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LIVED SPACE: AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND THE WORK OF
WILLIAM KURELEK AND EMILY CARR

by

JULIE RAK, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Institute of Canadian Studies

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

September 16, 1991

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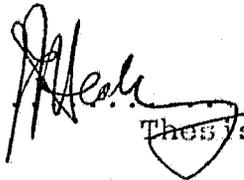
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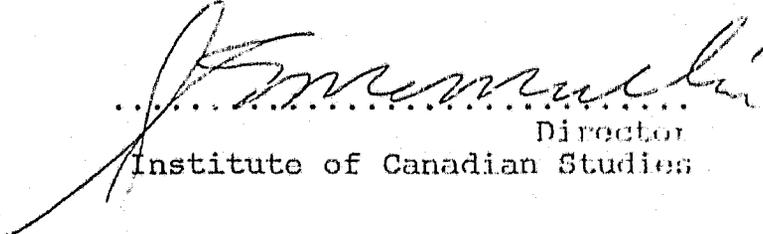
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"Lived Space: Autobiography and the Work
of William Kurelek and Emily Carr"

submitted by Julie Rak, Hons. B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

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September 1991

Abstract

This thesis examines the visual and written work of William Kurelek and Emily Carr in an autobiographical context. The approach dispenses with more traditional approaches to the theory and criticism of autobiography and offers an interdisciplinary interpretation of the artists' work as twentieth-century Canadian examples of autobiography as a tool for constructing identity. "Identity" is conceptualized as a matrix of acquired subjectivities rather than a unified pre-linguistic subject. The autobiographical moment is discussed as a linguistic and visual gesture developed over time, as the artists' needs to construct iconic visual signs changed. Both artists, it is suggested, used autobiography in various non-traditional forms, and combined their psychic and spiritual motivations in autobiography to enable new creative configurations to take place.

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This thesis is dedicated to my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Autobiography and Lived Space

More than any other body of texts, the practice of autobiography, and the body of theoretical and critical texts about it, has been tied to Western metaphysical notions of the self, language and memory. As Sidonie Smith argues in A Poetics of Women's Autobiography, the beginning of autobiography mirrored the beginning of self-awareness and a sense of historical consciousness in the philosophic discourse of the late medieval and early Renaissance periods (Smith 21). Autobiography in its classic form emerged as part of an ongoing humanist discourse, which presupposed the self as centred, stable, unique and valuable at first to God, and then to itself and others (Smith 23-26), although I would argue that it is likely that self-narrative contributed to the development of a humanist concept of self even as it was altered by the discourses of self it inhabited. As Elizabeth Bruss has observed,

We can speculate on what cultural conditions promote an emphasis upon individual identity but conceptions of individual identity are articulated, extended and developed through an institution like autobiography (Bruss 5).

Whether autobiography developed from primarily extra-textual cultural elements, or whether ideas about "the self", "memory" and "communication" developed from the articulation

of them in autobiography, autobiography as a text involving a conscious, concentrated looking-back on experience, and a linking of experience to an idea of self, including the capacity for self-knowledge, has been developed as part of, and in response to, whatever construction of self and identity was required by the discourses of the "self" in existence at the time. Autobiography, as it has been defined and framed by canonical autobiographers, became both a function and a feature of Western historical consciousness -- it was presented as an articulation of what came to be called the "self" in the developing areas of cultural/individual consciousness, particularly from the seventeenth to the nineteenth-centuries in Europe and Britain. Canonical (and some non-canonical) autobiography at this time acquired various cultural preconditions involving the "self", including,

the new recognition of identity as an earned cultural achievement, an arena of self-fashioning rather than an ascriptive, natural donnée; the corollary recognition of identity as simultaneously unique and yet dependent on social reality and cultural conventions; an increased willingness to challenge the authority of traditional modes of inquiry and to promote the hermeneutical responsibility and authority of the speaking subject; the transformation of concepts

of historiography (Smith 28).

Autobiography became a way to make public (in language which was thought to be reflective) what was private and, as James Olney has observed in Metaphors of Self, it came to be seen as an act of self-creation in recollection as well as self-discovery (Olney 33). The pre-textual self used autobiography to create or recreate a textual self, to speak the preexistent self into textual being. Once the authority of the speaking subject as an articulator of itself was established in Western cultural discourses, autobiography could be a discourse entered by a "qualified" speaker as an act of power inside a culture devoted to the articulation of a pre-textual self. In a Romantic sense, autobiography could probe the "darkness" of personality and create light. It could make experience unique, for an autobiographer could claim to "know" things about him/herself no one else could. An autobiographer, through his/her text, could also impose order over chaos by choosing narrative control. So, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in a passage often quoted by scholars of autobiography, claimed that the act of speaking in autobiographical language constituted an act of power, of control over the speaker's eternal destiny:

Let the last trump sound when it will, I shall come forward with this work in my hand, to present myself before my Sovereign Judge . . . I have bared my secret soul as Thou thyself has seen it,

Eternal Being! So let the numberless legion of my fellow men gather round me, and hear my confessions.¹

In Britain, Europe and the United States -- where autobiography as an act of individual control and power became linked to the technologies of capitalism, the ideologies of liberalism and American cultural investment in the idea of individual and societal progress -- critics and theorists of the "genre" of autobiography have been quickest to recognize autobiographies written in Rousseau's tradition. It is a "genre" produced by the power holders in the Western discourse of "the self", who have usually been articulate, educated, white men. Since all of the early critics and theorists of autobiography are, or were, themselves emmeshed in discourses which presupposed the self as a centred, unified, unique subject, the New Critical theorists and critics, from Roy Pascal to James Olney, have tried, and largely succeeded, in determining what autobiography is and what the canon of core-texts includes, although the difficulty of isolating and defining what autobiography actually is has caused difficulties for many critics. An autobiographer, for example, may write "fictions" about him or herself. For a liberal humanist scholar then, what constitutes "truth" in autobiography? How do "we" determine what a "good" (and therefore, canonical) autobiography is? Is autobiography really only

another form of fiction, or is it a genre by itself possessing clearly definable properties²?

These questions, and others like them, have stymied historians, theorists and critics of autobiography, particularly formalists like Elizabeth Bruss and Philippe LeJeune, who focus on the structures of the autobiographical text as the locus of meaning and then attempt to explore the text as a signifying generic practice. Bruss has stated that autobiography occurs when the identity of author and protagonist are the same³, while LeJeune proposed that there is an autobiographical "pact" between reader, author and the "I" in the text, whose name is the same as the author's name on the text's title page⁴. Yet, the gap between the writing "I" who is extra-textual and the written "I" in the text cannot be bridged. LeJeune has said that identity lies in the gap between enunciation and utterance, but in autobiography, the gap can never be closed. Although an author can claim that s/he is telling a true story, it remains fictional. There is, then, no way to ground identity in terms of the text alone, and in autobiography, the text is all that the reader has (LeJeune 44). Poststructural approaches, like Louis Renza's, eliminate the author altogether. The speaking "I", the writing "I" in the present tense, and the "I" in the past tense cannot be connected; autobiography can only be spoken about as a "fiction" in which the author is also fictional. Paul deMan has written

of autobiography simply as a de-facement, another death of the author. Michael Sprinkler has gone so far as to proclaim, in an article of the same title, "the end of autobiography", because no connection can be made between author and text (Sprinkler; Olney 1980).

But what Sprinkler actually establishes is that autobiography is still part of yet another discourse of the self as it is current in Western culture: self-reflexive, fragmentary and textually generated. He proclaims, not the end of autobiography, but the end of autobiographical genre criticism. As various feminist and "minority" approaches to autobiography have begun to assert, autobiography by and about women, and people who are not white, explores new modes of subjectivity, of the way to say "I", and link it to experiences which undermine how and why those who have held power have determined what identity is. Just at the moment when poststructuralist theorists are proclaiming the impossibility of saying "I" and referring to extratextual experience, those who have been kept out of the signifying practice of canonical autobiography are found to have been developing alternate ways to use autobiography as a signifying practice. According to Carol Laing:

It has not yet been much acknowledged that at the same time the death of the author was being widely proclaimed in poststructuralist texts, floods of other texts were surfacing--loosely accounted for

by terms such as New Subjectivity and Subversive Realism--that undermined in a different way the imputed referential authority of the "I", but that insisted on the verifiably, authentic, or personal "I", the problems of everyday existence, and revelations of the formerly oppressed (Laing n.p.).

But this new subjectivity is not part of the Western metaphysical tradition of a self, which pre-exists language. It is, in a postmodern sense, a constructed identity, rather than one which is discovered or recovered in the process of creating a text. In place of a self which enters a reflective language and describes its essence, some branches of postmodern theory admit the existence of a subject who can take up any number of identity positions intersecting at, and constituted by, history, language and culture.

Therefore:

[the] reformulated self is a product of specific discourse and of social process. Individuals construct themselves as subjects through language, but the individual--rather than being the source of his or her own meaning--can only adopt positions within the language available at a given moment (Nussbaum; Olney 1988 120).

Since autobiography is still regarded as a discourse of power which can be entered into and used in order to

broadcast identity, autobiography for those who have been denied a pre-existent self by dominant discourses of gender or race can reconstitute or construct identity as an act of empowerment; although constructing a new subjectivity will probably not involve the configurations of canonical identity which autobiographical readers, critics and theorists have been trained to recognize. Autobiography itself is a position which can be inhabited, and adapted, to construct identity. It can act as a signifying process in a single text or in multitextual layers, in stories or in visual configurations.

This means that the process of examining an autobiographical act should not be reductive, but inductive. If acquiring an identity is a constructive process, and a series of subject positions acquired over time, then autobiographies and their writers should be looked at in terms of their motivations for looking at themselves, for needing the act of looking at all, and autobiographical texts should be examined as cultural artifacts, the products of the attempt to communicate identity by means of specific configurations and strategies. Autobiography is more than a reflection of identity; it is also a sign for identity, and a means to achieving identity which can be read as a sign. William Kurelek and Emily Carr, who wrote almost exclusively about themselves, used autobiography in this way; as a sign for and about identity, among the images which they lived

in, and through, as artists. Autobiographical texts at times indexed the images they made, giving them specific meanings beyond themselves; at other times, autobiography enabled both artists to name themselves as sacred sign makers⁵. Here, among the images each artist made, "autobiography" becomes unfamiliar territory, occupying spaces and uses beyond the usual critical discourses about it.

In his book Earthdivers, Gerald Vizenos tells an Ojibway creation myth in this way. Wenebojo, a trickster, is standing on the top of a tree, trying to keep his head above the water which covers the whole world. He asks several animals in turn -- beaver, muskrat and otter -- to dive to the bottom and get grains of dirt for him. With the dirt, Wenebojo could make a world. After the beaver and otter have tried and failed, the muskrat floats to the surface with five grains of dirt. Wenebojo takes the grains and throws them on the water. A little island forms. Then Wenebojo takes dirt from the island and throws that around. The island becomes larger and larger as he does this constantly, until the island becomes the world.

Amidst a welter of cultural signs, sacred images, strategies for identity, and the appropriation of writing as a survivalist tool, Emily Carr and William Kurelek can be

sighted, creating their own sites for identity. Both artists made constructions, and reconstructions, of "self" during circumstances which threatened to extinguish them. Autobiography, for them, was a process in which they gathered pieces of themselves. In so doing, they made peace with their pasts and wrote themselves into a place to see, and perceive, the world. They were earthdivers, who cobbled together islands and liferafts made of images, words, childhood traumas, Roman Catholic theology, liberal Protestantism, animals, and, eventually for both, God. Unlike most other Canadian artists working at the same time, Carr and Kurelek each believed that they were visionaries, who had a religious mission rooted in communicating the sign of God's presence, with visual signs rooted in what they saw, and had experienced. As a part of this vocation, both chose to inhabit mental, physical, psychological, or religious borders where few people could communicate with them, largely symbolic spaces. Autobiography, in their hands, was a means to access their past lives as part of their religious motivations and artistic vocations. It functioned as a supporting "fiction", healing them of emotional trauma, and providing them the means to name themselves, and God, in a symbolic, creative, lived space.

As Laing observes, when looking at representations of the self, it is necessary to ask, "Who is speaking? Who is picturing? To what ends?" (Laing n.p.) As ongoing

representations of the self, as living spaces in texts which enable creative life to take place, the autobiographical acts of Emily Carr and William Kurelek should be examined as ways in which identity is framed and communicated, and why that communication process, which drove both artists to autobiographical expression again and again, occurred. In Kurelek's frame, autobiography was a sign of and a means to a "comeback to wholeness", while for Carr, autobiography was a way to map her life, "with all the rivers and hills showing". With comebacks and maps, in whatever form they appear, a sighting of Carr, Kurelek and autobiographical living space can take place.

Notes

1. Rousseau from The Confession of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Tr. J.M. Cohen; Jean Starobinski, "The Style of Autobiography" Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical ed. James Olney (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 80.

2. See James Olney's introduction, Barrett J. Mandel, William L. Howarth and James M. Cox in Olney, 1980 for examples of the debates over autobiography as a genre. Also see Brodskii and Schenck's introduction to autobiographical theory in Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography.

3. Elizabeth Bruss, "Eye for I: Making and Unmaking Autobiography in Film" in Olney, 1980, 299-300.

5. For a complete discussion of signs, iconics and indexes, see Nichols, 11-24.

CHAPTER TWO

Survival: William Kurelek

In order to understand a philosophical system (or the philosophical corpus of an entire historical period), it is often necessary to approach it from the margins rather than from the center. From the center, a system always seems well defined and hardly challengeable; it is at its periphery that it gets put to the test.

--Umberto Eco, The Medieval Theory of Signs

Until recently, theorists of autobiography have worked hard to make what was seen as a marginal area of studies central. Autobiography -- its history, its canon of core-texts and its aesthetics -- has been established as a legitimate area of study, particularly for students of American history and literature'. But the legitimizing of autobiography as a genre has involved enclosing autobiographical theory and practice in order to consolidate it. Autobiography is now envisioned primarily as a literary activity, performed in a historical (usually American-historical) continuum, involving a single written text, by a single author. James Olney inadvertently highlights this positioning of autobiographical discourse when he observes, in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, that the 1985 Louisiana State University

Conference on Autobiography had few representatives from outside the literary and historical disciplines, despite a call for interdisciplinary papers (ii).

In William Kurelek's case, the act of autobiography, the intention of autobiography and the formation/formulation of autobiography as written and visual signs, combine in ways which do not accommodate the more traditional frames and paradigms of the theoretical discourse of autobiography. A study of William Kurelek and autobiography, then, should take place on the periphery of autobiographical discourse.

In terms of the present situation in autobiographical theory and criticism, Kurelek is peripheral. He was a visual artist, a first-generation Ukrainian-Canadian, a believing Catholic-Christian, and a one-time mental patient. Although his autobiography, Someone With Me², was published when he was a well-known artist, Kurelek had begun writing and revising autobiographical fragments thirty years before, when he was twenty years old and seeking psychological help. For the rest of his life, he recorded and reinterpreted his life-story in written, spoken and visual forms with an intensity which bordered on obsession. William Kurelek's autobiography was unusual. Knowing who he was, and determining the position he occupied as a Ukrainian/Canadian, Catholic artist, was essential to his psychic survival. Remembering, recollecting, and interpreting recollection and memory in

the light of his chosen position were essential life-giving acts for him. His symbolizations of his own identity by means of autobiographical strategies were developed -- and at times, discarded -- as his requirements for identity changed. Kurelek had to establish a strong sense of self so that he could attach symbolic formulations to his own identity, and rename/renege his experiences. So, Kurelek constructed his identity for himself in any way he could whenever he needed to. His psychological and creative needs fuelled his experiments with autobiography whenever those needs arose. The condition of tranquillity which Wordsworth found necessary for poetic recollection was not available to Kurelek; his recollection/identity ventures took place in the midst of an instability he addressed in autobiography so that he could stabilize himself. Thinking back for Kurelek involved the construction, layering, and repetition of features of his experience which, as a painter, he set out to interpret as key. Re-collection of this sort often occurred in the direct visual configurations of his art. At other times, Kurelek used his autobiographical writings to project in images aspects of experience, which he would then use to advertise his need for an identity or even, having done this, create another aspect of an identity which he wanted himself to have. For Kurelek, having an identity founded in written autobiography meant that he could construct and control the

symbols and meanings of his paintings. Through autobiographical writing, Kurelek gave himself what Gusdorf called a "space of speaking", a living space, into which he poured all of his anxieties, his (eventually) Christian orientation and his symbolic configurations, textual and visual.

Kurelek's last project -- a trip to his father's village, Borivtsi, in the Ukraine -- is a good example of the mix of self, symbol, life, place, moment that for Kurelek marked the point at which, for him, memory, paint and the sacred met. He probably knew that he was dying of cancer before he made that trip, but he vowed to go if it killed him. And in Borovtsi, physical realities occupied the same space as symbolic gestures, as in a description of Kurelek's behaviour in To My Father's Village:

Mykola Kolankiwsky reports he was told that one day when Kurelek was out alone painting in the fields, a small child came running into the house: 'Uncle is ill; he is lying on the ground.' When the relative rushed out to Kurelek, he found him on the path with his face turned to the freshly plowed furrows. Touching his arm, he inquired about his health. Kurelek answered, 'I'm alright -- I'm only searching for my roots (n.p).

The act of lying face-down on his father's soil -- particularly when he knows he is about to die -- was for Kurelek a gesture of tremendous symbolic force. It is in

the gesture: in his life and in his written/visual work, that Kurelek's need to symbolize and re-symbolize his own life, to live his life symbolically, can profitably be examined.

Covering Over/Recovery -- Behold Man Without God (1953-54)

Kurelek painted what he felt was a Swiftian satire on all human life (Morley 99) when he was a mental patient at Maudsley Hospital in 1945 (fig. 2.1)³. The painting eventually titled Behold Man Without God gives us a picture of Kurelek's world view at the time. But it also provided Kurelek a way to prove to his doctors that he was mentally ill and deserved treatment. Behold Man Without God was, originally, testimony and performance -- an acting-out, visually, of deep personal misery, triggered by the belief that psychiatric "salvation" would result from it.

Throughout Kurelek's autobiographical writings, the combination of justification, performance and testimony forms the core of his motivations, even though his view of what salvation might mean changed radically over time. The key symbolic elements in the painting provide a way into the conscious symbolism of Kurelek's work, a visible didacticism which, although it may have had an audience in mind, had, first of all, an instrumental, self-reflected function to perform for himself. Kurelek worked at his paintings: he worked himself into them, by design, and made

a coherent network of signs that were themselves signs of his identity. Behold Man Without God expresses and explores Kurelek's identity/situation. It is a lived space from which Kurelek's moral identity sprang: it is also a sacred, symbolic space to which he returned long after he painted it.

The background and borders of Behold Man Without God picture the general state of the world as misery. A burning fire highlights a stone tablet inscribed with literary quotations. Nearby, worms come out of a beehive and become tanks and human beings, while blackened soldiers fight and die on a nearby hillside. A symphony orchestra and choir (featuring players with human bodies and the heads of pigs, conducted by an ape-headed figure) plays nearby. The players and singers perform on a sagging carpet precariously suspended over a pit. They are as unaware of falling as they are of the war taking place beyond them. But, a crowd of working people carrying burdens do listen to the orchestra until they pass behind the stone tablet and emerge, exhausted, with enormous burdens on their backs, which break apart and crush them beneath. One member of the crowd gives alms to a crippled beggar. Kurelek's meaning is clear: high culture, while representing the "best" of mankind's achievements, is a hollow comfort and cannot change the human lot of suffering, war and death. In the painting, even isolated



Fig. 2.1

acts of charity are impotent in the face of poverty and war. The indifference of the powerful only adds to the misery -- wealthy, but bored society people in Behold Man Without God turn away from the devastation and pursue only empty social rituals. The foreground of the painting gives us a close-up of human depravity: it features a naked, crying baby and a dead rat, with a human face. The rat holds a placard proclaiming, among other things, "What a piece of work is Man". Humankind is nothing but this; human achievements (including a crumbling wall behind the rat and baby representing "Man" as an ape) cannot last and can do nothing to prevent injustice, death or disease. In Behold Man Without God, "Man" has achieved nothing of real value.

Kurelek's symbols for the more general state of human misery include walls which seal off the baby and rat from references to the artist's own past. Set into one of these walls is a scene illustrating the way Kurelek framed his personal experience and used the frame to provide an allegorical explanation for the state of the world. In a room decorated with a poster advertising Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, a man kneeling on a skylight worships the hollow statue of a woman (labelled "Woman"), his face literally buried in a book of the same title. Stairs lead from the statue to a room below, where a couple (who resemble Kurelek's parents) lies in bed, partially hidden

by a screen. The man in bed points accusingly at the worshipper, while the woman laughs. The stairs also pass by an bricked-over opening in the wall, where a man in pajamas, a cap pulled over his eyes, is entwined with a large snake. The head of the snake resembles a penis, but with a mouth-like opening on one side; the mouth is swallowing the man's right hand while his left hand holds the shaft. The society gathering is on the other side of the wall against which the man is leaning.

This scene in Behold Man Without God is a visual allegory of Kurelek's division of love into spiritual and carnal poles. Spiritual love (complete with posters advertising Pride and Prejudice and a worshipping man) is "upstairs", but its object, an idealized statue labelled "Woman", is hollow. Carnal love is "downstairs" in the form of marriage, but the resemblance to Kurelek's parents and the accusing pointing finger may also indicate Kurelek's view of the attitude of his parents to marriage: Kurelek felt that they saw matrimony as a sign of normalcy, and until he himself married, they believed him to be abnormal (S1 327).

