

Modernity and Post-colonialism *The Heart of the Empire* (1909) by F.M. Bell-Smith

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NOTE AND DOCUMENTS

Modernity and Post-colonialism: *The Heart of the Empire* (1909) by F.M. Bell-Smith

Ellen L. Ramsay

As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but contrapuntally, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts. In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order, an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work.¹

A CONTRAPUNTAL READING of F.M. Bell-Smith's painting, *The Heart of the Empire* (Fig. 1), 1909, reveals the rhizomic nature of imperialism in the early 20th century. Not only was this an era of emergent nationhood, but it was also a period of capitalist development. The consolidation of various markets, media, demographic changes, motorized transport systems, gender relations, and social upheavals in both metropolitan centres and colonial hinterlands jostled with one another for recognition as significant markers of a new age. Most particularly was this happening in the country that could now envision independence of both its Anglo- and Franco-Canadian constituents. This painting of modernity by F.M. Bell-Smith, an Englishman transposed to a new nation, thus becomes a kind of parchment or pa-

¹ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York 1993), 51.



Figure 1. F.M. Bell-Smith, *The Heart of the Empire*, 1909. Watercolour, 57.2 x 89.0 cm. Vancouver, Vancouver City Archives and Vancouver Centennial Museum. Photo: reproduced in Roger Boulet, *Frederick Marlett Bell-Smith (1846-1923)* (Victoria 1977).

limpest on which various ideas of empire are inscribed. A cursory glance at the painting will inform the viewer that the urban scene depicts busy Threadneedle Street in London, England with the Royal Exchange (centre) and the Bank of England (left) prominently displayed in the background, lending the area its name of Bank Junction. The middle and foreground of the painting show a busy throng of people from various occupational and class backgrounds (of both sexes) travelling by foot, horse-drawn carriage, motor-driven cars, and omnibuses around a statue of the Duke of Wellington.

F.M. Bell-Smith's painting had a very famous precursor in the 1904 painting of the same title, *The Heart of the Empire*, by Neils M. Lund (Fig. 2). Originally purchased for the Lord Mayor of London, Sir William Treloar, the Lund painting now hangs in the Guildhall Art Gallery. An aerial view from the roof of the Mansion House, it depicts the same busy junction from a different perspective. In an article on Lund's streetscape, Iain S. Black has used the painting as an illustration of the 19th-century Victorian city, contrasting this depiction to the subsequent rebuilding of the Bank of England between 1919 and 1939. As Black argues, the painting has been seen by scholars as the "paradigmatic representation of the City of Empire," but goes on to suggest that the political and economic context for the city's landscape was actually unstable at the time. He asserts that while the "empire clearly provided an important context for the [painting], it was only one such context and not necessarily always the most important." Warning "against reducing ex-



Figure 2. Niels Moeller Lund, *The Heart of the Empire*, 1904. Oil on canvas, 137.2 x 182.9 cm. London, Guildhall Art Gallery Photo: Guildhall Art Gallery.

planations ... to a purely imperial discourse," Black points out the temporal nature of the interpretation of the city in the recent use of Lund's painting by conservationists in the 1980s.² This revisionist reading of Black can be supplemented, however, with a post-colonial assessment of Bell-Smith's painting of the same title.

Frederic Marlett Bell-Smith (1846-1923) emigrated to Canada from England in the year of Canada's Confederation, 1867. He came from a family of respected artists and settled into a livelihood of photography, graphics, and teaching. In 1886 he was one of a handful of Canadian artists who was granted a free rail-pass for the newly completed Canadian Pacific trans-national railway route, and firmly established his reputation at landscape painting in this era of "nation-building." At a time when Canadian writers were filling novels with tales of exploration, Canadian art academicians were trying to build a "national school" of painters through landscape. Bell-Smith, a founder member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (RCA), was an example of this tradition.

