C., childhood—I must have been 10 or 11 years old—my parents thought it was a good idea to try to encourage whatever fledgling artistic talent I may have possessed. I remember with painful clarity the cold lumps of grey and brown clay that simply would not submit to my aesthetic will during pottery class, confirming for me yet again my utter inability to transform the images in my head into any kind of visually recognizable facsimile. With rather more affection, I also remember being sent off to the Royal British Columbia Museum for art “appreciation”: presumably, if I couldn’t do art, at least I could be taught to recognize it. Exactly one artist dominates this memory of art appreciation: Emily Carr.

Carr’s paintings of dense, green rainforests were so much a part of my cultural milieu that it did not consciously occur to me until years later that Carr was not a realist painter; for me, Carr’s modernist vision of the West Coast *was* the West Coast.¹ This influence is not surprising: as cultural geographer Bruce Braun discusses, not only are her paintings habitually displayed in all manner of galleries across the country, but also her work is almost endlessly reproduced on T-shirts, postcards, calendars, fridge magnets, and “dog-eared posters [that] hang on the office walls of local environmental organizations, realtors, and travel agents.”² That I see Carr’s West Coast as “mine” thus has a great deal to do with the fact that I was so routinely exposed to her images: her vision has so influenced mine that I see the forest for her trees.

Carr was, in fact, famous as both a painter and a writer; during her lifetime, in fact, more for the latter than the former. Her first book, *Klee Wyck*, won the Governor General’s Award for Literature in 1941, and she published two other popular literary recollections of her life before her death in 1945 (several others were published posthumously).³ Indeed, I remember from my childhood not only her forest landscapes, but also the stories she wrote about Woo, her Javanese monkey, and the legions of other animals with whom Carr cohabited over the course of her rather unusual life.⁴ Certainly, her artistic and literary legacy has spawned a huge number of academic, literary, theatrical, artistic, and even musical and choreographic responses to her work, placing her among not only the most publicly recognized but also the most debated and discussed artists in Canadian history.⁵

A lot of environmentalists would consider Carr's influence on Canadian collective vision and culture a definite boon: her famous paintings depict a nature that seems to demand our awe and respect. Although it would be problematic to call Carr an "environmentalist" per se, more than one commentator has suggested that "she has been enthroned as a kind of proto-ecofeminist heroine who understood in advance of her time and place the importance of nature."⁶ In this regard, most people focus on her forest paintings. *Forest, British Columbia* (1931–32), for example, depicts a thick growth of massive, magnificent trees, and the browns and greens of the individual cedar trunks both absorb and reflect the diffuse light that animates the whole forest as sacred. This forest is alive, sensuous, and profoundly humbling in its solidity and permanence. It would, I think, be quite difficult to look at *Forest, British Columbia* and reduce the huge, luminous trees to an industrial and instrumental calculation of board feet of timber.

It is this quality that has been remarked on in recent environmentalist "uses" of Carr. For example, a 1992 working paper from the UBC Centre for Applied Ethics uses the popularity of her work *Wood Interior* (1932–35), with its emphasis on nature as a place of sublime beauty, to encourage policy-makers to attend to artistic representations of the forest such as Carr's in order to "shape their practices into images the public will support."⁷ Along similar lines, a 2001 article in *The Atlantic Monthly* examines *Forest, British Columbia* (Figure 9.1) as part of an argument that "landscape paintings [of the Pacific Northwest] are pictorial dispatches from a long war that is more heated now than at any time in the past 200 years."⁸ As Braun sums it up, "although we have scant evidence that Carr intended her forest paintings to be statements of environmental protest, . . . there is merit in the view that Carr's rainforest paintings disrupted the objectifying gaze of capital."⁹ Insofar as her paintings inspire a desire and respect for nature outside, say, practices of industrial logging, the images can be claimed as part of environmental history, and particularly a history of environmental ideas.

But Carr is also a controversial figure, and some of the arguments are instructive to consider as we examine her environmental contributions. One debate in particular has polarized both scholarly and popular ideas about Carr, and that issue concerns her relationships with the first peoples of British Columbia.¹⁰ In *Klee Wyck*, Carr claims a strong, personal relationship—against the social conventions of her time—with a wide variety of native individuals, and certainly expresses a deep admiration for aboriginal cultures as a whole. In particular, Carr understands native peoples as having a special relationship with nature. As she writes, "I was to them a child, ignorant about the wild things which they knew so well. In these things the Indian could speak with authority to white people."¹¹ In the same vein, many of Carr's early paintings focus on native artefacts such as totem poles and longhouses. Although the paintings clearly depict such items as beautiful and spiritual, these artefacts are also frequently portrayed as decaying, receding into the forest, returning to nature. For many critics, both her professed intimacy with and her visual eulogies for a "dying" native culture¹² are deeply problematic. For Marcia Crosby, a Haida/Tsimpsian writer, not only was Carr's relationship with aboriginal people already shaped by colonialism, meaning that she did not, as she claimed, significantly challenge her privileged position as a white observer of native peoples, but also in both her art and writing she actively appropriated native cultures to an ongoing project of constructing an imaginary, romantic, thoroughly colonial "Indian." As Crosby puts it, "if [Carr] did forge a deep bond with an imaginary, homogeneous heritage, it was with something that acted as a container for her

Figure 9.1



Emily Carr, *Forest, British Columbia*, 1932

Source: Emily Carr, *Forest, British Columbia*, 1931–1932, oil on canvas, 130.0 × 86.8 cm, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Emily Carr Trust, VAG 42.3.9, Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery.

Eurocentric beliefs, her search for a Canadian identity and her artistic intentions. To accept the myths created about Carr and her relationship with ‘the Indians’ is to accept and perpetuate the myths out of which her work arose.”¹³

As Douglas Cole admits, there is no question that “Carr appropriated Northwest coast Aboriginal peoples in that she incorporated them into her conception of Canada and the West.”¹⁴ And it is quite true that the romantic “myth of the vanishing Indian” (as discussed in Chapter 8 of this volume by Colin Coates) was an important element in colonial discourses of Carr’s time: if aboriginal peoples were dying out, then white people could safely romanticize their cultures without having to recognize, say, their territorial claims. What is particularly important to us here, though, is that there is a strong relationship between Carr’s appropriation of native cultures and her depictions of forests like *Forest, British Columbia*. Although toward the end of her career Carr had completely turned her attention toward representing nature in itself, rather than focusing on aboriginal presences *in* nature (the totem poles completely disappeared as her focus changed), there are distressing similarities between a view of aboriginal artefacts and communities as dying and “returning to nature,” and an image of nature as “wilderness,” as uninhabited, and especially, as devoid of precisely the ongoing and visible aboriginal peoples for whom the forests were, in fact, “home.”¹⁵ Carr may have stopped actively using native images (for artistic, not political reasons), but her subsequent “wilderness” paintings proceeded as if aboriginal peoples were not just dying but already dead. Carr was clearly, then, a product of her time, and much as she might have been a “proto-ecofeminist,” she was also steeped in particular colonial assumptions that shaped her views of nature in ways that might not be entirely progressive.

How are we, then, to understand Carr as a figure of importance to environmental history? As is made apparent by much of the Carr controversy, it is necessary to examine the ways in which her particular portrayals of nature have had an effect on subsequent environmental ideas; here, the subject of analysis is as much her influence as her life. What does it mean, one might ask, that people like me grew up surrounded by Carr’s forests? How did the emptiness of her wilderness, as portrayed on T-shirts and in art appreciation classes, affect my views of nature? What does it mean that her images are still so influential? In this vein, it is entirely reasonable to ask, as Braun does especially well, about the implications of what one might call the “Carr industry” for the *continuing* romanticization of aboriginal peoples’ lives and livelihoods in, and also their erasure from, a modern imagination of West Coast natures, *including* an environmental imagination. The ways in which Carr has been interpreted, distributed, and discussed form a complex story in their own right; her changing reputation is part of a history of environmental ideas in which Carr has been a player after her death.

