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6325 Monroe Ave Chicago.*

Beyond the Beckoning Border

WITH
AGNES DEANS CAMERON

FOUR TRAVEL-
TALKS ON
WESTERN AND
NORTHERN
CANADA
BY THE
VICE-PRESIDENT
OF
THE CANADIAN
WOMEN'S
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- 1—**WHEAT, THE WIZARD OF THE NORTH.** The Story of Canada's Wheat Belt, a bread-yielding plain as large as Europe, extending from the Great Lakes to the Rockies and from the invisible parallel of 49, who shall say how far North? Here new cities rise in the night, and surging into the fat mesas come people from the world's four corners. It is the Melting-Pot of the Nations.
- 2—**FROM WHEAT TO WHALES.** The Story of Agnes Deans Cameron's Ten Thousand-Mile Journey in the summer of 1908, from Chicago to the Arctic Ocean by way of the Athabasca, Great Slave Lake and the Mighty Mackenzie, with word-pictures of the Crees, Chipewyans, Dog-Ribs, Yellow-Knives, and fur-clad Eskimo, and side-lights on the Mounted Police, Fur-Traders, and Cloistered Nuns.
- 3—**THE WITCHERY OF THE PEACE.** Miss Cameron's Journey continued from the Eskimo in the Arctic, across Great Slave Lake to Lake Athabasca, and homeward by way of the Peace River and the Lesser Slave. The six weeks in an open boat on the bosom of the Peace include stories of the Chutes of the Peace, Moose-Hunting, the Golden Grain-Fields of Vermilion, America's most northerly Flour-Mill, the Site of Alexander Mackenzie's Last Camp, and Cannibal Louise the Wentigo.
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Tiffany Johnstone

**Seeing for Oneself: Agnes Deans
Cameron's Ironic Critique of
American Literary Discourse in
*The New North***

In 1908, Agnes Deans Cameron, a schoolteacher, journalist and suffragist from Victoria, British Columbia, traveled from Chicago to the Arctic with her niece, Jessie Cameron Brown. Cameron followed the original 1789 route of Alexander Mackenzie and was intent on being one of the first white women to explore and document this northern territory (Roy, "Primacy" 56). She wrote about her trip in the popular book *The New North*, which was published in New York in 1909 by Appleton¹. While *The New North* is written by a Canadian author about Canada, it is deliberately aimed at an American audience. Not only was the book published in the United States, but the narrative also begins and ends in Chicago and repeatedly depicts her Canadian surroundings according to American frontier motifs.

Cameron's fascination with language and literature throughout her trip to the north of Canada explores the way that identity, both individual and cultural, is mythologized through language. She argues for the need to question and expand upon the very frontier myth that she invokes in two overarching ways. First of all, Cameron's use of American frontier rhetoric to describe the Canadian north presents such language as open to novel reinterpretation within a different cultural and ethnic context and

¹ All quotations from *The New North* in this paper are taken from the 1986 edition of the book and correspond with the page numbers for this later edition. The title of this paper is based upon the Winnipeg trapper's advice to Cameron that you must see for yourself (11), thus strengthening Cameron's emphasis on the subjective nature of language that runs throughout *The New North*.

from a female perspective. Secondly, by drawing attention to the fallibility of such rhetoric, she argues for the need to continually rewrite and question the myths by which we define ourselves. With attention to recent theory on women's travel literature and women's autobiography, as well as to the literary and cultural context behind Cameron's work, I will examine her remodeling of the American literary travel writer as one who renegotiates, rather than just reasserts nationalist myths.

