EMILY CARR'S TENNYSON

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EMILY CARR'S COPY OF THE POEMS of Tennyson is a small dark blue linen-bound volume, much underlined and occasionally annotated. On the recto of the front end paper Carr has signed her name: M. Emily Carr, Jan. 1905, and underneath are sketched three heads, two of older women, and one of a man with a moustache (Fig. 1). On the other end papers of both the front and back of the book are amusing social sketches (Figs. 2-5). Inside the volume, where she dated her reading of some of the poems (and occasionally doodled human profiles), Carr's underlinings give us vivid insight into her feelings and concerns during 1905, her 34th year.[1] They also cast light on the way literary images can fruitfully work on a painter's sensibilities.

January of 1905 had seen Emily just back in Victoria after a disappointing sojourn in England, which included fifteen months of harsh treatment for "hysteria" at the East Anglia Sanatorium in Suffolk.[2] To her family, she appeared "a fat, fast, vulgar woman"[3] having taken up smoking while she was away. She was also not afraid to swear or ride astride. Very soon after her return, she landed a job as cartoonist in Victoria for the newspaper *The Week*, which she held till November 1905. However, from her underlinings of Tennyson dated during this year, it is possible to conclude her confident behaviour in part hid a sensitive nature smarting from emotional experiences, clinging to religious mysticism, yet bordering on despair. Tennyson suited her moods well.

A page of *The Palace of Art* is revealing. Emily has bracketed with double lines the stanza:

> And death and life she hated equally,
> And nothing saw, for her despair,
> But dreadful time, dreadful eternity,
> No comfort anywhere.

Yet if these lines reflected her own dark mood, a few lines previously her artistic eye had been caught by the lines:

> The plunging seas draw backward from the land
> Their moon-led waters white.

Next to these lines she wrote "Dallas Road,"[4] indicating that they reminded her of one of her favourite walks along the Dallas Road cliffs in Victoria. These under-

