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Visual and Audible Expressions of the North based on the Works of Selected Canadian Artists and Henry Beissel's *Cantos North*

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Abstract

The article focuses on the visual and audible expressions (the image /"image-ings" and sound effects) of Canadian artists and poets (C.D. Shanly and Henry Beissel) and their interpretation of the North. Since there is an abundance of works related to this topic, I have limited my focus of the artistic works (paintings specifically) to W. B. Bruce's (*The Phantom Hunter*) and Lawren Harris's arctic paintings (*Lake and Mountains*, *Winter Comes from the Arctic to the Temperate Zone*, *Mount Robson*, and *Mount Lefroy*). The aim of the article is to compare and analyse the poems with the selected paintings and to illustrate (through word selection, metaphorical images, colours, images, formations etc.) how and to what extent the visual (the paintings) and audible (the poem) complement each other and give an added force to how we perceive these works through our senses.

Keywords: The Northwest Passage, myth of the North, visual snow-scapes, C.D. Shanly, Henry Beissel, W.B. Bruce, Lawren Harris, Group of Seven

Résumé

Cet article se penche sur les expressions visuelles et sonores (image / «image-ings» et effets sonores) d'artistes et de poètes canadiens (C.D. Shanly et Henry Beissel) et leur interprétation du Nord. Compte tenu de l'abondance de travaux traitant ce sujet, la présente étude se focalise sur les œuvres plastiques (plus particulièrement picturales) notamment celles de W.B. Bruce (*Le Chasseur fantôme*) et sur les scènes arctiques de Lawren Harris (*Lac et montagnes*, *Winter Comes from the Arctic to the Temperate Zone*, *Le mont Robson* et *Le mont Lefroy*). Le but de l'article est de comparer et d'analyser les poèmes avec les toiles sélectionnées et d'illustrer (à travers une analyse du choix des mots, images métaphoriques, couleurs, images, formations etc.) comment et dans quelle mesure le visuel (les tableaux) et l'audible (le poème) se complètent et confèrent plus de force à la façon dont nous percevons ces œuvres.

Mots-clés : Passage du Nord-Ouest, mythe du Nord, paysages de neige, C.D. Shanly, Henry Beissel, W.B. Bruce, Lawren Harris, Groupe des Sept



The article focuses on the visual and audible expressions (the image and sound effects) of Canadian artists and poets and their interpretation of the North. As the literary and artistic interpretations on and about the North are countless, I have limited my article to the artistic works, specifically the paintings, of William Blair Bruce, and The Group of Seven (with a focus on Lawren Harris's Northern paintings). These paintings will be compared and contrasted with the epic work of Henry Beissel (*Cantos North* -1982) in seeking to establish and understand the concept of what the North has come to mean and how the myth and fiction of past centuries has given layers of theories and misconceptions.

How does one begin to define a conceptual understanding of the North? This is an entity that is loaded with theories, myths, and legends that have accumulated during the past centuries. The obvious starting point is to try and define the whole concept of the Canadian North. Therefore, it can be stated that the North is at once a geographical fact and a fluid, ungraspable metaphor. The myth that has evolved dates back many centuries, which has held many adventurers and seafarers intrigued and occupied. The mysteries evolved mostly due to the fact that the areas of the Northern hemisphere were difficult to navigate, because of the unfavourable weather conditions prevailing for most of the year. These areas were unaccountably viewed as a blank space and as such allowed a whole series of speculations and theories to build up.

One of the most enduring theories was the existence of the Northwest Passage. This was supposed to flow between the land bridge and America through which one may reach North Eastern Asia, the Orient, and its riches. The appropriation of those territories was therefore considered crucial by the great European monarchies. The charting of the Arctic was a very slow and gradual process over the past centuries roughly from the early fifteenth to the early twentieth century in which each and every expedition drew further territories on the map. Though these territories were considered empty by the white European man, one of the first discoveries within these areas was the fact that it was in fact inhabited by the Inuit and Native Peoples. This of course did not stop further expeditions, but enforced the realization that inland expeditions may rely on the resources and guidance of the local population.