I

Scholarship on women's travel writing focuses on the conflicting discourses within such literature. Drawing on Foucault's use of discourse analysis, and Mary Louise Pratt's postcolonial approach to travel literature, Sara Mills explores women's travel writing in *Discourses of Difference* as existing "within a range of power nexuses" (18), including conflicting discourses of femininity and colonialism (18). She argues that to study such literature is to examine how power is simultaneously resisted, complied with and enacted through the process of subject formation (19). Work on autobiography theory and performativity further sheds light on the intersecting cultural and literary discourses within women's travel writing. Critics such as Judith Butler and Sidonie Smith present the female subject as continually reiterated according to normative roles that can be altered in the very act of performing them (Butler 22; Smith 114). This concept of performativity applies well to travel writing as a whole since, as James Doyle argues in *North of America*, literature about other cultures inevitably becomes a kind of autobiographical act that defines both the writer, as well as their own cultural background (3). It can also be applied particularly well to women's travel writing since the construction of the self is heavily scripted according to discursive conventions, from which women writers deviate in subtle ways. Furthermore, the conflicting roles that women travelers adopt can be seen as literary, as opposed to solely cultural, because they are constructed in a highly fictional manner and reflect specific conventions within American literature. Cameron's inventive use of language throughout the text

recognizes and plays with the fictionality at the heart of the frontier myth that she embodies in the north.

II

It is important to discuss the specific motifs that Cameron was drawing upon throughout her text. At the turn of the twentieth century, Canada was often portrayed according to the conventions of American wilderness literature. Robert Thacker argues in *One West, Two Myths II* that Canadian and American discourses of frontier expansion deserve greater comparative study considering that “the stories, the histories, and the myths are utterly interconnected, interdependent” (3). Doyle makes an attempt to explore this interconnectedness in his study of American literature written about Canada (*North*). He observes that the pervasive myth of the close of the American frontier as encapsulated by Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1893 Frontier Thesis was magnified by the Klondike Gold Rush and led to the popular literary portrayal of Canada as the last frontier to the north (147-48). He notes that writers such as Hamelin Garland and Jack London portrayed this mythic last frontier to the north as the site of a primal masculine test of endurance in a barren wilderness setting (147-148), similar to what Schmitt refers to as “the Great Fight” within the mind of the American wilderness hero (130). Lisa Bloom interprets the transferal of this paradigm onto the north as part of the wider patriarchal and imperialist rhetoric of frontier expansion at the dawn of the twentieth century (32). Supporting this nationalist agenda, Turner’s Frontier Thesis mythologizes the role of the American frontier in somehow shaping an idealized, archetypal American character (37). He associates the battle with nature on the frontier with the creation of American principles such as individualism, freedom, and egalitarianism that were formed through a battle with nature (37). According to George Gusdorf, autobiography was traditionally defined as an authentic act of self-expression that captures the life of the individual as well as the “common cultural heritage” in which they participate (31). The motif of the American traveler as an individualistic frontier hero within travel writing is thus a specific literary model of

individuality that is meant to embody the values of the culture as a whole.

This popular representation of the Canadian north is embedded in Canadian as well as American culture. Sherrill Grace notes that the north has long been portrayed within Canadian literature according to formulaic stories of masculine endurance in the wilderness that often express imperialist themes (*Canada* 184). This parallel with American wilderness motifs highlights the cross-cultural nature of the American frontier myth, suggesting that it informed the literary representation of Canada by Canadians themselves. According to Nick Mount, Canadian writers actively participated in the popular literary industry in America at the turn of the twentieth century (18). This telling parallel with the literal and imaginative migration of so many Americans to the north suggests that it would have been inevitable for Canadian writers who worked and lived in the United States such as Agnes Deans Cameron to recreate Canada in the image of their adopted culture. Mount reveals that there was an exodus of Canadian writers such as Ernest Seton Thomson and Bliss Carmen toward the lucrative literary circles of America (18), and observes that Chicago, Cameron's adopted home, was a particular hotspot for publishers and journalists, and attracted many Canadian writers, including fellow Canadian women journalists, Eve Brodlique and Constance Lindsay Skinner (9). In her study of American women's travel literature, Mary Suzanne Schriber argues that the move of women into the sphere of professional journalism played a significant role in increasing opportunities for women and coincided with a higher interest in women's travel at the end of the nineteenth century (6). Cameron was thus writing at a time when there were unprecedented opportunities for both Canadians, as well as women in particular, to have an active voice in the American literary industry.

