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Ekphrastic Drag
Temporal Transgressions in John Barton's *West of Darkness: Emily Carr: A Self-Portrait*

> Be careful that you do not write or paint anything that is not your own, that you don't know in your own soul. [D]on't take what someone else has made sure of and pretend it's you yourself that have made sure of it till it's yours absolutely by conviction.
> —Emily Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr*

Emily Carr's 1935 painting *Edge of the Forest* bisects the canvas in a jagged line. On one side the sky rises in a swirl of greys, whites, and unexpected streaks of orange. On the other side, the forest's rich greens deepen to pitch black. In the painting's foreground, a thin arrangement of stumps and pathetic firs marks the liminal space between the interior and exterior of the forest, between the dark and the light. In his ekphrastic poem of the same title, John Barton writes: "Salal and oregon grape / fall back to thickening / trunks. / Centuries pass. // It is mid-morning" (*West of Darkness* 53). For Barton, the blurred edge is simultaneously temporal and spatial. Both painter and viewer are on the outside of the forest looking in, yet Carr's depiction of the persistent growth on the outside of the forest suggests that there can be no clean division. Appropriately, a section of *Edge of the Forest* provides the cover illustration for both the first (1987) and second (1999) editions of Barton's *West of Darkness: Emily Carr: A Self-Portrait*, a collection of biographical poems written in the first person that offers a fragmented narrative of Carr's life and work.[1] The painting, showing the ragged desolation that comes just before the lusher—if darker—forest, provides the ideal Carrian image for this borderland text on the edges of ekphrastic and documentary modes. By assuming Carr's voice, one already well established in her own prolific and popular autobiographical texts, Barton transgresses

the boundaries of not only gender and era, but the settler-colonial city of Victoria and the Indigenous communities Carr visited and represented in her visual art and writing.

Yet another transgression is rendered in the collection's second edition, where readers have access to both the poet's original afterword (1987) and a new essay entitled "My Emily Carr" (1999). In the first afterword, Barton writes that his version of Emily Carr "is representational rather than purely documentary, impressionistic rather than exact. [Carr] despised art that betrayed nothing of the artist" (128). In the later essay, Barton reveals what his poems "betray" when he writes that he was not yet out as a gay man when first composing his Carr poems. He notes, "It is only in the last ten years [between editions] that I have come to see Emily as my drag persona" (136). As this essay will discuss further, temporality—especially its gaps and delays—is an important component of both Barton's ekphrasis and his iconoclastic choice of persona. Yet without the inclusion of the poet's paratextual comments, arguably nothing would differentiate Barton's poems as "drag" from any other example of a male writer—gay or otherwise—who takes on a female character's voice.[2] Gerard Genette refers to paratexts as the "threshold" of interpretation (261) and certainly in Barton's case, the afterword and essay are essential to recognizing Barton's performance as specifically queer, by marking the boundary—as slippery as it may be— between John Barton and "his" Emily Carr. In the same essay, Barton also notes a change in the text's subtitle between editions: the poet's "portrait" of the artist has become a "self-portrait." Barton explains that the change stems from an early book review that questioned why, if the text was written in Carr's voice, the collection was not called a "self-portrait" instead of "a portrait" (Barton 135). Although Barton's is an impersonated "self-portrait" of Emily Carr, it is also, arguably, an authentic "self-portrait" of the poet. Yet only after his coming out does Barton look back upon his text and interpret Carr as his drag persona. The change in the subtitle might suggest a greater degree of comfort with the collection's queer subtext—a declaration of "self" even from within the intact persona. Barton's (auto)biography of Carr allows him to emphasize Emily's awareness of patriarchal constrictions on her expression as a woman, a Canadian, and an artist and allows Barton to express a similar sense of displacement and repression. Following the shifting "I" of his poems, the concluding essay serves, in terms of theatrical drag conventions, as the equivalent of removing a wig at the end of a song to emphasize that the illusion of "realness" was just an act all along.