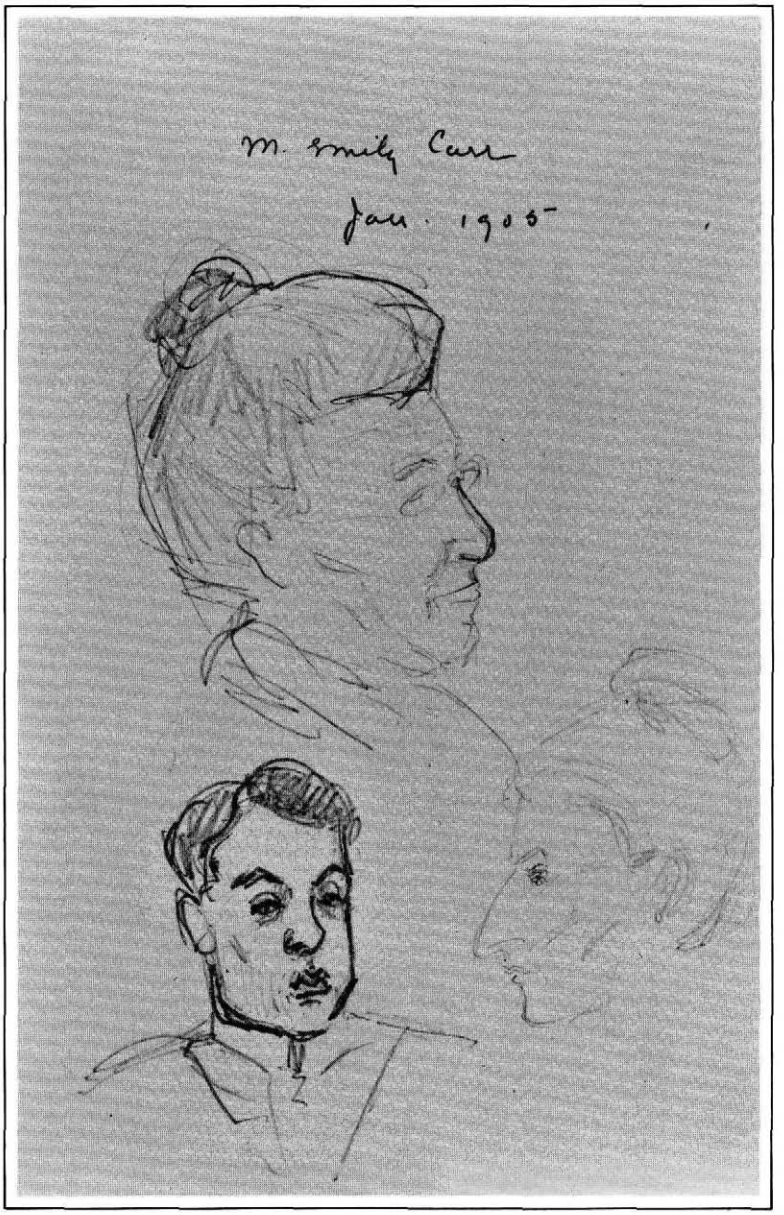

FIG. 1 Under Emily Carr's signature are sketched three heads. I believe the head at lower right is Emily's sister Alice, because of its similarity to a painting of Alice (reproduced in Tippett, p. 82). The man seems to be the same person sketched at the dancing party (Fig. 3). The woman with glasses seems to be the same woman as in Fig. 6, possibly Emily's oldest sister, Edith.

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linings are typical of the kind of poetry that caught her attention throughout the volume. She marks passages of landscape that communicate colour or light; she marks passages of love poetry; and she marks lines expressing religious feeling, and sometimes despair.[5] Tennyson's *Palace of Art* and the *Lady of Shalott* are poems which deal with the isolation of the artist from society and the consequences of re-entering society. ("I am half-sick of shadows" and "She left the web . . ." are underlined in *The Lady.*) Emily may have identified these poems with her return from England and resumption of a normal life after her months of seclusion in the sanatorium. In *Growing Pains* she wrote of this year:

> And so I came back to British Columbia not with "know-it-all" fanfare, not a successful student prepared to carry on art in the New World, just a broken-in-health girl that had taken rather a hard whipping, and was disgruntled with the world.[6]

In Tennyson's *Maud* she had marked with double lines:

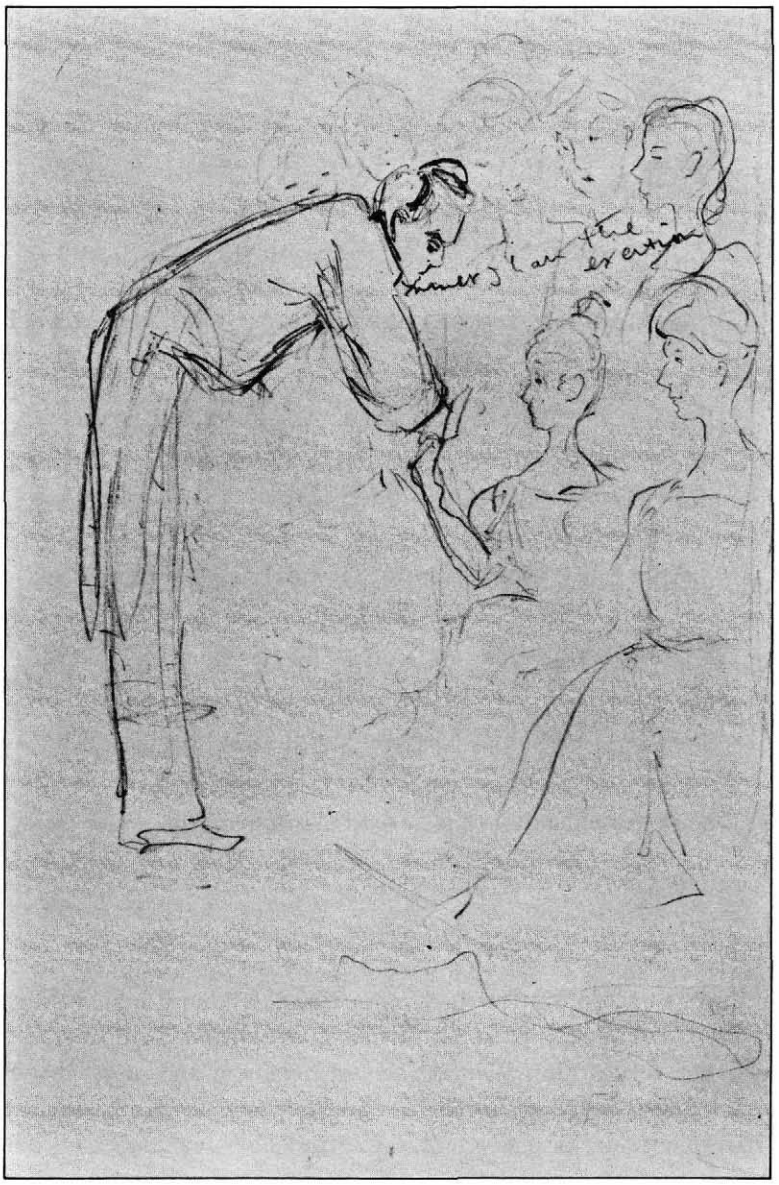
> Ah what shall I be at fifty
> Should nature keep me alive
> If I find the world so bitter
> When I am but twenty-five?