The mystery surrounding the Arctic and the Northwest Passage created a myth of the North that was imagined as being empty and void of human inhabitants. The erasure of the Native Peoples and the Inuit from the landscape was important in maintaining this myth throughout the centuries. After all, an uninhabited and seemingly empty landscape allowed the European monarchies unlimited and undisturbed access to these lands. The notion of charting “seemingly” undiscovered and new areas (thus the term “Terra Nova” is often used) gave the expeditions further zest and bravado. The intention of these adventurous men and wealthy merchants was ultimately twofold: to attain fame and huge profit from whatever “riches” could be had.



Hundreds of men sacrificed their lives in search of the Northwest Passage, a myth that kept expeditions going until the early twentieth century. Whether it was worth it is certainly questionable. Nevertheless, the continuous output of works written on and about the north since the sixteenth century has remained constant. The paradoxical fascination for this vast, empty, barren and hostile land defies comprehension and reason, which is imagined as a “sinister and menacing” (1971: 142) monster by Northrop Frye that arouses “stark terror” (1971: 138) in those who envision it. Nevertheless, the North seeks to define and formulate the ungraspable with the fantastical. Noteworthy examples are many, Sherrill Grace for example, refers to the powerful “visual images” (2009: 20) that have influenced Europeans throughout history as Gerardus Mercator’s *Map of the Arctic* (1569)¹, which combine fact and fiction in its imagining of the North. The “image-ing” (Grace 2009: 20) of the North as Grace notes provides countless fanciful visual and audible representations past and present.

In defining or “image-ing” the North Henry Beissel’s epic work, *Cantos North* (1982), envisions a “vast blank canvas of a land” (1982: 7). This short, but extremely complex description carries within it the many and varied meanings that have accumulated in the past. The formation of definitions, therefore, is an often discussed issue that concern the Canadian North. Inevitably, one must distinguish between the North’s image and its reality. A certain fact is that nearly half of Canada’s land mass lies north of the sixtieth parallel. Where is the North or rather from where do we define the North? One often accepted view is that Canada’s North is part of the great sweep of northern lands and seas above where most Canadians live (“The Canadian North”). Other notions view the Canadian North or the North as a political definition for a region that consists of Canada’s three territories: Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Yet, an alternative definition that concerns the description and natural phenomena in general, says that it is that portion of the country that lies north of the tree line (this includes Canada’s geographical centre): covering most of Nunavut, and the northerly parts of the Northwest Territories, Yukon, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and Labrador. Based on this popular imagination white people do not seem to perceive the North as a whole, but rather “regard only particular and very localized northern situations”, which would include references to the Northwest Passage, a particular Arctic expedition, the Inuit, the cold and possibly the Klondike (Hamelin 1989: 7). The whole notion reflecting on Cartier’s expression with reference to the North, “the land God gave to Cain,” still echoing in scientific literature in mid twentieth century (Hamelin 1989: 8).

1) Gerardus Mercator (1512–94), a Flemish cartographer, is well known for developing the Mercator projection map. This colourful map of the North Pole is a mixture of contemporary medieval information and myths from exploration in the Arctic regions and undiscovered areas of open waters. (“Mercator Gerardus”)



The idea of the North seems altogether ungraspable and its conceptual boundaries are also fluid. “The North occupies the imagination, filling it with dreams of high adventure and fabulous wealth. To a Canadian, North is an idea, not a location; a myth, a promise, a destiny” (Francis 1986: 152). The concept of nordicity, thereby, depends on the measure of northernness that other Arctic territories share. This means that Canada is a country situated in the northern part of North America, whose population is concentrated along its borders with the United States and is often assumed not to have a ‘south’. Why? This is due to the fact that ‘the South’ is only perceived as a region when it is contrasted to or viewed from those in ‘the North’ (“Canada’s Northern Strategy”). If we are not looking for physiographical or political definitions, but merely wish to approach this from a traditional and partly literary angle we may say that