The image of the man entwined in rope also has its basis in Kurelek's personal life. Until he converted to Christianity in 1957, Kurelek masturbated and felt guilty about it -- in Someone With Me he discusses it as a sign of physical and moral weakness (450)⁴. The parallels are

obvious: halfway between carnal and spiritual love and cut off from "normal" society, Kurelek pictures himself caught in the grip of an obsession he cannot control.

This statue also represents a part of Kurelek's past. In the first edition of Someone With Me, Kurelek describes his first infatuation with a girl he only calls "Natalie". Natalie "made me begin speaking Ukranian at home, the purest possible. She helped me fight sexual temptation" (161-62). But Kurelek was too shy and insecure to tell her how he felt, until years later, when Natalie rejected him. Instead, Kurelek used the idea of Natalie as an emblem of spiritual love, in opposition to his idea of carnal love. In another painting, The Nightmare (1954-55), Kurelek depicts the dichotomy and interprets it:

In one of the scenes [Natalie] is shown just as she'd imprinted herself in my memory, at a typewriter with a sort of a halo around her. But under the counter are two dogs who had copulated and then remained stuck together . . . [t]he whole scene was a satire on marriage, and it showed the harsh dichotomy of my concept of love by then -- the spiritual and the carnal. The carnal I'd gleaned from gutter talk of the school boys and labourers; the spiritual from books like Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice (163).

Kurelek goes on to write about his "spiritual" love for Natalie:

I have never since had that experience so wonderful yet so painful -- painful, that is, on those occasion when I felt normal desire for a girl and realized I couldn't approach her. Most of the time, however, I floated in that exalted mental-emotional milieu that psychologists call "agape." In it the young man worships the maid as a goddess, a goddess so pure it would even be a sacrilege to desire her (164).

But the placement of this scene beside more general signs of misery -- empty social rituals, abandonment and decay -- indicates that Kurelek's dichotomous, alienated view of love is not just the result of his insecurities. It is also humankind's problem. Given Kurelek's view, which he held while painting this picture, that psychiatry and psychology should provide people with a cure-all for emotional, sexual and psychological problems, this section of Behold Man Without God probably is an indictment of the failure, in Kurelek's opinion, of psychology. The statue is not labelled "Natalie" -- it is idealized and labelled "WOMAN". The man in pajamas has a cap over his eyes so that he remains anonymous. His alienation from the social gathering (which includes scenes of courting) can be interpreted as the general alienation from "healthy" sexuality and from the dichotomy of spiritual/physical love which, in Kurelek's later view, a godless person experiences. Kurelek, in Someone With Me, did view

masturbation in this way after his conversion (450). He was telescoping his more general view of mankind into his personal experience, but he was also attempting to project his personal experience into a more general frame, without losing the personal base beneath the image. Kurelek's ability to renegotiate the parameters of his symbolic iconography, without losing the original intent of that imagery is, I would argue, the foundation of his approach to autobiography.

There are several scenes in the centre of Behold Man Without God which form the core, for Kurelek, of his personal history, and it is here, in Kurelek's most personally sensitive territory, that the genesis for his autobiographical imagery can be traced. In one, Kurelek, wearing a bag on his head, pulls his father in a rickshaw, while his father lashes him with a cat-o-nine tails issuing from his mouth. In another grouping nearby, Kurelek's father breaks, with his foot, the back of a small, emaciated boy. Near this grouping, a man in a comfortable armchair watches a caged rat trying to reach a mannequin (resembling Kurelek) encased in a bubble.

All three groupings occupy a central space in the painting; they also occupy a prominent place in Kurelek's framing of his life story before and after conversion. Kurelek attributed his psychological (and later, spiritual) difficulties before his conversion to the verbal abuse and

constant overwork to which his father had subjected him as a child. Both editions of Someone With Me contain many references to the elder Kurelek's sarcasm (104), contempt for his eldest son's work skills (124) and lack of support for anything he did (135). In an effort to understand and interpret what had happened to him, Kurelek originally framed his father's abuse of him in Freudian terms. The Freudian imagery of oppression would subsequently be translated into the Christian language of sin and its expressive consequence, for Kurelek, to materialism and atheism. This framing, reframing and renaming of his experience under the formative pressure of his psychic needs, came to characterize Kurelek's ongoing negotiation of his identity. His father remained a torturer and bully, but the interpretation Kurelek placed on the roles he had his father play in his life and in his paintings altered dramatically.

Kurelek dealt with his father's harshness by deadening his mind and body to all sensual responses; and he called this process "depersonalization". The mannequin in the bubble, protected from the rat -- who probably represents Kurelek's anxieties and fears⁵ -- is incapable of real human feeling, of life. This, for Kurelek, was the essence of depersonalization, a process he also experienced as a patient in a mental hospital when he was put on display for a doctor's "enjoyment", instead of his examination and

diagnosis. Depersonalization was more than a psychological term for Kurelek. Until his conversion, it was a way for him to explain to himself what was happening to him, and how he could be cured. It gave him a means to locate himself and his life experience inside of psychological discourse as he understood it, but also to resist what his doctors were telling him. "Depersonalization" was a word taken from those who could provide explanations, and Kurelek used it to emphasize how little psychology had to offer. It had, in his view, provided him with the key to the "problem", but not the solution. Once named, Kurelek believed, his inability to relate meaningfully to others could be removed, and as a result, his frustration with his doctors' seeming unconcern about a "solution" rankled (294, 318)⁶. As a Christian, Kurelek felt that he had his "answer", and so he recast "depersonalization" as a moral/psychological problem, turning it into an almost theological talisman. Kurelek's need to name and explain problems -- in contrast to professionals who cannot or will not -- forms an important part of his autobiographical impulse before his conversion -- and it also forms the basis for most of his later didactic visual work. The mannequin, watched by a complacent doctor in Behold Man Without God, is a part of a symbolization process that would be translated, later, into an announcement of a world cure, and into Kurelek's publicized desire for worldwide

wholeness through belief in Christ. Christianity, in Kurelek's opinion, did "diagnose" problems, provide explanations and a cure, for him and for everyone.

Near these groupings, Kurelek painted a man (resembling himself), wearing a laurel wreath, holding a scroll and making a proclamation. He is, literally, wearing a small theatre, complete with a spotlight, and is walking into the social gathering. Posters on the front and sides of the theatre advertise a performance:

The William Kurelek Theatre presents William Kurelek in
WILLIAM KURELEK, an epic tragedy by William Kurelek.

Continuous Performance.

This image is, literally, Kurelek's imaged request for psychiatric treatment. He understood the need to present himself continuously, and the need to exert complete control over that presentation, even in a satire. Framing himself, giving himself a theatre and play-acting to receive treatment were all part of his plea for help (S2 18). The act of autobiography for Kurelek was an act, but not of narcissism. Instead of looking at himself for the sake of looking, Kurelek insisted that "advertising" his narrative of his life -- even its narrative frame -- was the only way for him to survive with an integrated identity. Controlling the presentation became part of the way in which Kurelek constructed an identity for himself.

Behold Man Without God later would acquire other

meanings as Kurelek consolidated his identity and required older symbols to be translated into new contexts. In Someone With Me, he wrote about the painting:

My bitterness towards life continued in other psychological paintings. But as I look back on them now I can discern the gradual shifting of these clinical psychological symbols to images with spiritual connotations. True, they're as savage as Jonathan Swift's images, but his became more savage as he declined into insanity. I, however, was able to turn on my decline, call it by its proper name, and make a comeback to wholeness. This is represented, it seems to me, by a painting done in 1954 which I later retitled "Behold Man Without God" (S2 19) [My italics].

For Kurelek, Behold Man Without God illustrated his ability to transform and adjust symbols as his circumstances -- psychological, social, artistic -- changed. He thought that it was so important to his development that he repainted it as one of the largest background images in his self-portrait of 1957. While other paintings from Kurelek's stay in Maudsley from 1952 to 1957 document his psychological difficulties and his desperate pleas for help, only Behold Man Without God combines personal and societal, private and public signs of misery and fragmentation in one field of reference, and by doing so manages to place a comprehensible interpretive filter over

them. Of Kurelek's works from the mental hospital years, Behold Man Without God remains the only painting to be retitled⁷ and repainted after his conversion, together with a written explanation of this process⁸. The painting was important to Kurelek, so important that he exhibited it in show after show, making copies of it whenever the canvas was sold. When he painted it into the background of his second self-portrait, the painting took on a function as a sign of what he had been overlaid literally with what he, as an artist, was becoming. Behold Man Without God is more than an expression of the narrative Kurelek constructed about himself before and after his conversion; it forms part of the narrative itself, and provides a roadmap into his method and motivations for constructing and maintaining an identity over time. The painting itself testifies to the complex, shifting nature of Kurelek's imaginative territory -- while most of the features remain the same, the names do change, and sometimes, as Kurelek's imaginative needs changed, the entire map is renamed.

Yet, Kurelek's motives for presenting himself changed little. This painting, and the written "explanation" Kurelek gave it shows how Kurelek needed, before and after his conversion, to interpret through narrative, to index the images he created, in order to name his experiences and give them form. He interpreted visual symbolic transformations as metaphysical. In this way, he discerned

a "shift" in the image segments of Behold Man Without God and identified it as part of an identity shift from artist/mental patient to artist/pre-Christian. He also connected this naming with taking control over his own "decline" -- a decline he eventually extends to Canada and the world -- with "making a comeback to wholeness". Kurelek's tendency to name and rename what he called the "memory pictures" of his past formed an integral part of his sign formation process, and part of his identity formation process as well. As a written parallel to Behold Man Without God, Someone With Me located Kurelek's images in a continuously evolving allegory, whether the allegory came from a caption, a painting title, a newspaper interview, a public speech or a book. According to Jean Kurelek, his wife, spoken, written and verbal communication serve one purpose, publically, in his work:

I do know that he [Kurelek] wanted this book to help others find peace of mind as he had. He firmly believed that the true story of his conversion to Catholicism after his hospitalization would inspire others with hope and perhaps joy. Since that time, in one way or another -- in his paintings, his public talks, and now in this book -- he has been trying to bring this message to anyone who will listen (S2 6).

It was the message, not the medium, which mattered.

Autobiography in many forms was a way for Kurelek to

harness visual signs and shift them as his psychological/spiritual needs for self-definition changed. In the process, he made "wholeness" out of fragments, of paint, identity and God. The flow of narrative, visual and written-textual, was, for him, essential to this process.

Behold Man Without God is, in this sense, a sign in itself of Kurelek's approach to and use of autobiography. This painting functioned, simultaneously, as a location of who he felt he had been before his conversion, a diagnosis of who Kurelek felt he was as a Catholic, and a projection of what Kurelek felt his role as an artist ought to be in the future -- all in terms of his process of visual symbolic formation. To this end, Kurelek used language as a way to bind his shifting signs into one evolving configuration. Language cemented Kurelek's imagining of his past and future; it also bound his symbols for identity into a flexible narrative, where Heaven and Hell, farm and asylum, his father and God, could occupy positions named, and drawn, by him. Kurelek used language to make the overlays of his -- painted -- life visible inside of his narrative agenda. He wrote:

At the time I renamed [Behold Man Without God] I also painted over the strongest Swiftian images. I suppose in future years, if my paintings stand the test of time, art experts and restorers will strip back the over-painting to reveal its original horror. I, of course,

will be long dead and won't be able to stop them. They will find under the anthill and beehive two giant women in labour spawning the teaming masses that make up the cannon fodder of the world's warring armies. Under the dead, wormy rat is a pile of human excrement. And the weeping child is really a boy wiping his bottom using Shakespeare for toilet paper⁹.

Kurelek renamed and recontextualized elements of the painting, but significantly, he wrote about what happened in the past, while indexing what he had done in terms of the future. His comments, like many of his captions for other paintings, were meant to bring, literally and symbolically, hidden images, hidden meanings, to light. In Kurelek's hands, writing gave his images, and himself, a recognizable past and future; with a malleable history in his possession, Kurelek could "draw" conclusions from it and project his painting -- and his position as an artist -- into the future. Writing also gave Kurelek a place where he could locate himself, and his imagery of time, as a part of eternal time. As he wrote at the end of Someone With Me, he had become a "real living person with a real name" (522). As this real person with a real name, a real identity, Kurelek negotiated with time itself to effect a final transformation -- this artist who had made a history, who had named his personal history and given it images, could write and draw the world spiritually. With a name,

Kurelek cast himself as one who gives names -- an artist who was also a prophet, imposing meaning on the physical world by making images, and endowing them, in language, with spiritual connotations.

It is hardly surprising, then, that Kurelek recopied Behold Man Without God in miniature as part of his second self-portrait. The painting was a sign of who he was (and is). But it is overlaid with the picture of a triangle inside a sun which bears the caption, "Late have I loved you, O Ancient Beauty, ever old and ever new. -- St. Augustine". What was ugly (and hence, for Kurelek, Godless) is not forgotten, but what is beautiful (and Godly) has changed the former meaning of ugliness. There is no repetition in Kurelek's work that does not involve recontextualization. His imagery does cover over old symbolizations, but it is not a cover-up. It is a discovery, a recovery of images. In "forward recollection"¹⁰ Kurelek found reorganized, and recognized, the identity of a survivor.

The Broken "I"

In the first published edition of Someone With Me, Kurelek included an apologetic dealing with a number of problems of deep concern to him: the existence of God, the person and divinity of Christ; and the existence of the human soul. He provided illustrations for the more abstract

conceptions. His observations about the nature of the soul, for instance, are illuminated with the figure of a capital "I" (S1 410) (fig. 2.2). The "I" is rendered in the form of a shallow, shaded box. Small chunks or broken pieces of material pour from the "box"; some are scattered in front of it.

The apologetics section was so important for Kurelek that whenever editors suggested that it should be edited, he refused to have his autobiography published (Morley 280-81). The discussion and illustration for the relation of the soul and the body was central to the shift in Kurelek's life: from his "depersonalized" sense of being cut off from normal human feeling, leading to his sense of personal control and psychic mobility as a Christian. Without coming to a sense of himself as an unbroken "I", Kurelek could not have found his way to his belief in God. With a belief in God, Kurelek as a reconciled "I" could name the rest of the world and "make a comeback to wholeness". Autobiography became part of this overall consolidation.

What did the "I" and the broken pieces of his illustration signify for Kurelek? The answer may be found in Kurelek's belief that the "I" can become aware of itself as "I"; this spiritually conscious "I" becomes synonymous with the soul; the consequence being that the renewed "I" takes on the most distinctive attributes of the

soul -- eternal, unique, created by God. Self-awareness is evidence, for Kurelek, that God exists:

A person knows that he (or she) is a person, that he is a separate entity from all other persons and things living or dead. He knows that he is not somebody else or a bit of one person and a bit of the other. As far as he knows, he never existed on earth before and never will again. He can look at himself and watch himself living. In sum total he knows himself as "I". It is the "I" that is the human soul. How funny it seemed to me when I found that out! It's like losing something and searching high and low for it and then finding you've been holding it in your hand all the while. I had missed the whole point all those years simply by not knowing the name of the thing. It is the one permanent thing about me (S1 407).

This "I" is permanent because death, which affects the body,

cannot touch the soul, which is immaterial:

Death is a thing common to all living things. But there is a vital difference between the animal life and the human life. A human life is spiritual . . . [t]here is, strictly speaking, no need for the spiritual part of the soul to cease existing when the body is separated from it . . . As already described, a body is a body because it is a total component of many parts and

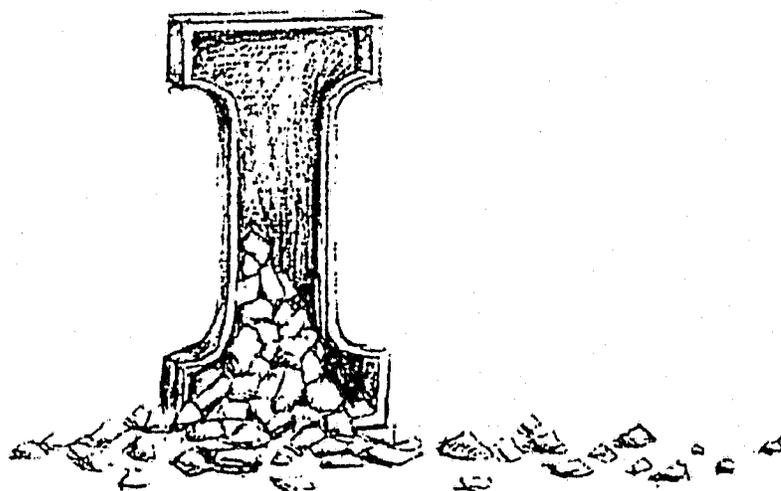


Fig. 2.2

Death [sic] is a separation of parts, one from the other. But the soul is not made of parts. It's [sic] very nature is to be one. We sense this in thinking of ourselves -- I am I, and there is only me (S1 408-10) [italics are Kurelek's].

In the light of this commentary, it becomes possible to interpret the drawing. It shows how the body deteriorates and loses the shape of the "I" but the "I", the form which held the body together, does not deteriorate. How did Kurelek travel from a situation in which he had no identity position, to the confident belief of knowing himself as an absolute, eternal "I"? Why did Kurelek link the idea of identity so closely to the idea of life and death?

His final identification of himself as an ultimate "I" which could not be broken, would be called, in the work of Robert Jay Lifton, the result of the centring, grounding and reintegrating of identity, an identity which can symbolize (and even resist) death in such a way as to preserve individual integrity in the face of breakdown. According to Lifton in his book The Life of the Self, identity is not primarily formed and maintained by unconscious drives, nor by social conditioning; identity is not merely a matrix of socially conditioned responses. Lifton advocates identity formation as:

stress on a symbolizing process involving continuous creation and transformation of psychic structures

(images and forms) on behalf of the many-sided life (and in response to the threatened or anticipated death) of the self (1.).

The self, then, can actively create symbols (or signs), in order to make its identity intelligible to the world and the world intelligible to itself.

If all individuals strive for unity and connection inside and outside themselves -- Lifton calls this "a compelling universal urge to maintain an inner sense of continuous symbolic relationship, over time and space, with the various elements of life" (31), then this need for continuity constitutes "a sense of immortality . . . man's symbolization of his ties with both his biological fellows and his history, past and future." (31) Why immortality? In establishing patterns of connection, of life as continuous, an individual must eventually symbolize the idea of death, of "the absolute infringement upon the life of the organism." (36) Everyone dies, and no one knows what death is like -- every individual's relationship to death is symbolic rather than experiential. An individual must negotiate with death, and with the separation from all that the individual associates with living and being, in order to live at all. Patterns of connection, of continuity beyond separation must be established, whether in the form of religious or scientific explanations, or in ideas relating to generational continuity or artistic

continuity (63).

The opposition of death to life, therefore, is one of the fundamental sites of psychic formation on an individual and a cultural level:

Most important [in the formative life/death paradigm] is its stress upon motivation around life (form) and death (formlessness). Central to human experience is the struggle to evoke and preserve the sense of the self as alive, and avoid the sense of the self as dead. All living beings share the struggle to remain alive. But the urge to retain and enlarge the feeling of being alive--of vitality--is specifically human, an evolutionary trait of symbolizing mentation that stands at the border of biology and culture . . . Struggles for vitality and continuity take place at levels that can be called proximate . . . and ultimate (51).

Kurelek's joy when he discovered that he had an eternal consciousness with a name, that the soul is the "I" and that the "I" does not deteriorate when the body breaks down indicates how closely he associates identity with form, and vitality.

Without this feeling of vitality, Lifton believes, the individual becomes a victim of "psychic numbing":

The concept of psychic numbing . . . suggests the cessation of what I call the formative process, the impairment of man's essential mental function of symbol

formation or symbolization . . . Psychic numbing is a form of desensitization; it refers to an incapacity to feel or to confront certain kinds of experience, due to the blocking or absence of inner forms or imagery that can connect such experience (27).

When Kurelek framed his psychological difficulties with his father in terms of "depersonalization", he described his own form of psychic numbing:

In my intense misery [on the farm] I was developing a concentration camp type of "out" -- called depersonalization. In it a person need not feel hurt, or nearly as hurt, because he is not a person (129).

Depersonalization was the term Kurelek used to explain why he could not relate meaningfully to his father, to others in high school social situations (166-67), and at work (170). In Maudsley Hospital and in Netherne, Kurelek blamed depression and depersonalization for his sense of separation from the rest of society (304). One panel of The Maze (1953), painted during this time, shows Kurelek slicing his arm with a knife in order to determine whether "I'm real like the others -- made of flesh and blood. In theory it's a desperate measure to break out of depersonalization." (312) Kurelek also connected his desperate need to know if he is "real" with life and death:

[I]f I could grasp the reality of death and the decay of the body then I might snap out of my sleep and come to

life (312).

At Netherne, Kurelek walked aimlessly around the grounds of the hospital, unable to find a "cure" for depersonalization. Endless review of his life did little to improve his condition. As he writes, "I carried my wretchedness with me wherever I went, and its inertia still determined my direction" (319). While Kurelek could vent his frustration in paintings like The Maze, I Spit on Life and Behold Man Without God, his inner psychic configurations still held him in a type of living death. He was unable to renew his inner forms and break the cycle; he simply produced new forms for his misery.