And again, marked in *The Two Voices*:

> A still small voice spake unto me,
> 'Thou art so full of misery
> Were it not better not to be?'

Although Emily in retrospect calls herself a "girl," and identifies with an age of twenty-five, in reality she was a woman of thirty-four at the time of her underlinings. This knowledge on our part makes very poignant her reactions to *Maud*, a poem in which she seemed to identify with the narrator's intense experience of love, marking:

> O let the solid ground
> Not fail beneath my feet
> Before my life has found
> What some have found so sweet;
> Then let come what come may,
> What matter if I go mad,
> I shall have had my day.
>
> Let the sweet heavens endure,
> Not close and darken above me
> Before I am quite sure
> That there is one to love me;
> Then let come what come may
> To a life that has been so sad,
> I shall have had my day.



FIGS. 2 AND 3 These informal little sketches from the front inside cover of the volume could be ideas Emily was trying out for cartoons. They are humorous commentaries on the dancing party behaviour of bored men. "Must I have the exertion" one says in Fig. 2. In Fig. 3, the woman is solicitous in the top sketch ("Don't you feel well, sweetie?" she asks; in the bottom sketch, the young woman exclaims "Horrid Brute" at her partner's behaviour.)

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Sometimes perhaps she identifies herself with Maud, for a refrain is marked by both a bracket and a cross (x) each time it appears:

> Rosy is the West
> Rosy is the South
> Rosy are her cheeks
> And a rose her mouth.

EMILY HAD A SERIOUS SUITOR IN ENGLAND, Mayo Padden, who visited her from Canada, intent on making her his wife. In the end, she refused him; he suffered a broken heart, she guilt. To me, her Tennyson underlinings do not echo that kind of experience, but rather the emotions of a shared romantic encounter, ending, however, in loss or rejection. She marks with a double line, for example:

> O that twere possible
> After long grief and pain
> To find the arms of my true love
> Round me once again!

Another such entry occurs in *Enoch Arden* opposite lines describing the despair of Enoch's rival, Philip, when he realizes Annie loves Enoch and he:

> . . . slipt aside, and like a wounded life
> Crept down into the hollows of the wood;
> There, while the rest were loud in merry-making
> Had his dark hour unseen, and rose and past
> Bearing a lifelong hunger in his heart.

Next to these lines, Emily has written, "bravery."

Maria Tippett suggests in her biography of Carr that such an experience could have been Emily's relationship with Sammy Blake, a young man Emily met in England, who in 1900 went to South Africa and married a nurse there. Emily romanticized her relationship with Blake, whereas she was upset by Paddon, because she felt guilt at not wanting to marry him. She could idealize Blake because she never had to consider him as a real husband. (Tippett makes a plausible case that Emily was probably frightened by sex and unable to respond.)