On another level, however, it is also important to understand Carr as a particular person with a rich biography that cannot be summed up by any one set of relations. In this view, it is important to look at not only the most public version of Emily Carr, but also sources that might offer a more nuanced picture of what she thought about nature, what role it played in her art and writing, and—crucially—how her views might have changed over time. This picture is of Carr the person rather than Carr the icon. Although such a picture does not supplant or disprove a critical view of her work as it is received in the present, it does suggest that a closer look at her life has something to reveal about her environmental contributions.

Finding Emily?

There are huge issues, of course, involved in undertaking such a project. First, as Stephanie Kirkwood Walker has demonstrated with specific reference to Carr, biographical writing says as much about the biographer as it does the subject.¹⁶ Any attempt to reconstruct a life emphasizes certain features and diminishes others, and especially in the context of the vast and controversial literature about Carr, all choices are complicated. Second, any research involving Carr requires dealing with an enormous and intricate archive. There is the huge visual record of her own making, her paintings and sketches; there are her seven major books, some of which were written as memoirs of long-past events, others of which were left as relatively unedited “journals” that were nonetheless intended for eventual publication and have since been compiled and edited (and re-edited) by others; there are her letters, saved unevenly by her friends and correspondents, some published and some not, and mostly from her later years when she was relatively well known; and, of course, there is the voluminous scholarship, including several biographies written by people who actually knew Carr, that has emerged following her death. Complicated choices are made even more so with this kind of archive: Where do we go to find Emily?

As Walker discusses, it is important to acknowledge, when doing or reading a biographical work, that the biographer-historian is an *interpreter* of her or his subject’s life, and that the act of writing an account of that life involves the unfolding of a creative and speculative relationship between, on the one hand, the particular concerns of the writer and, on the other, the details available in the subject’s archive. Indeed, as Walker writes, “the biographical subject confers a coherence and legitimacy upon the biographer’s speculations that would not otherwise be granted,”¹⁷ and thus the act of writing requires that the author pay careful attention to the concerns animating the biography in the first place. Neither Walker nor I would argue that this kind of reflexive approach to writing a self-consciously created account of a subject’s life excuses relativism or solipsism. Quite the contrary: awareness of her/his own concerns and interests when approaching a subject allows a writer to consider the tasks of research and writing as the development of a conversation between current ideas and historical figures, in which the work of biography stands as an important moment in the development of a relationship between present and past.¹⁸ In other words, the fact that I am interested in Carr as an environmental thinker does not mean that I can discover a new truth about her as “an environmentalist”: this stance would be an exercise in anachronism, in which I impose early-21st-century ideas onto her early-20th-century writings and paintings. What I have instead is an opportunity to sharpen and develop my understanding of the specificity of both historical and more recent environmental ideas about nature, a process enabled by a careful reading of the unique character of Carr’s life and works.¹⁹

But the question remains: To which works will I go to develop this conversation with Carr’s biography about her environmental thought? The complexity of Carr’s archive offers many possible strategies, but here the richness of the available material would suggest that one can turn to multiple sources of information, and also involve multiple modes of interpretation. I will, then, investigate three different sets of sources to see what each reveals about Carr’s understandings of nature. In the first, I will look at selections from one of the literary memoirs Carr published before she died: *The Book of Small*, Carr’s 1941 account of her childhood in Victoria in the late 19th century.²⁰

Although, as Doris Shadbolt states quite plainly, *The Book of Small* “is really a collection of episodes recalled later in life when self-mythologizing had become [Carr’s] habit,”²¹ it is interesting to read these recollections in terms of what they say about the later Carr’s understanding of herself in relationship with animals, plants, and landscapes. If, as I will argue, we look closely at some of Carr’s literary choices to present her childhood in the particular manner she does (i.e., “reading beyond the words,” as discussed in Carolyn Podruchny’s contribution to this volume), what we see is a clear picture of Carr’s adult view of herself as an outcast, a rebel even in childhood against the gendered social conventions of her time. In particular, Carr presents us with a strong notion that nature was always already part of her rebellion; her relations to plants and animals were always (she intimates) both more satisfying and more “authentic” than her relationships with other human beings.

The second source I will examine is a selection of entries from her posthumously published journal, *Hundreds and Thousands*, which Carr set down between November 1927—when she first encountered the Group of Seven and achieved some degree of recognition and respect for her work and views—and March 1941. As Susan Crean notes, although Carr certainly intended her memoirs for publication, “it is also evident from letters that the original idea for the book was a collection of stories in the format she had used for all her other books. It may be that she regarded her journals as raw material for that venture.”²² Certainly, there are considerable variations in the tenor and address of the different entries in *Hundreds and Thousands*, suggesting that some parts of the journals were more polished than others, and possibly also that Carr was writing partly to herself, in order to jog rather than record memory. However one might choose to read the memoirs, many of the entries in *Hundreds and Thousands* directly concern Carr’s understanding of her own artistic process. The quality of Carr’s memoirs is descriptive/reflective; particularly among the varied passages that involve Carr speaking directly, almost to herself, about issues of God, art, and nature, we see an interesting shift in the journals as Carr ages.

The final set of sources I will examine is Carr’s paintings.²³ Although many art critics pay most attention to the dramatic differences between Carr’s earlier, more “anthropological” paintings of totem poles and her later, more modernist “nature” paintings,²⁴ I will not endeavour here to draw a comparison between these two periods. Rather, in order to juxtapose relatively synchronous writings (the memoirs and the journal) and paintings (Carr’s post-1927 oeuvre), I will focus on a selection of paintings that demonstrates some changes to Carr’s views of nature *within* what is often called the “mature” period of her artistic work. Specifically, although Carr is best known for the dark, interior forest landscapes that she painted in the late 1920s and early 1930s, including both *Forest, British Columbia* and *Wood Interior*, she underwent quite a significant aesthetic change during the 1930s that, I think, suggests a changed relationship with nature. Doris Shadbolt writes that “having explored the dark, forbidding side of nature, Carr began to express its animating life and joy. She extended her range of nature themes to include, in addition to deep forest and jungle, more open weeds, fields, airy tree tops, beaches with open sky, and she made corresponding stylistic and expressive changes”²⁵ including, significantly, a move from an emphasis on the sculptural qualities of forests to an emphasis on light and movement in a range of spaces. This shift is particularly apparent in some of the later paintings that treat “altered” rather than apparently primal landscapes, specifically, that include evidence of large-scale logging in her depiction of the divine in nature: *Stumps and Sky* (1934) and *Scorned as Timber, Beloved of Sky* (1935). The

subjectivity and tenuousness of the central tree in *Scorned as Timber*, for example, suggests something far different from, and more fragile than, the impenetrable awesomeness of the dense forests for which Carr is generally more famous.

Memoirs: Small in the Garden

Emily Carr, born in 1871, was raised in Victoria on what was then a semi-rural property near Beacon Hill Park. *The Book of Small* is Carr's late-life recollection of that childhood, including vivid descriptions of both the developing city of Victoria and its inhabitants and, especially, of the various "natural" spaces that twined through and beyond that development. The book is not structured chronologically; it does not offer a retrospective explanation of Carr's development as an artist so much as it presents a series of loosely connected vignettes that often read more like anecdotes told in front of a fire than an artist's retrospection of her journey toward art.