Kurelek could not experience renewal because, in Lifton's paradigm, he was neither "centred" nor "grounded". He could not maintain a sense of himself as a living, vital "I" with inner integrity, a connection with others, or an ability to move (symbolically and physically) in a wider context. In Lifton's terms, Kurelek could not adapt his inner forms to the flow of continuity and separation which symbolized life and death for him. On a visual/symbolic level, he broadcasted his inability to adjust; for example, in many drawings and sketches dating from his stays in Maudsley and Netherne, he represented himself as a lone traveller in a trench coat and porkpie hat, walking in darkness or turning towards darkness, away from a light source¹¹. The image refers to his earlier wanderings in the

United States and Mexico, but it is also an icon -- the drawings show how Kurelek felt in not belonging anywhere, or to anyone, on a spiritual as well as a physical level.

According to Lifton, an individual perceives and recasts the flow of continuity and separation in three subparadigms which hold true from infancy to old age. When an individual is psychically "centred", s/he feels connected to others, able to physically and psychologically move in her/his environment, and perceives him/herself as integrated -- that is, s/he has inner forms and images which can make the "outside" world meaningful, and which can be adapted to any new encounters (37). An individual who feels integrated, mobile and connected can then extend his/her sense of connection, movement and integrity to a wider, often cosmic context and in so doing give personal experience a greater meaning: Lifton refers to this as "symbolic immortality". Symbolic immortality consists of "man's symbolization of his ties with both his biological fellows and his history, past and future" (31). It involves the knowledge that the core of one's being is alive, and will continue to be so despite the inevitability of death. Symbolic immortality moves "outward from the individual and connects the individual to historical flow and cultural projects extending beyond the self" (62). Some manifestations of symbolic immortality are biological (a sense of living through and in one's descendants), theological (a belief in

God, an afterlife, or a death transcendence), natural (nature continues although we die), or a sense of a continued life through "works" -- creative endeavours, teaching, achievements which affect human experience as a whole (31-34).

The opposites to these paradigms are formulated in infancy and, as an individual matures, become more psychologically complex. When an individual feels cut off from meaningful interaction with others, s/he associates this state with separation, which becomes acquainted, in an ultimate sense, with death (38). In a similar way, an individual who cannot physically or psychologically "move" freely will associate the absence of movement with stasis, a "deathlike experience" (39). An individual who cannot adapt old forms to new situations, or whose inner forms are inadequate in "outside" encounters may experience disintegration, which is again associated with death (38).

As someone who was uncentred and had no "ground" on which to build identity, Kurelek could not communicate effectively with others, a problem which he articulated again and again in Someone With Me, and which his doctors took note of during his hospitalization (Morley 78). He had difficulty even looking people in the eye as he spoke to them (Morley 78), and when he was a child, Kurelek believed, depersonalization prevented him from talking, moving or staying awake (74). His painting I Spit on Life

(1956) symbolized this experience, showing him as a child and an adult, with a depersonalization bag over his head, inside a zoo-like enclosure studded with broken glass. Other vignettes show Kurelek chained by the ankle or wrist. One has him trapped in a coffin while his therapists hold the lid shut.

At Netherne, too, Kurelek's need for something on which he could build integrity and defend against disintegration, is much in evidence. Most of his symbolic paintings from his stay at the hospital are allegorical cries to his doctors, and later to God, for help, with titles like Help Me Please Help Me Please Help Me -- Please Help (1953-55), Where am I? Who am I? Why am I? (1953-54) and Lord that I May See (1955). The Maze (1953) remained, in Kurelek's view, the strongest expression of his need for psychological treatment in the face of personal failure and his father's mistreatment (Morley 88). Kurelek had placed his faith in psychology since his years in university, but it failed to provide him a ground for identity building because it could not "cure" him of depersonalization. In his view, finally, psychotherapy was only "Talk and talk and talk; think and think and think. Nothing led to nowhere" (335). His vocation as an artist also could not provide the ground he needed because, as he concluded, "'Was there really any sense in being a dead hero?'" Kurelek's works might outlive him, but in his view, art

could not "save" him while he lived. Nor, he felt, could marriage, books, music or sociability because of his progressively deadening sensitivity to these things (327).

When an individual cannot move, connect with other people or other symbolic formations and cannot feel integrated, s/he can experience psychic numbing, a living death. Since all individuals are "at every moment concerned with proximate (personal, local) and ultimate (symbolically immortal) matters" (127), a person who feels as if s/he is dead in terms of personal social relations feels that s/he means little in an ultimate sense. For example, in Someone With Me, not only does Kurelek enumerate all the failures he perceives as having experienced in his childhood, but he also cast himself as a failure incapable of success (167). And at Netherne Hospital, since Kurelek felt that he was already dead and a failure, he had no sense of symbolic immortality. Suicide made sense:

There are others for whom life is bad, often much worse than my own, but they have something with which to hold on to it -- religion maybe, or a sense of duty to others, or just plain fear of oblivion . . . I pity them for being tricked into letting life torture them -- for nothing . . . If there were no God, no after-life, no final justice, then suicide is really quite reasonable (337,39) [Italics are Kurelek's].

But suicide proved to be unreasonable, or at least, unobtainable, and Kurelek continued to search for a way out of his own "maze" by manufacturing symbols like mazes and bags in order to make his despair comprehensible. But his imagery was destructive rather than survivalist: it simply broadcast his need for meaning rather than bringing him into healing configurations. Lifton explains that life-affirming imagery of continuity, as opposed to discontinuity (in death) constitutes the imagery of survival:

It is the image-model of the human being as a perpetual "survivor" -- first of birth itself, and then of the "holocausts" large and small, personal and collective, that define much of existence -- but a survivor capable of growth and change, especially when able to confront and transcend those "holocausts" or their imprints (62). According to Lifton, when an individual is able grow and change by establishing patterns of integrity, connection and movement between him/herself and others within a time/space/emotional frame, then the individual is centred, or grounded (71). Kurelek's phrasing: "If there is no God . . . then suicide is really quite reasonable" indicates where he was looking for that ground and where, after his suicide attempt, he found it.

A centred individual can, as Kurelek could when he wrote about Behold Man Without God and repainted it in his

second self-portrait, bring old images and forms to bear on what Lifton calls "an immediate encounter . . . in ways that can anticipate future encounters" (71). Centring in a spatial sense means that an individual can unite "immediate exposure, including bodily involvement" with "distant", "ultimate", "abstract", "immortalizing" meanings (72). In other words, a centred person feels that s/he has meaning and involvement in the arena beyond her/himself, that s/he has value in a larger context. In an emotional sense, a centred person can distinguish between what Lifton calls "impassioned images", those which form the core of the self, and those which are less impassioned and more peripheral (71). The centred person knows who s/he is, where s/he is and what s/he means in the "world" beyond him/herself.

In order to maintain temporal, spatial and emotional centring, an individual must detach her/himself from the immediate situation to make judgements on events and principles beyond the self. Lifton calls this manoeuvre decentering:

Decentering is necessary to the continual process of altering the existing forms that constitute the self, and to applying those forms to new encounters in ways that make possible new kinds of psychic experience. In decentering there is a partial suspension of close integration in temporal, spatial, and emotional planes,

with anticipation of new integrations of a more inclusive kind (72).

If an individual cannot decentre, the inner forms in her/him become static, while the absence of centring means that the individual cannot connect new experience with viable inner forms. A stable centring/decentring dynamic, then, needs a ground in order to have a foundation on which growth and change can occur. Grounding, in turn, is "the relationship of the self to its own history, individual and collective, as well as to its own biology" (72). When an individual is grounded, the pain and confusion which comes from radical decentring and centring "can be experienced in the service of recentering -- achieving a new mode of still-flexible ordering" (73).

Thus, Kurelek recorded his first mystical experience, when as a newly arrived patient in Netherne Hospital he prays "from the heart", as process of radical decentring, but a decentring which had no ground for its basis:

I awoke for no accountable reason sometime after midnight and sat up in bed. The moon was shining brightly on the cabbage field outside our villa and the pine forest beyond. Yet I was overwhelmed by a sense of complete and utter abandonment . . . [i]t was not so much like "little boy lost" but like "LOST IN THE UNIVERSE." It would have been silly or childish for me to awaken a patient or call the night nurse and say,

'Could you help me please, I feel abandoned' (333). Kurelek could not integrate his experience -- when he said the Lord's Prayer later, he wrote that "I didn't feel a thing, or see myself contacting anyone or anything" (334). He was literally unable to create psychic forms to give meaning to what happened to him. Shortly thereafter, he attempted suicide.

But after his conversion, Kurelek had Christianity and the Catholic Church as his ground. With his sense of himself as possessing a consciousness, an eternal soul which belongs to God, he created and recreated new forms from old formulations. In this way, Kurelek achieved psychic renewal by means of constantly reinterpreting his past as a survivor of it. His Catholic Christian orientation enabled him to name it, consolidate it, and survive it. It also gave him an identity which he extended into a world-survival context and an eternal survival time frame. When Kurelek wrote what it had meant to be received into the Catholic church in 1957, he wrote as a survivor: "I'd arrived home at last. Now I could start living" (S2 155). He had, in Lifton's words, achieved an equilibrium which represented vitality itself:

A fluid centering-decentering equilibrium, that is, can open one to experiential transcendence; and experiential transcendence can greatly contribute to both components of that equilibrium (74).

In Kurelek's case, the older configurations of his psychological difficulties and his sense of inadequacy in the face of his father's (and the world's) criticism were not erased, but reinterpreted within a Christian frame, which allowed the creative expression of what Lifton calls "the grounded imagination":

Especially strong in the innovator, grounded imagination has roots in a person's living forms; and these roots permit a certain amount of freedom in imagining outward, so to speak, toward new (or new combinations of) images and original forms. The assumption here is that no form can be entirely new but must have imaginative grounding in older ones. Such grounding provides a suppleness in both centering and decentering -- an agile "moving and bending" of images and ideas within a self that continues to cohere -- that the innovator requires and at moments achieves (101-02).

All of Kurelek's past experience, then, and every visual sign formation of that past experience became empowered by his Christian ground. There, he centred his own "I" as eternal and created by God, and decentred his "I" and the past experiences which make up that "I", in terms of who God is. The past was no longer simply a litany of failure, but a failure to which he gave the names sin and injustice. Sin and injustice on a personal scale provided Kurelek with a jumping-off point to eternal namings, reinterpreted as

eternal, world injustice. Once Kurelek located himself inside an theological system with its own language for time and eternity, autobiography formed part of his self-transformation from the "tragic" (if ironic) victim of his own holocaust, to a healing survivor who must constantly touch his own wounds and remind himself that he is healthy. Having resighted his own experience in terms of eternal verities, Kurelek went on to locate Canada, and the world, as part of the resighting of his life.

For example, Kurelek moved his sense of himself as his father's (Ukrainian) child, and his feelings of impotency and failure which accompanied it, into a symbolic realm which gave an eternal meaning to how he felt:

When I was a boy, my father used to quote a Ukranian saying, 'If you weep over the ills of the world, you will wash your eyes away.' After I went out into the world I became aware of many of those ills besides my own, and I was bitter about man's follies and injustices, much as Jonathan Swift in Gulliver's Travels. Still later, after my conversion to the Catholic Christian faith, I became all the more conscious of this world as a 'vale of tears.' But now there was a significant difference. I know that God has the whole wide world in His Hands and so good will triumph over evil in the end. It is the sins of men, and that includes mine . . . that blight the goodness

and beauty of the world¹².

In this text, Kurelek centred himself ("I was bitter, my father's wisdom was the source of my pain; now, I see the world in terms of sin and suffering.") and decentred himself ("God is in control, now.") His bitter self-imagery has been turned to an imagery of survival. In his paintings, too, Kurelek redrew and renamed his personal world as an eternal ground, once he named himself as an artist with a spiritual vocation.

Self Portraiture as Visual and Written Signs

In telling you this story, I will have to be quite open. Actually I have no choice but to be quite open because I'm not a good writer. Yet I still think the whole story should be told. My one hope in holding your interest lies in my belief -- to vary a phrase -- that truth is stranger than fiction (S2 7).

The formation of inner forms and images is an ongoing, dynamic process throughout a person's life. According to Lifton, symbolizations of integrity, connection and movement remain vital when reviewed:

Old people approaching death look back nostalgically over their whole lives. This "life review," as it is sometimes called, has to do with a process of self-judgement. One examines one's life around issues of integrity, connection and movement, and searches for

evidence of relationship to the modes of symbolic immortality (40).

William Kurelek, however, did "life-review" for more than thirty years. His two formal self-portraits, both painted at times when he needed to consolidate and affirm his identity as an artist, show how Kurelek wove old configurations into new harmonizations, and how vital this process was for his psychic survival.

Kurelek painted the first self-portrait in 1950 or 1951, when he was 23 or 24. He repainted it in Maudsley Hospital in 1953 (fig. 2.3)¹³. Kurelek describes the painting as a major work in conception as well as in execution. His first "masterpiece" as an artist would be, deliberately, his own likeness. As he himself observes, "the psychology underlying such a conscious, deliberate preparation was very complicated" (S2 115). Kurelek painted this portrait at the height of his fascination with Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, and with Van Gogh (220), just before he set out on a hitchhiking trip to Mexico "in search of [him]self as an artist"(225). He styled himself as a Joycean figure, a "hero-artist" rebelling against society, embracing the world of ideas and revelling in poverty by choice, all so that he could produce "great art" (220). His first self-portrait was to be his way to "prove" that he was a true artist, and to consolidate his identity as an artist in a visual sign (238). He had never painted in

oils before (220), and oil, he thought, was the medium of a mature artist. This portrait was intended to locate his past in terms of a (symbolic) artist-identity. It was also a "test" for that identity; since he felt that he had to show that he was not only an artist, but also worthy of his calling.

While Kurelek did have four criteria which, he felt, would prove his merit (the ability to render the appearance of bread, and the successful depiction of living hands, shirt material and his own face), (220) he also placed the image of himself in front of various scenes of his life, a technique which he would reuse in nearly all of his hospital works. Kurelek had already sent a preliminary sketch of the background to Natalie. He described that picture as "an imaginary temple and me painting murals in it of different incidents of my life" (116). Already, Kurelek strongly desired to communicate the act of recording his own past as an act of identity. While the original sketch had been, in his words, "a self-pitying gesture", this version was meant to be heroic: a portrait of the artist who had made art from his life, "the Joycean artist about to burst into beautiful bloom" (S2, 116).

The background scenes indicate how Kurelek could contextualize his life in terms of a symbolic ground, in this case, that of his Joycean-style romanticism. Among other scenes, Kurelek painted himself as a child, lost in a



Fig. 2.3

forest and then dancing naked in his farmhouse yard in a moment of ecstasy -- a scene which actually occurred (101). He also included two hated professors from his university, and placed them in "devotional" niches, surrounded with graph paper; Kurelek's description of them in Someone With Me shows that he felt they tried to crush his creativity and did not understand him (S2, 117). The bread roll, which Kurelek painted as one of his "proofs" of talent, also "symbolized the need to earn one's bread without crushing the spirit" (S2, 116). In this way, Kurelek created an allegorical backdrop for his "hero-artist" identity composed of personal signs with iconic meanings, although Kurelek later observed that this identity was in fact "phoney" and staged (220).

Phoney or not, the portrait served its purpose. Once his identity as an artist was established through that resymbolization of his life and vocation, Kurelek "moved" - even literally, for he began to hitchhike to Mexico for artistic training shortly after finishing the painting. In this stage of his life, Kurelek could "stage" his life with symbolic resonance, although the centring he was able to achieve, even with this work, was short-lived. Yet, his sense of himself as a worthwhile artist remained intact. The act of painting enabled Kurelek, as an artist, to claim and reclaim his own experience symbolically. As Morley comments, "He could do it. The power flowed from his brush

and shouted his being aloud" (Morley 8).

The self-portrait of 1957 is, in itself, a recontextualization of the earlier one. Again, Kurelek painted himself standing in front of a backdrop of other images (fig. 2.4). But this time, the backdrop consists of painted objects: older paintings, photographs, sketches, which Kurelek has, in trompe l'oeil style⁴, rendered as if they were photographs and/or postcards "pinned" to a wall or bulletin board. Like the earlier self-portrait, this one was meant to convey who Kurelek thought he was, as an artist. It is another naming of himself in terms of his vocation. But this time, Kurelek is not a Joycean hero, but a Catholic/Christian artist, consciously operating inside a didactic tradition, as the images behind him show.

Kurelek painted this picture shortly after his conversion and his official reception into the Roman Catholic church. In it, he draws together older paintings and photographs by or about his pre-conversion life and overlays them with newer images relating to Christianity and Catholicism. As before, Kurelek communicated identity by means of "loaded" pictorial symbols, but symbols have been altered. Instead of "scenes" in a Romantic temple, Kurelek's "life" symbols have become photographs, a collection of memorabilia selected and arranged by the artist. They have, against Kurelek's newer ground,

acquired the symbolic weight of icons, inside an iconic tradition, and religious motivation, dating back to the time of Augustine and Aquinas. In medieval terms, a Christian image-maker was required to picture abstract, doctrinal ideas, so that the Christian viewer could "remember" them and use them as visual aids during religious contemplation. This contemplation was meant, in turn, to lead people to a greater faith, and even to action in the world (Hagen 5,7). In 1957, Kurelek found meaning, vocation and symbolic immortality in his new role as a Christian image-maker. Suddenly, he was able to draw on, and be nurtured by, the most powerful Christian artistic tradition in the West; he gleaned, not the substance of medieval art, but the role, in his view, of the medieval artist. In speeches, interviews, and Someone With Me, Kurelek praised what, in his view, the ethics of medieval artists were, in their role as the makers of contemplative aids rather than original works of art (S1, 501 ff). Medieval art emphasized craftsmanship, not artistic originality, Kurelek believed. It was humbler, and in his view, free of the materialism and self-aggrandisement he saw in the secular art world. Instead of "style", message was what mattered. So, "medieval art" provided Kurelek with what he saw as an unbroken precedent, for he, too, was an artist of the Catholic church, just as the medieval artists had been.



Fig. 2.4

Medieval art did give him some symbolic reservoirs he could dip into when he needed them, but most importantly, it shaped his sense of mission, and provided an ethical basis for some of Kurelek's actions in his new role -- including his copying of older pictures, and his gift of The Passion of St. Matthew to the Church for evangelistic use.

With a strong sense of mission, Kurelek displaced his secular, Joycean artistic ambitions, without sacrificing his original drive to succeed. He simply translated his ambition, and recast it into Christian frames of the sinful life "before" and the righteous life "after" conversion. But now, instead of Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and Joseph Cotton providing guidance, the theology of the Roman Catholic Church and the Bible gave Kurelek the tools he needed to renegotiate, and reframe, his past life, as well as his artistic role. Thus, the "photographs", which are not "original" creations, are merely "arranged" by Kurelek. He is longer represented as a creative genius, but as a "humble" person, like the "anonymous" medieval artists he admired, with an awareness of Catholic art traditions, who chooses "didacticism" over originality. But he is still an artist who can arrange elements as a symbolic communication of himself to his viewers. The pictures and photographs on the "bulletin board" represent, by their positioning, who Kurelek thought he was as an artist, how he interpreted his pre-conversion life, and how

he now saw the world through Catholic-Christian lenses.

Much of the re-visioning Kurelek performed on his life, after conversion, included recontextualizing images that had been important to him. Behold Man Without God was one of these. It was reproduced in the self-portrait of 1957 as a re-covered sign of Kurelek's pre-conversion frustration with himself and with the world, but Kurelek overlaid it with (i) a symbol of the Trinity (ii) a quotation from Augustine about "Ancient Beauty" -- and (iii) by an "icon" of the Madonna and Child. Artistic beauty, in this work, cannot cancel out ugliness and misery -- it simply recontextualizes it. In the same painting, Kurelek performed another series of overlays on events from his life: an actual photo of himself as a young lumberjack (during his Joycean period) is overlaid with a reproduction of Christ's face from the Shroud of Turin: a photograph of his father at a family gathering gets covered partially by images of the Cathedral at Lourdes and a young girl lifting her hands in worship. It seems that Kurelek felt that he had forgiven his father after his conversion. In a more disturbing manner, Kurelek arranged a photograph of a Satanic figure fallen/falling, covering photographs of the farm owned by Kurelek's parents, the bogland Kurelek knew as a boy, and a likeness of Kurelek's father as a young man. Sin (and in Kurelek's mind, what he saw as his parents' ambition and "materialism" were tremendous sins)

also forms a part of the Christian judgement-as-overlay; it enabled Kurelek to reinterpret his difficult relations with his father, and his difficult childhood in terms of filial, personal and societal sin which eventually has to be judged. Kurelek had seen his vocation before 1957 as a "calling". Now, he felt that, like Catholic/Christian artists before him, he was called, in a theological sense which he took very seriously, to "preach" the Gospel in paint and "judge" the world, with paint, through a Christian lens, with the help of autobiographical captions, media interviews, talks on various subjects, and his autobiography. He set out, first, to give his life an eternal cast, and later, to bring the imagery of that orientation to bear on everything he saw around him, a task which he described at great length in Someone With Me and in the forwards to many of his "didactic" exhibitions (501-508). This gospel was presented, not according to, but through the craft, talent and belief of William Kurelek. Kurelek's life was pressed and compressed into service, regardless of the time frame. Depersonalization, his father, a trip to the Holy Land, painting "pot boilers" for money, housing foreign students, campaigning against abortion, even building a bomb shelter and using it for a studio -- every gesture Kurelek had ever made and ever would make, fit, or was made to fit, a "pre-fabricated" Christian frame. His own recording and reordering of his

life-journey became what Hagen, in her discussion of the medieval poem "The Life of Man", refers to as "a memorial sign":

As we see him [the Pilgrim] use the memory of what he has learned in order to complete his pilgrimage, the pilgrim himself becomes a memorial sign, and the story of his journey becomes a memorial system for the reader's remembrance of the pattern of individual men's and women's lives within the larger context of Christian life (Hagen 5).