In addition to the textual drag performance of narrating Carr's life in the first person, Barton's "self-portrait" includes numerous ekphrases of Carr's paintings written in her voice. Ekphrasis, which, in its most basic definition, provides a textual representation of a work of visual art, is a wide-ranging genre that includes descriptive works by an observer as well as attempts at allowing the painting's subject (or the artist, in Barton's case) to speak back to the viewer. As Emily, Barton's speaker expresses a contemporary, if closeted, queer subjectivity that takes pleasure in her representations of an idealized and isolated western frontier. Robert G. May contends that Barton, in his Carr poems, focuses on Carr's landscapes "as a place of rejuvenation and renewal, of personal illumination and new growth" (250) before he was able to write more explicit or confessional expressions of queer experience. May goes on to write that "although Barton is not yet prepared to articulate his own sense of otherness nearly so explicitly, his strong identification with Carr and her work points to his analogous desire to assert his own reality, to speak with his own voice" (251). In this essay, I demonstrate how ekphrasis, in concert with drag, functions as a queer form of Canadian (auto)biography. As the narrative of Carr as both a Canadian and feminist icon intimately seams her nationality and gender, Barton's reframing of his poems as an exercise in performativity suggests the implications of drag for nationalist discourse, particularly in the reiterative presence of iconic figures. By inhabiting Carr's paintings and her voice to tell the story of her struggle for expression as a social and artistic outsider, Barton transforms Carr's landscapes into a representation of, and respite from, the confines of an interiorized sexual closet.

As Carr's paintings provide Barton with liberatory points of departure, he explores both the spatial dimension of her canvases as well as her life history. Recent scholarship on temporality in queer theory suggests the manifold ways the queer subject engages with the past (and future). As Heather Love notes in her discussion of "affective history," scholars are becoming less interested in proving or disproving authentically queer subjects of the past, but are rather "exploring the vagaries of cross-historical desire and the queer impulse to forge communities between the living and the dead" (31). Similarly, Paula Rabinowitz notes that while there is no evidence that Carr was a lesbian, "Part of the labor of modernist thinking back through our mothers entails discovering their latent feminism (and, even better, lesbianism). Even if the evidence is missing, it becomes a willed desire of the feminist critic" (201). In Carr, Barton finds a historical correspondent in the struggle for self-expression within a hetero-patriarchal culture.

The cross-historical connection in Barton's poems is achieved through what I term "ekphrastic drag." The latter includes the performative sense (in that Barton assumes the voice of a female artist), yet it is perhaps more indebted to Elizabeth Freeman's concept of "temporal drag" which Freeman associates with "retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past on the present" (62). For Freeman, temporal drag allows for an embodied interrogation of queer progress. Her examples from contemporary experimental film—in which the "pastness" of feminist and queer history becomes, for example, worn as anachronistic items of clothing or held as supposedly out-of-date protest slogans in the present—not only indexes prior moments that we have apparently transcended, but rather allows for "a kind of temporal transitivity that does not leave feminism, femininity, or other so-called anachronisms behind" (63). Instead, these artists and writers "[mine] the present for signs of undetonated energy from past revolutions" (16). Barton's Carr poems are similarly infused with the anachronisms and backward temporal shifts that Freeman, Love and others identify as being central to a queer affect.

Reflecting upon the "backwardness" of his persona, even Barton notes his choice of Emily Carr is "iconoclastic": considering that most drag performers borrow from contemporary pop culture, it is iconoclastic by being anachronistic (136). Yet in Barton's ekphrases, Carr's landscapes are not merely historical images widely reproduced for popular national consumption, but are rather sites of contestation and desire, and also the very stage on which he constructs a contemporary mode of queer expression. As Richard Brock argues, "ekphrasis represents both the frame and its other: it occupies the site of conflict between the spatial and the temporal, while resisting and countering the exclusionary, spatializing act of *framing*" ("Framing" 133-34). While May has detailed how Barton's use of natural imagery across his body of work "explor[es] the ways in which Canadian national ambivalence, particularly toward the landscape, can be expressive of an equally pervasive Canadian sexual dissidence" (246), the exploration of nature, bound in colonial narratives and representation, is also temporal, and especially so in *West of Darkness*. Through his literary performance, Barton demonstrates that neither Carr's struggle for critical acceptance, nor her controversial legacy, can be safely consigned to the past.

Carr's life and work have frequently been the subject of such reconsiderations. Stephanie Kirkwood Walker writes of how, with the many iterations of Carr's life in production, she becomes a subject of "repetitious re-evaluation" by biographers who "using the lens of their own preoccupations, [have]

explored the dimensions of her nature, her time and her place" (115). Of Barton's project, Kirkwood Walker writes, "Self-aware, he recognizes that his portrait is idiosyncratic and multiple: it both is and is not Emily Carr" (119). Similarly, Eva-Marie Kröller considers how each literary representation of Carr has been "significantly shaped by the occasion for which it was produced and by the tradition informing its author's work" (88). This multiplicity of Carrian subjects has two sources: Carr's own construction of her public personae in popular autobiographical texts and the way she has been taken up as a nationalist-feminist icon.