"Small" is Carr's name for herself in the book, a literary choice that has the interesting effect of distancing the author from the character, and thus making clear the distinction between the scattered, collected stories that form *The Book of Small* and most literary memoirs. Laurie Ricou argues that this choice suggests Carr's "dissatisfaction with the potential superficiality of a memoir in which the writer records strictly what is remembered in her own past."²⁶ Rather than understand memoir as a work of retrospective truth-telling, Carr's writing suggests an active attention to the fact that retrospective writing is a work of memory, and that memory is not so much a recording as a reordering of that past. What Carr offers is a narrative that highlights rather than hides the fact that it is remembered: "Small" is not the actual younger Emily as much as she is the crafted figure of the younger Emily in the older Emily's present, and the scattered and uneven quality of the remembered events actually emphasizes the fact that this collection is indeed a set of memories. Cornelia Hoogland argues, in addition, that the voice Carr chooses in *Small* is itself childlike: what we read is not a calmly remembered past told in the voice of a middle-aged woman, but a series of vividly present events, told in the past tense but giving "the impression of a child narrator bursting to tell her story."²⁷ That story is never completed; indeed, one could argue that the fragments of her life presented in *Small* are more like pictures than narrations. A good artist, Carr is more interested in showing than telling, and her choice to speak of the past in such immediate and childlike terms gives the reader (rather like the viewer of a painting) a sensuous rather than narrative picture. Consider the following passage, in which the immediate, intensely visual experience is rudely interrupted by the insertion of narrative time:

Everything was going so fast—the butterflies' wings, the pink flowers, the hum and the smell, that they stopped being four things and became one most lovely thing, and the little boy and the white horses and I were in the middle of it, like the seeds that you saw dimly inside the white currants, like a big splendid secret getting clearer and clearer every moment—just a second more and—. "Come gather up the white currants," a grown-up voice called from the vegetable garden.

The most beautiful thing fell apart.²⁸

The contrast Carr sketches in *The Book of Small* is quite clear. On the one hand, there is her family, deeply conservative, Christian, and attached to its social position in the new capital city, and on the other hand, there is Emily. A large proportion of Carr's sharp descriptions involves her childlike opposition to the rigid, adult social codes surrounding her. From Small's perspective, the adults around her—especially her eldest sister, Dede—are fairly horrendous, spanning a range from cruel and abusive to pious and stupid. We know Small through vivid depictions of her profound childhood pleasures, most of which are rudely interrupted—like her reverie among the white currants—by some arbitrary, careless, or cruel adult demand. Consistently, Small's pleasures occur in her direct contacts with plants, animals, and natural landscapes; nature is her delight, and also her refuge. In fact, what Carr offers us is a consistent opposition between what Small considers important, namely the exquisite possibilities of the nonhuman world, and the violent destruction of those possibilities by the adult world around her.²⁹ That Small is a *girl* is no trivial matter, here: she is defying both class and gender rules in her insistence on exploring the immediate pleasures of the natural world rather than the ritual trivialities of her sisters' proper and (for Small) hollow lives.³⁰

In one memorable vignette called "Time," Small's family, including a particularly prim auntie from San Francisco, goes on a picnic to Mill Stream. After they have their lunch, Emily and her siblings are allowed to explore freely for four hours.³¹ Carr describes particular elements of the landscape in great detail, from the stream that "would rush around the corner of a great boulder and pour bubbling into a still pool, lie there pretending it had come to be still, but all the time it was going round and round as it if were learning to write 'O's'," to maidenhair ferns that "spread their thin black arms over the edge [of the banks] and, dipping their fingers in the water, washed them gently to and fro."³² Carr depicts stream, fern, flower, and even the wind as *animate* parts of the landscape: "it was not strong enough to sweep boldly up the tunnel, but quivered along, giving bluffs and boulders playful little whacks before turning the next corner and crumbling the surface of that pool."³³ Indeed, even the smell and the sound of Mill Stream are alive: "it was like the stillness of a bird held in the hand with just its heart throbbing."³⁴ The passage is breathless, full of awe and intimacy; one feels exhilarated reading it, as if one were the child perceiving that world. Certainly, Carr presents the landscape as a place outside conventional adult time. When called by her eldest sister to return to the city, her four hours' attention to nature over, young Emily wonders that "a stream can squeeze a whole afternoon into one minute. A clock could spread one week out into a whole year."³⁵ Emily attempts to take this world home with her, carefully smuggling onto the bus carrying the family back to Victoria a toad in a tin, under a skunk cabbage leaf ("One sister said, 'Ugh!' The other said 'Warts.'"³⁶). But Auntie can't stand the smell of the leaf. The tin is revealed, the toad frightens Auntie, and eldest sister throws the toad out the window. Deflated, Emily settles back and in the quiet listens to the pocket-watches of her relatives; she is back in Victoria time.

This story clearly illustrates the overarching opposition between childhood/nature and adulthood/Victorian society that animates the book as a whole. In addition, however, it demonstrates a great deal about Carr's late-life appreciation of nature. For Carr, the natural world is full of animate actors—from streams and breezes to the many animals that also populate the book—that are accessible to a child's wondering eye. It is not so much that Small is innocent because she is a child and thus able to "see" nature, as it is that she is an outcast, a rebel. Small actively looked for life in nature because she could not find it in the social world that comprised her childhood.

Although Carr produced this image of herself as a child quite self-consciously—she thought herself a rebel and an outcast—it remains the case that Carr considered the embrace of the natural world as rather an oddity, especially for a girl. Nonetheless, it is an oddity with great reward: unlike her sisters, aunties, and often cruel male acquaintances, Small could take in the quality of life and timelessness that, in her view, eludes a more rational, adult view of the natural world.

Crucially, the childlike wonder in the natural world portrayed by Carr as Small's rebellious habit is set in explicit opposition to a more instrumental view of landscape or animal, and in particular to a view that would insist that nature should have a moral agenda. For Small, the stream anthropomorphically practising its O's is not a metaphor for anything at all (except perhaps herself): not a message about progress, and certainly not an invitation to hydroelectricity. The stream is, simply, a wonderful thing to be apprehended, to be experienced in as rich detail as humanly possible. It is thus not surprising that Carr presents her "wonders" as scattered memories, rather than as links in some greater chain of meaning. As readers, we are to get pleasure from each experience in its own right, and even if the stories might be connected as moments of testament to Carr's self-professed ill fit with the social world around her, the detail of her descriptive moments suggests a sensuous richness in the natural world that is ultimately what Carr wants her memories to provoke.

The impressionistic nature of *The Book of Small* is particularly interesting in light of Carr's other writings, and her paintings. As I will suggest below, Carr moved quite dramatically away from a view of nature as universal and abstract, to one emphasizing the intimate and personal relations that comprise human/nature interactions, in both her painting and the reflections on painting she set down in her journals. Significantly, *Small* was created during and after these other works; it is almost as if Carr decided to return to her childhood to find the most intimate and personal stories about nature.

Journals: Carr in the Wilderness?