For Kurelek, then, the recording of memory is not so much a process of "covering over" or denying older imagery, but as a creative "recovery" of older images into eternal frames. When he extended these into a journey from "failure" inside one frame to "success" in another, Kurelek gave himself a way to assume a prophetic role. He retold his reframed life-story on a "micro" level, and made it the story of humankind on a "macro" level, capturing the symbolic resonances of his own life, as a memorial sign, inside a wide-ranging diagnosis, in paint, of what the world's destiny was. In this way, Kurelek fused his seeing of the world to himself. His now-eternal, Christian "I" became part of, and even enabled, his "eye" to function. Seeing accurately, and having eternal, accurate insight into what he saw, became part of who he was. Av Isaacs, his dealer and friend, knew this very well:

Bill was a possessed individual -- possessed with a sense of urgency of how much he had to say, possessed with a sense of 'doomsday' and how we must face up to this fate, both spiritually and in practical terms . . . He once told me that allowed himself only four hours a night's sleep as he had so much to do . . . Although he was the most literal artist that I represented, each painting in many of his exhibitions would have an explanatory text beside it . . . He wanted to make doubly sure that his intent was understood¹⁵.

In front of this backdrop in the self-portrait of 1957, the artist was no longer painting murals of his personal life as a Joycean artist, but was now arranging, and commenting on, its arrangements, events, and people to proclaim, in humility, his new reason for painting. Kurelek's autobiographical manuscripts, published works and captions record this symbolic shift, as well as his need to index in language what is already iconic in paint. His extraordinary drive extended beyond his visual work: he may have painted up to three paintings a day of his childhood life on the farm, and he may have fasted for weeks on end while he painted religious subjects (506), but he also wrote and rewrote hundreds of pages of autobiographical manuscript, both before and after his conversion. Like his two self-portraits, Kurelek's autobiography, in its many forms, was a performance, a communication and a testament

which enabled him to locate who and where he was. From his point of view, its primary function was as a memorial sign for others.

When Kurelek was admitted to Maudsley Hospital, he was "travelling light", by choice and by circumstance¹⁶. It is significant, therefore, that Kurelek arrived at Maudsley with "three large scribblers" containing what were probably the autobiographical fragments that he wrote for an unknown Winnipeg doctor in 1947 (Morley, 78). For someone who carried so little with him anywhere, this autobiography had to matter more than extra clothing, food, or money. These early manuscripts represented, in 1947 and in 1952, Kurelek's urgent need to communicate to someone, anyone, who he was, who he had become and who he wanted, desperately, to become. They were his way of connecting, of speaking when he could not speak, and were directed to anyone who could give him the spiritual ground he needed.

Kurelek wrote his first autobiographical manuscripts in 1947. He was twenty years old. There were, originally, two manuscripts which filled eight scribblers (Morley 1). His first manuscript was an autobiography written for an unknown Winnipeg neurologist, because at the time he believed that "psychiatry . . . had the magic power to transform me from an immature, cringing, weakling into a healthy, balanced, popular he-man" (192). According to Morley, the early manuscripts are "incredibly long and

detailed", with a focus on Kurelek's emotional and physical senses of inadequacy, and on his unsuccessful efforts to improve his grooming and social etiquette (Morley 55-6). Morley draws our attention to the "patterns of silence . . . elaborated in his manuscripts" (57). The silence was, in her words, "a retreat, a refuge and a defence" (57). Kurelek himself admitted that he was often reprimanded by his parents for his silences, which descended on him when he was too frightened of his father to argue or when he was overcome with "humiliation" at having done something wrong at home or school (Kurelek; Morley 57). He used silence to defend himself against emotional outbursts and to avoid social contact, because he was haunted by the feeling that people rejected him in advance of meeting him. The early autobiographical manuscripts, and later Someone With Me, acknowledge that many of his fantasies and ideals involved speech. His Ukrainian school experiences convinced him (for a time) that Ukrainian nationalism obliged him to speak pure Ukrainian -- and his (unvoiced) love for Natalie inspired him to speak purely for her (162). He hated "easy chatter" and longed instead for real philosophic dialogue. Someone With Me describes a fantasy he once had in university, in which he delivered a moving speech about Communism to a political meeting. In real meetings, he never spoke. These early manuscripts show how he articulated his "patterns of silence" before an anonymous "listener". Autobiography at

this time functioned for him as a confession, as an expression of his desire to "succeed" socially, and his failure to do so. These manuscripts were Kurelek's voice, his way of creating and justifying his persona and his plea for help¹⁷.

Autobiographical writing continued to function as a confession/consolidation/plea during Kurelek's stay in Maudsley Hospital. He wrote angrily to his psychologist, Dr. Cormier when he did not feel that he was getting proper treatment:

I . . . expect you to be idealistically attached to a high standard of work and dedicated to serving mankind. If you were, you'd grasp eagerly at every scrap of information you could get about me so that these interviews wouldn't be wasted on mere 'getting acquainted' sessions. You're not even coming halfway to meet me. You're not even reading the autobiography I gave you (305).

If Dr. Cormier had read the autobiography (Kurelek indicates), he would "be acquainted" with his patient, and he would understand him in such a way that a "cure" could begin. Autobiographical language framed Kurelek's life in terms of sickness and failure, and gave him a way to force a response to himself as a person in terms of his life history. His self-portraits indicate that Kurelek never presented himself detached from his past -- he wanted

people to examine his past to get at his identity. With these identities and connections established, Kurelek felt he could "move" himself out from paralysis and senseless repetition to something more dynamic, more alive.

His need to record and repeat life experience, and even to solidify older impressions of his life (such as Kurelek's anger at his father) -- contrary to Morley, who sees this process as simply obsessive -- is actually Kurelek's grounding act of repetition. It was, in my view, a recovery and a renewal of older symbolic configurations on (newer) atemporal, eternal ground. Both of Kurelek's published autobiographies follow the same recapturing/repeating pattern as the post-conversion hauntings do the pre-conversion haunting episodes: Autobiography Two (or perhaps it is autobiographical fragment Four, or Five) re-runs Autobiography One.

The most favoured frame appearing most clearly in the first edition of Kurelek's autobiography is that of the spiritual journey as a memorial sign. The title, Someone With Me, refers to a vision Kurelek had while sleeping outdoors as he was travelling on the road, when a figure clothed in a white robe urged him to wake up:

'Get up,' he said. 'we must look after the sheep, or you will freeze to death!' I did get up and set off at a near-run down the road, shaking violently from the chill. Presently I noticed the sheep around me had

become nothing but those ragged pieces of mist floating across the road, and the 'other person' just seemed to blend into myself (254).

The Someone, Kurelek concluded years later, was God. Kurelek framed his autobiography around that journey, translated into a spiritual search, ending in Christianity and linked closely to his mission as a Christian artist. Kurelek concluded:

What I am sure of . . . is that I am not really alone anymore in the rest of my journey through this tragic, puzzling, yet wonderful world. There is Someone with me. And He has asked me to get up because there is work to be done (523).

Someone With Me is a conversion script: it is work God has asked Kurelek to do. It provided Kurelek with arenas where he could centre himself as a Christian, decentre his former self, and place himself and his audience/readers together in a Christian universe. Someone With Me loosely binds together the matter of Kurelek's life and allows him to arrange its texts, contexts, ways of speaking, images and people so that they communicate with each other, or, be silent when required.

Kurelek wrote many parts of Someone With Me years before he first published it; he revised the manuscript from his stay in Netherne and Maudsley Hospitals until six months before his death. Yet, both published versions end in

1962, on a triumphant note of "Success". They described a "journey" from childhood and youthful failure, to conversion after hospitalization, ending with a brief description of his life as Catholic-Christian, husband, father, and committed, popular artist, with a clear sense of prophetic mission. Kurelek did experience psychological, marital, financial and spiritual difficulties after 1962, but his conversion script told him that "inner" problems like these do not really exist in a model Christian life. Any feelings of inadequacy from these difficulties that would lead to anger would be "immoral" (135). As I have noted, Kurelek's resolutions to the "problems" left over from his pre-conversion life are translated, and Christianized. His father's desire for farming success, for example, is evidence, in Someone With Me, of "atheism" and "materialism", while his own drive to succeed indicates the urgency of his prophetic mission.

The first edition of Someone With Me begins with Kurelek's location of himself in his parents' farmhouse, which he feels is "somehow appropriate" (1). He also describes the activity of the natural world, and contrasts it with the intrusion of the "harsh realities of the outside world" which come in the form of news bulletins on his radio. He relates his search for meaning as a younger man in an imperfect world to the writing of his autobiography (2). Unlike the second edition of Someone

With Me, which abruptly begins with his hospitalization at Maudsley, Kurelek located himself in terms of his childhood environment (physically and emotionally), the natural world he loved as a visual artist, and the threatening outside world he could not understand as a youth and which he, as a Christian, can now interpret. These are the controlling images that Kurelek will arrange, interpret and -- as in his second self-portrait -- overlay with Catholic/Christian images, carrying the transformative power of icons.

Kurelek begins with his father's background. He establishes his father as a powerful, important character in his life, and he surrounds the first look at him with tales of hardship in the Ukraine and later, in Canada (3, 12-13). Throughout the story of his childhood, Kurelek represents himself seeing and interpreting his early life in terms of misfortune and failure on a familial as well as a personal level. Although hundreds of his farm paintings would later show more positive, even idyllic, aspects of farm and village life, from the beginning in Someone With Me the focus is negative: he describes his rivalry with his more mechanically inclined brother rather than their friendship (15), unpleasant smells associated with personal humiliation rather than pleasant ones (23); and constant "humiliation" (the word is Kurelek's and it is repeated often) suffered at school in the hands of bullies and teachers. Kurelek interprets all of this as "fallen human

nature" (41). The chapters "Childhood", "Boyhood" and "Education" (with the exception of the Mexican travel section) form the largest part of the narrative, with comparatively little space devoted to "Hospitalization", "Conversion", "In the Church" and "Success". Kurelek recounts his unhappy childhood as a pattern of escalating, ever-repeating failure, in contrast to his transitional hospital period and his "success", spiritual and material, as a Christian.

As Kurelek's narrative unfolds, he describes childhood bullying (42-45) and even early classroom results in detail -- often he "sees" events in the present tense, as when he writes, "I can still see a trail of ink from an inkwell running down the desk cover" (49). He can remember the names of all his playmates, enemies and neighbours, and exactly what they said to him, but only when it was "humiliating". Kurelek also recalls, repeatedly and in detail, how weak he felt and how he sensed "raging impotence" growing within him (44) over the unfairness of the world with what, for someone writing twenty to thirty years later, is an astonishing amount of accuracy. It is as if Kurelek has placed himself on a psychiatric couch and, once more, is rehearsing his childhood so that he can be "helped". As the narrative progresses, Kurelek uses, with increasing frequency, phrases such as "inevitable punishment" when he alludes to his parents' treatment of him

(64), or when he refers to his own attitude as "weak" or "half-hearted", which he says is usual (64). He describes his attitude at school as cringing or excessively proud (83). Although Kurelek did record some positive memories of childhood, his own role is almost always depicted as socially incompetent, humiliating or physically weak, which always earns him the contempt of his parents and his father's epithet, "stupid" (104-106). He placed much of the blame for his attitude on his father's criticism of him and on the hard work, too hard for a child, which he made Kurelek perform on the farm -- which Kurelek insists he was unable to do (123-129, 132, 134).

Kurelek focusses on shyness, incompetence and humiliating experiences when he describes high school and university. When he is chosen to sing in a Gilbert and Sullivan drama, he writes that "I was out of my depth -- it was obvious to me anyway" (153) indicating that even he realizes that this may not have been the case. He focusses on subjects he "did poorly in", instead of describing classes in which he did well (154). On his first summer job, Kurelek describes himself as a "clumsy, a blundering clod" (170), while at Ukranian dancing class, he is a hopeless dancer who practiced "fanatically", to no avail (172). On the whole, Kurelek represents himself resorting to his father's habit of hard work when things go wrong, and he always fails, cracking under the strain. His

narrative of isolation amid his search for meaning and social connection escalates in university, where his only friend "betrays" him despite Kurelek's efforts to impress him, Natalie rejects him, and he suffers from eye pain due to fanatical studying and self-improvement programs (169). Even his strenuous efforts to create a Joycean identity-in-isolation were a failure, because they were false: "I seemed to sense I was a phoney, but I had no one to help me. I had to do, try, suffer on my own, always on my own" (203).

Only his description of his hitchhiking to Mexico and his stay there contains memory gaps: "the erosion of time [sic] broken up this journey into such scraps of memory" (245). There is no mention of humiliation, incompetence or awkwardness in this section; it appears that Kurelek's autobiographical memory could retain only the negative aspects of his early life. The journey itself, however, is a sign of the rootlessness Kurelek felt; as I mentioned, while Kurelek was in Maudsley he produced hundreds of sketches of himself on the road, slouching away from a bright light. After his conversion, he interpreted his wanderings in a moral way, in glosses to paintings, showing himself in his road garb on a (fruitless) allegorical search for lasting meaning. His script dictated this: Kurelek needed to recount his life in terms of moral, physical and emotional weakness so that he could "name" his

difficulties. In making his early life a problem, he could show how his conversion overcome his problems and allowed him to make his "comeback".

After his conversion, Kurelek felt as if he had integrity, grounded as he was in the belief that the "I" and the soul are as one and do not change. No longer isolated, he wrote that he did not need to masturbate (452); in the supportive atmosphere of an English Catholic social club, he describes how he learned to be sociable and have relationships with women -- he credits his sociability to his conversion. He writes, "I was already on my way to marriage, and its promise of a wholesome, physical relationship with a real woman" (450). Kurelek no longer wrote of wandering aimlessly on his travels. He spends a large section of his "In the Church" chapter detailing his trip to the Holy Land, where he went to gather information for his illustrations for the Passion of St. Matthew series(463-480).

Kurelek ends Someone With Me with an emphasis on his connection, as a grounded artist, to God. The "Success" chapter serves this purpose -- it is a testimony to Kurelek's resilience as a survivor and an affirmation/explanation of his perceived calling as an artist. Here, Kurelek reframed his previous ambition to be a great artist, as his desire to be a humble Christian artist who gives all the credit for his "success" to God

(498-99). He briefly described his rapid rise to popularity in the Canadian art scene, his marriage, his parents' (particularly his father's) long-awaited approval of his career choice (498) and his belief that his conversion enabled him, at last, to have true personal charisma. As Kurelek himself states, all of these goals were actually those which his parents wished him to achieve:

So wonder of God's wonders, I had come exactly full circle to my parents position; but for an exact opposite reason - a spiritual instead of a material one. How I wished I'd learned back then to be popular, cheerful, interesting, humorous, forward. Today through personal charisma I could do so much more to advance the Kingdom of God and help others (510).

From his position of spiritual and material "success", Kurelek assumed another role: having survived his personal holocaust, he could, prophetically, forecast a global holocaust, and show how to survive this. He wrote and drew this "doomsday" vision of world history to warn the public. By this time, Kurelek was acting in a prophetic role springing from his new identity: he extended the naming of his role in his own past to naming of the future in terms of his present ground. He felt that God had called him to warn people that the sinful, materialist ways of the world would cause the destruction of nature by -- in his view --

the immanent explosion of the atomic bomb. He also believed that the bomb would be the required shock that would turn the world back to God, and interpreted Jesus' commission to the disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 to "go and make disciples of all nations", literally. Since the gospel had not been preached to the entire world, Kurelek felt that the Great Commission was only partially fulfilled, and would not herald Armageddon. In his view, Christians had a responsibility to live through the blast in order to preach to unbelievers in its aftermath (515-518). He referred to this belief as "part of me, this vision. 'Vision' is the only word I can find to name that intuitive premonition of what the modern world is heading for" (516). Much of Kurelek's sense of urgency channelled its way into prophetic paintings; he painted nuclear mushroom clouds behind peaceful, Manitoban farm scenes, remembered from his childhood. He illustrated scenes from the apocalyptic chapters of the Book of Matthew, drawing on his memory of childhood haunts, using his experiences as illustrations of what the future would bring.

As his apocalyptic paintings show, Kurelek's consolidated "I" enabled him to see, and paint, the future in terms of the past. His Christian identity allowed him to translate his past symbolizations of his identity through a Christian lens into new symbolizations. His Christian ground let him submit past experiences and psychic

transformations into a ready-made sin/redemption pattern. The "I" that he had become gave him an eye to see with: an eye which could see farms, fathers, bombs and place them on a sanctified ground. There, in paint, Kurelek's past in miniature became the world's future on a grand scale.

The painting In the Autumn of Life (1964) (fig. 2.5) is an example of what Kurelek's prophetic work did to family relationships and places which mattered to him. It is the last of a series painted to honour his father. In the painting, the artist's family poses for a photograph on the lawn of his father's farm. A figure of Christ crucified is on a nearby tree, surrounded by dogs. A nuclear mushroom cloud bursts in the background. The gloss to this picture locates and contextualizes all the symbolic elements in the painting:

(1) Atomic cloud, bursting over Hamilton, 14 miles from my father's farm, illustrated in this painting, is like a premonition of the disaster that will befall our materialistic society because it is so bent on pursuit of security and prestige, it ignores God. What I'm trying to say is that my father's life, hard as it may have been, is not a happy ending story . . . he will still have to meet the Day of Judgement. And Christ, whom he has ignored all his life . . . is like a skeleton in his closet. It's an unpleasant scene, that he may try to keep off his property, but it's still

there nevertheless.

(2) The dogs in the picture are 'supernatural' ones referring to enemies of Christ talked of in one of the Psalms of David (Kurelek; Murray 27).

Kurelek has extended his personal location (his familial and geographic relationships) into an eternal field -- the blast represents his general vision of what the future will look like and more importantly, why the future will occur. Kurelek had interpreted his father's cruelty as personal malevolence, hardship and the artist's own weaknesses; now, the explanation changes the frame to materialism and atheism -- and this he represents with the supernatural images of Christ, the dogs and the nuclear blast. The "failure" of Kurelek's father becomes, in the gloss, part of humanity's failure to acknowledge God: bombs, painted and real, will fall upon Hamilton, and the world. The captions serve, as Kurelek's autobiographical manuscripts served, to locate his images and index them in terms of his frame, a way to explain, locate and justify signs that could be imprecise, and to locate many types of signs on a single ground. Kurelek's own life as a memorial sign was the means to centre his identity and present it to others; signs, spiritual and "natural", became subject, in Kurelek's texts, to the gravitational pull of his sacred ground. Once centred in this way, Kurelek extended his position to everything he saw, and fit all he perceived,

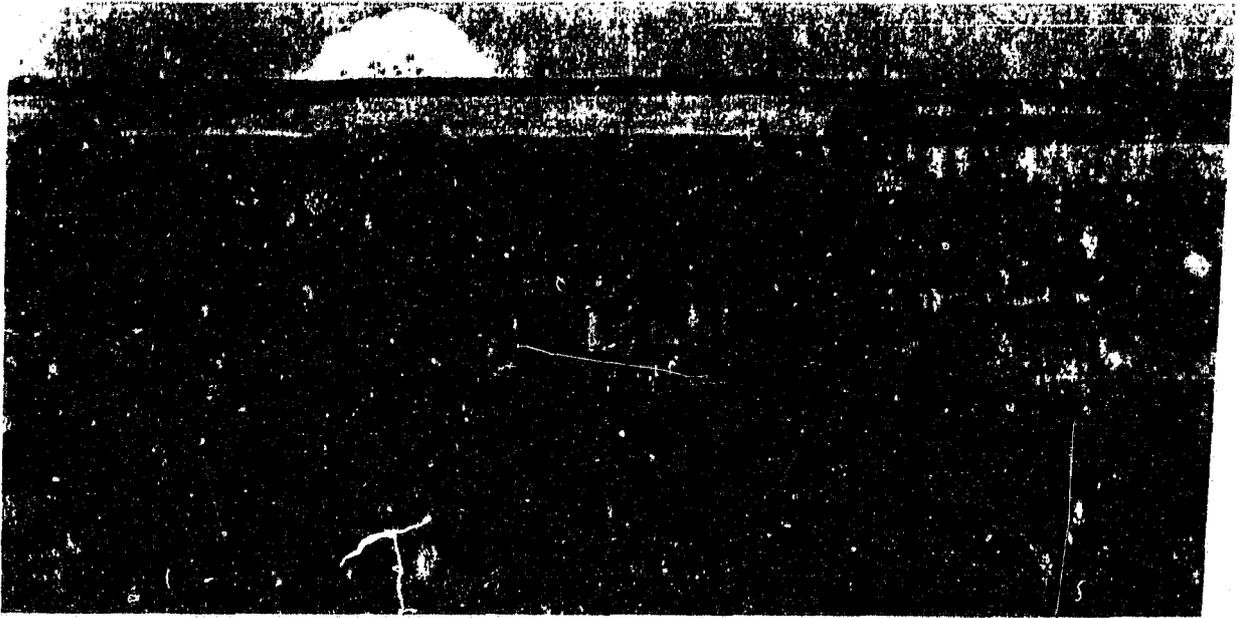


Fig. 2.5

and even all he did, into his symbolic system. Nature becomes secondary to God's presence in the Fields (1975) series, characterized by Kurelek as "beautiful, but heartless". He "hid" crucifixes in his farm paintings and, in captions, told viewers not only to find them, but to remember that it is often hard to find God in material things. He did a series called Temptations in the Desert (1975), which featured characters encountering, in deserts and prairies, symbolic representations of temptations, including reckless driving and alcoholism -- in a conscious recontextualizing of Brueghel. Kurelek set most of these didactic scenes in areas he knew as a child. Symbolically, he rooted his worldwide observations in areas, and attitudes, belonging to his own past, as re-visioned through the lens of Catholic theology.