It is the land of the midnight sun, of the Klondike Gold Rush and the Northwest Passage, of Robert Service and “The Cremation of Sam McGee,” of the search for the lost Franklin Expedition and the law of the North-West Mounted Police. It is also towering mountains, rushing rivers, and Canada’s first self-governing Native territory. This is the North, truly the beautiful land. (Hughes 2003: 14)

The conceptual images of the North projected by outsiders are often based on the North as visual “image-ings” (as quoted from Grace) rather than the reality of the region. The popular view of the North as a “cold, forbidding, and inhospitable wilderness” (Coates 1989: 3) has done more harm than good in terms of development. These northerly areas are often viewed as being barren and desolate (as previously quoted from Beissel) and without any form of human habitation (and often photographed as such), is only one of the false conceptions that still survive in our minds.

Notable artistic representations of the Northern regions throughout the past centuries have been numerous, but the quantitative output tends to increase during the course of the 19th and early 20th century. This era produced countless artistic and literary depictions of the North in the form of paintings, travelogues, diaries, novels, short stories and films. The many works in general focus on the Northern terrain as an empty (hence uninhabited, “Terra incognita”) and barren land. The Native Peoples and the Inuit are virtually excluded from most accounts both visual and written.

One of the most well-known and popular images depicting the vast snowy northern landscape was given expression in William Blair Bruce’s painting *The Phantom Hunter* (1888), recently renamed *The Phantom of the Snow*.

With this painting the Hamilton-born painter became an instant success and the painting was accepted in the 1888 Paris Salon, thereby distinguishing him as Canada’s first notable impressionist painter. This is a “narrative, mimetic painting, with representational figures in a recognizable northern snow-scape” (Grace 2001: 116).



Image 1: W. B. Bruce: *The Phantom Hunter* (1888)

The work was inspired by C.D. Shanly's poem "The Walker of the Snow" (1859), in which a hunter meets his death by freezing. The allusion to the immense power and strength of the natural elements illustrated in the painting, which overpowers the human being and his ability to survive under such harsh conditions is reflected upon in the following extract from the poem.

For I saw by the sickly moonlight,
As I followed, bending low,
That the walking of the stranger
Left no footmarks on the snow.

Then the fear-chill gathered o'er me,
Like a shroud around me cast,
As I sank upon the snow-drift
Where the Shadow-hunter passed.
(Shanly, *The Walker of the Snow*)



Therefore, “the haunting image of the solitary trapper abandoned in the barren snow-scape has become a metaphor of individual struggle as well as a pictorial touchstone of northern identity” (“Art Gallery Hamilton”). Here, white man is presented as an epic hero, who struggles with the natural elements, whereby this individual battle is highlighted and magnified to achieve a highly melodramatic and sentimental image. The portrayal of the “solitary trapper” presents man desperately fighting against the all-encompassing cold and inhospitable landscape. This is, however, a lost battle which continues until the very last breath. No positive outcome is possible.