The March 7, 1941, entry of Carr's journals, *Hundreds and Thousands*, is fairly typical in that it contains rich descriptions of Victoria and its surrounds: "The sun was powerful, the Olympic [Mountains] strong, delicate blue, Mount Baker white. The cat bush is already green and the weeping willows round the lake droop with the weight of flowering life, but there are no leaves yet."³⁷ It is relatively unusual, though, because it comments on the political events of the world around her: "The war is staggering. When you think of it you come to a stone wall. All private plans stop. The world has stopped; man has stopped. Everything holds its breath except spring. She bursts forth as strong as ever."³⁸ Indeed, the final lines of the journal seem to radiate false optimism, with their description of the birds "fulfilling their moment" and the exhortation that they—or is it the reader?—"carry on, carry on, carry on."³⁹ But Carr doesn't carry on: this entry is her last one. Although Carr continued to write and edit what were to become three books (not dying until March 1945), she moved at this stage of her life from an intense focus on writing her present, as she had done quite regularly for nearly 14 years in her journals, to working far more concertedly on publishing her past, in the form of her memoirs.

Across the years that she wrote them, however, the journals themselves contain a terrific wealth of material about Carr's life and thought, including how many of her ideas changed and developed. Although there are some vivid descriptions of events, places, and people, including Carr's trips to eastern Canada and the Chicago World's Fair (where she missed the art exhibition by one day), some of the most interesting passages are those that involve long passages of direct address. In these segments, Carr not only records the circumstances and status of her painting (and, later, writing), but also offers provocative challenges on the artistic process itself. She evaluates her own work honestly and harshly, all the while attempting to articulate a philosophy—or, perhaps, a theology—of painting, which she sees as a profoundly spiritual quest both to know divinity through painting nature and, perhaps, to represent the divinity of nature *in* painting.⁴⁰ In September 1933, for example, she writes,

I begin to see that everything is perfectly balanced so that what one borrows one must pay back in some form or another, that everything has its own place but is interdependent on the rest, that a picture, like life, must also have perfect balance. Every part of it also is dependent on the whole and the whole is dependent on every part. It is a swinging rhythm of thought, swaying back and forth, leading up to, suggesting, waiting, urging the unworded statement to come forth and proclaim itself. . . .⁴¹

The literary rationale for such passages is not immediately obvious: to whom is Carr speaking as she writes? Is she attempting to justify her work to a larger audience, or capture something of her own version of modernism for eventual publication as a philosophy of her art? Or is she trying to pin down something for her own reference, using the written page as a place in which to explore, in a more reflective and private manner, her developing aesthetic? Sometimes the passages are written in the first-person singular and describe in some detail what it is that she understands herself as doing as she paints: "I grasp for a thing and a place one cannot see with these eyes, only very, very faintly and with one's higher eyes."⁴² Sometimes they are written in the first-person plural, as if she is writing to a member of an artistic community to which she belongs: "I think we miss our goal very often because we only regard parts, overlooking the ensemble, painting the trees and forgetting the forest."⁴³ And some of the most interesting passages are written in the imperative voice, as if Carr is telling herself or the reader what s/he must do:

Go out there into the glory of the woods. See God in every particle of them, expressing glory and strength and power, tenderness and protection. Know that they are God expressing God made manifest. Feel their protecting spread, their uplifting rise, their solid immovable strength. Regard the warm red earth beneath them nurtured by their myriads of fallen needles, softly fallen, slowly disintegrating through long processes, always living, eternally changing yet eternally the same. See God in it all, enter into the life of the trees. Know your relationship and understand their language, unspoken, unwritten talk. Answer back to them with their own dumb magnificence, soul words, earth words, the God in you responding to the God in them.⁴⁴

Potentially, Carr was trying to capture something of her own creative inspiration for herself in order to sharpen and develop it, but it is also highly likely that she had an eye to the eventual publication of these particular philosophic words for a larger audience. Certainly, however, Carr had particular interlocutors for these weighty thoughts about art and nature, and especially so during the earlier part of the journal's existence, the entries she wrote in the years immediately after her initial contact with the Group of Seven. I will discuss the influence of the Group of Seven on Carr's art in the next section; what is interesting to note here is not only the overt spiritual insistence throughout these passages—for Carr, God is revealed in nature, and nature is a sacred embodiment of God to be painted with humility and something approaching reverence—but also that modernism, with its emphasis on the essence of the world below appearance, offers a particular aesthetic path toward the perception and revelation of the hidden divinity in painting. For Carr, modern art sought to reveal the essence of the subject—nature—beneath its outer layers. Her quest for the divine, then, was oriented to the representation, through different modes of perception and abstraction, of a divine essence of nature that could not be revealed in the static realistic tidiness of most of the painting around her at the time in Victoria.

In the earlier passages in the journals, Carr's modernism was deeply influenced not only by her general contact with the Group of Seven, but also by her particular relationships to Group member Lawren Harris and to Bess Housser, wife of art critic Fred Housser.⁴⁵ Harris and Housser were deeply involved in theosophy, an esoteric religious movement emphasizing the universal divinity of all things, including nature, and the achievement of a knowledge of God through the individual revelation of truth. At the outset, Carr saw enormous similarity between Harris and Housser's theosophical beliefs and her own, mirroring her deep admiration of Harris's art and her reliance on his critical opinion of her work. Her painting leaned, in these years, toward abstraction; so did her written reflections on painting. Carr's words were written in bold prose, and very often in the imperative. They emphasized universal qualities such as balance, ensemble, splendour, glory, and even, in several places, the soul: "Oh to realize that intensity! It is of the soul."⁴⁶ In addition, they resonated with many elements of theosophy, including ideas of universal knowledge and expression. The following passage bears particular imprint of this influence:

Remember, the picture is to be one of concerted movement in a definite direction for a definite purpose, viz., the expression of a definite *thought*. All its building is for that thought, the bringing into expression and the clothing of it. Therefore if you have no thought that picture is going to be an empty void, or worse still, a confusion of cross purposes without a goal.⁴⁷

In 1934, Housser divorced her husband, Harris divorced his wife, and they married. Emily was, to put it mildly, not impressed. She wrote: "*November 1*: A letter from Lawren. He and Bess have divorced and married each other. None of my business but I feel somehow as if my connection to the east is over."⁴⁸ Although, perhaps, this perceived personal betrayal was a last straw, Carr had actually diverged considerably from Harris on matters spiritual some months before.⁴⁹ This divergence is reflected in the following passage both overtly—she says it—and in a more subtle shift in

Carr's spiritual emphasis from a universal idea of God in nature to a far more particular one, emphasizing trees as individuals in need of a far less abstract mode of apprehension:

Somehow theosophy makes me shudder now. . . . It's that pedantic know-it-allness that irritates me. . . . Instead of trying to force our personality on to our subject, we should be quite quiet and unassertive and let the subject swallow us and absorb us into it; and not be so darn smart of our importance. The woods are marvelous after the sun has dipped and quit tickling them. Then they get down to sober realities, the cake without the icing. They are themselves, then, like people alone and thinking instead of persons in a throng trying to sparkle and taking on reflection from others. Dear trees, we don't stop half enough to love and admire them.⁵⁰

In this passage, Carr deviates significantly from some of her earlier, rather strident spiritual rhetoric toward a much gentler, more intimate voice. She also clearly moves from *thinking* first into *looking* first. Rather than find abstract forms in nature (which was what Harris did increasingly in his own work), Carr looked to nature to see what forms it revealed. Her journal entries are still often absorbed with questions of nature, divinity, and art (Carr began to re-embrace the mainstream Christianity available to her in Victoria churches), but she is increasingly focused on particular landscapes and on the evocative possibilities contained not in grand sweeps of words, but in intricate descriptions. God moved, as it were, into the details, and especially into the realm of sensuous apprehension rather than cerebral reflection.