Bell-Smith not only established himself as a premier landscape painter, but also became known for urban genre scenes. From youth, Bell-Smith sketched street scenes in London, England where he himself found work in a Cheapside shirt and collar factory (1861). In Montréal (1867) the artist continued his sketches, now depicting local French Canadian scenes. Both Frederic and his father John Bell-Smith were founding members of the Society of Canadian Artists (1867) and immersed themselves in the artistic life of the nation. In Montréal it is believed that the son found work at the photography works of James Inglis, colouring photographs, and began exhibiting sporting scenes at the Fifth Exhibition (1868) of the Art Association of Montréal and the Society of Canadian Artists. In 1874 Frederic Bell-Smith moved to Toronto and exhibited in the second exhibition of the Ontario Society of Artists. By 1877-1878 he began his teaching career at the Ontario School of Art. In 1881-82 he went to London and Paris with his wife, Anne Myra Dyde, and in Paris joined Colarossi's studio under Celestin-Joseph Blanc (1818-1888), Joseph-Paul Blanc (1846-1904), Gustave Courtois (1853-1923), and Edmond-Louis Dupain (1847-nd). He then returned to Canada to become the Director of Fine Arts at Alma College until 1890. He moved to London, Ontario and founded the Western Art League and was appointed drawing master to the Central Public School until 1888. In 1887 Bell-Smith was made full academician of the RCA. In 1888 he moved back to Toronto and embarked on other trips to the Rockies aboard the Canadian Pacific Railway, and to England, France, and Holland. He studied under the popular American painter Thomas Alexander Harrison and became aware of Impressionism

²Iain S. Black, "Rebuilding 'The Heart of the Empire': Bank Headquarters in the City of London, 1919-1939," *Art History*, 22 (November 1999), 593-618, esp. 594, and 598-9.



Figure 3. F.M. Bell-Smith, *Lights of a City Street*, 1894. Oil on canvas, 122.7 x 200.0 cm. Toronto, Collection of Simpsons. Photo: reproduced in Roger Boulet, *Frederick Marlett Bell-Smith (1846-1923)*, (Victoria, 1977).

through the works of James McNeill Whistler and others. From 1891 (age 45) he settled into a life of teaching and painting.³

In 1894 Bell-Smith completed one of his most well-known works, entitled *Lights of a City Street* (Fig. 3). The urban scene depicting King Street, Toronto is shown at dusk after a rainfall. Newspaper boys in the foreground are the focus of the scene although the men and women depicted are also important, shown traveling by foot and a variety of other modes of transportation. Following the success of this painting, Bell-Smith continued large documentary painting for two years. The urban landscape, the second *genre* in the artist's *oeuvre*, was thus established by the mid-1890s. A high point in the artist's career was reached in 1895, when Bell-Smith obtained a personal sitting with Queen Victoria to paint her portrait.

As Roger Boulet has documented in his monograph on Bell-Smith, the artist made several more trips to England in the early 1900s. A notable orator, he impressed himself upon local society and was elected President of the Ontario Society of Artists in 1904. *The Heart of the Empire* under consideration here was successfully exhibited at the 34th Exhibition of the Ontario Society of Artists that opened on 20 February 1909, the 25th Spring Exhibition of the Art Association of Montréal

³For a useful monograph on the artist see Roger Boulet, *Frederic Marlett Bell-Smith (1846-1923)* (Victoria 1977), with the above paragraphs drawing directly on 16, 18-23, and 104.

that began on 2 April 1909, and the 30th Annual Exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy that opened on 6 May 1909. Thus Bell-Smith's urban scenes became as frequent as his mountain scenes and he was amply rewarded with an honourable mention at the Pan-American Exhibition in Buffalo, New York in 1901, and later with the Dow Prize for best watercolour in the April 1909 Montréal showing. He became known for fidelity to nature in his paintings and became a regular exhibitor with an output that was prolific by contemporary standards. The Studio Club in Vancouver purchased *The Heart of the Empire* for presentation to the city as part of the nucleus of an art collection and it remains in the city's museum to this day.

Bell-Smith's urban landscapes are visual *testimonia* to daily life in the early 20th century. They are perhaps best described as palimpsests on which several themes have been inscribed with affiliated connections to the theme of empire. The various layers of the painting may be unfolded like an onion skin, so while there is no core or single meaning to the paintings, there are layers of inscribed meaning that join to form a malleable image. Canvases thus become a pidgin for those who are located in the nexus of colonial and post-colonial dialogues. In the first instance, a preliminary layer of the onion so to speak, Bell-Smith's work is located at the apex of a dialogue on the "national tradition." The Wilfrid Laurier years of Liberal government (1896-1911) saw not only an effort at national boosterism among English Canadian artists but a broader movement that included writers as well. Authors such as Margaret Marshall Saunders (1861-1947), Nellie McClung (1873-1951), Sarah Jeanette Duncan (1861-1922), and Lucy Maud Montgomery (1874-1942) not only achieved national acclaim writing from a Canadian perspective, but were also recognized by wider international audiences. The new woman shown in Bell-Smith's painting was echoed fictionally in Sarah Jeanette Duncan's novels *An American Girl in London* (1891), *A Social Departure: How Orthodocia and I Went Round the World by Ourselves* (1890), and *A Daughter of Today* (1894), as well as in Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) and *Anne of Avonlea* (1909).⁴