The interpretation of the poem offers several layers of readings making it out to be much more complex than a first reading may suggest. The poem introduces an element that is based on legends and folktales about the “Shadow Hunter”, a figure, who “bears resemblance to the Windigo of Ojibwa and Cree mythology” (Grace 2009: 25). The poem designates a frame structure, in which the “Walker of the Snow” relates the events, in other words the story, of the past to a “good Master”. The demarcation of time becomes insignificant as past seems to merge with the present. Emphasis is laid on the timelessness of the event. The highly dramatized Gothic presentation of the scenery, enhances and gives added force to the visual and audible expressions (that influence our perceptions of sight and sound), through the images of “cold December”, “pale moon”, “sombre wood”, “no sound of life or motion”, and the “wailing of the moose-bird” (Shanly). This creates a chilling and threatening atmosphere, which is appropriately illustrated in Bruce’s painting through the use of cold grey, white and black tones.² The “story-within-a-story” feature of the poem relates the appearance of the “Shadow hunter” as a “dusky figure ...in a capuchin of gray”, who “left no footmarks on the snow” (Shanly). The poem and painting together create a Gothic ghost story and this chilling suspense is further enhanced by the highly eerie and uncanny situation of the “I” persona. His loneliness, isolation and the emerging darkness deepen his uncertainty emphasizing the “fear-chill” that falls upon him appearing twice in the poem. Into this loneliness appears the “dusky stranger” out of nowhere, who however does not communicate in any way, merely “travelled side by side” with him (Shanly). The isolation, loneliness, deprivation, inability to communicate are key entities within the poem. The contradiction that surfaces at the end of the poem, when the “I” narrator steps out of the “story” into the present time of the poem is rather confusing. The story ends with the “Walker of the Snow” having been found “with my dark hair blanched and whitened / As the snow in which I lay/ ...I had seen the Shadow Hunter/ And withered in his blight” (Shanly). These lines clearly indicate that

2) The painting, according to Grace, is not as cold and solemn as the reproductions tend to suggest, but warmer “with flecks of peach tones” that give it an “inner warmth and glow”. And the sky for example which is seen as being dark in the reproductions have areas of pale turquoise, with stars in the sky, one of which is the North or Pole Star, this being very bright (Grace 2001: 116).



the man dies during the night and the “stranger” with the “capuchin of gray” is the masculine presence of death. According to Grace,

Death in the form of this ghostly male “Shadow Hunter” travels, as does the storyteller, who, we should remember, is himself a hunter, as the story-teller’s only companion. In at least one reading of the situation, he is the storyteller or *Doppelgänger* (and thus his soul), which passes from him and leaves him behind as part of the feminine, natural world he has dared to penetrate. (Grace 2001: 112)

The valley that the storyteller, in other words the “Walker of the Snow”, has entered is the “female space” (Grace 2001: 113) associated with the deadly natural elements (the moon, snow, the frozen December night, stars, etc.), which do not allow him to leave the “haunted valley” (Shanly). He falls and dies and becomes one with the snow, thus he is embraced and taken in by Mother Nature. The painting clearly shows this fallen figure and part of his face, which according to Joan Murray³ “[...]’represents Bruce’s own collapse and disorientation of 1885–86’, and she says that ‘the face so far as it can be seen, is his face.’” (Grace 2001: 115)⁴ If the face is that of Bruce, then the portrait is in fact a “self-portrait”, as Grace acknowledges, and the key words listed above, that refer to the emotional and psychological turmoil of the storyteller in the poem and the fallen figure’s hopelessness, reflect the artist’s mental disorientation and the two mutually complement each other and give the painting added force.

The idea of isolation, fear and loss of orientation that is heavily emphasized in Shanly’s and Bruce’s work may be connected with Henry Beissel’s epic poem. Beissel provides numerous references to the images of the “Shadow Hunter”, the “Walker of the snow” and Bruce’s “Phantom” in *Cantos North* (1982: 31), which is evident in the following extract:

up north
my love
where you follow
tracks in the snow

you fail to recognize
till you fall
to a cold embrace

3) Joan Murray is a leading scholar on William Blair Bruce’s work (Grace 2001: 115).

4) According to Joan Murray, W. Blair Bruce had a nervous breakdown and he returned to Canada from Europe in 1885. It was here in Canada that he sketched a snowbank scene behind his family’s Hamilton home (Grace 2001: 115)



in the arms
of a familiar shadow
final as a statement:
folie de la neige.