Even his sense of his Ukrainian-Canadian identity became part of his Christian frame -- he admonished his readers to "[p]ut God first and your country and ethnic origin second. Then you will at least truly produce good for your Country [sic] and people" (520). He often cited his many Ukrainian projects as an example of how this can be done. Having "succeeded" as a Ukrainian-Canadian artist, again because he is a Christian, Kurelek felt that he could advise all Ukrainian-Canadians on spiritual matters. For example, he wrote that, "I don't consider Canadian citizenship nearly as important as citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven"

(Kurelek; Murray 72). He did, however, mention his ethnicity constantly and he took pride in his citizenship - - perhaps because they showed that he was "normal". He belonged, he had a cultural place, a history. Many of Kurelek's paintings, for example, whether the subjects are purely "didactic" or purely "ethnic", feature frames decorated with Ukrainian motifs. He often wore Ukrainian clothing and painted hundreds of "typical" Ukrainian-Canadian scenes. He took pains to be recognized by Ukrainian art patrons and groups, and was proud when they did. When Kurelek delivered a paper on ethnicity to an ethnic studies group, he showed what role his citizenship and ethnic heritage played for him. He structured the speech as an autobiographical account beginning, as in Someone With Me, with his father's experiences and ending with his conversion and the success he had had as a Ukrainian artist. His general statements about Ukrainians and ethnic migration resembled autobiographical rehearsals, and, as in his autobiographies, he placed them on the same Christian/eternal plane. When he spoke, for example, about the hardships of Ukrainian settlers, his discussion turned to the abuse he suffered from his father. When he discussed the problems of assimilation, Kurelek mentioned his wife's refusal -- in his eyes -- to learn Ukrainian. He mentions his conversion as part of his observations about the Ukrainian church (Kurelek; Identities, n.p.).

Kurelek's sense of himself as an ethnic "I", allowed him to place his ethnic "eye" on Canada and its other immigrant groups, much as his position as a Christian artist "I" enabled him to envision, in words and paint, the present moral state of the world, and the coming apocalypse. The illustrated books and series The Jews in Canada, (1976) A Northern Nativity (1976) and They Sought a New World (1985 posthumous) are among Kurelek's many paintings of ethnic life, painstakingly researched, accompanied by his usual glosses which fit the images into his systemic view. Northern Nativity is a visual analogy of Kurelek's idea that citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven must come before citizenship in Canada, while They Sought a New World reflected Kurelek's belief that he, as a Ukrainian, could paint and speak for all of "ethnic" Canada. Ukrainian origin, then, operates as a part of Kurelek's larger script; Canada, and the Ukraine, functioned as parts of his narrative of secular failure and Christian success, as well as part of his world-view. "Canada", in particular, became a domesticated sign of Kurelek's prowess as an artist; it was a symbolic area, a new Jerusalem, where Kurelek acted and reenacted the drama of his identity. Armed with an identity equally rooted in his memories of Canadian prairie and in his faith in God, Kurelek drew himself into the cultural map of Canada; he painted and wrote his own idea of Canada into existence and, arguably, he helped to create

an image of that "Canada" which is still in use. With the help of autobiography, Kurelek had achieved stability and power. He had made himself a history, and claimed a place on earth, as in heaven. He had a mission: to make the unseen, seen, metaphysically and visually. He had become an artist able to make things in his own image, a namer of names.

At the end of Someone With Me, Kurelek states two reasons for writing and publishing his autobiography. He wanted to encourage others to make "a comeback to normalcy and success". He had become real enough to encourage others to:

take hope from the fact that someone else like themselves -- a real living person with a real name -- did eventually recover. Not only is it possible to recover, but they might even take advantage of, and put to work, what they went through for some personal or social good (522).

Kurelek's retelling of himself gave him the power to call his illness by its proper name and make a "comeback", to find a ground and give himself "a real name". He had once described his problem as "depersonalization", and thought that he was dead, but now he described himself as "a real living person", a survivor who could point the way to personal and world survival. Morley observes that Kurelek "was a superb survivor, and perhaps if anyone was

physically and psychologically fitted for surviving a nuclear holocaust he was" (193). Kurelek was, indeed, a survivor: his autobiographical writing functioned as testament of the holocaust he had survived, as well as a script for what the world would have to endure. For more than thirty years, autobiography, in writing and in paint, gave Kurelek a way to index the imagery of his own life in terms of survival -- its existence created a space for his own.

Eternal Return and Sacred Ground

Putting it negatively, the myth of eternal return states that a life which disappears once and for all, which does not return, is like a shadow, without weight, dead in advance, and whether it was horrible, beautiful, or sublime, its horror, sublimity, and beauty mean nothing.

--Milan Kundera, The

Unbearable

Lightness of Being

In 1962, Kurelek began to make a series of trips west to photograph and paint the areas where he had grown up. The trips furnished the basis for hundreds of Kurelek's most popular "memory-recording" paintings, which he painted for money, dubbing them "pot-boilers" (Morley, 190). But Kurelek did not regard these trips as simply money-making

ventures. He needed a space where he could locate his remembered symbolizations and link them to God; he wanted a physical space which, in recollection, could become sacred. In his childhood homes, and particularly in the bog near his home in Stonewall, Alberta, Kurelek found what he needed: a space he made his own when he constantly returned, recorded and articulated what it had meant and would mean to him. In the bog, Kurelek ran spiritually and psychologically sensitive territories together, and by doing this, he renewed his creative resources.

As a child, Kurelek had loved the bog because it was a vast natural area without human habitation, strange and, at times, frightening. It looked like the edge of the world. It also represented "Freedom", an unplowable area without fences, without reference to farm work, which Kurelek felt had stolen much of his boyhood (67). It was also, to him, beautiful; Someone With Me contains descriptions of the natural wonders to be found there, and the childhood games Kurelek enjoyed, without any undertone of "humiliation" (67-70). On the whole, Kurelek experienced a communion with nature in the bog as child, a communion he relived whenever he returned:

The bog was a strange, fascinating place to me and even today when I as an Easterner visit it, its particular magic catches on. Somehow I still feel that I own it and it owns me, that 'this is my land' as the popular

song goes. It speaks to me because it is flat and it is lonely, as I often was and sometimes still am (67).

Kurelek recorded his adult trips to the bog, and to the sites of his former homes, in travel diaries and letters. One of his letters, to his dealer Av Isaacs, shows what recalling the bog, past and present, meant to him:

I decided to spend the night out on the farm so as to relive and recall the dark hours of the farm late evening and the night itself . . . the vastness of the prairies with the occasional clumps of poplar bushes really gives me a feeling of communion. Nobody else seems to understand why I'm fascinated by the place not even the local people. Only I it seems can express it though others may feel it inarticulately. (Kurelek; Morley 191-92) [Italics are mine].

The bog was Kurelek's own space, a place where the physical landscape and the remembered experience of land combine to form a fluid psychological/spiritual territory. Religious and natural "communion", past and present, was possible for Kurelek there, and one communion sustained the other. He called it "reliving the communion to refresh memory" (Kurelek; Morley 192). Camping in the bog, he prided himself on surviving alone in his beat-up VW Bug, but he also mentioned, often, how alone he felt (Morley, 194). Even his loneliness gave him spiritual meaning, however, since Kurelek believed that as a "prophet" in paint he, and

only he, could articulate the true meaning of the bog. So, Kurelek made the bogland into his own holy space, made sacred by his repeated "pilgrimages". From it he took (even literally, in the form of boards from his father's abandoned barn, which he used for picture frames) a renewed sense of his own past. The bog's images, held in his camera and in his mind, became "memory-recording" paintings and the backdrops to some of his strongest "moralizing" works. Here, Kurelek collected and recollected remembered images, places, people. He drew life for himself from their repetition, in eternal configurations.

On this sacred space, even "ordinary" objects bore intense symbolic meaning for Kurelek. Farm implements, rising bread, sunsets, the physical process of return itself all existed for Kurelek on a spiritual plane, brought together in the paintings he made of them. They were the stage where Kurelek presented his life, not as a tragedy, but as a continuous performance, an endless return to a place inhabited by objects, events, people asking to be named, and set into an eternal script. They were, too, artifacts of passage, filled with creative possibility. Returning, both psychologically, and actually, gave Kurelek the space to paint.

Most of Kurelek's last works, made while he was dying of cancer, were not renderings of the approaching Apocalypse. He spent most of his creative energies sketching farm

implements from his father's village in the Ukraine, relics from a farming past, which in Canada had largely disappeared. The reverence Kurelek had for these simple objects, such as a family food bowl¹⁸, is unmistakable, since he rendered them so carefully and accurately. As the editor of his last drawings observes, the objects have the force of icons. For Kurelek, they were. They were real -- and they located, even anchored, who he was, where he was and why he was "here" -- as a Ukranian-Canadian, as a Catholic and as an artist. Kurelek, by "recording" them, showed that he was alive, a survivor. He kept his identity as a survivor meaningful by discovering, and recovering, objects, spaces, God, even what he believed was the destiny of the world. He found life in naming and picturing his experience, as autobiography, and giving it an eternal frame. As Kurelek said to the worried child when he lay on the ploughed soil in his father's village, 'I'm alright -- I'm only searching for my roots.'

Notes

1. In James Olney's second compilation of articles, Studies in Autobiography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), roughly half of the selections are about American autobiographers. The other half are about autobiography "in general".

2. There are two published editions of Someone With Me; a self-published unedited manuscript from 1972 (written for James Maas, a professor of psychology at Cornell University, as an educational tool) and a heavily edited edition published posthumously. All references to Someone With Me are to the first edition (indicated by page numbers only in brackets) unless S2 appears, followed by the page reference.

3. Morley believes that Behold Man Without God was painted in Netherne Hospital, after Kurelek was moved from Maudsley Hospital. Since Kurelek felt that at Netherne he no longer had to "prove" his need for treatment by depicting his difficulties on large canvasses, it is more likely that Kurelek painted it in Maudsley. In addition, he mentions Maudsley as the location in both autobiographies (S1 315; S2 19).

4. Kurelek's illustration for his discussion of masturbation is a prone man fighting a snake which is coiled around his body.

5. In Morley, 40. In a published autobiographical excerpt, Kurelek wrote that he stored his anger against his parents like a packrat. Kurelek also frequently pictured and referred to himself as a rat in a maze while he was hospitalized.

6. Kurelek demanded as much from one of his doctors at Maudsley Hospital in an angry letter (S1 304-305). Kurelek also pictured his frustration at psychiatric examining practices in the paintings The Maze (1953) and Help Me Help Me Please Help (1953-55).

7. Although Kurelek writes in S2, 19 that he "retitled" the work, he never said what the painting's previous title was.

8. There are two versions of The Maze -- Kurelek painted the original in 1953, and the second in 1972. While there are some changes in the second painting, the new "scenes" are closely related to the originals. The painting was never retitled and, most significantly, Kurelek never commented on the changes he

made.

9. S2 19. The first edition of Someone With Me adds "and so forth" at the end of the list, indicating that there are more overpainted images than the ones Kurelek named.

10. Kierkegaard in Michael Sprinkler, "The End of Autobiography", Olney 1980 181.

11. An example can be found in Morely 126. The interpretation is my own.

12. From a foreword by William Kurelek to a 1966 exhibition, in the exhibition catalogue Kurelek's Vision of Canada, ed. Joan Murray, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, 1982, 73.

13. Morley mentions that Kurelek "re-worked" his self-portrait in 1953 (49) but since Kurelek would have been working on the painting at Maudsley and only had a photograph of the original with him, he had to have copied it before "re-working" it. Kurelek himself never mentions that he revised the painting.

14. Trompe l'oeil literally means "fool the eye" and is a style of painting whereby objects are rendered so illusionistically in paint that they look three-dimensional (S1 351). Kurelek painted extensively in this style in England during the 1950s in order to make money.

15. Avrom Isaacs, William Kurelek: Paintings 1052-1977. Exhibition flier. The Art Gallery of the Canadian Embassy, Washington, D.C. April 12-Aug. 30, 1991.

16. Kurelek's style of living was extremely frugal just prior to and during his stay in England. (cf Someone With Me, the chapter "In the Hospital".) In the first edition of Someone With Me, Kurelek depicts his "struggle" to leave his landlady's apartment in order to be hospitalized as a tug-of-war over a piece of luggage. There are only two suitcases in the sketch -- since Kurelek was extremely concerned about the accuracy of detail in all of his work, it is likely that he carried no more than this to England with him.

17. I only know of these manuscripts from what Morley has said of them. It appears that they deal with Kurelek's early childhood with his problems, in 1947, with sociability and grooming and with his dreams of becoming a "successful" artist in order to "prove his father wrong" about his inadequacies (Morley 57-8).

18. William Kurelek, To My Father's Village (Tundra Books: Toronto, 1988), n.p.

CHAPTER THREE

Wording Seeings: Emily Carr and Autobiography

God is love. Love is a grand, grand thing, the most magnificent there is. That old green bag, the one I used to carry my dance slippers in, was chock full of love, love coming to me in letters, love burst from me in the poor, silly little rhymes that eased me in writing. For writing is a strong easement for perplexity. My whole life is spread out like a map with all the rivers and hills showing.

--Emily Carr, Hundreds and
Thousands

Near the end of her life, by means of her journal, Emily Carr was able to map in writing where she had come from. She linked this love to God. Doing this was part of a long journey she had made in order to become a "spiritual" painter of British Columbian forests. As the only painter of her generation to try to capture what she experienced as the inner intensity of the totem poles and forests of the Canadian West, Carr had rejected the artistic languages of the British and Canadian academies, and had largely discarded the Victorian piety of her childhood. For much of her career, she chose to look for alternate languages, both

written and painted, to help her realize in images what seeing those forests meant to her in an emotional, artistic and spiritual sense. Like William Kurelek, Carr at first attempted to make a makeshift language to help her become the artist she wished to be -- although hers did not take the form of therapeutic autobiographies -- made up of sketches, verses, the poetry of Tennyson, and drawings she had done when, also like Kurelek, she was hospitalized in England. And, just as Kurelek at one stage assumed the role of a Joycean rebel to break into art, so Carr assumed the role of an ethnographer, looking at and contextualizing, in writing as well as drawing, the artifacts of a vanishing native culture, latching onto the artistic and spiritual power she sensed in the objects she tried to reproduce.

But unlike Kurelek, Carr's epiphany came after a fifteen-year hiatus when, handicapped by a community where she went unrecognized, she kept a boarding house and painted very little. It was not until 1927 when she met Lawren Harris, that she learned about theosophy and new art techniques which she could use to link new religious beliefs with the woods themselves. In her journal, Carr used the knowledge she drew from Harris' encouragement to construct a private language in which she could pull God, the facts of her own life, and what she saw in the woods, into a narrative which allowed her to realize her ideas and feelings in "eternal" signs. In her journals, Carr could, in

her words, "word her seeings" and make the frustrations of everyday life occupy the same ground as the ecstasies of her spiritual/artistic life. It was there, in that personal/spiritual territory, that her best-known work was made, from 1927 to 1934.

But near the end of her life, when she was recovering from heartattacks and could not paint, Carr created a new set of autobiographical writings, making the contexts hovering in the backgrounds of her paintings into a ritual of identity in which her re-vision of good and evil stood out clearly in the light of her vocation. The stories she wrote about herself as a child, her struggle to become an artist, about the animals she loved, the family who exasperated her and her painful times as a landlady, do not deal extensively with the concerns which had motivated her as an artist: the woods, God, painting techniques. Unlike Kurelek, Carr did not seek to harness language to image, to rename the world and her place in it. Rather, Carr's writings functioned as a linguistic space in absentia, a re-viewing of her life from the perspective of her creative period which included the parts of her life which, in the paintings, went unseen.

Here, in controlled written retrospectives, Carr's identity building and maintenance should be sighted. From this point, we can see how Carr remoulded her life history in terms of her artistic struggles and successes, and the

devices she wrote into her life (as it was lived, and as it was recorded) to achieve this history.

To look at Emily Carr and autobiography, it will be necessary to alter the standard view of her life as linear, involving clear artistic stages. As Doris Shadbolt outlines in The Art of Emily Carr, Carr's life moved from early beginnings to her ethnographic phase; then after her hiatus, she had a "Great Period", which lasted until 1933. After 1933, her painting entered what Shadbolt called "A New Liberation" and then a rapid "decline", which happened while she was writing. But a look at Emily Carr primarily through her writings rather than her paintings shows that her life line was not so linear. I would suggest that Carr's writings acted as a sort of co-text to her paintings while providing a context for them. They formed the ground, in light of her most powerful work, where she achieved the fusion of feeling, perception and artistic rendering of the forests she had long desired. Those late paintings were a liberation, which cannot simply be explained by her newer methods of oil on paper sketching. Since Carr herself felt that her written sketches healed her, "eased her perplexity", autobiographical writing did more than clarify her past in light of her work. It also freed the work which was coming by domesticating old hurts and struggles in a symbolic arena where, as in Kurelek's writings, everything was named. Carr's autobiographical writings are not captions

for some of her pictures in the way that her journal writings can be, but they formed a written introductory and concluding space for her paintings to take place, in her "great period" which was past and the "new liberation" which was beginning.

Carr saw her paintings, as well as painting generally, as primarily "universal" expressions of life mediated by personal experiences: "the story that God told [her] through that combination of growth"¹. Yet, her autobiographical writings from this period do not specifically address art or God, and are thus reminiscent of her paintings, which contain few direct references to people or animals, or herself. The writings, in fact, seem to contain everything that the paintings do not: they mythologized episodes of her career; they exhumed hurts, humiliations, and rebellions in her past; they reflected her frustrating, often symbolic struggles against authority. It is difficult to say why Carr herself felt that the written pieces of her life were vital to her, and precisely why, while she was writing them, her paintings took on the visionary quality she had been working towards for years. Her stories are often sentimental, pitting thinly-drawn people -- who were often mere mouthpieces for Carr's version of authority -- against her heroic, and innocent, animals, child persona, and adult self in a cruel, misunderstanding world. They seem to have little to do with the turbulent, joyous landscapes of her

later work, and even less to do with the religious intention of these paintings. And yet, it is possible that Emily Carr could only be the "religious" painter she wished to be when she had rooted herself firmly in her version of the conflicts she had experienced -- or had to invent -- along the way. Since 1927, when she was "discovered" and sustained, spiritually and artistically, by the long-distance friendship of Lawren Harris, Carr had relied on writing letters as a comfort during times when no one would "listen" to her in Victoria. When even Harris could not supply enough "conversation", Carr began in 1928 to rely more on her journals as an occasional space where, in words, she could articulate what she felt the shapes of the trees communicated to her. She also continued to write about the hurts, real and imagined, which frustrated her when she was not painting the trees. While the words of her journals helped her to recognize vision, the impulse of her retrospection was two-fold: it healed a past of many hurts, and sanctified a past of great creative achievement. She turned her "vision" on herself, and stylized her life, as she had stylized her paintings, so that she could, in her words, "dig deep". The importance of Carr's autobiographical writings lies not in her motivations for writing, but in the ways that she reshaped herself, in writing, to bring her life into line with what had become her artistic and religious motivations.

The language of Carr's autobiographical writings shows just how stylized her framing of her life was. It was unlike the language of Carr's journal, which functioned as a commonplace book recording the trials and triumphs of her everyday life, and where she also put into words ideas she developed about nature, God and the act of painting itself. That language, with its sweeping sentences and exclamations of joy, anger, and delight in what she saw around her, has much in common with the paintings of her last years. The freedom of the journal's language allowed her to achieve new, deeper interpretations of what she saw, which she turned into symbolically charged images in paint (H&T 32). At the same time, Carr's informal language gave her a free space where she could be "unvarnished me" (H&T 20). Journal writing was Carr's first autobiographical language, flexible enough to accommodate a personal record of feelings, longings, her sense of purpose, her struggles with different religious approaches, her belief that painting was a religious act. But by 1937, the long descriptive nature passages in her journal indicate that Carr used her journals to map out what she wanted to paint, in part because there was no precedent for what she wanted to do. "I seem to be after something without a name" (H&T 272), she wrote. Writing helped her to name it. Later, autobiographical writing synthesized Carr's past struggles and difficulties, and helped to free her from them. Once

freed emotionally, she could be freer artistically. She often referred to her writings as therapeutic, an activity she undertook during times of physical illness which would heal her emotionally as well as physically. In Growing Pains (1947), her autobiography², she represents what she thought her writing was in a conversation with her doctor:

"Doctor, may I write?"

"Write? Write what?"

"Describe places I've seen on my sketching trips, woods, Indians and things -- nice Canadian things of the West, things that will heal, not rile my heart?"