Shadbolt is describing Carr's painting in this period, but might also have been describing her writing, when she states, "her route by this time was becoming expressionist, immediate, based in the senses though informed by spirit."⁵¹ Carr herself wrote, in 1934, that abstraction "seems rather like cutting a flower out of cardboard. The form may be correct, but where's the smell and the cool tenderness of the petals?"⁵² And as the following passage demonstrates, by the late 1930s the larger discussions of God and Art so indicative of her conversations with Harris have shifted into intimate, often minuscule descriptions of the world around her as an approach to the divine:

The wild bit of Armadale is bursting out in tender leafage and the birds do a great deal of discussing there. Wild lilies of the valley are shooting up umbrella-like leaves to hide the blossoms they are going to get. The salmonberry bushes are dotted with deep pink blooms. Skies are fine these days. White clouds dance over the blue dome. Oh, that dome! The blue is so much more than blue, the illusive depth boring into Heaven's floor.⁵³

Given my previous emphasis on the intimate natures of Carr's descriptions apparent in her memoirs, it is interesting to see that the movement into such intricate detail was present in Carr's writing well before she began the memoirs. It is also interesting to note that Carr explicitly recognized and addressed her artistic choice in this regard; Carr's stories about Small are not simply nicely written little stories about details from her childhood memory, but their very detail reflects a commitment to the sensuous apprehension of the divine that Carr increasingly understood as part of her spiritual relationship with the world.

In the final section of this chapter, I will turn to a third element of Carr's work—her painting itself—in order to see how Carr's commitment to detail was manifest on canvas, and how we can see, in her images, a particularly revealing segment of Carr's developing understanding of her relationship, as artist, to the natural world. Specifically, Carr is not simply descending into autobiography as she ages. Rather, her increasing focus on motion in landscape, and her increasing attention to the effects of human contact on natural landscapes—a facet of her work not often discussed—suggest that Carr's later-life attention to particularity, detail, and relationship can be viewed as a nuanced and sophisticated move beyond some of her artistic colleagues' works.

Painting: Emily among the Stumps

Although Carr had had significant contact with several different currents of modern art at different points over the course of her life,⁵⁴ her 1927 contact with the Group of Seven was particularly influential.⁵⁵ In the Group Carr finally found a community of artists receptive to ideas that were similar to hers: that there was something deeply significant about the landscape that deserved more than picturesque representation in paint; that there was something especially significant about the *Canadian* landscape that required an “organic” expression such as the one Carr was attempting to provide of the West Coast; and that modernist aesthetic experiments supplied some of the tools necessary to develop this unique art movement. The Group understood itself as creating a uniquely Canadian body of art. Their landscapes were intended to represent the essential nature of Canada, against both the subject matter and the aesthetic conventions of other nations (Harris was particularly attached to this project). In this respect, Carr shared more than just aesthetics with the Group. As the following passage from a 1929 article demonstrates, Carr also shared their nationalist artistic aspirations.

What are Canadian artists of the west going to do with our art? . . . Shall we try to make Canada look English or French or Italian by painting conscientiously in a style that does not belong to us? Or shall we search as the Indian did, amid our own surroundings and material, for something of our own through which to express ourselves, and make for ourselves garments of our own spinning to fit our needs and become a very part of us?⁵⁶

The Group of Seven has been lauded for their bold and moving depictions of Canadian wilderness en route to this uniquely Canadian representation. They have also been castigated for their complete erasure of aboriginal peoples from the landscapes they painted, and for their contribution to the development of a nationalist fantasy of a romantic, pristine, Northern “Canadian” nature, devoid of any human presence at all, and resonating with ideas of intimate unity with the natural landscape irrespective of any actual activity, settlement, or human contact. As the passage above indicates, Carr is not exempt from such criticism. After 1927, her landscapes increasingly de-emphasized the presence of aboriginal artefacts (Harris specifically counselled her to turn her artistic attention away from totem poles), even as she rhetorically took on the position of “Indian” in her claim to an unmediated relationship with the landscape. As discussed earlier, these aesthetic

and ideological claims are a strong part of what fuels the controversy concerning her relations to aboriginal peoples. Here, it is worth emphasizing that, in the midst of her closest contact with the Group of Seven, her depictions of “primordial” forests not only erase the actual lives of aboriginal peoples, but also paint out of existence the large set of social and technological relationships by which she was able to paint many relatively remote B.C. settings.⁵⁷

In this light, paintings such as *Forest, British Columbia* and *Wood Interior* are not simply beautiful and moving paintings that would seem to be offering the viewer a non-instrumental view of West Coast rainforests; they also participate in a view of nature in which the “real” nature of “pristine” wilderness is the primary site of value, to the exclusion of human contact. What is not in *Wood Interior* is the set of relationships by which Carr is able to paint the forest. These relationships are absent from the frame because, for Carr, the essence of nature—and of the nation—is actually that part of the forest that lies beyond human, social life. Although one might well argue that the depiction of a nature “beyond” social relationships serves to highlight the need for a respectful approach to the environment based on awe or reverence, many recent environmental thinkers—and many critics of Carr and the Group of Seven—are quite correct when they point out that this view of “pristine” nature is not only historically inaccurate but also politically deeply problematic.⁵⁸

What is clear from both Carr’s writing and painting is that she was very much engaged in a project of representing Canadian nature as part of an overtly nationalist art movement at the time she painted some of her most famous canvases. Her dense forest interiors are not only the dark mysteries of the forest, but also the primordial origins of Canada, and the West Coast in particular. *Wood Interior* is a perfect example: it focuses on trees as pillars, thrusting upward from a green mass of abstract undergrowth to a light-dappled canopy. The trees are the stuff of a solid and almost inviolable nature, as well as the sculptural foundations of the nation, stretched upward from a swirling and indistinct past to a light-filled, divine future—in short, toward God. In much the same vein, *Forest, British Columbia* draws our attention “into” the mystery; the thick and textural tree trunks reveal a path of light that ends in the middle distance, again suggesting a view of nature/nation as a solid line between the origins of the nation in a thick and impenetrable nature, and its glorious path to the future, to the light, and to God. Both paintings represent nature as solid, sculptural. There is a quality to them of heaviness and permanence that speaks volumes to the Group’s ideas of the nation as rooted in a timeless nature, as *being* permanent, unyielding, destined.

As Shadbolt notes, however, these densely packed forest interiors of the late 1920s and early 1930s were not Carr’s only (or final) subject choices. Carr was certainly influenced by Harris, nationalism and all, during this period, but she actively turned away from both his theosophical outlook and his artistic trajectory—and, I think, his particular project of aesthetic nationalism—by the mid-1930s.⁵⁹ Although Carr remained committed to the idea that she was representing the West Coast, her later paintings are far more concerned with particularity and transience than they are with nationality and permanence; her natures come to express movement rather than solidity, and—importantly—show the influence of human beings on nature, rather than its pristine-ness or imperviousness, both of which suggest a very different kind of representation of the landscape indeed from the one with which she and the Group are generally associated. As Robert Linsley writes, “Carr’s late expressionist paintings of the forest . . . have to be seen as profoundly historical.

Figure 9.2



Emily Carr, *Scorned as Timber, Beloved of the Sky*, 1935

Source: Emily Carr, *Scorned as Timber, Beloved of the Sky*, 1935, oil on canvas, 112.0 × 68.9 cm, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Emily Carr Trust, VAG 42.3.15, Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery.

stumps in the painting are revealed as part of the same moving nature as the swirling sky. Yes, there is death and yes, there is transformation—these themes are absent from the earlier forest interiors—but these changes *connect* the viewer with the painting, as s/he is part of the landscape being depicted rather than a witness to something divine existing outside her. Indeed, as Shadbolt has noted, movement itself is the subject of many of Carr's later paintings;⁶² the image captures a moment, not a state, and the viewer is drawn into movement *with* the painting.