In her study of Carr as a biographical subject, Kirkwood Walker contends that Carr-as-icon, and thus Carr as a figure open to biographical interpretation and artistic appropriation, emerged in the mid-to-late 1970s, a product of second-wave feminist historical recovery (xxii). Rabinowitz, discussing the transnational marketing of feminist icons such as Carr (from biographies to tote bags and coffee mugs) writes, "Feminism, which in its (so-called) second wave organized under the banner of international solidarity among women against capitalist exploitation and male chauvinism, has, paradoxically, been central to this modernist structure and has as such aided the recent rise of [Georgia] O'Keeffe, [Frida] Kahlo, and Carr beyond celebrity to iconicity" (194). The biographical fascination with Carr, "a figure embedded in Canada's colonial past" (Kirkwood Walker 99), intervenes in the dominant narrative of Canadian history. In fact, for Kirkwood Walker and Rabinowitz, Carr's later fame is directly related to a merger of feminism and nationalism. This ideological connection began with Carr's relationship to the Group of Seven, and especially to Lawren Harris, painters Carr met during her trip east for the 1927 exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art at the National Gallery. Carr and the Group of Seven all "drew upon sentiments of nationalism linked to the northern mystique of the Canadian landscape" (Kirkwood Walker 11). As May has pointed out, Barton composed his early poetry, including the poems for *West of Darkness*, within the context of 1970s literary nationalism (246), an ideology that developed alongside, but did not always converge with, the burgeoning feminist and gay and lesbian liberation movements (cf. Dickinson 4).

While Carr's nationalist-feminist iconicity is inflected by her unmarried status and demand for solitude, it is also marked by the insistent pursuit of what she saw as a disappearing past, not only in the form of Aboriginal villages and cultural life, but the rainforests themselves. Similarly, if Barton interprets Carr's landscapes as a figurative closet, then the sense of always-

imminent decay in many of the poems (the forest threatened by logging, the destruction of Aboriginal villages through resettlement, as well as Emily's aging body) suggests an urgency hurtling the speaker toward a future transformation that is sometimes celebrated and sometimes stop-gapped by the act of painting and writing poems, respectively. In his ekphrasis of "*Red Cedar*," for example, Barton writes:

> How I wish the years
> could be like this
>
> reaching upward
> unwavered
> by notions of sky
>
> I need such days
>
> all limbs at ease
> in the wind's sway
>
> like wings (46)

The poem suggests envy for the tree's ability to stand "unwavered" by the passage of time, especially as it is captured within a painting. The shift to Emily's own "limbs" indicates the merger of the artist with the painted landscape, subverting the body's desires (Emily's and Barton's) by projecting them onto the ancient trees instead.

Carr's painting, *Red Cedar*,[3] (as well as *Edge of the Forest*, discussed at the outset of the essay) continues a trope that Brock, following the art critic Jonathan Bordo, identifies in paintings by the Group of Seven: "the anthropomorphic form of a foregrounded solitary tree" ("Envoicing" 57). In works by the Group of Seven, the "symbolic deposit" of the solitary tree represents a desire to document the human presence of the artist while simultaneously affirming the notion of the seemingly uninhabited landscape (Bordo qtd. in Brock, "Envoicing" 57). In Carr's *Red Cedar*, this narrative is somewhat countered by her depiction of a sweeping whorl of foliage and the trunk's yonic imagery, emblematic of what Rabinowitz identifies as a desire, shared with O'Keeffe and Kahlo, to "enter history and reshape the vision of the land as eternally feminized" (200). Barton's ekphrasis then not only makes explicit the female artist's presence in the landscape, he also expands upon Carr's problematizing of the landscape's gendering. If, as Brock points out, landscape painting, particularly in the mode shared by the Group of Seven, participates in erasures of "the bodily traces of all other presences in the landscape, including traces of both Aboriginality and femininity, whose essentialized

characteristics are taken on by the wilderness itself" ("Body" n.pag.), then Carr's bold presentation of female desire (and Barton's subsequent ekphrasis) offer a queer rebuttal to this discourse. Yet in Barton's ekphrases, such liberating gestures are future-oriented, even if they participate in a Romantic nostalgia for a solitude found in the wilderness. In "*Vanquished*," for example, Emily seeks a way through "the darkness of who I am" (19) and asks, "How many centuries must I sleep?" (19). The imagined future in both "*Red Cedar*" and "*Vanquished*" is created through the temporal expansion ekphrasis allows. By writing most of his disjointed historical narrative in the present tense, Barton lends currency to Carr's lingering presence as a historical feminist, and potentially queer, figure in the national imaginary.

