

*Emily Carr*, by Ruth Gowers. Leamington Spa: Berg Publishers Limited, 1987. Pp. 129; illus.

Free-lance Oxford writer Ruth Gowers has written *Emily Carr* to introduce British Columbia's most celebrated artist to the British public. It begins with a quotation from *Manchester Guardian* art critic Eric Newton, who called Carr a genius some fifty years ago, then continues introducing the uninitiated reader to the west coast of British Columbia somewhat in the manner of a travel writer: "A visitor to Victoria today would find . . ." Given the recent scholarship on Emily Carr, Gowers has been able to tell the story of her subject's life with few errors. But in so doing she gives us nothing more than a factual account which follows Carr to native Indian villages along the west coast, to schools in San Francisco, London, and Paris, and from Victoria to Vancouver — where she had a studio and taught art from 1906 to 1910 — and back again. There is in all of this no attempt to discuss Carr's paintings. For example, three pivotal works, *Grey, Tree*, and *The Little Pine* are lumped together in one sentence which tells us that they "all date from the early 1930s." There is more discussion devoted to Carr's writing, but it makes no attempt at literary analysis.

Given such limitations, one wonders what the average British reader will gain from such a book. Certainly the five poorly reproduced black and white illustrations of Carr's paintings will hardly induce the reader to look for more art work. Nor will the short synopses of her books, which are confined to content descriptions, prompt one to seek out her autobiographical writings. Indeed, reading *Emily Carr* was for this reviewer a bit like reading a first year university end-of-term paper in which major secondary works — for example Doris Shadbolt's superb *The Art of Emily Carr* (Vancouver 1979) — have not been consulted; in which photographs and paintings are illustrated with no indication as to their location; in which phrases, concepts, and quotations have been lifted from other secondary sources as well as from Carr's own writings without being properly annotated; and, finally, in which no attempt has been made to break the monotony of the chronological narrative by emphasizing or assessing events, or by analyzing the artistic and literary works at hand.

It is a pity that Emily Carr is being introduced to the British public in this unimaginative fashion. She certainly deserves better. So do the audience for whom this volume is intended.