Benedict Anderson has described the phenomenon of national boosterism in these terms:

My point of departure is that nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today they command such profound emotional legitimacy. I will be trying to argue that the creation of these artefacts towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex "crossing" of discrete historical forces; but that, once created, they be-

⁴*The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (Toronto 1983), 224-6, 478-9, 528-9, 728-9.

came "modular," capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains.⁵

Bell-Smith's painting, like the literature, is an example of that transplanting of national consciousness in the age of emergent industrialism following Confederation in 1867.

To understand this new national boosterism, it is crucial to realize that three major changes occurred in Canadian society during the early 20th century. As Bryan Palmer has pointed out, in the first instance there was economic concentration and transformation of the workplace. The increasing concentration of power caused a shift from family dynasties to monopoly joint-stock companies and boards of directors. Between 1900 and 1912, 56 major industrial consolidations occurred, breeding a new kind of industrial financier in an economy where manufacturing was outpacing agriculture. The workplace was then transformed, with more streamlined production in central Canadian corporate enterprises. In the second instance, there was a remarkable change in the social composition of the workplace. A period of mass migration saw 2,206,342 new immigrants arrive between 1903 and 1912, and little English was spoken in many large workplaces. Finally, the period witnessed the rise of the interventionist state. In 1907, for instance, the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act (IDIA) introduced compulsory conciliation of the labour process and tripartite boards of arbitration made special intervention in public interest disputes. Between 1907 and 1911, 101 disputes were handled by the IDIA, which contributed to the period being characterized as one of harsh defeat for the labour movement. Changes in the Canadian workforce amounted to a social revolution, one that pushed workers to organized militancy. Between 1901 and 1914 there were no less than 421 strikes in the south-central part of Ontario alone. The strike became the weapon of many workers, including female labourers in the knitting mills, carpet, and garment factories. Labour politics was also stimulated, this pre-World War I context witnessing the rise of the Independent Labour Party.⁶

Benedict Anderson has pointed out the interrelationship of print technology to capitalism and the construction of national consciousness. While he dates the origins of national consciousness to the 16th century and the coalition between Protestantism (the Reformation) and print-capitalism in Europe, many of the features he describes were transplanted to Canada around the time of Confederation. Cheap newspapers quickly created new reading publics, not least of which included women and assisted in the development of new social and political expressions. As Anderson states "the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined com-

⁵Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London 1983), 4.

⁶Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour 1800-1980* (Toronto 1983), 138-47, 149, 153, 158.

munity, which in its basic morphology set the state for the modern nation."⁷ At the forefront of change was the newspaper industry, so well depicted by the street vendor in Bell-Smith's paintings, and evoking imagery of new technology and workplace practices. By 1900 Canada had 112 daily newspapers selling for a penny a copy and readership was at an all-time high with 90 per cent literacy among the adult population. As early as 1883 the average Toronto family was purchasing two newspapers a day.⁸

As Anderson has noted, the articles on the front page of the newspaper were juxtaposed in an arbitrary way, but this was done so that the reader could reformulate an imagined linkage among them. Anderson quite astutely refers to the "mass ceremony" involved in the "almost precisely simultaneous consumption (... 'imagining') of the newspaper-as-fiction."⁹ The newspaper, then, is one of the artefacts that forms part of the "imagined community" of the nation: "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."¹⁰

Anderson cites Ernest Gellner in his defence: "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist."¹¹ The novel and the newspaper are just two such expressions that provide the tools for "re-presenting" the nation as an imagined community. This view is reinforced by Paul Rutherford's researches into the Canadian newspaper industry in the late 19th century. Rutherford suggests that newspapers were a contributing factor in the process of nation-building mythology and that the mass media exerted a great deal of ideological power.

Not surprisingly, then, the newspaper industry faced major upheavals with the advent of mechanization in the late 19th century. Large steam-powered presses were introduced in the mid-19th century, creating a new division of labour between compositors and pressmen. Pressmen, originally handicraft workers, became producers of the machine age as steam-powered cylinder presses and then rotary presses transformed the nature of their work. Major lay-offs were experienced with the introduction of type-setting machines.¹²

⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 46. On the Canadian newspaper industry see Paul Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto 1982). On the role of Canadian newspapers in the national myth-making process see Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority*, 156-89.