Ekphrasis, while sometimes complicit in this national mythologizing, also offers poets a form of response. As Brock points out, the genre "has not . . . traditionally been discussed in terms of its radical critical potential" ("Envoicing" 52) and yet he rightly argues that we may identify in its literature an "ekphrastic engagement with imperialist visual artworks, locating in their temporalizing impetus a counter-discourse to colonial spatiality" ("Body" n. pag.). While a relatively recent addition to queer theory, the "temporalizing impetus" has long been central to the poetics of ekphrasis. Although the famous Horatian dictum, *ut pictura poesis* (as is painting so is poetry), exemplifies the mimetic relationship between visual art and literature, in his eighteenth-century text, *Laocoön*, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing contends that since painting and poetry are spatial and temporal arts respectively, they are necessarily different modes of representation and cannot be easily conflated (Hollander 6). In other words, painting and poetry may be sister arts, but they are not twins. Despite, or perhaps because of, Lessing's dictates, poets and critics have continued to wrestle with ekphrasis and explore, or irrupt, its space-time boundaries. While Barton's ekphrastic poems perform what might be the basic duty of the genre as it is generally understood—as he attempts to imitate or represent the visual image in language—the poems offer less a "confrontation," in John Hollander's terms (4), between representational modes than an attempt at personal merger between the poet and the painter. For Murray Krieger, ekphrasis has always provided poets with the ability to "interrupt the temporality of discourse, to freeze it during its indulgence in spatial exploration" of a work of visual art (7). Barton's speaker, his Emily, takes this process one step further when she tells us as much about what is unseen or wholly imagined in or around the painting's composition as what is explicitly present within the frame; thus,

Barton's ekphrasis offers not only a textual representation of the image but also the inspiration behind the painting as he re-conceives it.

In his discussion of temporal duration in ekphrasis, Hollander's language borders on the erotic: "The viewer's gaze which embraces a particular work can long for further consummation—to possess a represented object, whether person or thing, to enter into an interior scene or a landscape" (6-7). Similarly, James A. W. Heffernan genders the "duel" between word and picture as that of "the voice of male speech striving to control a female image that is both alluring and threatening" (1). He traces this binary of the passive feminine painting and the active masculine poem to Lessing "who decreed that the duty of pictures was to be silent and beautiful (like a woman), leaving expression to poetry" (7). Heffernan contends that ekphrasis, giving speech to the silent image as well as the possibility of speaking back to the viewer, has the power to "challenge at once the controlling authority of the male gaze and the power of the male world" (7). While I would argue that the genre may equally risk the replication of the male gaze or appropriation of the subject and voice, the ability "to speak [out]"—as an early entry for "ecphrasis" is parsed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*—suggests at least the possibility of such challenges to the status quo and the genre's potential as a mode of queer expression. In Barton's collection, Carr speaks out in a time and space that often excludes, silences, or misinterprets her. Kate Braid suggests that Barton allows Carr to express certain private thoughts and feelings in a public form that she did not allow herself in her own life, but which appear in her diaries and notebooks (4).

The struggle for self-expression is frequently tied to issues of gender and sexuality throughout *West of Darkness*, but particularly in the sequence of narrative prose poems entitled "Life Class," where Barton explores how Carr's gender and nationality become conflated. Informed by Barton's reading of Maria Tippett's 1979 study *Emily Carr, A Biography* (Barton 128), the "Life Class" poems cover the years between 1899 and 1904 when Carr studied art in England. While in his free verse poems Barton uses enjambment and varied stanza forms to mimic the visual lines of Carr's landscapes, he employs the prose poem to signal the conservative social pressures Carr experienced while abroad. The prose poems also indicate Barton's motivation in taking on Carr as a drag persona as they frequently emphasize her status as a social, artistic, and colonial outsider.

