

Portents

Spirit and the wilderness ...
When Mark Tobey arrived
fresh from Paris on the Seattle ferry
I had felt abandoned for years,
a paste solitaire in Victoria's
steel-claw setting,
isolation hooking deep into my flesh.
People smirked
at my pram full of animals
while I shopped,
another of the Carr antiques
pottering all around town —
this one trying her darnedest,
Lizzie said, to spatter our late
father's honour with paint.

Slowly I was beginning to heal:
the words 'Group of Seven'
and 'holy' sweet on my tongue;
the totems I sketched that summer
bivouacked all over the Charlottes
imbued with a forest stillness
I ached so much to get at.
Wrenching me, with little ruckus,
away from an eternity of housework,
Mark handed me a camel-hair brush.
In my studio he held court,
the assembled steeped each night
in his epiphanies in France.
He talked of the manipulation
of light and perspective,
the latent power of objects
suddenly transfigured by space.

His ideas took me aback.
A totem mother and babe
rose out of my darkness,
an interior light I had only
guessed at housed in her loins;
her hands so full with love
I made them huge and distorted
as they enfolded the child,
his face wise as a father

of fathers, a talisman
of all that is given,
lost, found, and forgiven.

Quiet fell the evening inside me,
my life striations of cloud
at last lifting away from the moon.
The heart of the forest thrown open before me,
I approached overwhelmed,
myself a daughter of prayer
conceived by Father in Mother,
for God's pleasure,
at the edge of the world.