⁸ On literacy and reading see Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority*, 24-35.

⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 35.

¹⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

¹¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 169; and from Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London 1964).

¹² See Sally F. Zerk, *The Rise and Fall of the Toronto Typographical Union, 1832-1972: A Case Study of Foreign Domination* (Toronto 1982).

As a consequence of the change caused by mechanization, typographical workers associated with newspapers and commercial work were involved with the movement for the shorter day from 1872 on. Workers struggled under the banner of the organized and enduring Toronto Typographical Union for the Eight-Hour Movement in 1902. The newspaper sector, due to the special conditions of its workplace, was among the first to witness a shorter work day. The militancy of the typographical workers became a model for other industries. This, then, was the other side of the national boosterism of the period, one that dealt with the daily consequences of boosterism and the details of daily life and labour.

In this environment everyday items such as clothing resonated with significance as European immigrants worked at scandalously low wages in garment sweatshops and home work. Child labour, represented by the street vendor in Bell-Smith's paintings was just one issue that workers organized around, giving strength to the Journeymen Tailors Union, the United Garment Workers of America, and the United Hat and Cap Workers. Between 1900 and 1914, 40,000 garment workers took part in 158 strikes. By 1908 the Ontario legislature had adopted an amendment that prohibited employment of workers under the age of fourteen in factories and under twelve in retail establishments. This fell short of labour's demand that no one should work under the age of sixteen, but it spoke volumes to the class pressures being exerted.¹³

This was the Canadian context for Bell-Smith's rendition of *The Heart of the Empire*. Much of the detail he has chosen, in contrast to the Lund painting, may be seen to respond to his unique perspective as a colonial interloper. Bell-Smith's watercolour is certainly worthy of closer attention as a self-conscious rendition of modernity. The newspaper boy, touching the front edge of the picture frame, leads the eye forward into the picture toward the street scene depicting two distinct modes of transport: horse-drawn carriages and buses with automobiles and omnibuses. This juxtaposition of old with new occupies much of the visual middle-ground of the painting, with a total of fourteen vehicles in partial or full view. London's Threadneedle Street is shown to be teeming with people just after a rainfall. With respect to the congestion and modes of transport, Bell-Smith's painting bears similarity to Lund's. At this junction in Threadneedle, Cornhill, and Lombard Streets, it is easy to see the two buildings annotating the title of the painting. In the centre-rear stands Sir William Tite's (1798-1873) Greek-revival design of the Royal Exchange building of 1844, a trading place for the Empire's merchants and bankers. Just barely visible in the painting is the pediment by Sir Richard Westmacott (1775-1856), professor of sculpture at the Royal Academy, depicting the figure of commerce flanked by the peoples of the world (Russian, Indian, Chinese, Greek, Armenian, Persian, and those of the Levant). In the left rear of the

¹³Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892* (Toronto 1980), 83-90; Harold Logan, *The History of Trade Union Organization in Canada* (Chicago 1928), 131-49.

painting stands Sir John Soane's (1753-1837) neo-classical rebuilding of the Bank of England, the national bank located in the City of London and nicknamed the "Old Lady of Threadneedle Street" after the figure of Britannia on the pediment. This bank increasingly took on the international finance associated with an extended empire and free trade policies. The scene is completed with the equestrian statue (1844) of the Duke of Wellington, Arthur Wellesley (1769-1852), by Sir Francis Chantry (1781-1841) mounted prominently in the left- middle-ground of the picture. This work, finished by Henry Weekes (1807-1877), recalls Wellington's skills as a politician as well as his imperial triumphs in India and closer to home in the Pyrenees.

The details of different modes of transportation strengthens the modernity of the painting. The motorized omnibus in the right-middle-ground of the painting signifies the height of modern life in 1908. At that time there was a merger of the main bus companies under the London General Omnibus Company (LGOC) (1908), the largest bus company in the world, and, as a result of the buy-out, the LGOC manufactured its first mass-produced bus, the B-type omnibus depicted here, an outstanding commercial success and the very latest in transport technology.¹⁴ This model put the 1,418 horse buses and the 7,000 horses that pulled them out to pasture. On 25 October 1911 the last horse buses ran between London and Moorgate. As the growth of London's population in the first decade of the 20th century had been considerable, there was much need for the new buses and, by 1913, 2,500 B-type buses were on the road.¹⁵ The meaning of the omnibus in the painting is therefore heightened by the contrast of the figures in the foreground. The presence of rich and poor together in the street was the legacy of uneven development of the commercial and transportation empire.