Emily's *In Memoriam* underlinings emphasize a sympathy with Tennyson's sense of loss. Like Tennyson, she seemed to feel the inadequacy of words, bracketing the four lines:

> I sometimes hold it half a sin
> To put in words the grief I feel;
> For words, like Nature, half reveal
> And half conceal the Soul within. (*IM* v)

When Tennyson finds places "emptied of delight" which he once visited with Hallam, Emily sympathizes, and underlines, in the same stanzas *For all is dark where thou art not* (*IM* VIII). She also marked on both sides the famous two lines of *IM* LXXXV, " 'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."

Emily is moved by the religious dilemma of *In Memoriam*. She has written the word "fearful" in the right margin of the page opposite the stanzas beginning:

> Oh yet we trust that somehow good
> Will be the final goal of ill,
> To pangs of nature, sins of will
> Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;
>
> That nothing walks with aimless feet . . .
>
> * * *
>
> So runs my dream: but what am I?
> An infant crying in the night:
> An infant crying for the light:
> And with no language but a cry. (*IM* LIV)

She bracketed the entire next stanza (LV), and the last lines of LVI:

> O life as futile, then as frail
> O for thy voice to soothe and bless!
> What hope of answer or redress?
> Behind the veil, behind the veil.

These, Tennyson's darkest moments in *In Memoriam*, struck a responsive chord in Emily Carr in 1905.

Yet Emily obviously was comforted by Tennyson's concluding stanzas, each marked in its entirety, "Love is and was my Lord and King" (CXXVI); "Dear friend, far off, my lost desire" (CXXIX) and "Thy voice is on the rolling air" (CXXX) which concludes:

> Far off thou art, but ever high;
> I have thee still, and I rejoice:
> I prosper, circled with thy voice;
> I shall not lose thee tho' I die.

At the end of *In Memoriam* is written a date, "Feb 14," which either marks the day she concluded the poem, or the day she began to read *The Princess* which follows on the page. The only other dated poems in the book are "Oct 5, 1905," marking the beginning of *Enoch Arden*, the annotation "finished November 27, 1905" at the end of *The Passing of Arthur* and "Dec. 8, 1905" beginning *Queen Mary*. These datings seem to indicate Emily was occasionally using the volume as a kind of emotional diary.