In "Life Class (I)," for example, Mrs. Redden—an older Canadian-born friend who was close to Carr while she studied in England—says, "*The way*

you dress! (how she'd swoon at the sight of these loose smocks I girth myself in now), *your lovely pale neck lost in a fuss of stiff lace. And the dreadful twill skirts that crossed the Atlantic with you, crikey, make me think Canada the dowager and England the precocious young miss*" (13). In Mrs. Redden's speech, Barton's young Emily functions synecdochally as a representation of a widowed Canada, suggesting the young country, like Carr, is aged—and has removed herself from the world of sexual interplay—before her time. In the poem Emily responds, "I didn't come to London to find myself a husband. I came hoping to paint" (13) so that marriage and painting are set into exclusive opposition. When the artist faces her first female nude model she is "taken aback" in Barton's "Life Class (III)" (24). She reminisces how "the girl on my left twittered, *You lot from the Colonies should draw only cows*" (24). Again, sexual repression is taken as a marker of colonial identity. Yet in the poem's next paragraph, Barton writes how Emily takes pleasure in drawing the model. The dairy imagery continues, ironically, in the next line: "The model's skin was clear, shone like milk in the sun" (24), offering a quiet subversion of her apparent naïveté. Throughout the "Life Class" sequence Barton calls attention to how Carr's unorthodox manners apparently echo her colonial status.

The "Life Class" sequence demonstrates that while Emily gains experience and skill through the opportunity to study and practice art outside of Canada, these trips lack the transformative power of her journeys into the forests of British Columbia upon her return home. In his ekphrasis of an early Carr painting, "*Autumn in France*," for example, Barton shifts the chronology from Emily painting in France and her "attempt at light" (14), to the "next summer" (15) in British Columbia, where she sees totem poles: "Where I would have seen darkness / a year earlier, seen only / time's talismanic decay, / I [now] felt the wind-shined poles / stand apart from the forest" (16). Emily describes herself as the totems' "midwife," quickly sketching them as she is "afraid / they would vanish forever" (16). For Barton's Emily, in "Life Class (V)", the trees "*that can root deep in a child's heart*" are Canada's authentic heritage whereas she "*despise[s] London, its history muddled, one building snuggled up to the next like pigs in a sty. Even your parks are glutted with people. They never admire the trees, just the statues*" (31). The poem concludes with Emily muttering about what she sees in the British Museum: "Nothing new in art for hundreds of years" (31). This comparison between Canada's natural history and Britain's built heritage points to Carr's long interest in the West Coast totem poles and what may be for her a merger between the forest's natural beauty and "new" artistic creation. As Doris Shadbolt observes, Carr

embraced modernist forms beyond her French post-impressionist style not as aesthetic ends in themselves but as the most useful mode of representing her Indigenous subjects (40).

While Carr appropriated her own version of Indigeneity in order to express a position of otherness within a conservative, patriarchal society, Barton takes on Carr's voice and imagery early in his career in order to redefine the western frontier as a space of self-reflection and sexual self-fashioning. In comparing Barton and Carr, I do not mean to imply that both acts of appropriation are equal, given the differences in subject, motivation, and historical occasion. Rather, I am interested in the way both artists— gender and sexual outsiders in different, highly specific contexts—develop transgressive personae paradoxically in the pursuit of *self*-expression. In his second edition essay "My Emily Carr," Barton notes that just after the collection's first publication in 1987 "the rhetoric of cultural appropriation was being voiced for the first time in mainstream literary circles" (132). The currents of critical and political discourse then become another temporal border between the text's two editions. While ignoring Carr's relationship to the Indigenous cultures of the Pacific Northwest would be problematic and disingenuous, Barton writes that he "[attempts] to theorize the creative nexus of a white female artist preoccupied with what she feared to be the decline of the original inhabitants of her own country . . ." (133). Yet Barton is also aware of how taking on Carr specifically as a "drag persona" further complicates the politics of cultural appropriation.[4]

In "My Emily Carr," Barton notes that during the original composition of the poems, "Feminism was . . . omnipresent . . . and I was very aware that I was a man writing in a woman's voice." He goes on to question whether his work is "parasitic" (134). Some feminist critics have accused drag performers of appropriating women's voices, demeaning women through misogynistic representations that exaggerate and replicate outmoded stereotypes, or reproducing racialized tropes (Butler, "Gender Is Burning" 385). Yet in Judith Butler's conclusion to *Gender Trouble*, she contends that such theatricality does not parody an "original" woman but rather has the potential to reveal that such a figure could never exist (138).[5] Thus, Barton-as-Emily-Carr may demonstrate how all iterative representations of gender are performative; yet, by speaking in the voice of a cultural icon whose reception is mediated through nationalist, feminist, regionalist, and postcolonialist discourses, Barton's "self-portrait" demonstrates how national iconicity has always been a reiterative performance as well: there is not one Emily Carr, but multitudes.