"You can try, but don't get excited, don't overture."

So I wrote the stories that were later to be known as Klee Wyck, reliving those beautiful, calm places among the dear Indians. Their quiet strength healed my heart (GP 359-60).

The outpouring of written sketches between 1937 and 1941 which became Klee Wyck, The Book of Small, The House of All Sorts, Growing Pains, posthumously Pause, a Sketchbook, Heart of a Peacock and in manuscript, two versions of an autobiography called Hundreds and Thousands, was a continuous narrative apart from what Carr was doing visually. They formed part of a tightly formulated script where overcoming obstacles to creativity and self-expression were played out over and over, and where Carr could sanctify

those experiences in terms of her later, artistic vocation. The stories concluded emotionally-loaded conversations with herself that she had had with her family, England, animals and enemies: "I put my whole soul into them and tried to avoid sentimentality. I went down deep into myself and dug up" (H&T 292).

To her, the stories were emotionally profound; they were an extension of painting. Her criteria for this writing were the same. It had to be "ultra-honest, ultra-true, some deep realizing of life" (H&T 331). Since in this case, "ultra-true" meant venturing into emotionally volatile territory, the language of Carr's autobiographical writings acts to distance the author from her potentially hurtful subject. Unlike the long, often eloquent descriptions in her journals, the language of the stories is simple, even austere. Most of the stories are only a few pages long; even her official autobiography, Growing Pains, consisted of these short sketches. Since Carr ritualized what she thought and felt, tightly framing her stories acknowledged some feelings, some events while it denied others. This permitted Carr to create a persona, Small, which would help her to travel through old hurts and thoughts. God, "natural" religion, and how she thought about painting, aspects of her thought-life which feature strongly in the the journal material, are hardly mentioned. Animals become angelic, humans lose their complexity and become "types". In this

way, there is an analogy, I would suggest, to the abandon of her late work which, as Carr observed, could not have been achieved without strict control over her painting technique, the way she saw the woods and her disciplined sense of vocation.

Here, the paintings of her last period meet her autobiographical writings. The paintings are the result of an intensely personal vision which, in her own words, she wanted to make "eternal", and recognizable to everyone who saw it. But the vision remained personal, and the stories made that personal space public while leaving the place from where her meditations on art, life and God came. In this sense, the stories fulfilled Carr's need for narrative (since she spent less time writing in her journal when she wrote them) and for public communication/absolution. They are not reflections on her past, or even a chain of remembrances she recalled "at random". Autobiography, for Carr, functioned as a healing, a reconstitution of what she mythologized about her life as an artist, and a lived context for the art she had made and would make.

From Recorder to Interpreter, Poles to Trees: Artistic Roles

Carr felt awe, and spiritual/artistic empathy, when she first saw Lawren Harris' work in 1927. As soon as she saw it, she saw the possibility of a spiritual language she could tap into in her own painting, which she had largely

abandoned for fifteen years. Her experience with Harris' works, and religion, amounted to an epiphany which revitalized her painting. Upon seeing some of his paintings, she wrote:

What language do they speak, those silent, awe-filled spaces? I do not know. Wait and listen, you shall hear by and by. I long to hear and yet I'm half afraid. I think perhaps I shall find God here, the God I've longed and hunted for and failed to find (H&T 7).

What she needed, she discovered, was a spiritual vocabulary and someone with whom she could speak. She found both in Harris' support and encouragement, which came mainly through letters. For a while, Carr wrote him at least once a week, and began her journal when Harris could not reply to her questions quickly enough. The letters dealt mainly with spiritual as well as painterly, technical matters: as a theosophist, Harris himself felt strongly that every artist's achievement was essentially religious. Carr found that through her communication with Harris, and with the thoughts she developed in her journal, she had begun to develop the "strange language" needed to translate her spiritual sense into visual images. She wrote later that for both Harris and herself, "religion and art were one" (H&T 238). Her journals record her response to Harris' ideas, and many of the descriptive passages of the woods,

until 1930, mark her effort to get the divine in herself to respond to the divine in what she saw or was trying to rework, much as Harris advised her to do (H&T 238). "A picture," she wrote during this period, "is an expressed thought for the soul" (H&T 26). The act of painting, therefore, came to be interpreted by Carr as a religious experience in itself and as an act of worship, not only for her but for every artist (H&T 29, 41). As she interpreted, more and more, art and religion as one, her vision as a painter changed profoundly, as she began to re-vision what sort of artist she wanted to be, and what she wanted to paint. Her autobiography Growing Pains and the stories of Klee Wyck, purportedly about her experiences with West Coast Indians, rearrange and reclassify what had happened to her in her life in terms of what had happened to her artistically and spiritually.

Although her journals do not ever record this shift occurring, Carr presented herself in Growing Pains as an artist who clearly had been "given" her special artistic vocation--to paint West Coast totem poles--very early, and that her vision had never altered. She wrote that at Sitka, in the Queen Charlotte Islands in 1907, her work was praised by another artist, who said that she expressed the spirit of the Indian people. Carr added that the artist's paintings of totem poles were not very good (GP 281-2). She located her first sense of artistic purpose in terms of another

artist's opinion of her work but whose own work, in her view, was not capable of the special vocation she set for herself.

While Peter Sanger insists that this episode merely illustrated how competitive, and vindictive, Carr was (Sanger 222), the way in which Carr set this scene shows more about the way she chose to frame, and present, her "vocation". She did not "discover" herself in the episode; a fellow traveller, in artistic guise, does. While he can recognize talent, Carr shows herself as having a more "spiritual" approach. He is cast in the same role as Lawren Harris: more established than she, he accepted her validity, and provided the catalyst for the spiritual/religious foundation of her work, although he cannot intuit British Columbia and the Indians as only Emily Carr can. In both cases, Carr deliberately located her vocation as "outside" recognition of what she already knew.

In Growing Pains, at least, Carr assigned herself, initially, the vocation of interpreter. She wished to preserve, in paint, the look of the West Coast totem poles and sculptures before they rotted or were removed and placed in museums. After hearing the artist at Sitka say that her work had "the true Indian flavour" (GP 282), Carr wrote:

By the time I reached home my mind was made up. I was going to picture totem poles in their own village settings, as complete a collection of them

as I could ... [t]he new West called me, but my Old World heredity, the flavour of my upbringing, pulled me back. I had been schooled to see outsides only, not struggle to pierce. The Indian caught first at the inner intensity of his subject, worked outward to the surfaces. His spiritual conception he buried deep in the wood he was about to carve ... no sham, no mannerism (GP 283-84).

Carr located the "private" reason for her initial calling as a pull between white culture and Indian art, with herself in the gap. Her artistic training, in the light of Indian art, she presents as inadequate, and she sets up a dichotomy which she would like to cast as dialogue: Indian art struck what she decided was a responsive chord, and in the light of her experiences after 1927, she assigned spiritual motivations to her calling. Up to this point in Growing Pains, Carr had expressed dissatisfaction with the social restraints of San Francisco and London, where she had been forced to live with disagreeable landladies and work with artists who were not serious, but she had not found fault with her training. In fact, she shows herself as working hard and learning much, particularly in England, where she assigns the cause of her illness, in part, to overwork. Her fruitful work in France is given only twenty pages of notice. But in Growing Pains, Carr gives herself at Sitka part of

the epiphany she experienced with Lawren Harris' work years later, while never mentioning in detail how his work had affected her. In retrospect, then, Carr reframed her vocation as an artist who could perceive and try to render Indian art on a spiritual as well as an artistic level, beyond European or British influence. Theosophy and later, liberal Protestantism gave Carr lenses through which Indian totem poles became emblems of the natural religion she presented herself as having always had, but never articulated.

In Klee Wyck, Carr mapped out what she felt her vocation had been in light of what she had become. Klee Wyck marks an important point in Carr's revisioning of herself, because it combines the ways in which she thought about her vocation before 1927, when Indian art first interested her, with her perception of her vocation after 1927. The Indian culture of Klee Wyck is moulded to frame Carr's vocation in this way. The story "Kitwancool", for example, later, provides her pre-1927, philanthropic reason for painting totem poles. When the matriarch of Kitwancool, Mrs. Douse, wanted to know why Carr wished to make pictures of the totem poles, Carr replied:

'Because they are beautiful. They are getting old now, and your people make very few new ones. The young people do not value the poles as the old ones did. By and by there will be no more poles. I want

to make pictures of them, so that your young people as well as the white people will see how fine your totem poles used to be³.

Here is Emily Carr as an ethnographer, recording (in an attitude common at the time) a "vanishing" culture in order to instruct both Indians and whites. At the time, Indian culture was only beginning to be recorded and interpreted by white anthropologists, who naturally felt that they could understand and preserve native culture better than the natives could themselves, just at the moment when native culture faced extinction by white culture. Meanwhile, the British Columbian forest coast, as well as the culture of the people who lived there, was still viewed generally by white Victorians as strange, unknowable, primitive and "heathenish", so that only ethnographers and missionaries were interested in native culture at the time. In this kind of environment, it is not surprising that Carr assumed the role of ethnographer for a time in order to "reach" Indian art and assign herself a reason for painting it, although as a white artist, she had little interest in native culture or religion. It was what natives represented in her own cosmology, in retrospect, which interested her.

As an ethnographer, Carr went to native settlements and sketched the abandoned houses and poles, that she saw in Klee Wyck in detail, by each village. Then, back in her Vancouver studio, Carr reworked these sketches in oils,

carefully subordinating the post-impressionist brushwork and vivid coloration she had acquired in France, for the sake of "accuracy". She even added Indian figures to some paintings, awkwardly at times, at the suggestion of an ethnologist, although he later wrote that despite her efforts, Carr's paintings were still too vivid to be used as an anthropological record (Blanchard 133-34). The canvas Tanoo, Queen Charlotte Islands (1913) (fig. 3.1), with its finely detailed poles and relatively subdued colour scheme, is an example of Carr's attempt to focus on poles as solely an ethnographic record.

Then, she set out to educate her public. In 1913, for example, she gave two lectures in Vancouver about West Coast Indians to accompany her paintings of their poles. These lectures show how conscious Carr was of her vocation as artist/ethnographer. They began with an explanation of the poles in the context of Indian culture, continued with descriptions of some of the paintings and ended with a selection of some of her personal experiences. Carr always emphasized the "dignity" of the people and the villages they left behind. It is clear that Carr's sense of ethnographic mission was at its strongest during this period, although the Vancouver audience was less than receptive to Carr's unfamiliar ideas and images (Blanchard 136-37).

Years later Klee Wyck presents her as both an ethnographer, and later, an artist in spiritual sympathy

with the spirituality of Indian art, at times overlapping both aspects of her re-revised vocation. It records what Carr experienced of a culture which she felt was passing away, with her own embellishments and additions. In more detail than the other books, Klee Wyck focusses on the environment and the people Carr encountered on these sketching trips, rather than the art she produced. Her language, although spare, is vivid as she describes deserted villages with padlocks on the rotting doors of longhouses, the forest growth which overran the ruined poles, the oppressive darkness, and the ways of the Indians who brought her to remote places to sketch. Unlike her sparse descriptions of the countryside near St. Ives, England or in France, Carr's descriptive passages in Klee Wyck mark her activity of seeing and recording as her primary concern at that time.

However, Klee Wyck also records the change in self/artistic-perception Carr experienced after 1927, without a consciousness of the shift occurring. In retrospect, she assigned a role to Indian artists which she had assumed for herself. The change is visually startling. With Harris' guidance and long debates with herself in her journals, she began to try to "paint beyond" the surfaces she had made and paint her spiritual response to the sculptures. This she did literally: she went back to her old sketches and paintings of Indian art and reworked them in terms of what she began to interpret as their innate



spiritual power, as in, for example, the painting Big Raven (1931) (fig. 3.2), as opposed to Cumshewa, her earlier rendering of the same subject (1912) (fig. 3.3). She simplified her forms and eliminated detail, working for a sculptural effect to convey her meanings more directly, as in her journal when she admonished herself to work only for essentials, to "cast out the personal" and become a spiritual channel between the object she was reworking and "God" (H&T 34). After 1927, at a rapid rate, Emily Carr had ceased to be a passive "recorder" of a vanishing culture but an artistic visionary who, with the impetus native art offered her, could realize "God" in paint, and reinterpret past images to fit her new frame.

Klee Wyck records part of this act of reinterpretation, even as it forms a part of it. From someone who painted poles so that Indians and whites could learn about their cultural value, she became an artist of independent spiritual sensitivity and sympathy, and she constructed a strong connection with the carvers themselves, rather than their art objects, to bring Indian art into her post-1927 sights. She presented Indian artists as articulators and interpreters of natural religion to their culture: roles she had assumed. She came to see making totem poles as a religious activity, just as painting them was:

He [the Indian artist] wanted some way of showing people things that were in his mind, things about

the creatures and about himself and their relation to each other. He cut forms to fit the thoughts that the birds and animals and fish suggested to him, and to these he added something of himself. When they were all linked together they made very strong talk for the people. He grafted this new language onto the great cedar trunks and called them totem poles . . . [t]hen the cedar and the creatures and the man all talked together through the totem poles to the people. The carver did even more--he let his imaginings rise above the objects that he saw and pictured supernatural beings too (KW 51).

Here, then, is Carr's portrait of the artist as a spiritual communicator. But the necessity of communication, of locating the object where it can be understood, was also important to her. Carr articulated, through the "Indian artist", what she saw as the struggle of the communicating artist (and object) with an uncooperative public, a struggle which she had faced, and now grafted onto her interpretation of Indian culture. About the Indians leaving their village for an ostensibly easier life elsewhere, Carr wrote,

there was no one to listen to their [the poles'] talk anymore. By and by they would rot and topple to the earth, unless white men came and carried them away to museums. There they would be labelled as exhibits, dumb before the crowds who gaped and



Fig. 3.2



Fig. 3.3

laughed and said, 'This is the distorted foolishness of an uncivilized people.' And the poor poles could not talk back because there was no one to understand their language (KW 52-3).

This passage shows how, in Klee Wyck, Carr presented her own problems as an artist as cultural problems for native people. While it is true that totem poles were placed in museums, Carr's anger-in-retrospect reads more like a disguised metaphor for the condition of her own art, which many Victorians did laugh at and refused to understand. Just as she linked aspects of theosophy, the Group of Seven's work and French post-impressionism to her work, so she made her motivations into the motivations of native artists, and made her "account" of their art speak for her own struggles as an artist. In Emily Carr's hands at the time, and in retrospect, native art was pressed into the service of her own artistic vision. Her vision, meanwhile, caused her to compress her own life and opinions in Growing Pains and Klee Wyck into the frame her vocation required. As she says to the doctor in Growing Pains, this activity "healed her heart", even as it gave her knowledge, while she wrote, to enable her to proceed. In "Kitwancool", Carr asks the dark, "'why did I come?' And the dark answered, 'You know'" (KW 103). Carr always did know why, in retrospect. Knowing why gave her the impetus to go on.

Transition and Manipulation: Tennyson, Pause and English Ladies

How dreadfully real the places and people are as they come back to me! The experiences must have been burnt as in pyrography. The story is a bit grim so far but I want to weave it round [sic] the birds, give it the light, pert twist of the birds. Birds are not tragic (H&T 299).

While Growing Pains and Klee Wyck provide a look at Carr's manoeuvrings-in-retrospect to construct an artistic/visionary history for herself, two earlier texts show how she pulled the symbolic language of others into her personal/artistic sphere before 1927 and how she arranged personal traumas in her autobiographical language to declare a personal victory which had not yet happened in images.

Before 1927, Carr had no textual ground, where her early spiritual and artistic discomforts could be organized into new symbolizations. There was no opportunity for her to have one; Victoria, British Columbia and her art schools in San Francisco and London, England did little to prepare her vocationally. While she did create a series of drawings and doggerel sketches to broadcast her anger at the social confines she had been subjected to in England, these did little to provide her with creative alternatives to what was happening to her, and she was sent to East Anglia Sanatorium in 1903, ostensibly for a rest cure due to exhaustion from

overwork (Tippett 56-7).

At the end of the treatment, she returned to British Columbia, feeling "the failure and disappointment of the last five years" (GP 270). Unlike her later stay in France, where she learned the techniques of post-impressionist painting, Carr's time in England would loom large in her mind as the symbol of her inadequacy, and the society of British Columbia would become, in Growing Pains, England on a small scale:

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, [sic] just a broken-in-health girl that had taken rather a hard whipping, and was disgruntled with the world (GP 272).

One guide we have for how Carr felt during the period after her return is an annotated copy of The Poetical Works of Alfred Tennyson, which contained some of her sketches and caricatures on blank pages and in the margins. This book shows how she appropriated a writer, pulling his or her symbolizations into her personal experience as she would later do with native art, and used them to fortify her own artistic intentions. Janet Warner sees Carr's underlinings of Tennyson's "The Palace of Art" and the "Lady of Shalott" -- done soon after her return from England -- as an indication of her identification with Tennyson's portrait of

the artist as necessarily isolated from society (Warner 116). Among the lines she marked in "The Palace of Art" were, "And death and life she hated equally/And nothing saw, for her despair . . . no comfort anywhere" (Warner 114), while in the "Lady of Shalott" she marked, "I am half-sick of shadows" (Warner 116). Carr clearly identified with the alienation of Tennyson's heroines. Apart from passages dealing with romantic love, and these may have reflected a personal experience, the main markings touch on Tennyson's romantic landscapes, with their emphasis on light, God, nature, and the recurrent romantic motifs of life and death. This transcendentalism, a mysticism of language, sound and image, probably had a foundational effect on Emily Carr as a painter of landscapes in British Columbia. Tennyson left his mark, on her thought and work, just as Walt Whitman, in a similar way, at a later point, would.

In "In Memoriam", Carr heavily marked passages connecting the quality of light, and the relationship in Tennyson's work between light and God, letting the poet verbalize what she herself sensed and could not yet render. She drew a double squiggle under the stanza ending, "Farewell! We lose ourselves in light", and drew a line around three sides of the last lines of stanza XCV, which associates light with life and death (Warner 126). She also marked passages in which Tennyson expresses the character of landscape in vivid, personified metaphors (Warner 122). Carr was ready

to identify with Tennyson's sense of loss and of the inadequacy of his words (and nature) to express the essence of life. She bracketed these 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 (Warner 118).

Under artistic or emotional stress, Carr would always rely on poetic language to express to herself what she wished to paint. The best reflection of Tennyson and Whitman may be found in the oil painting Giant Trees, Stanley Park (1909) (fig. 3.4). Here, Carr captured the spirituality of the giant cedars in Stanley Park, but did so in a derived religious-romantic language:

Now [with this painting] she tried to reach beyond the merely visual, to express the sense of sanctuary and peace she found only among these giants of her own country. As yet she could not go beyond conventional religious symbols--the slant of cathedral light, the massive pillars of God's house (Blanchard 104-05).

This was the only language Carr had: Tennyson, her emotions and intuition, and Stanley Park. "England" had given her no way to apprehend the forests of British Columbia, and no religious, mystical space where she could assign transcending meaning to them. French post-impressionism

would later give her the technical means to paint the trees, as would cubism. But stylistic changes could not give her a spiritual language, a way to give symbolic weight beyond the visual. For this, Carr needed Lawren Harris, and she used his ideas in the way that she made use of Tennyson: a personal comfort and an articulator of what she wanted to express artistically.

While Tennyson provided Carr with an early language for her emotional difficulties and her spiritual/artistic motivations, Pause, a Sketchbook is a unique record of Carr's struggles in East Anglia Sanatorium in sketches, coupled with the stories which she later wrote about the experience. Pause shows how Carr, at an emotional nadir, tried to make sense of events around her visually in 1903 but in retrospect, labelled the experience in 1938 as a "cosmic" failure "woven" with an elastic imagery of hope which allowed her to assume control over the symbolic meanings of her narrative. This control was cathartic: Carr remarked in her journal that, "[i]t hurts getting it out" (H&T 263), but that writing also "eased me, pouring out that way" (H&T 265). She herself saw something special in the text of Pause: "In a way I think it is the best thing I have written but I don't know . . . I think this is deeper than 'The House of All Sorts'" (H&T 300). Textually, Carr entered the confused, despaired imagery of Pause in 1938, and created a healing space from it, granting herself a



Fig. 3.4

spiritual victory from an assured identity position.

When Carr entered East Anglia Sanitorim, her confidence in herself as an artist, and as a human being, was low. The drawings in Pause, a Sketchbook represent her attempt to create an imagery of resistance during this time as she struggled to maintain some form of identity in the midst of confusion about herself and her vocation. Since this territory was, in 1938 as well as 1903, painful, the written structure of Pause does in some ways reflect the uncertain drawings Carr did. It is the most "inaccurate" of Carr's writings; she constantly altered details, such as dates, events, the length of her hospital stay and her age, more frequently than elsewhere. The territory is so difficult in Pause that thematizing events--and patterning an allegory of failure--was far more important to Carr than accuracy. In what had become, by 1938, Emily Carr's journey to artistry as well as spirituality, Pause had a special function to perform: it marked the parameters of Carr's "failure" in both areas at every level, and it named the "reasons" for failure. The stories of Pause gave that failure a transcendent dimension which fit into Carr's general life narrative, since Carr arranged the narrative around imagery of English, human defeat and Canadian, animal resistance.

