

m.e. A portrayal of Emily Carr, by Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher. Toronto: Clark Irwin, 1969; pp. 123, \$4.95.

Emily Carr, by Doris Shadbolt. Vancouver Art Gallery (to accompany the retrospective exhibition to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the artist's birth), 1971, pp. 96, illus. \$5.00.

Two books have recently been published to add to the growing list of Carriana. They are important contributions and the most important outside the writings of Emily Carr herself. This remarkable person grows in stature as time reveals her presence. So many things are stirred up by the artist herself and by those who try to write about her. It is likely that the first great monograph on a Canadian artist will be on Emily Carr. The time has not yet come.

The first of these books, *m.e.* by Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher, is a very personal experience and a revealing one. It is charming, easy to read, well-written. The author has avoided the usual pitfall of intruding her own personality to the detriment of her subject. There is very little in the book about the author apart from her direct association with the artist — only enough to provide continuity. However, the author has intruded her personality in her reporting. Emily Carr was much more sharp-tongued than would appear in this book. Her journals (*Hundreds and Thousands*) were very strictly edited, omitting important material. Perhaps now time has softened recollection. Emily's personal reactions to people are vividly expressed in her letters and many of them yet to be published. Some of these would throw a different light on the events described by Mrs. Hembroff-Schleicher. Nevertheless the book is a genuine appreciation of a friendship that extended over a decade.

The inclusion of twenty letters "from Emily to Edythe" are of particular interest. No matter what reminiscences are recorded and what recollections are written (more are still to be written) the unique character and quality of the subject is revealed best in what she says informally to her friends. It is disappointing therefore that the letters have been carefully edited. Admittedly Mrs. Hembroff-Schleicher qualifies this by a statement that Emily's style is filled with spelling errors and a disregard for punctuation. In their original form the letters are most revealing of a personality pungent with wit and humour, with warmth, compassion and honest scorn, a disregard for conformity. They form some of the most vigorous and entertaining correspondence in Canadian letters.

Even the free spelling is genuinely naive and logical — altogether intriguingly vital.

Unfortunately the letters have been diluted and therefore misrepresent Emily as she was. The reader suspects that the editing is somewhat biased. It is hoped that someday the numerous letters of Emily may be collected and published as she originally wrote them.

The numerous remarks (even though obviously modified in the book) about her contemporaries give valuable insight to her own problems and loyalties. She was constantly loyal to a few friends — most notably Lawren Harris and Ira Dilworth.

One of the difficulties of a book of recollections dependent on memories of forty years past, is that the dates and sequence of events may be vague. The author frequently avoids this by omitting dates. This is forgivable and commendable since the book is primarily about the character of Emily Carr not a biography or critique of her work.

These more analytical aspects are the foundations of the more recent book, *Emily Carr* published by the Vancouver Art Gallery, to accompany the retrospective exhibition in 1971. This is partly a catalogue and partly an illustrated survey of her life and work. The whole concept of this book is a commendable one.

The six photographs, though poor in quality and poorer in reproduction (no good photographs have come to light) give a necessary insight to the person, her character, and the way she lived — dependent on wit and will and the loyalty of her pets. This is a useful supplement to the other books about Emily. One photograph is most important — the portrait of the artist in her studio holding a canvas. The whole photograph shows a vigorous dynamic and well composed study.

The 25 colour plates also suffer in the process of printing. They do not satisfactorily reveal the vitality or subtlety in colour of the original. However, they are a valuable contribution to the knowledge of an artist whose work has seldom been reproduced.

The essential style is seen with less distraction in the seven black and white reproductions of her drawings. Even here the quality could be improved.

The critical analysis which occupies most of the text is the finest assessment yet written. It reveals an effective and perceptive review of the topic and a respect for the subject. It stands as one of the best pieces of historical art criticism to be published in Canada.

Perhaps the most valuable part of the book is the catalogue of 122 paintings in the exhibition, each item accompanied by a small black and white reproduction which will be a permanent reference to the artist's work and will greatly enhance the record and also encourage further study.

The exhibition and catalogue provide a detailed year-by-year description of the artist's output from 1895 to 1942. Its chronological arrangement is revealing in itself with its postage-stamp reproductions.

Of less value is the last part — six pages of chronology, exhibitions and bibliography. It is of less value because of small inaccuracies and larger omissions so that it cannot be used as authoritative. In the chronology on page 89 it states that Emily Carr was in England from 1889 to 1904. But she was in San Francisco from 1889 to 1894 and didn't go to England until 1899. This is confirmed on page 9. Her bibliography omits such important references as Harper, *Painting in Canada; Journals of E.C. Hundreds and Thousands*; Duval, *Canadian Water-colour Painting*; Mellen, *The Group of Seven*; and the National Gallery of Canada, the Mr. and Mrs. Jules Loeb Collection.

The problem of dating appears in the self-portrait which adorns the cover. On page 83 it is dated "1934-1935," on page 51 it is dated "about 1938," while Mrs. Hembroff-Schleicher refers to her interest in portrait painting in 1932. Other references by the artist herself (including letters) would support the earliest date while comparisons with photographs would seem to rule out the latest date.

The book itself is a commendable one but it suffers slightly from the appearance of a team production.

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IAN McNAIRN

Joe Plaskett and His Paris. In Search of Time Past, Vancouver and Ottawa, Fine Arts Gallery, The University of British Columbia and the National Gallery of Canada, 1971; pp. 35, illus. \$2.00.

This attractive book is intended as accompaniment to an otherwise uncataloguable exhibition. Its novelty and imagination are its most striking features. It seems to capture the essence of the subject to the point where one wonders if the book is the "real" Joe Plaskett (if he is real) or a colourful romantic vision of the author. It is from beginning to end a character study. As such it is revealing and intriguing. We see a man who paints like a mystical poet, enjoys poetry like an epicure, wines and dines like a painter, lives like an impoverished prince.

Plaskett reveals that there is still a dream in many of us to live an unfettered sophisticated life such only Paris can provide — a dream that many thought was destroyed by the first world war.