Born in Victoria in 1863, Cameron's early success as a teacher and journalist laid the groundwork for her later career as a professional writer in the United States. In the 1890s, she became the first female high school teacher and principle in the province of British Columbia (Pazdro 103) and went on to become the vice-

president of the Canadian Women's Press Club (Pazdro 117). She also wrote journalist pieces for local publications during that time on issues of suffrage and education reform (Pazdro 103-105) and was openly critical of discriminatory aspects of the school system such as the teaching of domestic science (Pazdro 107) and the salary gap between male and female teachers (Pazdro 108), which ultimately led to the removal of her teaching certificate in 1906 (Pazdro 114-115; Reid 42). Cameron's early outspokenness on topics relating to gender equity and education reform can be seen as foreshadowing her skilful critique of dominant literary discourse throughout *The New North*.

Cameron's trip to the Arctic coincided with a broader shift in her writing career from part time journalist to full fledged travel writer. In the same year that she was dismissed by the school board, she accepted a job with the Western Canada Immigration Association, based in Chicago, for which she wrote promotional material relating to the western provinces, while beginning to plan her journey north (Pazdro 117). With the aid of the Hudson's Bay Company, Cameron and her niece embarked on a six month trip that took them north along the Athabaska River, Great Slave Lake and the Mackenzie River, as far as the Mackenzie Delta, and back via Peace River and Lesser Slave Lake. The two women brought typewriters and cameras to document their journey, which included stops at various settlements along their route, including a ten day stay with an Inuit family in Arctic Red River. As Richeson points out, Cameron wrote about the people who lived and worked along the major waterways of the area, with attention to the fur-trade and agriculture (ix), and with particular interest in the lives of native people, as exemplified by her discussion of residential schools (x). Cameron's lecture tours throughout Canada, the United States and Great Britain to promote her book received huge success among her feminist peers as well as the general public (Pazdro 120; Reid 96; Richeson xi). Scholarly responses to *The New North* tend to focus on her unusually empathetic treatment of women and native people in the north (LaFramboise 152-153; Reid 61; Richeson x-xi; Roy, "Primacy" 54), while neglecting the literary nature of her work. Roy's discussion of the use of

technology in *The New North* as a means of both reifying and reworking traditional notions of primacy associated with travel and exploration hints at Cameron's ironic appropriation of conventional ideas of gender, race and nationhood ("Primacy" 76). Examining Cameron's nuanced use of literary conventions can allow for a better understanding of the subversive implications of *The New North*.

III

Throughout *The New North*, Cameron ironically displaces the very American frontier rhetoric that she uses by revealing it to be open to interpretation. She conflates Canada and the United States within the wider symbolic concept of the west, a blurring that is further emphasized by her inter-textual allusions to American and Canadian writers. Cameron also deliberately reworks specific American motifs relating to egalitarianism and cultural assimilation within a Canadian setting. By de-familiarizing the very American frontier rhetoric that she uses, Cameron reinvents the archetypal American literary traveler as one who must question, rather than merely repeat such frontier discourse.

From the very beginning of *The New North*, Cameron aligns Canada with a mythic American view of the west. Despite the fact that she traveled to the arctic circle, she portrays her journey as a movement westward, noting that "the West that we are entering upon is the Last West, the last unoccupied frontier under a white man's sky" (3). Her longing for a final frontier evokes Turner's nostalgia for the frontier as a mythic setting that pitted man against nature (2). By using this recognizable rhetoric to introduce her book, Cameron is not only associating her journey to Canada with a sense of American frontier expansion, but she is also identifying with the traditionally masculine role of testing and reasserting American values in the wilderness that was established by Turner and expanded upon by writers such as Jack London. However, her capitalization of the "Last West" (3), as well as her relocation of this motif onto a Canadian setting, reminds the reader that the frontier she refers to is mythical in nature. The very fact that Cameron, a forty five year old single professional woman, depicts

herself as “entering upon” (3) this final frontier emphasizes the reiterative nature of the role that she performs by reminding us that it can be accessed and altered from an unorthodox perspective. Just as Barthes critiques the perceived naturalness of myth (125), Butler applies this same principle to performativity, suggesting that embodied cultural discourse denies its own fictionality (12). In this sense, Cameron’s conflicted identification with American literary values challenges their apparent stability and instead portrays both her own individual role, and the cultural values it represents, as open to interpretation and revision.