This extract is taken from the *Canto* titled *Compass and Circles*. The compass is the instrument used to help orientation and navigation, however the “circles” (“we have run circles” as Beissel writes) are a suggestion that something has gone amiss. The circles are also cycles that contain the cycle of nature and plant life, the cycle of human history, the cyclical motion of the planets and the Earth, and the natural elements (reflecting on the feminine symbolic entity), but “We are each compass / and circle drawing / our solitary lives / clockwise / on the ground” (Beissel 1982: 31–2). If the cyclical motion is an eternal renewal of life (thus cycles), then this creates a paradox. Though the “walker of the snow” seems to know his way, Bruce offers help by placing the North Star in the right hand corner of the painting. Perhaps showing that there is a way out and orientation is possible, if one is able to see, but the delusion and fear that overcomes the individual results in madness and frenzy blocking all visual perception. In the North “Our circles shrink to a still point” (Beissel 1982: 31), and this is where the human being is forced to stop and consider, because the “North is / where all parallels converge / [...] into the mystery / surrounding us” (1982: 35). This “mystery” baffles the white man and as he cannot relate and understand its essence he (man in general) must inevitably fall. Here, we come across words that are obvious references to Shanly’s poem and Bruce’s painting: “tracks”, “snow”, “fall”, “cold embrace”, “familiar shadow” (Beissel 1982: 31). The “familiar shadow” is a clear indication of the symbolic image of death and its perpetual presence. And the “cold embrace” clearly indicating the feminine aspect of Earth that takes back the masculine hunter into its heart, “for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19). The final statement, *folie de la neige*, however, written in French and in italics (to give it major emphasis) sums up Beissel’s conceptual belief of the North and may be translated as the “delusion or madness of the snow”. Interestingly, Beissel presents white man as the colonizer and conqueror figure in his epic work, who is tricked and misled (and deservedly so according to Beissel) by the natural elements. This further highlights the mad frenzy and depths of despair of the individual on the verge of death in the cold and isolated landscape (to be seen in Bruce’s painting, heard in Shanly’s and Beissel’s poems). The climax of the situation, presented in the aforementioned works, is charged with tension (marked by delusion) from which death is a welcome release. The visual and audible illustrations presented, therefore, mutually complement and simultaneously highlight one another in their depictions of the North.



The image of the Northern myth in Canadian art in the first half of the 20th century was strengthened by the paintings of the ‘national movement’ in Canadian art, The Group of Seven. They identified the Canadian being through the Canadian landscape, and this became the essence of their painting. For them and through their works the North became a mirror of national character and identity. They portrayed the rugged terrain of the Canadian Shield and the changing seasons in the Northern woods. The would-be members of The Group travelled to Algonquin Park, Ontario, in order to sketch along with Tom Thomson. Between 1918 and 1921 several of the Group, including Harris, Jackson, Lismer and Johnston travelled to Algoma country (northern Ontario), north of Algonquin Park, above Georgian Bay and east of Lake Superior. Another region the artists enjoyed exploring and found inspiration was the north shore of Lake Superior. In their exploration of the north shore of Lake Superior they were able to discover new sources of visual inspiration. The artists of The Group believed that nature was more than simply a visual feast of form and colour, and sought in their work, like other landscape artists of similar belief, like the Romantics, to transcend mere physical description of the outside world. They regarded nature as a powerful spiritual force.

The image of the North as being mysterious and mystical definitely inspired The Group’s Romantic nationalist vision (Hulan 2002: 140). They realized that the Canadian northern landscape, as it is different in its colour scheme, immensity and appearance cannot be painted using the colours and methods studied in Europe. Therefore, they experimented outdoors *en plein air* in natural surroundings and concentrated on observing the slightest nuances under different weather conditions in colour, movement and light effects. “For The Group, especially for its most articulate spokesman, Lawren Harris, the natural environment was the North, although, the discovery that Canadian nationality was connected with the north was hardly new” (2002: 140). Harris painted for five successive autumns in Algoma and Lake Superior (1917–22), in the Rockies from 1924 on, and in the Arctic in 1930 in his personal search for a landscape that would enable him to express his spiritual beliefs. In their work The Group focused on the idea of the “Canadian North” and “Canada as north,” thereby conflating this image, but their images (here the reference is only to the landscapes) consist of only the natural elements.