Emily was saved from too much melancholy by her sense of humour. It was

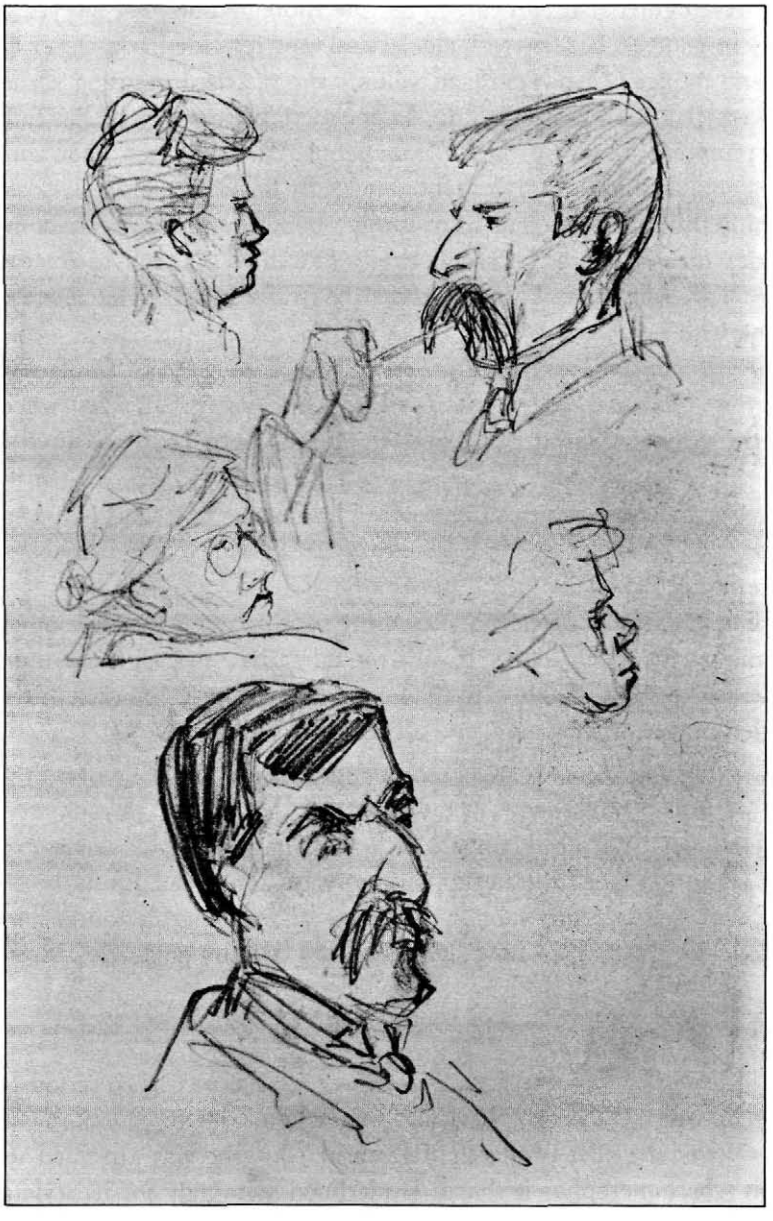

FIG. 4 These sketches from the back end papers appear to be of people who are also in the sketch at the dining room door (Fig. 5). The man with the moustache is at the top right of Fig. 5. These sketches are very free and informal, rather unlike Emily's usual controlled style at this time.

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capacity for laughter that had earned her the Indian name "Klee Wyck" (Laughing One) in 1898 on her trip to Ucluelet and now it made her a clever cartoonist. On the end papers of her Tennyson volume she sketched amusing scenes from a dance in which a man in evening dress appears to be so bored he has fallen asleep (Fig. 3); another shows a group of irate people knocking on a door and banging a dinner gong. A plump woman (probably Emily herself) holds a clock set at 1:20 p.m. I think this may be a scene from Emily's boarding house in Vancouver, when the midday meal was late (Fig. 5). Emily moved to Vancouver to teach art in January 1906, where she lived in several boarding houses. Her Tennyson must have gone with her.

After *In Memoriam*, poems from *Idylls of the King* affected Emily most deeply (i.e., they are most marked). Emily participated as she read, so that when she had finished the story of "Gareth and Lynette," in answer to Tennyson's remark

> "and he that told the tale in older times
> Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,
> But he, that told it later, says Lynette,"

she wrote "I say Lynette."

Long lines are drawn down the sides of the page on many passages of *Guinevere*. Here Emily seems much involved with the narrative, and with the moral issues, sometimes expressed as maxims, in the poetry. For example, marked in three ways, with underlining, a vertical line, and an X, are the lines:

> For manners are not idle but the fruit
> Of loyal nature, and of noble mind.

Emily also liked "We needs must love the highest when we see it," and "For mockery is the fume of little hearts." What most impressed Emily in *Guinevere*, however, was Arthur's long rebuke to Guinevere recalling his youth, her adultery and his love, for she marked both sides of almost two full pages.

WHEN EMILY CARR IN LATER LIFE turned seriously to writing, her style was vividly metaphorical: "Black pine-covered mountains jagged up on both sides of the inlet like teeth."[7] Even in 1905 she was attracted to parts of Tennyson where metaphor is sharp. Underlined seemingly for its style alone are lines from *Queen Mary*: "My Lord / I have the jewel of a loyal heart," or from *In Memoriam* (XCV) ". . . the trees / Laid their dark arms about the field." On the relationship between words and painting, Emily wrote years later, "I visualized my words and worded my 'seeings' and seemed to get a fuller understanding a deeper inlook." Tennyson's ability to word his seeings interested Emily from the start.

FIG. 5 This sketch is on the inside of the back cover of the book. Emily drew herself on the right, holding a clock, while other members of the group are banging on a door. I conjecture that this is a scene from Emily's boarding house in Vancouver, where she moved in 1906 to teach art.

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Perhaps the most significant underlinings to anyone interested in Carr's development as an artist are those which appear to be related to her aesthetic responses. Many of Emily's markings of Tennyson concern landscape. Sometimes Tennyson's words reminded Carr of a real landscape, such as the "Dallas Road" entry previously noted in *The Palace Art*. Another passage occurs in *Enoch Arden*, where opposite the words "halfway up / The narrow street that clambered toward the hill," she wrote "St Ives." Emily had spent eight months taking art lessons in St. Ives in 1901. She described the experience memorably many years later in *Growing Pains* (1946), remarking that the glare of the sea and white sand gave her headache.[8] In 1905, it took only a slight poetic image to call up the place for her.