By invoking a version of Emily as he enters the paintings, the speaker is able to allow both the artist and the closeted poet to speak anew. In "Fresh Seeing," one of Carr's few public lectures on aesthetics, she says, "We may copy something as faithfully as the camera, but unless we bring to our picture something additional—something creative—something of ourselves—our picture does not live. It is but a poor copy of unfelt nature." Later she figures the artist's struggle as the attempt to "grasp the spirit of the thing itself . . . the 'I am' of the thing" (11). Carr's emphasis on the first person pronoun recalls Barton's shifting between his lyric speaker and his drag persona. For Carr, it is the repetition *without* difference that is problematic and uncreative. Barton's representation of the seemingly unsettled frontiers of Carr's landscapes does not replicate journeys of mythic progress in which the male settler penetrates virginal land but rather turns away from viewing that myth—necessarily bound up in a heternormative model of kinship—as compulsory.

The discomfort of social, political, and familial bonds placed on the queer subject recurs in poems throughout Barton's career. In his long poem "Hidden Structure" for example, Barton's speaker wrestles with the distinction between discrete genders and desire. Barton writes, "Tell me why / as a child I often wished / I was born in female / flesh" (28-29). Later, the speaker, addressing his father, says, "I hated you / then and grew up hating / the destiny I thought my sex / prisoned me in" (30-31). Same-sex desire can only be understood as an error of gender for Barton's young speaker; thus, in this logic, queerness can be resolved by becoming the gender that 'should' be desired, recalling an outmoded understanding of homosexuality Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls "the trope of inversion" (87). Yet toward the conclusion of the poem, the now-adult speaker considers, "Rewriting the history of pain, // for once I know / what I am trying to say. / Those who love shall love / no matter how bodies join" (34). The process of "rewriting the history of pain," of going backward in time but with new metaphors for understanding, allows the speaker to grasp the hidden structure of desire just as in the Carr poems, drag allows Barton to "[*reveal*] *the imitative structure of gender itself*" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 137).

Queer theorists of temporality have begun to index these recursive manoeuvres. In *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Heather Love writes that while gender or sexual outsiders of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are often viewed today as "isolated and longing for a future community," she also locates queer artists and writers of that era who "choose isolation, turn toward the past, or choose to live

in a present disconnected from any larger historical continuum" (8). Writing the early poems for *West of Darkness* at the advent of Canada's gay and lesbian liberation movement, Barton also turns back by taking on a modernist persona—herself a gender outsider—who is preoccupied with themes of isolation, the past, and a skepticism of progress. Yet it is through this backward turn, and attempts to freeze time in his ekphrases of Carr's paintings, that Barton begins to envision a different future.

   Barton's ekphrastic drag suggests several correspondences between Carr's persona, her unique vision of the British Columbia landscape, and contemporary spatial and temporal metaphors of the queer closet. As Sedgwick claims, "The closet is the defining structure of gay oppression [in the twentieth] century" (71). If Barton's ekphrases of Carr's landscapes provide an escape from the contemporary closet, then they necessarily create a different one. The total absence of people in Carr's later landscapes suggests both solitude and loneliness, and perhaps mistrust of the dominant community. Shadbolt notes that Carr's art and writing are imbued with a sense of her self-awareness of being an outsider:

> A reflection of the difference [Carr] felt was the large number of *they's* who loomed in her life: those who in one way or another formed the opposition. *They* included do-gooders, society ladies, clergymen with empty rhetoric, fussers, analysts, statistic-minded curators, critics, and the affected. (13)

One sees from this brief description how queer writers and artists might take up Carr as a powerful, if certainly controversial, icon later in the twentieth century.