The Group’s paintings depicting the various natural phenomena are basically without human beings. The Aboriginal Peoples never feature on the paintings of The Group, they are dealt with as a non-existent entity. This naturally raises a number of ideological questions, but this is not the present issue of this paper. “The north is represented as a blank page from which the presence of all people have been erased, presenting the viewer with a territory to be occupied and possessed (hence the term “Terra Incognita”), and a symbolic space, a topos being named” (Hulan 2002: 141). The notion



of using the “blank page” imagery with reference to the North is quite common and refers back to Beissel’s opening phrase of the “vast blank canvas of a land” (1982: 7) used previously in the article. The visual depictions of the North, therefore, commonly stress the emptiness of the land with a major emphasis on the immense power of the natural elements that white man must ultimately conquer.

What Lawren Harris sought in nature, especially the North, and projected through his paintings was the individual union with the greater self, that is timeless and beautiful, where the personal is to be transcended. As Harris said, “All great art is impersonal, achieved by a sublimation of a personal ecstasy” (Davis 109). And the easiest place to see that greater, perfect world is out in nature. His paintings from the late 1920s illustrate his movement from early Impressionism to stark landscapes of the Canadian North (Algoma, then north shore of Lake Superior) and the Arctic creating abstract and simplified forms. Examples for the abstract representations of the North are many, therefore allow me to illustrate this with a few examples. The painting *Lake and Mountains* (1928)⁵ features an expanse of water in the foreground, with nicely curving hills or mountainous range, completed with a huge rugged mountain jutting out into the sky in the background. The illustration of the sky takes up roughly half the painting giving added force to the higher celestial spheres. The tones used vary from the various shades of blues, white and black, presenting an altogether “cold” depiction of the North. The mountains seem to blend and open up into the vast expanse of sky, all movement projecting upwards toward the higher spheres. The swirling motion of the clouds, however, projects a horizontal cyclical movement, which seem to urge and press this upward movement further. In addition this cyclical movement of nature (renewal and cycle already referred to earlier) also reminds one of Beissel’s notion of “epicycles/ upon epicycles/ spinning on and off” (1982: 36).

Another example is Lawren Harris’s *Winter Comes from the Arctic to the Temperate Zone* (1935)⁶, which is in many ways like the previous painting in its use of colours of blues, greys and white, though in this case there are glaciers in the foreground, however the image of the water surrounding the mountains is light blue and dark, almost black. As in the previous painting the mountains and glaciers strive upward, but here one specific mountain peak with tones of blues and white seem to radiate outwards and upwards. This immense radiation appropriately defines Beissel’s notion of the North as a place “where all parallels/ converge/ to open out [...] into the mystery/ surrounding us” (1982: 35). Here too, the visual (the paintings) and audible (the poem) complement each other and give an added force to how we perceive these through our senses.

5) *Lake and Mountains* (1928) requires copyright permission for reproduction; hence a web page link is provided in the “Works cited” section.

6) *Winter Comes from the Arctic to the Temperate Zone* (1935) requires copyright permission for reproduction; hence a web page link is provided in the “Works cited” section.



Within the series of Arctic paintings two further works should be mentioned by Lawren Harris, *Mount Robson* (1929)⁷ and *Mount Lefroy* (1930)⁸. These illustrate huge mountains in various shades of browns and white, with their highest points touching the cloud and sky. No stretches of water is seen here. The mountain and the sky dominate the works. Both paintings tend to focus on the middle and top peaks, as if the viewer were suspended in mid-air. The motion of the mountains reaching out towards the sky are painted in the form of vertical stripes, while the sky is painted in different shades of blues in horizontal layers in *Mount Robson*, while there is a noticeable circular, swirling movement in *Mount Lefroy*. These opposing movements enhance a continuous upward motion that strive to reach out and touch the heavenly spheres. This ceaseless upward movement is highlighted by Beissel in his poem and the image the viewer is given is that of a “bizarre patchwork quilt” (1982: 49):

[...] range after range of mountains
 hot and cold
 wet and dry
 the elements clash in countless valleys
 fighting their way up for possession of every peak
 and crevice.
 (Beissel 1982: 49)