Cameron’s use of quotations from American and Canadian writers locates her work within the context of American wilderness literature, while blurring the nationalist lines upon which such literature is based. The very first chapter of the book, entitled “The Mendicants Reach Winnipeg” (1) owes its title and the quotation in the heading to Bliss Carmen’s poem “The Mendicants,” a poem that celebrates “The vagabondish sons of God,/Who know the by-ways and the flowers,/And care not how the world may plod” (1). This idealized portrait of a nomadic lifestyle strongly echoes Turner’s idealization of the frontier as liberating the American character of stale social conventions (4). The passage is then followed by a quote from American poet James Whitcomb Riley, written in a southern dialect, in which the poet bluntly advises us to “try sweat” (1) if crying won’t help to achieve our goals, also echoing the tough individualism of Turner’s ideal American character (37). By aligning herself with Carmen’s frontier hero in the title of the chapter, and identifying with the longing for freedom within Riley’s poem, Cameron associates herself and her book with a kind of frontier heroism. However, the lack of clear attribution to either poet blurs the cultural origins of the very frontier motifs within the poems, again implying that American frontier discourse somehow merges and evolves within the literature and culture of Canada. Smith’s description of the autobiographical subject as existing on “multiple stages simultaneously” (110) is evoked in this intertextual beginning, reminding us that Cameron identifies with an ongoing dialogue in relation to the north, rather than a fixed point of view. The blurring

of geographical location, literary style and gender in Cameron's identification with these two poems evokes the kind of creative agency that autobiography theorists associate with the conflict between one's performative roles (Butler 22; Gilmore 114; Smith 111). By starting her book in this way, Cameron complicates her own role in relation to the north, reminding us that she is reworking and exploring the frontier myth at hand, rather than merely imposing it on her surroundings.

Cameron's wry allusions to American authors throughout the book also push the boundaries of popular American wilderness motifs. In an effort to convey the complex skills of Chipewyan trappers in Fond du Lac, and to dispel assumptions about their simplistic trapping methods, she argues "The man who used to 'make fur' in that way is, like Fenimore Cooper's Indians, the extinct product of a past race that never existed" (95). Referring to American author James Fenimore Cooper, Cameron subtly places her own writing within the tradition of great American wilderness writers, while also critiquing Cooper for depicting Aboriginal history in a patronizing light in celebrated books such as *The Last of the Mohicans*. Cameron's dismissal of Cooper, based on her own first hand experience, reveals her attempts to broaden American conceptions of the north to accommodate a more accurate and respectful understanding of native people. Cameron further critiques the very American literary tradition that she is entering into by comparing her own impression of Winnipeg with that of the American Quaker poet, John Greenleaf Whittier, noting that "We slip out of Winnipeg as the bells of St. Boniface ring the vespers from their turrets twain. Whittier, who never saw this quaint cathedral, has immortalized it in verse" (13). By articulating her own experience of the place according to Whittier's poem, despite his ignorance of the actual location, Cameron mocks the illusion of primacy associated with the traveller (Roy, "Primacy" 56), as well as the potentially arrogant attempt of wilderness writers to somehow capture the north. However, her use of these familiar allusions grants her the kind of "cultural intelligibility" (Butler 2) that Butler associates with the reiterative process of tapping into dominant discourse (Butler 2). Drawing attention to

these American authors in a mildly critical light, Cameron warns of the paradoxical force of American wilderness myths in shaping our understanding of reality, while hinting at her own participation in rewriting such myths.