Scorned as Timber, Beloved of the Sky (Figure 9.2, and cover) has a similar sense of light and movement, and also shares with *Stumps* a foreground composed of a clear-cut (although in

If the frozen quality of Harris' work . . . is a defensive response to modern history, then the turbulence of Carr's paintings . . . talks about the real turbulence of that history as enacted on the land—the industrialization of the wilderness.”⁶⁰

The turbulence of a landscape enacted *upon*: Carr's 1934 painting *Stumps and Sky*, and her 1935 *Scorned as Timber, Beloved of the Sky*, are both good examples of this theme. In *Stumps*, the foreground is dominated by a clear-cut, complete with rows of stumps and the detritus of cut branches. There is no question of permanence here: the standing trees in the middle of the painting are dwarfed and indistinct in comparison to the arresting centrality of the dead ones, suggesting their fragility, their movement toward becoming timber. But this is not only a scene of carnage, a sort of eulogy for *Forest, British Columbia*: the standing trees also draw our attention from the stumps up into the sky, which is swirling and moving with light.⁶¹ The stumps reflect that light and, in fact, themselves give off a sense of movement; certainly, they are not painted with dense layers of paint or as static geometric forms, but are actually airy and incomplete. In this way, the

Scorned, that foreground is much smaller). The focal point of the painting is, however, a standing, towering tree. This tree is very different from Carr's earlier forests: it is (almost) alone; it is spindly and with virtually no canopy; it feels as if it is stretching toward the light in the sky—moving—rather than resting solidly on the ground; and it is, of course, surrounded by stumps, suggesting that this tree is an industrial survivor, scorned as timber, rather than a pillar.⁶³ Linsley observes the significance of the painting's title: it clearly anthropomorphizes the tree as an individual both scorned and beloved (one could see it as an autobiographical statement on Carr's part), and thus offers a deeply subjective portrayal rather than an objective one. It also invokes a specific past, in that the tree *has been* scorned—the loggers have been there—and yet, at this moment, exists to reach upward to the sky, to the beloved.⁶⁴ The painting is intimate rather than abstract; it invites a personal relationship with a singular being in a particular time and place, rather than a conceptual understanding of an external nature. And in its combination of change and intimacy, we see once again an emphasis on relationship rather than distance.

Both of these paintings, then, demonstrate a significant departure from Carr's earlier work: from a timeless nature to a historical and changing one; from a universal nature to a subjectively experienced one; from an objective, external nature to a personal and intimate one; from a solid nature outside history to a fragile and transient one bearing the scars of industry and death. Whether or not we can call even these latter images "environmental," it seems clear that they evoke a vastly different set of relationships to nature than do the works with which many viewers of Carr are more familiar. In *Stumps* and *Scorned*, we have a nature in the process of change, the outcome of which is not at all certain; we have a nature that *can* be clear-cut, and that continues to reach to the sky even with the scars of history. Perhaps most importantly, though, here we have a nature that should be known personally and intimately: "Dear trees, we don't stop half enough to love and admire them."⁶⁵

Conclusion: Emily Carr in Environmental History

Consider two final passages from Carr's writing, the first from her journals circa 1934, and the second from a segment called "Silence and Pioneers" from *The Book of Small*:

There's a torn and splintered ridge across the stumps I call the "screamers." These are the unsawn last bits, the cry of the tree's heart, wrenching and tearing apart just before she gives that sway and the dreadful groan of falling, that dreadful pause while her executioners step back with their saws and axes resting and watch. It's a horrible sight to see a tree felled, even now, though the stumps are grey and rotting. As you pass among them you see their screamers sticking up out of their own tombstones, as it were. They are their own tombstones and their own mourners.⁶⁶

They felled mighty trees with vigour and used blasting powder and sweat to dislodge the monster roots. The harder they worked with the land, the more they loved these rooty little brown patches among the overwhelming green. The pioneer walked round his new field, pointing with hardened, twisted fingers to this and that which he had accomplished while the woman wrestled

with the inconveniences of her crude home, planning the smart, modern house her children would have by and by, but the children would never have that intense joy of creating from nothing which their parents had enjoyed; they would never enjoy the secret wrapped in the virgin land.⁶⁷

There is an interesting tension between these passages that, with *Stumps and Sky*, offers a good resting place for these thoughts on Emily Carr as a figure in environmental history. In the first passage, we see Carr apparently displaying overtly environmental sentiments: trees “screaming” at their demise at the hands of loggers. In the second passage, we see what seems to be the opposite: Carr lauding the virtues of the pioneer taming the wilderness, and loving it in its domestication. Which is the “real” Emily?

The preceding analysis suggests that Carr developed, in the last decade or so of her life, a much more intimate and personal relationship with the nature she sought to represent. Old age and failing health probably played a role in this process, as did her acquisition of a trailer that she fondly called “The Elephant.” Carr did not travel as widely as she had in the past, but chose instead to visit relatively local sites repeatedly; *Stumps and Sky*, for example, is probably based on a sketch she made in relatively nearby Metchosin. Her growing intimacy with the landscape was a product of familiarity. This transformation is clearly apparent in her painting, which moves from monumental, dense landscapes that impose on the viewer a sense of the impenetrability and ineffability of the forest, to a view emphasizing fragility, transience and motion in “cleared” landscapes, in the moving, individual relationships between and among natural elements like sky and stump, and also between the landscape and painting itself. It is apparent in her journals, which—particularly after Carr’s disillusionment with theosophy—become increasingly focused on the details of the particular landscapes that she was attempting to paint rather than sweeping statements about the nature of painting landscapes in general. And it is most apparent in the *Book of Small*, which offers highly polished and detailed reflections that are crafted to reveal the beauty and sacredness of the local natures of Carr’s childhood through absolutely personal and intimate stories—stories, incidentally, about a world long past.

Is this later emphasis on transience, intimacy, and particularity somehow more “environmental” than one emphasizing monumentality and permanence? There is certainly an argument to be made that Carr, in her increasing late-life focus on altered, humanized landscapes and intensely personal experiences of the natural world, made a move away from the kind of colonial “wilderness” discourse that privileges and romanticizes primordial landscapes over recognizing responsibility for human interaction with altered ones. But that move is not completely unambiguous.⁶⁸ In any case, it would still be awkward to claim Carr as a “proto-ecofeminist,” as if she were somehow prescient to late-20th-century developments in environmental thought that challenge the politics of an environmental emphasis on wilderness. What is interesting, however, is to take this “other” Emily back to her critics. Specifically, if one focuses, as this paper has, on Carr’s movement *away* from the Group of Seven rather than toward it, and on portions of her writing that treat questions of childhood memory and personal experience of landscape, rather than the more direct depictions of the first peoples of the West Coast, one gets a somewhat different view of Carr than the one often highlighted by her critics. Although it is not possible to separate the one Emily from the other, the colonial from the maverick, the Victorian

from the spiritual rebel, it is possible to argue that Carr's thinking about the environment is more complex and nuanced than previously imagined. Although Braun, for example, is correct to point out that there are very troubling issues in Carr's depictions of absolutely human-less forests, it is also necessary to consider that Carr was a complex individual, whose ideas, images, writings, relationships, and social positions changed over time: some of her most interesting forests were clearly not wildernesses.