The visual “image-ings” (as mentioned earlier) of the above paintings fully complement the audible expression provided in Beissel’s *Cantos North*. The *Cantos* is a universal epic that discusses Northern Canada with its ancient forests, tundra and eternal ice. The work is a cycle⁹ of poems, consisting of twelve Cantos, focussing on Canada as a land, as a state with flashes of history incorporated, and as an idea. The notion of the land as being eternal and existing before the time it was “Gondwanaland” (1982: 8) is heavily interlinked with the myth of the North. As the author stresses, this region with its emptiness, and untouched purity, is a “vast blank canvas of a land” (1982: 7). Beissel fully emphasizes the awe-inspiring nature of the land and the fact that “this vast stretch of frozen country never yielded to imperial command” (1982: 26). The primordial emptiness of the North offers a challenge to white man, but this land cannot be conquered. And only “to endure is to belong” (1982: 39), which Beissel further

7) *Mount Robson* (1929) requires copyright permission for reproduction; hence a web page link is provided in the “Works cited” section.

8) *Mount Lefroy* (1930) requires copyright permission for reproduction; hence a web page link is provided in the “Works cited” section.

9) The word “cycle” here is used metaphorically to refer to the cycle, circle, circular, and cyclical movements within nature, animal life, plant life, life of human beings, and human history, etc. The circular movement emphasizing the constant, ceaseless and endless motion of life and existence.



explains that “not by mastering the tree do you harvest its fruit but by submitting proudly to its seasons” (1982: 39).

Therefore, “the north is a condition of the south” (Beissel 1982: 44), and “the north is the graveyard of all ambition” (1982: 57), it all begins and ends here, this is the core of mother earth to which man remains bound. This bond or bondage between the human being (here specifically white man) and the North is a “craving of the blood” (Beissel 1982: 32). The North when seen as a monster (N. Frye’s reference) that attracts its prey (this being white man), which in turn wants to conquer (kill, slay to use the animal imagery) the monster, however neither is fully capable of extinguishing the other. Beissel’s answer to this utterly complex dilemma is to submit “proudly to its [the North’s] seasons” (1982: 39).

To submit or to conquer? The visual “image-ings” (Bruce’s and Harris’s paintings) that have been analysed in the present article focus in general on one or other aspect of conquering the northern sphere. The North offers a challenge, which ultimately cannot be rejected by the colonizer and conqueror. This aspect is clearly present in Bruce’s painting where the “Walker of the snow” keeps going against all odds, through which he encounters death itself. In Lawren Harris’s paintings we see a similar concept in the manner of transcendental unity with the heavenly spheres, which in a sense also entails a certain “conquering” or overcoming of the natural elements (the grand and majestic mountains), but never can we speak of “submitting” as Beissel suggests. In his *Cantos* Beissel gives an account of the creation of the world and the harmonious unity of the natural elements. This eternal unity, according to Beissel, was disrupted by the white colonizer with the intention to conquer and colonize, but ultimately at the cost of hundreds of lives.

To fully understand the North it needs to be experienced and the Canadian northern landscapes featuring in the paintings and artistic representations of The Group of Seven (Lawren Harris) and W. B. Bruce are also an experience projecting vivid “image-ings” of landscapes (with vast expanses of sky, huge glaciers with vibrant colours, rock formations, snow, the Pole Star, darkness etc.), while the poetic endeavours focus on audibility through the highly effective metaphorical images and selected words used to convey and enhance these ideas (as in Shanly’s and Beissel’s poetry). These visual and audible images emphasize and mutually complement the immense power and spiritual force of Nature and the natural elements that have an altogether overwhelming effect on Man (the human being). The poetic endeavours discussed in the essay underline and stress the vibrant and overpowering forces that Man encounters and experiences in the northern regions of Canada. Therefore, both the poetic and artistic works are vital experiments in coming to terms and experiencing Canada’s North and the myth of the North.



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