   Barton replicates Carr's iconoclasm in his ekphrastic poems, often casting her as an avenging figure. In "*Vanquished*," for example, Barton writes, "No one is left to stand / the totems erect" (18), suggesting that Emily sees herself as the sole inheritor of what she believes to be a culture in the process of being destroyed. In "*Blunden Harbour*," Emily is similarly alone, awaiting her guide's return to the abandoned Aboriginal village where she sits sketching. The spatial isolation creates a temporal dislocation as well when she says, "I have been on this island for an age / I cannot remember where I was born" (36). The journey from home has produced a break with the normative time of personal and familial history. This solitude is contrasted with domestic life and the economic obligations that frequently threaten to disrupt her work: "If I string a few minutes / together and paint / some ass taps on my door" ("*Autumn in France*" 16). Even productive retreats from the social world have their price. In "*The Clearing*," an older Emily ruminates, "I cannot say //

this solace of trees // . . . has left me unscarred. I am tired" (123-24). There is power, even pleasure, in solitude, but the isolation exhausts the painter in the solitary struggle for self-expression.

Carr's paintings are famously the product of her excursions to remote locations along the British Columbia coast and interior. Similarly, migration and mobility are often central in queer narratives of coming out, since the metaphor of the closet suggests both spatial and temporal indeterminacy— one is going in or coming out, a closeted past gives way to a liberated future. Carr's dynamic landscapes represent the forest as a place of change and movement, even as they attempt to preserve the past. In his ekphrasis of "*Nirvana*," Barton writes,

> How I wish time
>
> would stop,
> the forest fall back.
>
> I would carve all hearts
> free of their prisons of rot,
> hold them high in the sun (39)

Only by stopping time can the metaphorical "heart" and what it desires be carved from its "prisons of rot" and held to the light of day. In these descriptions of what the forest conceals, Barton points to a "sublimated erotic energy" that Shadbolt identifies in Carr's work which was a result of the artist's adamant commitment to painting and writing, even if by claiming the role of artist, she risked maintaining a position of social difference to the end of her life (Shadbolt 13).

Barton remains fascinated with Carr's later years and images of Emily's aging body recur throughout *West of Darkness*. In "*Forsaken*," for example, Emily asks, "How many more years must I / watch fall, / . . . so helpless am I in this, / the diminishing shift of my flesh?" (107). The emphasis on Emily's deteriorating body mirrors the desire to maintain the totem poles that are represented in Barton's ekphrases as aged bodies, such as in "*Blunden Harbour*" where Emily in her sketching "preserve[s] the moss / nesting in [the totems'] cracking joints" (34). In "*Queen Charlotte Islands Totem*," Emily asserts that "the weathered poles" should not "be this / slow collapse into ungodliness" (17). The body under duress is a frequent trope for Barton. May has noted that throughout the poems included in *Great Men*, for example, Barton "repeatedly invokes the image of the 'groin' under various uncomfortable conditions . . . to symbolize his feelings of sexual anxiety

. . . and to foreshadow his sexual reawakening to come" (266). Barton's representation of Emily's failing body suggests impatience with the passage of time that correlates to a body's frustrated and unexpressed desire. For example, in the ekphrasis of "*Old Tree at Dusk*," Emily coyly considers,

> What secrets do I feel
>
> fall open
>
> inside my clumsy lungs?
> Something tingles like dawn.
> An old tree can only
> just sense the slow pulse
>
> of sap draining (50-51)

Barton's stanzaic form (four quatrains each separated by a single line) suggests the stuttered disclosure of breath and secrets toward the end of life that Emily offers in the poem. Time cannot be stopped and "secrets" (Emily's and, presumably, Barton's) are coming to the surface.

While embodiment is frequently discussed in Barton's ekphrases, eroticism is less coded than almost entirely withheld; however, perhaps the most explicitly queer moment arrives in "*Jack-in-the-Pulpit* Remembered," in which Emily describes meeting Georgia O'Keeffe at a New York exhibition in an account of one of O'Keeffe's paintings. Even this moment of sensuality occurs through the retrospective lens of memory as the speaker recalls:

> I nearly drowned, the calm within
> suddenly uncentred, giddy, turning
> me away from the edge; years later,
> trees parting toward this focusing
> coast, I ache to wash myself through
> one endless conduit of essence (60)

The floral abstracts of O'Keeffe's *Jack-in-the-Pulpit* series suggest the erotic image "of petals, promises swiftly opening / around me [in] concentric circles of wake" (60). Here, Emily communes with O'Keeffe through a shared vision that moves from the artist gazing upon O'Keeffe's *Jack-in-the-Pulpit* to her own "focusing / coast" (60). Viewing O'Keeffe's natural imagery provides Emily with the same liberatory, erotic vision that Barton receives from viewing Carr's paintings.