It is no accident that the Carr most widely known from her presence on T-shirts, posters, and environmentalist websites—the Carr I remember from my childhood—is the one of *Forest, British Columbia* and not *Stumps and Sky*. Where the former image is easily borrowed to the marketing of tourist destinations, to the development of environmental campaigns against clear-cutting, and to the promotion of a national or regional identity (not to mention one that manages to erase the constitutive presence of first peoples), the latter demands a more complex mode of thinking that doesn't make for easy T-shirt material. What does it mean to find the kind of light and beauty Carr depicts—in a clear-cut? What kind of spiritual or ethical relationship with the natural world is Carr alluding to when she paints a single, possibly autobiographical tree, “beloved of sky,” in the midst of a canvas emphasizing death and change? What kind of relationship does Carr suggest among art, God, and nature when the major subject of the artwork is stumps? One might ask similar questions about Carr's writing, perhaps especially about the contradictions she seems to present between the pleasures of “creating from nothing” in the act of building a home among the trees, and the screams of the trees themselves being clear-cut. There is an ethical complexity to these works that defies easy categorization, and demands that we remember that although Carr could never transcend the colonial relationships to nature in which she was immersed, she did have more than one thought about them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What role does (or should) art play in shaping environmental awareness?
2. Should environmental artists be environmental activists, or is art about something other than politics?
3. What are some of the key differences between text and image as sources for environmental history?
4. What does it mean that writing history is a process of interpretation? Are there dangers in recognizing the subjective qualities of writing environmental history?
5. What does it mean that biography says as much about the biographer as the subject? What does this chapter tell you about its author?
6. Focusing in particular on the section on *The Book of Small*, discuss the ways in which literary criticism might be an important part of environmental history.
7. Focusing in particular on the section on Carr's later-life paintings, discuss the ways in which art criticism might be an important part of environmental history.
8. Was Emily Carr an environmentalist? Was she a racist?

NOTES

1. My thanks to Niiti Simmonds for her invaluable research assistance in the preparation of this chapter. The term “modernism” generally refers to a collection of aesthetic, literary, and political movements that, beginning in the late 19th century, but especially in the years around the First World War, emphasized the need to sweep aside “traditional” forms in order to reveal radically new truths about the world, and in art in particular, to reveal elements of essential experiences and substance that lie “below” the realm of realist appearances. For example, Fauvism, one of many schools of modernism (and one that had a particular impact on Carr’s 1920s forest landscapes), used simplified lines, bold colours, and exaggerated perspectives to emphasize the lightness and delight of the generally ordinary scenes represented (think Matisse). Although we may now see paintings by Carr and her contemporaries as aesthetically relatively conservative—say, in comparison to abstraction or minimalism—at the time many audiences found them literally repulsive.

2. Bruce Braun, *The Intemperate Rainforest: Nature, Culture, and Power on Canada’s West Coast* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 2002): p. 160.

3. All quotations in this paper from Carr’s published writings are taken from Doris Shadbolt, ed., *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr* (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993). The individual works are: *Klee Wyck* (1941), *The Book of Small* (1942), *The House of All Sorts* (1942), *Growing Pains* (1946), *Pause* (1953), *The Heart of a Peacock* (1953), and *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of An Artist* (1966). These works are all thoroughly edited, including her journals.

4. One of the largest regrets I have of this chapter is not having room to address Carr’s relationship with her animals. Her stories about Woo and the bobtail sheepdogs are not only an interesting example of animal literature, but also reveal aspects of Carr’s relationship with the natural world.

5. There are far too many examples to list them all. The following list suggests a different range of recent, more creative responses: Kate Braid, *To This Cedar Fountain* (Vancouver: Polestar, 1995), poetry; Susan Crean, *The Laughing One: A Journey to Emily Carr* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2001), memoir; Veda Hille, *Here is a Picture—Songs For . . .* (1998), music; Jennifer Mascall, choreographer, *The Brutal Telling: A Portrait of Emily Carr* (Vancouver, 1998), multimedia dance production; Eileen Whitfield, *Alice and Emily*, Citadel Theatre (16–24 November 1992), play; Jin-me Yoon, *A Group of Sixty Seven* (Vancouver Art Gallery, 1996), art installation.

6. William Closson James, “Foreword,” Stephanie Kirkwood Walker, *This Woman in Particular: Contexts for the Biographical Image of Emily Carr* (Waterloo: WLP, 1996): p. x.

7. Steven Taubeneck, “The Postmodern Forest: Images Differing,” Chris J. MacDonald, ed., *Environmental Ethics: Sustainability, Competition, & Forestry* (Working Paper, Centre for Applied Ethics, UBC) <http://www.ethics.ubc.ca/papers/susdev/html> (accessed November 15, 2006). Taubeneck notes that “Carr’s painting of the ‘Wood Interior’ captures quite clearly that very experience of intensifying movement. What is also decisive is the complete absence of human figures. Carr becomes a kind of ‘natural expressionist,’ who paints the experiences of space, movement, and light into her forest images.”

8. Jonathan Raban, “Battleground of the Eye,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 287 no. 3 (March 2001): p. 40. Raban writes that “in her best paintings the forest is literally a whirlpool of meanings, in a state of constant dissolution and recombination,” p. 52.

9. Braun, *Intemperate Rainforest*, p. 203.

10. This controversy was at the heart of a recent travelling exhibition of Carr's art, "Emily Carr: New Perspectives," co-curated by Vancouver Art Gallery senior curator Ian Thom, Université de Montréal art history professor Johanne Lamoureux, and National Gallery curator of Canadian art Charlie Hill. The exhibition was accompanied by an excellent catalogue, which I include in the list of recommended readings, along with Gerta Moray's exhaustive and rigorous treatment on Carr's relationships with aboriginal peoples. My one criticism of the exhibition is that the curators almost completely ignored Carr's own complex literary voice from the discussion; Moray's work goes out of its way to include it.
11. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 27.
12. See in particular Carr's "Lecture on Totems," Susan Crean, ed., *Opposite Contraries: The Unknown Journals of Emily Carr and Other Writings* (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2003).
13. Marcia Crosby, "Construction of the Imaginary Indian," Stan Douglas, ed., *Vancouver Anthology* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991): p. 278.
14. Douglas Cole, "The Invented Indian/The Imagined Emily," *BC Studies* 125/126 (Spring/Summer 2000): p. 161.
15. As Cole also writes, while admitting Carr's participation in colonial relations is not wrong, it is anachronistic: "to a degree it condemns her for not sharing the contemporary political views of her critics." A critical perspective on Carr's work necessarily includes a careful analysis of colonial relations, as they were both influential to and influenced by Carr's art and writing, but "to expect Carr to have been a crusading social and political reformer is to ask her to have assumed a role to which she was intellectually and temperamentally unsuited and uninterested," p. 161.
16. Walker, *This Woman in Particular*, p. 2. This excellent book is a history of the biographical *image* of Carr, and emphasizes the fact that biographical writing is a relationship between subject and biographer in which the biographer organizes a narrative account that can "grant particular lives significance within larger contexts of meaning," p. 2. One other "metabiographical" discussion of Carr worth mentioning is Nancy Pagh, "Passing Through the Jungle: Emily Carr and Theories of Women's Autobiography," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 60 (1996): pp. 166–87.
17. Walker, *This Woman in Particular*, p. 116.
18. This position is, I think, also indicated by Cole: our imagination of Carr as "colonial" may be correct, but that imagination is as much the creation of the position of the interpreter as it is inherent to the world that Carr actually inhabited and the particular character of Carr herself. A careful and nuanced account must also pay attention to the latter elements.
19. Crean's *The Laughing One* is, in my view, one of the most successful biographies of Carr, largely because it self-consciously explores the author's own relationship with Carr at the same time as it is based on a very careful and detailed reading of Carr's archive, as well as subsequent scholarship about and response to her.
20. In looking at literature for environmental themes, I rest on a body of scholarship known as "ecocriticism" or "environmental literary criticism"; several sources are listed in the recommended readings to give further detail on this body of work.
21. Doris Shadbolt, *The Art of Emily Carr* (Toronto and Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1979): p. 12.
22. Crean, *Opposite Contraries*, p. 5.
23. Clearly, there are many other sources upon which I could draw in this chapter, including several of Carr's other published works (especially *Klee Wyck*, which documents her early artistic forays into the BC

landscape, in addition to several stories about her relationships to aboriginal peoples). The British Columbia Archives holds a significant collection of Carr's later-life letters, and there are published editions of particular correspondences such as Doreen Walker, ed., *Dear Nan: Letters of Emily Carr, Nan Cheney, and Humphrey Toms* (Vancouver: UBC, 1990). The BC Archives also contains an excellent collection of photographs pertaining to Carr, in addition to the original manuscripts of all her books; a wide range of her paintings, studies, and sketches; and several manuscripts for secondary research on Carr (see <http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/index.htm>).