It is not known why Carr was admitted to East Anglia Sanitorium. She herself assigned her problem to various

causes, including depression, influenza, overwork, excessive exposure to London, England as a whole and anaemia (Blanchard 9). Carr certainly was physically and emotionally unwell, but the psychological basis for her illness was complex. Like many women of her day, Carr was probably diagnosed as having hysteria, or what would now be called conversion reaction, at the Sanitorium⁴. Since hysteria was thought to arise from either a woman's innate sexual inadequacy, frigidity or desire for a role other than that which Victorian social discourses had assigned her, it is likely that her doctors diagnosed Carr's illness as the result of her frustration with her inability to act as an artist inside English artistic and social discourses. Carr underwent a treatment called the rest cure, which was as much designed to make her forget what had "upset" her (namely, her ambition to be an artist) as it was to give her rest. Largely confined to her bed, forbidden to think or talk about art, subjected to forced overeating and kept from doing any activity but some sketching, she eventually lost her enthusiasm for art and with it, her enthusiasm for life itself (Blanchard 94-96). With no other outlet, her emotional frustration channelled itself into physical symptoms and she became deeply depressed. For more than a year, she did not respond to her treatment and when she could, she vigorously protested it.

Since she was forbidden to move literally or

figuratively, Carr tried to construct and maintain a symbolic sense of identity through the only media she was allowed to use: sketches and rhymes, done under tremendous emotional strain⁵. These, with an "Author's Note" from 1903 which was found in her writing trunk, all became part of Pause when they were assembled, edited and published after her death. In them, Carr gave herself an identity which both described and explained what was happening to her: she drew and wrote herself as "the Fat Girl", a failed person unable to control her physical size, and even her sense of maturity. "The Fat Girl" was always drawn and described as a victim, as in the "Author's Note". Here, Carr drew herself looking at a bird's nest, and wrote an accompanying text subtitled "The Fat Girl and Her Failure":

The fat girl came from the far west where the forests are magnificent and solemn but no singing birds are there. The fat girl found birds in the early days of her sojourn in England. She heard a thrush sing. It was a poor prisoner in London, broken tailed and bedabbled, in such a dirty cage, but the pure song coming from its dreary prison touched the fat girl. By and by illness came and the fat girl subsided into a San [a patient] with a limp and a stutter. Then it was that the plan came to her to rear some thrushes and take home [sic] to her glorious silent woods. The fat girl bucked up.

Spring came, birds built. The fat girl waddled forth with her stick and watched for many weeks the pretty mothers build and sit and hatch their clean and ugly babes⁶.

All the symbolic elements of failure and inadequacy are here; the text reads more like an fable than an actual account of Carr's stay in London. In the "allegory", the fat girl is younger, and heavier, than Carr actually was. She is like the bird, a "prisoner" in London, trying to sing despite the filth around her. The fat girl failed, partly, because she has been separated from life-giving things--the "far west" and its forests. The message is clear: cities, particularly English cities, and their lack of freedom for people or animals encourage spiritual and physical sickness, and death. Although the rest of Pause does not sound such a note of hopelessness, the format will be the same. In sketches so indistinct that the human figures often seem to be grim shadows or ghosts (animals in Pause are always heavily drawn, as is the one human exception, "Hokey", the nurse Carr loved), Carr pictured her own sense of insubstantiality. She drew herself as "the fat girl" when she was bedridden, although she was 33 years old at the time (Pause 13, 42). But when she drew herself as more mobile, she appeared as an older, overweight woman--one sketch even shows her smoking with a defiant expression on her face (Pause 41, 103). Therefore, whenever Carr could imagine

herself as a survivor (walking, smoking, raising birds, writing verses) her imagery shows her as an older "actor" exerting some control over her environment and her own image. But at moments of helplessness, she assumed the form of a small child. The child, the "fat girl" who had failed, blurred into the defiant adult in constantly shifting configurations. Since her sense of identity was in flux, Carr's analysis of what was happening to her, even when she wrote the Pause stories, also remained elusive. She never named her illness in Pause, nor did she give a consistent reason for her stay at East Anglia. The elusiveness, as Tippet suggests, may have constituted evasiveness, since Carr might not have wanted to admit to her "diagnosis" of hysteria⁷. Whatever the reason, Carr altered her bodily image to fit her emotional state in 1903. In the text of Pause, and even more strongly in Growing Pains, she assigned reasons--and a liberal amount of blame--for her feelings of insubstantiality inside the pattern she had acquired since that time: conflict and resistance. For instance, while she was unclear in 1903 why she was hospitalized, Carr attributes it in her autobiographical writings to familiar causes--misunderstanding of her vocation and a lack of sympathy for her position. Even these "explanations" shift according to autobiographical purposes. As the narrative dealing directly with her "failure" to be a successful artist, Pause has a doctor tell her that she is tired, while

she unsuccessfully protests that she must work (Pause 5), while Growing Pains, the narrative dealing more fully with England-as-disaster, has her doctor tell her that she is too ill to go back to Canada and must go to the Sanitorium, again despite Carr's protests (GP 247).

But as a counterpoint to the pictured instability of 1903, the written sketches of Pause, feature an imagery of hope which the visuals did not show--and significantly, hope does not come from the human world. Pause and Growing Pains contain stories about the songbirds Carr raised in the Sanitorium to take back with her to Canada, and how they helped her, as well as other patients, combat loneliness and isolation. Naturally, the birds are far more than just birds, so much so that her narrative stretched to accommodate the symbolic needs Carr had as she wrote. As Peter Sanger observes, the birds are a controlling metaphor in the stories of Pause (Sanger 225). They represent life, health, and the only nurturing relationship Carr was able to have at this time. They perform the same function as other animals in Carr's stories--where animals are credited with warm, affectionate feeling, courage and honesty, people are pictured as cold, uncommunicative and unsympathetic to her needs. To put it bluntly, animals, in Carr's narrative, are "life-enhancing", a part of Carr's romanticized idea of the Canadian natural world, and most people are "death-encouraging", like cities, Victorian missionary fervour and

the trappings of British society. As a human being who wants to be "alive" spiritually, Carr imagined herself caught between these extremes. She interpreted her problems, whether they were spiritual, psychological, or a combination of these, as stemming from a struggle between living and dying. As a cold English tomb, the "San" of Pause was meant to represent spiritual as well as physical death. Any gesture of resistance is interpreted, on a symbolic level, as "life". The staff and some of the patients, for example, do not like Carr to walk in the woods (a "life" image), or talk about art (again, "life" itself). But the stories of Pause lovingly record how Carr disobeyed the rules of the Sanatorium and brought "life" to a death experience: she tamed and reared nests of thrushes and blackbirds. Inmates catch worms and beetles for them, and Carr is nicknamed "Bird Mammy" by one of her doctors (Pause 42-43). She also raised two nests of bullfinches, who cheered other patients; they are pictured as life-restoring or a small joy for patients near death (Pause 62-3), providing, ironically, a small dose of humane treatment. Carr places them at the centre of a small rebellion against the forced confinement of the Sanatorium, and, in that rebellion, they represent a promise of life held against death. Carr wrote:

If at any time I was unable to go to my birds, there was always some patient willing--glad to lend a

hand. Common boredom, common interests, knit us tight. Shuttles were, flying across the warp of San rules--empty shuttles to be sure, but maybe the San was weaving more pattern than we guessed (Pause 44).

The birds, then, hold possibility, control and some hope of autonomy inside a pattern of fruitlessness. They come to represent hope for her so strongly that her narrative bends and stretches to accommodate them in 1938 when, as Carr says, she "wove" them in. Unsurprisingly, Growing Pains and Pause, both meant to show patterns of failure in England, have her chloroforming the birds before she entered the last phase of her treatment, when she was too ill to take care of them; Pause even concludes with this episode. In The Heart of a Peacock, a collection of animals stories without the frame of failure, Carr gives most of her bullfinches away because they were too quarrelsome, and brings one pair back to Canada with her⁸. The differing versions and the elastic nature of Carr's chronology (she probably only raised them for a few weeks, but stretches the time to months in her accounts) indicate the sensitive meaning the story was meant to carry. The raising of birds, an illicit activity causing official disapproval and unofficial delight, a sample of the restorative power of the natural world, provided a ground and a justification for Carr's later position as the (misunderstood) interpreter of her version of nature to culture. Although her sketches from the time only show her

as the "fat girl", in the text she is "the Bird Mammy"--an artist who has some measure of control over her experiences, and has an identity, given to her by others, as someone with a loving affinity to the natural world.

Being "alive", too, involved rebellion against "society", which in Carr's view had no sympathy with "nature" and held it captive, as she was held captive. As representatives, on a symbolic level, of "life" itself, animals were the occasions and even the metaphors for resistance against "death", representative of honesty and love throughout Carr's autobiographical writings. They gave her the unconditional love which she craved; the birds in Pause, for instance, flew to her because she was the only mother they had ever known, and their eyes are trusting as she puts them in a box for chloroforming (Pause 148). Animals also functioned as the emblems of her survival; Carr names them as the greatest help to her as a painter in Growing Pains (GP 323), although they rarely appeared in anything but brief sketches and cartoons.

More than any of her other books, Pause marks the tension between Emily Carr as a young artist, patterning her self-image in terms of failure and instability, and as an older artist who can re-vision that experience as a conflict of life and creativity versus death and sterility. Her rearranging of a conflict on this level reinforced Carr's position as a committed artist occupying territory between

"nature" and "society", healed by the former even as the latter, in her view, almost destroyed her.

Once Carr had achieved the spiritual and artistic fusion which she sought as an artist, she could turn her eye back on episodes like her stay in the sanitorium, and fit them into symbolic narratives where they could be domesticated, and seen in the light of her vocation. As she did with her Pause narratives, she constructed narratives of confrontation in her autobiography to solve old problems and heal old hurts. Difficulties could be projected as national/cultural problems, much as she saw native features as an extension of her own problems. In Growing Pains, for example, she projected personal conflict into differences of national character between Canada and England. In this contrast, England became a stuffy parent and Canada the spirited, rebellious child deprived of adult, creative space--as when English landladies (given names like Mrs. Crump) question why she is an unmarried artist, when the English countryside and London are compared unfavourably to the woods of British Columbia, or when Carr says to a snobbish friend, "'I don't like your English ways, Wattie!'" (GP 117, 146, 165). In England, as she later elaborated in Growing Pains, Carr felt the difference between the environments of British Columbia and London, in a spiritual, social and physical way. No one encouraged her in England; one did not, she wrote, encourage female students there (GP

204, 288).

Therefore, Carr took revenge in her autobiographical narrative. Immediately after the moment when Carr cast herself as the recorder and interpreter of Indian culture, an unnamed lady from England who purports to understand Canada and Indian art comes to see her to offer her patronage. Carr accuses her roundly of exploitation and cultural blindness, and tells her a story about how she once admonished another unthinking English woman, "'Teach your English people geography, Madam! Then maybe they will be interested in British things'" (GP 286-87). Carr ended the chapter with her spirited reply--the English woman, in Carr's narrative, had nothing further to say.

It is not accidental that Carr clashes with, and triumphs over, a conceited British woman as part of her "new" vocation. In her autobiographical writings, Carr constructed a pattern of engagement and victory over opposition as part of her decision to live on a border between cultures which she invented. She often sharpened that conflict to make the underlying aspects of her development fall into line with the way she wanted her vocation to be seen. The unnamed English woman was the representative of an ongoing, angry dialogue Carr had with England, and with all "English"-thinking white people, whom she thought preferred "sham" to any true artistic expression, rooted in the environment they lived in.

Growing Pains and the other autobiographical writings had many of these people appear, or Carr invented them, in order to justify her earlier struggle for her artistic vocation, and to provide the ongoing dialogue of difference she had, once she had a vocation, with groups of people, institutions, or ways of thinking that were "opposed" to what she valued.

Since she formulated her autobiographical exploration of her vocation in terms of conflict, anything which she did not recognize inside her conflictual structures was not made to fit. Her stay in France, for example, had a tremendous impact on her artistic style. The culture was surely more difficult for her to operate inside than that of England-- particularly since she did not speak French. She was in France during a period of artistic and intellectual ferment, and certainly had heard about Gertrude Stein's salon, among others. In Paris, she lived around the corner from Henri Matisse; in Brittany, one of her teachers was a talented woman, Frances Hodgkinson, who became one of New Zealand's leading painters, and had a similar drive to succeed in serious painting to her own. And yet, in Growing Pains, none of this is mentioned. Only the peasants of Brittany are described in any detail. While her experiences in England merited a more than two-hundred page discourse on her difficulties there, France fills less than twenty. The reason is readily apparent: France did not pose a

recognizable problem, and recognizable problems were what fuelled Emily Carr's presentation of her vocation. Her trip was successful for her from a stylistic point of view, but as an English-Canadian from Victoria, that success did not translate culturally, or even spiritually. It was England which Carr could recognize and wanted to be recognized by, and it was England which had rejected her on every level she found meaningful. Therefore, she always gave much weight to her stay in England, casting herself as the rebellious artist who chafed against decorously going to tea, rather than an adventurist artist who found visual salvation, of a sort, in a "foreign" country. France gave her nothing to triumph over; and so, from the position of successful artist in her autobiographical writings, Emily Carr assigned spiritual triumph, after the requisite struggle, to the wilds of British Columbia, Lawren Harris, and her own intuition--and she replayed her drama of resistance and resolution in what she constructed as strictly English, English-Canadian and native spaces.

A Free Space: Small as a Persona

'It's disgusting! Stop that vulgar row, Small! What must the neighbours think? Stop it, I say!'

Small sang harder, bellowing the words, 'The cow likes it and this is her yard'⁹.

Caught in a web of Victorian femininity which would not

allow women to be spontaneous, creative, sensual or socially unorthodox, Carr eventually developed a persona which allowed her this kind of freedom in a way which she could control. The persona, a child called "Small", helped her to maintain what Jane Flax called a "core self":

Only when a core self begins to cohere can one enter into or make use of the 'transitional space' . . . in which the differences and boundaries between self/other, inner/outer, and reality/illusion are bracketed or elided (Flax 93).

With a core self allowing her creative flexibility, Carr could remain inside Victorian society while breaking new ground artistically outside of that social context. Small was particularly useful when Carr wanted to explore conflicts between Victorian social values and her vocation. Whether the setting is the family farmyard, her boarding house or the woods near her family home, Small functioned as a transitional space between Carr's desire to relive her early spontaneity and joy in natural things, and her corresponding need to be taken seriously as an adult artist.

She particularly needed to make use of this transitional space when she wrote about her childhood, and when she experienced (or created) conflict between what was expected of her as an older, Victorian, woman and what she wished to do outside those confines. She most needed to do this near the end of her life, when she wrote about Small, and

sometimes as Small, to Ira Dilworth, whom she called "Eye" (GP 365). She did think of him as an "Eye", who could recognize and comprehend Carr as she wished to appear--an adult who wished to retain the features of a child. So, Small was a strategy for recognition as well as a way to recognize herself in, and distance herself from, Victorian society. Small allowed Carr to piece together who she was in a less emotionally precarious way than she had in the visual sketches of Pause, when her self-images slid from adult to child depending on emotional circumstance. It was no longer Carr, strictly, who had to become younger so that she could express states of innocence, helplessness and rebellion: it was Small. And Small, always sure of who she was, held her own, craftily, saucily, against events and people which Carr found threatening.

Who exactly did Carr think Small was, and when did she develop? In his introduction to The Heart of a Peacock, Ira Dilworth wrote that "she was the embodiment of Carr's childhood" (HP xv), and then quoted Carr's description of her from a note he had found in her manuscript after her death:

Do not be too sad when you and Small unpack the box, let her giggle a bit . . . she has been a joy to us, hasn't she? . . . and if there should be an et cetera [Carr's designation of my hypothetical wife] who questions 'Who is Small?' say 'Oh, she's just a

phantom child, made up of memories and love'.

Small's adult outgrew her (as every adult must or remain an imbecile) but the child Small learnt the trick of coming back to cheer what used to be her (HP xv) [Square brackets and ellipses are Dilworth's].

Small was a phantom child, but in Carr's mind, she was real enough. So the question remains: what did Small do for an elderly artist who wrote stories about herself while she was bedridden? I would suggest that, like Carr's animals, Small provided comfort for Carr, and also stability when she travelled to emotionally volatile places. But she may also have, as Blanchard suggests, functioned as Carr's muse in old age (282). At a time when Carr was unable to paint, unwilling to open her secret emotional life to other people and unable to bring her art to what she saw as its full fruition, Small appeared in stories, spontaneously sniffing flowers, riding ponies through the woods and dancing in a dream with a small boy while white flowers spun around her. She was, as Carr wrote, a child of memory, but she was also a creative reformulation of the artistic impulses Carr assigned to her childhood, long before she thought that she would be an artist. Perhaps, in the stories where she is featured, she enabled Carr to access a display of emotions denied her as an adult, and so helped to heal some of the difficulties she had experienced.

Carr often assumed the roles of a child when Victorian Victoria insisted that she behave with decorum. She wrote in Growing Pains that when she returned from London, Victorian society expected a "nice English miss with nice ways" but instead she was "more me than ever before, just pure me" (GP 272). She hung on to her old identity, and her old habits of taming animals and rambling outdoors, with pride, although a friend concluded that she had outgrown her. Carr agreed (GP 270-71). Blanchard writes that, "For Carr, maturity was the strength to choose the honesty and unclouded sensibility of a child" (Blanchard 101), and to some extent, Carr did choose this role. Her unorthodoxy and rebelliousness against what her family and Victoria thought was appropriate behaviour for a lady, ensured that within her family at least, she was only recognized as a child. To get attention, she had to say and do unusual things, which would be tolerated because she was still "the youngest" (Tippett 214). Being treated as a child by her family and by Victoria, however, meant that she would never be recognized as an adult. Carr realized this: indirectly, her work as a landlady was meant to circumvent her family's belief that as a child, she was incapable of taking on adult responsibilities (H&T 191). Small allowed Carr to carry on, in autobiographical writing, a dialogue with her past as a child, while maintaining control over the past-as-written, as an adult.

Since Small is a persona and not a person, she operates in symbolic, rather than actual space. Her relationships with animals, her family, and authority figures verge on allegory, as Carr, through the eyes of Small, named events, and people, in terms of their meaning to her. What Carr saw as essential truths about the world became actualities in Small's space. Small's fight against the unimaginative world of adults on a small scale, was also Carr's struggle against what she called "sham", her reading of adult hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness. Small, then, was a creative way for Carr to name and make symbolic struggles and triumphs in her own life. Carr certainly regarded Small, and Small's world, in this way; when she read "The Cow Yard"--a story featuring Small and Carr's other family members--to her sisters, for example, she was hurt when they thought that it was simply a child's story. Carr felt that it was about maternity, and the process of life and death, which she experienced as a small child, while her sisters had not experienced this. "Cow Yard" was intended to be a look at a budding artist responding to her environment symbolically, looking at animals, trees, family relationships and perceiving "eternal" truths about them. Carr's stories about Small, and her use of Small as a persona in letters to Dilworth, enabled her to act out her past life on a symbolic level, particularly when telling a story "straight", or voicing painful emotions, was too

difficult for Carr to do.

Therefore, in her remembering process, Carr, as an adult, gave Small the free rein against authority which she could not enjoy, in a symbolic world with polarized elements of what Carr considered good and evil. Small's adventures in her stories usually centre on her relationships with her sisters (who are named Elder, Bigger and Middle according to their age and also the positions of power each held within the family), and often involve her disregard for rules, an intuitive response to nature and a rebelliousness which they do not possess. In "The Cow Yard" for example, Carr wrote that Bigger (Lizzie) "was a pure, clean child and had an enormous conscience. The garden rather than the Cow Yard suited her," while Middle (Alice) "liked equally the tidy garden and the free Cow Yard", but "Small was wholly a Cow Yard child", so, she favours freedom and unbound natural life more than the others (BS 15). Small sings, to the joy of the cow and the despair of her sisters (BS 30), and unlike her sisters or neighbours, she responds with all her senses to flowers (BS 57). She is different, sensual and rebellious, all of the time.

Carr did tell some stories about her childhood in the first person, but they are less personal, dealing more with Victoria's growth and development, even while they are more accurate. The first person was a "dangerous" way for Carr to talk about potentially wounding events. Yet, while she

could not allow herself to run amok, break things or fall enthusiastically in love, Small could, and did, in Carr's stories about her (Blanchard 74). For example, when Carr described her attraction to an unnamed young man in Growing Pains, she tells her story briefly and factually: he does not return her love, and she suffers for a while. But in a short story, Small jumps off a ladder and the man catches her in his arms, kissing her passionately. Then, he jilts her. Small's pain and bitterness are described in detail; when she was Small, Carr made little effort to hide her feelings.

But Small was more than a character in Carr's stories. It is unclear when Small began to take shape in Carr's mind¹⁰, but once she was there, she began to take on an extra-textual existence, particularly in her relationship with Ira Dilworth. Small invaded Carr's life occasionally, sometimes even to her embarrassment. When Carr wrote the stories for The Book of Small she found that she not only had returned to a childlike tone, but that she had slipped back to elementary school punctuation and spelling as well--Small had hated school (Blanchard 166). Carr would comment on Small and her activities in letters to Dilworth, but sometimes Small wrote about Carr, expressing a level of intimacy with Dilworth which Carr could not allow for herself, and criticizing Carr for her testiness. At the same time, Small coaxed Carr out of depressions and

performed antics to distract her from melancholy and the problems of old age. Dilworth willingly acted as her sympathetic "Eye", accepting Small's painful confessions about Carr's past, and he helped Carr to formalize them in autobiographic writings. On this level, Small operated as a kind of ritual mask for Carr, simultaneously revealing inner secrets while obscuring the outer persona Carr had assumed. In this sense, Small operated as a "raw" Emily Carr, revealing the pain of her family relations and daring intimacies with Dilworth which Carr would not allow herself to do, while poking fun at Carr's preoccupation with "trivial" details which had little to do with her painting. While Small rarely talked about painting herself, she seems to have closely approximated the joy and pain which characterized the subjects of Carr's last "great" works, while keeping Carr, the adult artist, tapped into her creative roots. As a text, a fiction, a mask, Small embodied a channel of communication Carr wished to make known, to Dilworth and even to her reading public, where her symbolic considerations met her emotional needs, and fuelled her creativity. Perhaps, then, Small and Carr's autobiographical stories about her, helped to pave the way for Carr's last works, in "forward recollection".