Cameron also expands upon the very American rhetoric that she invokes by idealizing Canada as embodying American frontier ideals of egalitarianism. She declares that western Canada “holds out opportunities to every plucky lad who has initiative and who is willing to work” (296). “Nothing is stratified” (296), she says. “The whole thing is formative” (296). This depiction of Canada echoes Turner’s vision of the frontier as a leveling place in which conventional social distinctions are abolished (2). However, once again, in transferring this myth onto her own journey to the north, Cameron releases this rhetoric from its distinctly masculine and American associations. In this new context, her discussion of the Canadian locale as “formative” (296) becomes a self-reflexive commentary on the very rhetoric that she uses, reminding us of the reiterative nature of her role as travel writer in the north and expanding upon the myth itself to make it more inclusive. Cameron extends these egalitarian ideals to the Inuit in the Arctic by declaring that “the pursuit of seal is the pursuit of happiness; life and liberty belong to all” (169). Her playful allusion to the Declaration of Independence again separates the symbolic value of language from the nation that it refers to and suggests that the very ideals that define American identity can take on a whole new meaning within the context of her journey north, one which includes the perspective of women and of Aboriginal peoples. Cameron thus expands Turner’s ideal of the prototypical American.

Her depiction of Canada as a site of cultural fusion and miscegenation ironically draws upon Turner’s frontier ideal of a “composite nationality” (22) so as to extend this ideal beyond the context of American nationalism. In her early discussion of Winnipeg, she declares confidently that “Before the year has closed a hundred thousand [Americans] . . . will have merged themselves into Western Canada’s melting-pot, drawn by that strongest of lures--- the lure of the land” (7). Cameron’s discussion

of Americans as “merg[ing]” (7) themselves within the “lure” (7) of the Canadian landscape ironically transfers Turner’s vision of the cultural blending of the frontier onto a Canadian setting, drawing attention to the fact that such ideals of cultural permeability dissolve the very nationalist boundaries that they are meant to define. The ironic portrayal of the American people as being merged into a new Canadian frontier, as opposed to existing autonomously as the new American race described by Turner (23), further emphasizes that this cultural amalgamation is a complex and ongoing process. Cameron’s belief that “God has intended this to be the cradle of a new race, a race born of the diverse entities now fusing in its crucible” (299), practically paraphrases Turner’s own declaration that “In the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated and fused into a mixed race” (23). However, Cameron’s ironic use of this American frontier motif of a new “mixed race” (Turner 23) within a Canadian context suggests a heightened awareness of the actual cultural and ethnic hybridity at the heart of nationhood. The description of the Canadian frontier as continuing the cultural integration associated with the American frontier thus questions the nationalist boundaries of American wilderness motifs, while at the same time envisioning a new, more fluid ideal of nationhood itself. The conventional role of the travel writer as merely depicting their own cultural background (Doyle 3) is thus widened to include a new cross-cultural self-awareness.

VI

Throughout *The New North*, Cameron also dismisses popular American conceptions of the north in order to encourage a continued questioning and rewriting of the American frontier myth. She dispels American assumptions about the north by contrasting her experience in the Arctic with common stereotypes and misperceptions. She also makes a point of admitting to her own limitations as an author so as to avoid supporting such misperceptions. In particular, photographic representations of Cameron associate her with American frontier motifs, while drawing attention to her own subjective reworking of such motifs.

Cameron's insistence on testing popular myths against the realities of the north defines the role of the wilderness writer as inherently subjective, and thus responsible for creating an ongoing dialogue about the north.

Cameron goes against common American perceptions of the Arctic as a barren wasteland that exists in opposition to the values of American civilization. Refuting text book definitions of the arctic, she notes that "Nine-tenths of the people in America to-day share the same idea, and so far as they think of the Arctic Circle at all, think of it as a forbidding place, a frozen silence where human beings seldom penetrate" (160). This concept of the arctic as a void testing ground epitomizes the prevalent literary representation of the north in American and Canadian literature (Doyle; 147-148; Grace, *Canada* 184). As Roy points out, Cameron's book was meant as a challenge to this "erroneous conception of northern Canada" ("Primacy" 76). Apart from challenging the way that Canadians portray themselves in popular literature, Cameron also challenges the particular language by which Americans define themselves in relation to other cultures. She thus reshapes her own role as American literary traveler into one who questions and rewrites the cultural myths that she is meant to perform. Her declaration that "There is no place like home, even when it is the Arctic Circle" (160) deliberately inverts the dichotomy of civilization versus the wilderness that is at the heart of both frontier mythology as well as travel literature itself, forcing readers to consider the north as an inhabited place with a cultural framework of its own. Cameron's critique of common perceptions of the north encourages a continual reworking of the mythical basis of nationalist boundaries.