24. See especially Moray, "Wilderness, Modernity."

25. Shadbolt, *Art of Emily Carr*, p. 122.

26. Laurie Ricou, *Everyday Magic: Child Languages in Canadian Literature* (Vancouver: UBC, 1987): p. 74.

27. Cornelia Hoogland, "The Trees in Emily Carr's Forest: *The Book of Small* as Aesthetic and Environmental Text," *Canadian Children's Literature* 111–12 (Fall–Winter 2003): p. 35.

28. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 123.

29. That is, the *white, middle-class* adult world. Carr's memories of childhood include romanticizations of aboriginal peoples, as consistent with many critiques of her, and also of members of the Chinese community of Victoria. She considers both as "closer to nature"; particularly given that the voice of Small is so childlike, this connection to nature, in Small's pro-nature world, is also childlike.

30. The question of gender is, of course, a crucial one for environmental history, and it is certainly worth asking, in this case, how Carr's sex influenced both her life circumstances and her perceptions of the natural world. (In the recommended readings, I have listed several works that ask interesting and related questions on gender and environmental history.)

31. "Time" is told in the first person.

32. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 133.

33. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 133.

34. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 133.

35. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 134.

36. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 133.

37. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 893.

38. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 893.

39. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 893.

40. It is interesting to note that Carr talked about the search for divinity only through her painting, and not through her writing. Although her journals record questions of authorial style, there is nothing in *Hundreds and Thousands* on writing to equal the intensity of her thinking about painting. This difference could indicate that writing and painting played very different roles in Carr's life. I think this is the case, but there is not space in this chapter to explore the possibility. It could also reflect that Carr came to writing much later in life, at which point some of her spiritual angst was already worked out.

41. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 697.

42. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 697.

43. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 701.

44. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 675.

45. Fred Housser introduced Emily Carr to the work of Walt Whitman. Copied sections of Whitman's poetry are scattered throughout Carr's journals, and his voice had a definite literary and spiritual influence on her.
46. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 716.
47. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 716, emphasis in original.
48. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 766.
49. Despite their disagreements, Carr continued to correspond with Harris, and he remained a strong influence on her work for some time despite his increasing focus, after the mid-1930s, on abstraction.
50. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 745.
51. Shadbolt, *Art of Emily Carr*, p. 146.
52. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 790.
53. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 824.
54. Carr was especially affected by Fauvism and Cubism. Carr trained in San Francisco, the United Kingdom, and France, experiences documented in *Growing Pains* (1946). This one of Carr's sets of memoirs is particularly interesting in its depiction of Carr as a woman in the midst of a profoundly sexist art culture (including modern art), and as a western Canadian in the midst of a profoundly Eurocentric one. Her experiences of exclusion—and ill health—throughout her artistic training no doubt contributed to Carr's idiosyncratic painting style, which as I suggest includes strong differences even from her more significant influence, the Group of Seven.
55. As Lizbeth Goodman and Stephan Regan emphasize, the influence was two way. See "Scorned as Timber, Beloved of the Sky": Emily Carr's Double Approach to First Nations Canadian Landscapes and Images in Her Paintings and Writing," *Journal of Gender Studies* 7 no. 2 (1998): pp. 157–79.
56. Emily Carr, "Modern and Indian Art of the West Coast," Supplement to *The McGill News* (June 1929): pp. 18–22.
57. Braun notes that Carr's is actually a tourist gaze enabled by the coastal routes of the B.C. Steamship Co., and not at all the intimate, long-term relationship that people interpret in her paintings—and that she more than intimates this in parts of such writings as *Klee Wyck*. See *The Intemperate Rainforest*, pp. 182–83. Carr's actual intimacy was with Victoria and its surrounds: Goldstream Flats, Metchosin, MacDonald Park. These were not wildernesses, even at the time.
58. In addition to Braun, see Jonathan Bordo, "Jack Pine—Wilderness Sublime or the Erasure of the Aboriginal Presence from the Landscape," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 24 no. 4 (Winter 1992–93): pp. 98–128; Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, "Looking for A.Y.: Nation, Wilderness and Anxiety in Georgian Bay Islands National Park," paper presented to the Canadian Association for Cultural Studies (October 2005).
59. It is worth noting that one of the actual Group of Seven members, Fred Varley, also turned away from a project of overt aesthetic nationalism, and that he did so after moving to Vancouver.
60. Robert Linsley, "Landscapes in Motion: Lawren Harris, Emily Carr, and the Heterogeneous Modern Nation," *Oxford Art Journal* 19 no. 1 (1996): p. 91.
61. Vincent Van Gogh's influence is palpable here, and Carr documents it in her journals.
62. Shadbolt, *Art of Emily Carr*, p. 122.
63. Readers familiar with the Group of Seven will note the thematic similarity between Carr's lone tree and such works as Varley's (1921) *Stormy Weather, Georgian Bay*. As Linsley notes, however, there are also

striking differences between their treatments: Varley's tree is the "universal" man, standing against the storm, where Carr's is "scorned as timber"—a reject.

64. One could also explore the deeply Christian overtones of this image of rejection and salvation. This interpretation is quite plausible given Carr's religiosity.

65. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 745.

66. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 750.

67. Carr, *Complete Writings*, p. 140.

68. It must be remembered that *Klee Wyck*, *The Book of Small*, and *The House of All Sorts* were all written in segments over the same general time period. Carr's childhood reflections on nature are not temporally separate from her thinking about aboriginal peoples, and *Klee Wyck* is problematic for its assertion of cross-cultural intimacy where it didn't really exist (except, perhaps, in Carr's much-debated relationship with Sophie Frank).

FURTHER READING

Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Halkes, Petra. *Aspiring to the Landscape: On Painting and the Subject of Nature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.

Hessing, Melody, Rebecca Raglon, and Catriona Sandilands, eds. *This Elusive Land: Women and the Canadian Environment*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004.

Hill, Charles C. *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995.

Hill, Charles C., Johanne Lamoreux, and Ian Thom, eds. *Emily Carr: New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon*. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006.

Lebowitz, Andrea, ed. *Living in Harmony: Nature Writing by Women in Canada*. Vancouver: Orca Books, 1996.

Moray, Gerta. *Unsettling Encounters: First Nations Imagery in the Art of Emily Carr*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006.

Relke, Diana. *Greenwor(l)ds: Ecocritical Readings of Canadian Women's Poetry*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1999.

Scharff, Virginia, ed. *Seeing Nature Through Gender*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003.