When Barton-as-Emily conceives of the future, however, the vision is never explicitly political but rather more suggestive of an embodied union with the natural world and a transcendence of the material "modern"

world with its attendant limits on gender, sexual, and artistic expression. Yet the distinction between the transcendent and the material is frequently collapsed. In Barton's ekphrasis of "*Swirl*," for example, a gust of wind in the forest is interpreted as breath on a body, traveling "through bark / into concentric / circles of my / heart" (23-26), "sucking" pine trees "into the forest's lungs" (32-33) as it travels. Barton deploys an eccentric enjambment, spreading letters of words across several lines, to imitate the movement of Carr's brushstrokes:

Emerald
      sa
ffron

   o
    l
     i
      v
       e

r u s t (84)

"*Swirl*" is the only new poem in the second edition, culled from an earlier manuscript of the first (*West of Darkness* 135). In its unusual syntax and calligramatic form, the poem is the most innovative of Barton's ekphrases and also the most contemporary in tone, even as it comes closest to representing Carr's visual art on the page. The ekphrastic gesture finally becomes, in Carr's terms, a "fresh seeing."

    Barton's paratextual comments in the collection's second edition may then be read as a kind of frame that offer his readers a "fresh seeing" of his own poems as well. The poet's ekphrastic drag performance not only offers a different vision of Carr's life and paintings, but also opens up the possibility of locating and inscribing the queer in a nationalizing historical discourse from which such desire is largely excluded. In a journal entry from August 1934, Carr writes, "For the second time a soul has kissed my hand because of a picture of mine—once a man, once a woman. It makes one feel queer, half ashamed and very happy, that some thought you have expressed in paint has touched somebody" (*Hundreds and Thousands* 177). While Carr uses "queer" in the sense of "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric" (*OED*), there is something otherwise queer in the cross-historical "touch" between Barton and Carr. Yet while the poet knows that Carr "despised art that betrayed nothing of the artist" (128), he is still anxious about what the historical Carr might think of his Emily. The poet recalls another antecedent figure when he describes

himself as "a Dorian Gray uncertain what his portrait betrays about his soul" (136). The allusion to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is apt because Dorian, like Barton, similarly desires a fixed temporality that paradoxically turns him backward. In his collection's titular poem, Barton writes, "Somewhere there is a place west of darkness / I visit in dreams, a beach I wake from each time I ever / plan to remain" (31-33). While Wilde's Dorian Gray seeks an eternal revolution of youthful beauty, for Barton's speaker, the desire is rather for a perennial, if impossible, frontier.

NOTES

1 Throughout the essay, I use "Carr" when referring to the historical figure and "Emily" when referring to Barton's persona.

2 Indeed, in a 1989 review of the first edition of *West of Darkness*, M. Travis Lane writes, "Most of our contemporary verse biographies, usually written as fictional autobiographies . . . describe their ostensible subjects less than their poet authors. . . . But there is nothing visible to us behind the mask through which Barton speaks but the 'Emily Carr' with which we are already familiar through Carr's own writings and paintings. When Barton's 'Carr' speaks of one of her own paintings, we feel we are hearing how Carr would speak, to herself, about it, and we recognize the painting" (105).

3 Interestingly, *Red Cedar* was presented alongside works by the Group of Seven at a 1931 exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario (Shadbolt 213).

4 While a detailed discussion of the discourse of cultural appropriation, gender, and Emily Carr is beyond the scope of this essay, see Janice Stewart's essay "Cultural Appropriations and Identificatory Practices in Emily Carr's 'Indian Stories'" on how Carr's self-conception of Indigeneity "allowed her to paint and write beyond the gendered boundaries of contemporary conventional aesthetics" (63). Gerta Moray's 2006 study *Unsettling Encounters: First Nations Imagery in the Art of Emily Carr* provides a contemporary discussion of Carr's visual representation of Indigenous cultural life.

5 As Butler focuses on the forward progression of drag—the repetitions with a difference— Elizabeth Freeman suggests that Butler "disregards citations of pasts that actually signal the presence of life lived otherwise than in the present" (63).

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