In particular, Cameron juxtaposes the Arctic with various metropolitan American cities to suggest that the American concept of the "pursuit of happiness" is just as attainable in the Arctic as it is in the south. After describing the ways in which polygamous Inuit marriages can result in happy family environments, she observes, "And is not happiness the goal of human endeavour, whether a man seeks it amid the electric lights, subtle perfumes, and dreamy waltz-music of a New York ballroom, or finds it

seated with his community wives on a hummock of ice under the Aurora?" (170). This comparison between society life and the north recalls Turner's dismissal of the artificiality of society in favour of the American frontier (4). Cameron's allusion to the American ideal of "the pursuit of happiness," in the context of her comparison between New York and the Arctic, challenges negative American perceptions of the north and echoes a recurring literary tendency to portray the Canadian wilderness as a redemptive alternative to the corruption of American society (Doyle 6). Her similar claim that "joy is the same, gastronomic and aesthetic, in the latitude of Boston and the latitude of Barter Island. It is only the counters that are different" (172), makes another ironic contrast between American city life and the Arctic so as to dispel negative associations with the north. Her suggestion that happiness is universal, while the standards that determine it are prone to change, draws attention to the dangers of judging the Inuit and the north in general through a culturally biased lens. Cameron's unique attribution of psychological well being and depth to the Inuit at this point of the book emphasizes her interest in examining the real experiences of individuals in the north in comparison with conventional beliefs or accounts that underlie nationalist myths.

She also emphasizes her own authorial fallibility so as to promote this continued reinterpretation of myth. Early on in the book, she celebrates the literary work of a Winnipeg trapper who advises her to "Atake your own mind, your own eyes; you must see for yourself" (11). By contrasting him with "the nature fakers" (11), a term for American wilderness writers, whose style was perceived as unrealistic (Schmitt 46), she celebrates a kind of authentic writing style that comes from first hand knowledge. This focus on a reliable, first hand account is reminiscent of Phillippe LeJeune's well known categorization of autobiography according to measures of factual authenticity (Eakin i-iv). However, her description of the trapper's ability to "project himself into the minds of those living things he had seen and hunted" (11) suggests a kind of openly subjective outlook that not only thinks outside inherited literary discourse, but which avoids imposing new monolithic

understandings to replace the old. Cameron's belief in the importance of interacting with her surroundings in a subjective way recognizes what autobiography theorists identify as the relational aspect of subject formation (Eakin 98; Friedman 73; Mason 321; Neuman 222; Stanton 140), a concept that underpins scholarship on Canadian women's travel writing (Buss 2; Grace, "A Woman's Way" xIii, I; Roy 5). Cameron herself identifies with this subjective outlook as early as the preface, in which she thanks the people of the north, noting "what we feel most strongly we cannot put into words" (xiii). Her legitimization of an empathetic cultural gaze ironically portrays her own individual outlook as more accurate than dominant American literary perceptions of the north.¹ By highlighting the subjective act of interpretation itself, Cameron avoids constructing a fixed identity either for herself or for her surrounding in the north, embodying Butler's and Smith's philosophy that the truth in identity formation lies in the very process of rewriting the self (Butler 15; Smith 111). The insistence on the value of her own unreliable perceptions reminds us that the reinterpretation of myth is a process of revitalization as well as revision.

One of the most memorable photographs in the book, which also happens to capture the underlying tensions beneath Cameron's authorial perspective, depicts Cameron and her niece sitting in the grass next to Great Slave Lake (309). The heading of the picture reads "The first type-writer on Great Slave Lake" (309)² and the two women are portrayed with a notebook and a typewriter, in the act of writing about the surrounding landscape.

¹ Cameron's departure from more conventional, objective approaches to travel writing is emphasized by Vilhjalmur Stefansson's criticism of her personal and empathetic way of interacting with the Inuit after meeting her in Fort McPherson (Roy 72-73).

² Photographs from *The New North* that I refer to in this paper are only contained in the original 1909 edition and correspond with the pages from this edition.