In *Enoch Arden* two lines are marked which appealed to her artist's eye: "Faint as a figure seen in early dawn / Down at the far end of an avenue." Similarly, many briefly marked passages are like little snapshots, as these from *The Passing of Arthur*:

> And in a sudden, lo! The level lake,
> And the long glories of the winter moon.
>
> * * *
>
> . . . a dark strait of barren land:
> On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
> Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Or, from *Gareth and Lynette*, her sense of colour prompted a line against:

> The damp hill-slopes were quickened into green
> And the live green had kindled into flowers,
> For it was past the time of Easter day.

Carr also responded to Tennyson's frequent metaphors and similies about painting. A heavy line marks this passage in *Lancelot and Elaine*:

> As when a painter, poring on a face,
> Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man
> Behind it, and so paints him that his face,
> The shape and color of a mind and life,
> Lives for his children, ever at its best
> And fullest; so the face before her lived . . .

More frequently marked than straightforward landscape or painterly passages, however, are passages in the poetry concerning the quality of light, and the connection often made in Tennyson's metaphor between light and God. Carr is consistently drawn to such passages, and in view of the mystical nature of light in her imagination and Tennyson's verbal images. *In Memoriam* is full of the lexis of late art, it is here that we see perhaps the closest connection between her visual

FIG. 6 This page is opposite the last page of printed poetry in the volume, and seems to be a sketch of the same woman as on the signature page. A figure bending with hands on knees is in rough outline on upper right.

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light. Carr marked the whole of XXX, and then drew a second line along the left margin of the conclusion.

> Rise, happy morn, rise, holy morn
> Drawn forth the cheerful day from night:
> O Father, touch the east, and light
> The light that shone when Hope was born

She marked with a double squiggle the stanza (XLVII) ending, "Farewell! We lose ourselves in light." She drew a line around three sides of the last lines of XCV, which again associates light with life and death. From the variety and frequency of the underlinings of *In Memoriam* we sense Carr's sympathy with all of Tennyson's deep emotions and ultimate mystical sense of God expressed "visually" in light and landscape.

Although it took her many more years to work out in her own medium the triumphant union of light and landscape, it may be that the poetic images of Tennyson remained for her a seminal influence. This small volume with its variety of moods and sentiments so freely marked, its reflection of its reader's pain and pleasure, is a unique record of the emotions of one year in the life of one of Canada's great artists.

NOTES

[1] Carr's edition was *The Poetical Works of Alfred Tennyson,* Hurst and Company, New York. The volume measures 11 cm by 17.4 cm. The name of the author and publisher are printed on the spine in gold. A photograph of Tennyson appears opposite the title page. All Carr's markings in the volume are in pencil. The volume is in the collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery. My thanks to Helle Viirlaid, Registrar, for her unfailing consideration and assistance, and to Glendon College, York University for research support.

[2] Maria Tippett, *Emily Carr, A Biography* (Toronto: Penguin, 1982; first published Oxford Univ. Press, 1979). Unless otherwise indicated, this excellent book is the source of all biographical information in this article. Emily was in England, 1899-1904. Her "treatment" at the sanatorium included electric shock, an extremely harsh and experimental practice in 1903 (p. 60).

[3] Tippett, p. 63.

[4] She also wrote a few other words which I have not been able to make out.

[5] In this article I attempt to give some idea of the range of concerns and emtoions that Carr responded to. I can only give the one or two examples in each case which appear to me to be most significant, but the volume is full of briefly marked passages and crosses marking the titles.

[6] *Growing Pains: The Autobiography of Emily Carr* (Toronto: Clark, Irwin, 1966; first published 1946), p. 203.

[7] She took a correspondence course in short story writing in 1926 when she was 55. Her first book, *Klee Wyck* was published in 1941. This example is from the story "D'Sonoqua."

[8] *Growing Pains,* p. 167.