Small was a porthole, and eventually a gateway, for Carr when she wished to travel to sensitive emotional territory on a symbolic level. Not surprisingly, then, Small was often

teamed with animals as part of Carr's chronicle of rebellion against the "adult" world. As Pause shows, animals represented hope and life to Carr, particularly when the human world was disappointing. For Carr as an adult, they provided companionship when she was painting in the woods; in Growing Pains she mentions that her greatest aids artistically were her journal and,

the companionship of creatures while working . . .
the creatures seemed somehow to bridge that gap between vegetable and human. Perhaps it was their mindless comprehension of unthinking life linking humanity and vegetation (GP 323).

As Carr wrote in her journal during a particularly lonely time in the woods, "Oh Lord, I thank Thee for the dogs and the monkey and the rat" (H&T 142). All of them were with her at the time. Animals were even part of her livelihood during the Depression, when she raised and sold Bobtail sheep dogs to make ends meet.

But on a symbolic level, Carr presented animals as more than a bridge between trees and people. Perhaps because she saw them as closer to nature and therefore more in tune with her, animals in Carr's narratives often aid and abet her attempts to break rules in the stories, particularly when they appear with Small. Animals are presented as if they were unflawed people, who do not "sham", even when they transgress human authority. Like Small, they are "allowed"

outside the boundaries of Victorian propriety, and often, behave more spontaneously than Carr herself was allowed. They too, were part of Carr's free, creative space in her writings and even in her art practice, accompanying her to wildernesses where human beings would not go. They also, in the writings, occupy points of resistance to whatever Carr felt was blocking her creatively, and like Small, often, on a symbolic level, fight her old battles for her.

"One Crow" from The Heart of a Peacock, is a typical example of the way Carr thought and wrote about animals. In the story, Carr, as Small, captures a wild crow, to the "disgust" of an unnamed woman with her. The woman, who performs the same function as the Englishwoman who does not understand Canada or Indians, threatens that "Elder" (Carr's sister Dede, the head of the Carr household by this time) would disapprove, but Small replies that, "just to touch wild things sends me crazy happy.'" The woman replies, predictably, "'I am glad my children are not like you, Small'" (HP 8-9). Elder uses the crow as a hostage to keep Small from protesting against their rude male house guest, who, for the sake of propriety, could not be ejected. The guest, called Bully, hates the crow and tries to destroy it and Elder, in a rare moment, unites with Small against her guest's brutality, although she does punish Small for rudeness (HP 11-12).

The crow, meanwhile, is able to play pranks, annoy the

Bully and cause the havoc which Small can only dream about. Small is caught, as Carr often pictured herself as caught, between the "honesty" of nature, and the "sham" in human life. She divides her time between comforting the crow after its bad behaviour and managing her annoyed sisters: "One either side of her, up and down, up and down, she was like the pivot across which their troubles seesawed" (HP 13). So, the crow antagonizes the Bully in ways Small cannot, even pecking apart the picture of "Auntie", a relative she dislikes (HP 19). The crow also shows Small the affection she did not sense from her family--when she lets him loose to fly with wild crows, he returns to her shoulder. "The wild flock flew away. The knot of humans dispersed. Small and her crow were alone" (HP 16). Small and the crow occupy the territory Carr had chosen as an artist: between human society and wilderness, beyond--in Carr's view--human superficiality.

Carr's last paintings of trees were meant to be signs of her religious convictions, but in the space of remembrance Carr constructed at the same time, Small and animals were the talismans of resistance and survival which backgrounded Carr's struggle to realize her spiritual convictions through a mystical bond with nature. They did not directly take part in their author's search for transcending meaning through images, but they were central to the journey she took after religion and art had become one to Carr, back to

the places where she had not yet made the linkage. And there, they were her comfort and her safeguard, lending symbolic weight to old conflicts, and making creative space from them, "easing" the writer through the thickets of society, wilderness and the choice to paint between what she chose to see as extremes.

The Picnic and the Coal Cellar: Final Rearrangements

Why should I want to express 'Mrs. Drake'? There is something in it I want badly to get, to express. It won't leave me alone . . . I hated Mrs. Drake and admired her too in a way, because she stood for-- what? Now, there it is. What did she stand for in my child eyes? Maybe a certain dignified elegance-- breeding--not humanness. My mother stood for human motherliness . . . (H&T 217).

Emily Carr did not write her stories about her childhood as straightforward, accurate accounts. Even when she was not writing as Small, she was more interested in what people "stood for" in relation to her life's narrative than in rendering them the way they had been. Carr altered totem poles and trees in the same way. She admonished herself, "to be vital, intense, sincere. Distort if it is necessary to carry your point" (H&T 48). She wrote, too, of painting totem mothers in Kitwancool where "the big wooden hands holding the child were so full of tenderness they had to be

distorted enormously in order to contain it all" (KW 102). Carr felt that "truth" did not necessitate fact, but was a matter of perception "true" to how she felt about something. In her autobiographical narratives, she often arranged elements, as she did in her paintings, to throw symbolic weight on them in light of her later vocation.

One of those symbolic territories was Carr's family life, particularly the lives of her parents. In her autobiographical writings, she places her representation of her parents in a conflictual setting, and locates them as the two poles in her early artistic/religious development. She draws her father as an autocrat, feared but also admired; her mother she represents as "Father's reflection--smooth, liquid reflecting of definite, steel-cold reality" (GP 5). Her father, according to Carr, was very "English"; he kept an English garden, imported English plants for his well-trimmed grounds, and insisted that his family had to walk around his property to admire it every Sunday afternoon. Although she admired the "straightness" and authority of her father, she eventually rebelled against his autocracy; she most clearly drew the split that resulted in the chapter "Mother" from Growing Pains. Carr wrote that she was her father's pet until she began to have will of her own. When she rebelled, "he turned and was harder on me than on any of the others." He acted, Carr wrote, as if he were God (GP 9). When Carr ran to her mother and

complained, her mother provided her with an alternative experience. She took her daughter on a picnic, and for an afternoon, gave her the freedom and a welcome opportunity to indulge her love of nature:

I stepped with Mother beyond the confines of our very fenced childhood . . . Beacon Hill Park was just as it had always been from the beginning of time, not cleared, not trimmed. Mother and I squeezed through a crack in its greenery; bushes whacked against our push. Soon we came to a tiny, grassy opening, filled with sunshine and we sat down under a mock-orange bush, white with blossom and deliciously sweet (GP 11).

Carr's mother did not criticize her daughter as they sat in the clearing; she sowed while Carr made a daisy chain. They "talked very little" (GP 11). Her mother, Carr wrote, made her feel special, recognized, in a way that the rest of her family did not; "Our picnic that day was perfect. I was for once Mother's oldest, youngest, her companion-child" (GP 12). The picnic is given still more impact when Carr writes: "It was only a short while after our picnic that Mother died. Her death broke Father" (GP 12).

The picnic shows how much of a symbolic arranger Carr was. She placed her mother's picnic directly after her first record of rebellion (against her father's authority) as part of an arrangement of the script for creativity she

wrote for herself. When she rebels against "authority" in its most patriarchal form and is punished, her mother offers her a free and natural escape, free of the "Englishness" her father loved to impose on his property and family. She offset English-Canadian culture with Canadian nature, oppression with freedom, male with female, rejection with acceptance; therefore, her portraits of her parents are made to encapsulate the hallmarks of Carr's struggle to be an artist. They are the icons of the conflict she designed between "nature" and "society": and it was in them that she located the emotional wellsprings of her creative drive.

If, as Peter Sanger believes, Carr invented the picnic incident (Sanger 223), her symbolic representation of this formative incident becomes all the more powerful. It was so necessary to her life narrative of conflict that, like the birds of Pause, Carr had to make it happen to explain why she went to art school against family wishes directly after it occurred in a chapter called "Drawing and Insubordination". The picnic was meant to be the "spiritual" root of her later linkage of art, nature and rebellion against a family, and then a society, and then a country, which disapproved of these things. In the background of an artistic impulse formed of opposition, linked to "God" via a transcendentalist, religious revolt against traditional religious fervour, the picnic set the tone for Carr's painful, even mythic underpinnings of her

creative life.

As a "distortion" of a foundational event, the picnic could also have been a translation into symbolic territory of things Carr found too painful to talk about, like her mother's death or the real reason for her break with her father--he had, in fact, frightened her with the facts of sexual production and she had recoiled, repelled by it (Tippett 261). In other writings where Carr wanted to express feelings which the actual narrative could not bear, she translated painful details into aspects of her overall life-narrative, as her needs for its expression arose.

In the stories "How Long" and "Loo" from The House of All Sorts--and in the unpublished versions "Fist" and "Struck"--are different versions of the same event which show how Carr rearranged painful incidents in terms of her narrational needs. The central incident involves a man striking Carr in her coal cellar. In "How Long", the man is "crude, enormous, coarse; his fleshy hands had fingers like bananas." He "was grinding the life of his little third wife", and wore thick, sinister glasses¹¹. One of the pipes in his flat froze and he came to the coal cellar to complain. When Carr protested that getting a plumber was impossible, he struck her across the cheek. She fell into the coal bin, and then stumbled from the cellar, moaning "How long, house, how long?" (HS 156). "Loo" is another version of the same story. But this time, Carr had just

come from her sister's deathbed and was tending the coal furnace when the man, shouting about his frozen pipes, struck her in the face, knocking her into the coal pile. He began to leave, then turned to strike her again. Carr turned the garden hose on him, knocking the glasses from his face. He ran away. Carr struck her dog Loo, who was trying to comfort her, and she regretted her own brutality (HS 216-17).

The basis for both versions is probably the account of the actual incident given by Carr's friend and tenant, Kate Mather. According to Mather, the man was not a tenant but a weekend transient whom Carr caught shovelling coal into the furnace. They quarrelled, Carr pulled his glasses off and stamped on them, and he pushed her into the coal bin (Blanchard 144). Carr distorted the actual event but did not erase its elements. Rather, she translated them as her narrative needs changed. "How Long" is the part of the collection dealing with Carr's hatred of landladying, since she was prevented from being an artist while she kept the boarding house. Therefore, Carr presents herself as a brutalized victim on par with her "boarder's" wife, forced to live with cruel people. "Loo" is in the collection "Bobtails", which shows how animals are more capable of natural goodness than people, and how Carr could not have survived as a landlady without them. So, she is victim who can retaliate, but who is also capable of brutality;

landladying has, in fact, "brutalized" her as well as victimized her, but Loo, in her animal/angelic role, provides the touch of "humanity" Carr needs when the dog forgives her. The transient and the irate landlady have been moved into a symbolic dimension to serve Carr's emotional and narrative needs, the same dimension where Small, accompanied by sympathetic animals, travels.

Conclusion

Carr's oil-on-paper sketch "Sunshine and Tumult" (1938-39) (fig. 3.5) shows how powerfully she was able, in her last period, to express movement, growth and what she saw as a divine life-force, God, in nature. She described her work at the time as "more fluid. I was more static then [before 1935] and was thinking more of effect than spirit. It is like the difference between play and real life" (H&T 287). In her journal, she exhorted herself to push beyond what she knew, even what she felt, and to watch the trees until she could speak their "language", the same language she had sensed in Lawren Harris' work years before. Her renderings of trees and seascapes bear witness to her determination, as well as to the attention she had paid to her craft and what she felt were its spiritual underpinnings. "[R]eal art is religion, a search for the beauty of God deep in all things", she wrote (H&T 172). Her vocation had become that of visionary: she aimed to make visible, despite the

struggles she faced, to make God's creative power visible to others in her painting (H&T 147).

But if the final phases of her art showed how she had paid "attention" artistically and spiritually during her shifts from a recorder, to an interpreter, to a visionary, most of her autobiographical writings show the price she felt that she had paid, in retrospect, for that attention. To write them, she subjected the events of her life to a strict discipline, the same discipline which she exercised when she painted, pouring the hurts and triumphs of her life through a transcendent filter, transforming the trees and skies of British Columbia into signs of the presence of God. Emily Carr viewed painting as a calling, hard-won, to change the shape of what she saw into the religious truths she felt. And late in her life, when she could not paint, she turned that discipline on her own life and restructured it as a narrative to fit the artist-visionary identity she had assumed since 1927, eliminating detail from her life to make its "point" stand out all the more. It was, in effect, a second identity which had been implied in the turbulence of her work but never made vocal. Using her own texts in the way she had used the poetry of Tennyson and the art of the West Coast Indians, she sought to transform, and even transcend, the material of her own life to make it an allegory of repression and resistance, restriction and creativity--a series of "fictions" which healed her hurts



Fig. 3.5

and, perhaps, gave her the strength to achieve in her art the synthesis between the visual and the eternal which she had worked so hard to realize. As a co-narrative containing everything which the paintings had left unexpressed, Carr's words to herself about painting could apply to her autobiographical writing as well:

The idea must run through the whole, the story that arrested you and urged the desire to express it, the story that God told you through that combination of growth. The picture side of the thing is the relationship of the objects to each other in one concerted movement, so that the whole gets up and goes, lifting the looker with it, sky, sea, trees affecting each other (H&T 185).

In her constructed, concentrated act of retrospection, this is what Emily Carr tried to do in her autobiographical writings as well, writing one idea, one theme of vocation into the realm of God, in one movement, from the viewpoint of one moment.

Notes

1.Emily Carr, Hundreds and Thousands: the Journals of Emily Carr (Clarke, Irwin & Co. Ltd.: Toronto, 1966), 185. Subsequent references will be by "H&T" and the page number.

2.Emily Carr, Growing Pains: the Autobiography of Emily Carr (Oxford UP: Toronto, 1946). Subsequent references will be by "GP" and the page number.

3.Emily Carr, Klee Wyck (Clarke, Irwin & Co. Ltd.: Toronto, 1941), 101. Subsequent references will be by "KW" and the page number.

4.Tippett believes that this was Carr's diagnosis (57), based on the Saitorium's patient registry. Blanchard argues that these records have disappeared and that it was irregular practice to list diagnoses in it in any case (90). Whatever the diagnosis, Carr's rest cure featured many of the elements of the treatment for hysterics at the time, and her symptoms closely matched those for hysteria. See the Encyclopedia of Psychology v. 1, 292-2 for a description of the causes and treatment for hysteria.

5.In Growing Pains, Carr mentioned that just after she left the Sanitorium she wrote and illustrated a satire on the "San" treatment to make her doctor and matron laugh. She did the sketches and verses "steadily crying all the while . . . I just ignored the stupid tears" (259). Some of these may have found their way into Pause.

6.Emily Carr, Pause, a Sketchbook (Clarke, Irwin & Co. Ltd.: Toronto, 1953), 3. Subsequent references will be by "Pause" and the page number.

7.While Carr may not have had hysteria, it is possible that if the diagnosis was recorded, she knew it, and knew too that hysteria was thought to have been caused by a sexual dysfunction (Blanchard 90).

8. Emily Carr, The Heart of a Peacock (Oxford UP: Toronto, 1953), 3. Subsequent references will be by "HP" and the page number.
9. Emily Carr, The Book of Small (Oxford UP: Toronto, 1942), 30. Subsequent references will be to "BS" and the page number.
10. As early as her story "The Cow Yard" Carr wrote as Small, although Blanchard may be correct that Small developed while Carr and Dilworth worked on The Book of Small together (Blanchard 282). However, Carole Pearson in her memoir Emily Carr as I Knew Her mentions that Carr told her stories of her childhood as Small -- which would mean that Small was in existence before Carr began to write stories.
11. Emily Carr, The House of All Sorts (Oxford UP: Toronto, 1944), 154-55. Subsequent references will be to "HS" and the page number.

CONCLUSION

But what do you call someone who invites you to step outside the rational world and to contend with the imponderables? Someone who does this without words but with signs, symbols, arcane intimations arranged on surfaces, slyly passing for paintings, where the very absences make their comment, where something you think you recognize, a wheel, a beetle or a blaze has been put there as point, not paint.

--Dorothea Tanning,
Birthday

On one level, what William Kurelek and Emily Carr were doing with art and autobiography may seem vastly different. Kurelek created a complex system of interdependent visual and written signs, bearing the imprint of his past in the light of his Catholic-Christian orientation. Carr, meanwhile, used writing to exhort herself to realize in paint what she saw in religious terms, and later used her autobiographical writings to reconstruct her life as a part of the paintings she had, finally, achieved, healing the wounds -- social, psychological, spiritual -- she had suffered in order to make herself an artist on a spiritual level.

But on another level, Carr and Kurelek shared similar motivations. Working outside of artistic traditions in

Canada, both of them developed an art of "spiritual" communication, where, in Dorothea Tanning's words, "imponderables" had signs, and even absences had meaning. I would suggest that they found that they could not be the kind of artists who could fashion signs for their beliefs without making a personal history to accompany, and support, their positions as visionaries. Both of them wrote about living in a symbolic world, where everything had been named by them in terms of eternal/personal verities; then they expressed, in visual terms, the "named" signs of their artistic lives -- whether these were Kurelek's neuroses translated as human sin, or Carr's persona Small, refashioning childhood traumas as creative victories. Autobiography gave them a place to anchor themselves between their suffering and, in their eyes, the sacred, because it gave names to both. As artists who lived, moved and breathed in symbolic spaces, autobiography became the written accompaniment, the libretto, for their painted and painting lives. Writing gave them, in medias res and in retrospect, a pacified territory of personal signs to draw on and in -- as George Gusdorf wrote, a space of speaking:

Naming establishes a right to existence. It is words that make things and beings, that define the relations according to which the order of the world is constituted. To situate oneself in the world, for each of us, is to be at peace with the

network of words that put everything in its place in the environment. Our lived space is a space of speaking, pacified territory in which each name is a solution to a problem (Gusdorf 39).

The problem of living, of painting through the pain of having to communicate inside a network of signs which few could read, made Carr and Kurelek push through into words -- to themselves, to others and sometimes, to God. They used words to construct identities to let them see, and name, the "unseen" in terms of what they perceived, with narratives designed to accomodate their psychic and spiritual needs. Autobiography helped to locate their images as signs for the eternal, like "archetypal" spiritual autobiographies, where the particular is "dialated into sacred history" (Hawkins 24). Once in these spaces, for each of them spiritual, Kurelek and Carr could pass from one mode of seeing to another, a more sacred one, as they moved from words to the images they had created in that spiritual territory. In that movement, both artists used autobiography as a means to access spiritual existence, in Hegelian "dialectical moments" made of personal/sacred time:

This would be a method first of bringing one's own lifetime to mind, of passing from the 'immediate moment' in which one's concerns are confined to the present situation to the 'existential moment' in which one's concerns are extended to one's

future and one's past . . . and of passing from the existential moment in which one's concerns are confined to one's own lifetime to the 'historic moment' in which one's concerns are extended to all time, both the future and the past (Dunne: Hawkins 24).

During the process, their journeying into their pasts began to resemble their pilgrimages to "actual" zones of memory (the bog, the BC woods), and the actual pilgrimages bear sacred meanings. For Kurelek, the bog was a place of eternal return, where he could allow his childhood, the landscape, and his Christian beliefs to occupy ground made sacred by his memories, and his religious beliefs: autobiography, in his captions and published manuscripts, named his own experiences and oriented them on the same ground. For Carr, the woods were a place where she could rise above the struggles of her life to see natural growth, struggling, she felt, towards God: autobiography, in her stories, named, spiritualized, and pacified her own struggles which had, in absentia, given her paintings energy and drive.

Although Gusdorf has said that, "autobiography is not possible in a cultural landscape where consciousness of self does not, properly speaking, exist"¹, both artists used autobiographical writings, whether in sanitoriums, sick-beds or churches, to map themselves into lived spaces.

Autobiography made consciousness, and creativity, possible for them. It constituted an act of power, and narrative control, which they used to lock the psychic pain, the often chaotic nature of their psychic lives, onto their creative lives as artists. For both of them, this was autobiography as instrument and therapy, serving the needs of both psychology and craft.

Out of conflicts with "authority", artistic and personal struggles, frustrations, and the anger which gave their work passion as well as impact, Kurelek and Carr made life narratives to accompany, and support, what they tried to do visually. In that lived space, where signs could be named, "domesticated" and harnessed to their spiritual motivations, their visual art gained the narrative power, in Dylan Thomas' words, "to get things straight. Out of the inevitable conflict of images -- inevitable; because of the creative, recreative, destructive and contradictory nature of the motivating centre . . . to make that momentary peace which is a poem."² Or, in a moment of peace, when all signs had names, paintings.

Notes

1. Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography", Olney 1980, 30.

2. Dylan Thomas, letter to Harry Treece, The Poetry of Dylan Thomas, ed. Elder Obon, publisher unknown, 34-35.

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