On the one hand, the immediate juxtaposition of their creative roles as travel writers against the rugged natural setting immediately aligns them with the frontier mythology of American wilderness literature and strives for the sense of autobiographical authenticity as valued by Gusdorf and LeJeune (Eakin i-iv; Gusdorf 13). However, the tension between their civilized demeanor and the wild surroundings also humorously draws attention to their ultimate fallibility as artists and as outsiders in trying to somehow capture the north. Rather than merely undercutting their creative roles, such ironic self-awareness proposes a new understanding of the American traveler as writing in conflict with one's surroundings and in an inter-textual debate with other representations. This sense of irony is also reflected within the blurring of gender roles in the picture. Jessie's act of writing on the typewriter while her aunt regards an open notebook differentiates Cameron from the more ladylike activity of her niece (Roy, "Primacy" 64). As Roy observes, Cameron's unconventionally masculine appearance, particularly in contrast with her

niece, deliberately goes against expectations about lady travelers (“Primacy” 58), highlighting the uniqueness of her “adventurous public persona” (“Primacy” 58). The questioning of gender roles in the photograph calls attention to the performative nature of the conventional frontier myth that they adopt. Literally caught in the act of rewriting, Cameron conceals her eyes beneath her hat in this photograph as if in acknowledgment of her own duplicitous enjoyment of the literary conventions of her time.

In another, yet more haunting photograph, Cameron is portrayed next to a woman she terms “Cannibal Louise,” in a manner that blurs the lines between the native woman and the author herself so as to challenge negative literary assumptions about Aboriginal people in the north (363).



Cameron observes that “From Chipewyan up the Peace we have traced the story of Louise the Wetigo, taking down at different posts, from the lips of nineteen different people, more or less garbled chapters of it” (281). Her self-reflexive discussion of Louise’s reputation as a story that is somehow fragmented throughout the surrounding locale, hints at the tension between myth and the realities of the north. As Grace observes, the wendigo myth is a pervasive motif in northern narratives that is often associated with a foreboding (*Canada* 208) and “malevolent” (*Canada* 35) threat to the outsider (*Canada* 35). It also echoes the trend in nineteenth century American literature to depict Canada as “intimidating” and “exotic” (Doyle 112). The photograph of Cameron next to Louise and her daughter blurs the normally fixed roles of white writer and native subject, challenging the assumptions that her readers were likely to have about native people. The two women are pictured sitting together and Cameron, seen to be smiling, leans toward her companion in a position of implied equality and intimacy. Cameron herself admits that this photograph destabilizes the roles of the two women saying, “Louise the Cannibal! When we look on our joint picture, it might be somewhat difficult to distinguish the writer from the Indian woman. She is ““even as you and me”” (283). Cameron’s first hand experience of Louise acts as a direct challenge to cultural assumptions about cannibalism in the north (Roy, “Primacy” 71). Apart from the similar attire shared by both women, Cameron’s Mountie style hat has been strategically placed upon Louise’s lap. As a symbol of masculine, racial, and patriotic authority as well as of authorial control, this hat makes a powerful visual statement when transferred to the hands of an Aboriginal woman, questioning the very power structures that Cameron knows to be hidden beneath her role as writer-explorer. The wry expression on Cameron’s face in challenging the reader in this way associates her authorial role with an ongoing dialogue between the real people and places of the north and the myths that are projected onto them.

The bravely intellectual nature of *The New North* makes it necessary to examine its complex engagement in dominant American literary discourse. Praising Cameron for her unusual

achievements or for her political outspokenness is helpful in recognizing the subtly politicized nature of her writing. However, this very element of social criticism is best explored through the nuanced manner in which Cameron navigates the literature and cultural language of her day. Far ahead of her time, Cameron consistently reminds the reader of the way that identity is constructed on a fictional level. The textuality of the north is mirrored by the very performativity of her role as traveler. Aware of the mythical nature of the motifs that she draws upon, she rewrites the frontier myth as it applies to travel writing, while also reminding us that this rewriting is a continual process. The need to see for oneself throughout this remarkable book envisions a new kind of autobiographical representation of the individual and the community based on the will to explore the dangerous terrain of myth itself and to cross the linguistic borders that define us.

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