In keeping with these signs of modernity and empire, Bell-Smith also consciously rendered a broad and contrasting cross-section of occupations among the multitude of people in the streets. The two men standing side by side at the fruit cart in the foreground are an example of this contrast in social classes. The man to the left wears the cloth cap of the working-class, while the man to the right dons the middle-class bowler denoting the proximity of the commercial City of London to a manufacturing, working-class district. Other individuals are depicted, from the fruit-seller and newspaper boy, to the sailor of the oceanic economy, as well as the clerks and managers of the urban financial sector. There is further contrast between those who work on the street (newspaper boy, fruit seller, and bus driver) and those who use the sidewalk as a pedestrian right-of-way. Two sailors in the right-fore-

¹⁴Roy Shadwell, *Horse Omnibus* (London 1994), 3.

¹⁵John Thompson, *Horse-Drawn Omnibus* (Hampshire 1986), 68; George Robbins and B.J. Atkinson, *The London B-Type Motor Omnibus* (Twickenham 1991), 21; A.L. Latchford and H. Pollins, *London General: The Story of the London Bus 1856-1956* (London 1956), 44.

ground and a regiment of soldiers in the left middle-ground punctuate this depiction of the domestic economy with a reminder of empire.

Gender's construction in the painting also heightens the modernity of the scene. In the construction of "Canada" in 1909 women were still cast as outsiders, denied the vote, and disenfranchised from a sense of belonging in any real sense. In the polity of Canadian settler colonialism, these second-class citizens were cast into a battlefield of gender, race, and class. While middle-class white Canadian women like Nellie McClung fought for the vote for women like themselves, their sisters of colour and working-class origin struggled with multiple oppressions. To Bell-Smith's credit, in the foreground of his painting he shows a small group of women from different social backgrounds and of different ages. The young woman holding the child's hand, with a rip in her tunic, signifies the clash of classes, her poverty in marked contrast to the affluence of the well-dressed woman to her right. The poor woman's care of her little sister speaks volumes to the provision of childcare in the period. Several women may be seen riding in the top of the omnibuses, depicting the new woman, most likely the "working girls" known to travel unaccompanied into public places. This diversity of female life is given a prominent position in the painting and suggests an intentionality on the part of the painter to represent gender in profoundly class ways.¹⁶

Gender, however, is also represented in *symbolic* ways that strip the individual of her lived experience and oppression and relegate her to a representative of her type. If the soldiers, sailors, and businessmen are offered to represent masculinity in the painting, the women in the foreground are offered to represent their gender in both rich and poor, employed and unemployed types. These, then, are not specific named individual women with various attributes but symbols of something else. As Himani Bannerji has pointed out, this is an argument against the self-proclaimed organic unity or wholeness of communities.

When we look at the status of women in the communities, we find it to be one of "property", of belonging to individual male heads of families, as well as to institutions called the family and the community ... we might say that women's status as a "sign" or even a symbol for "our" cultural autonomy amounts to no more than being handmaidens of god, priest and husband ... In fact, if she were not powerless, she could not have been pushed into the mould of a symbol or dis-embodied into a metaphor.¹⁷

To Bell-Smith's credit, *The Heart of the Empire* conjures up an even more complex symbolic notion of community. The women are not only "handmaidens of God, priest, and husband," but also "tenants" to the "landlords" and "workers" to the

¹⁶Himani Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender* (Toronto 2000), 64-8.

¹⁷Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation*, 168-9. On the construction of community in Canada and a critique, 63-86.

"bosses." This is quite an unusual portrayal for the period when women were ideologically cast into fewer roles. Gender is thus a double-edged sword where the woman is both a representative of her class and an abstracted symbol of womanhood.

The presence of subaltern classes in the painting should not pass without mention because it is in his London scene, as opposed to his Canadian urban streetscapes, that Bell-Smith presents different social classes co-mingling on the street. It does not seem that the artist has set himself the task of showing absolute modernity in his Canadian scenes, as he would surely have depicted the great increase in male European immigrants and the presence of First Nations, Asian, and Black workers; a task he does not attempt. In London, England, however, he chooses to depict class and gender quite distinctly. One is left wondering why the artist felt freer to express diversity in England than he did in the settler colony of Canada, and why gender is a highly significant illustration of this. Perhaps the class nature of the diversity simply struck the artist more resoundingly in London than it had in Canada, and he saw fresh scenes with new eyes. Perhaps Bell-Smith is able to use the scene on Threadneedle Street as a sort of template for changes occurring in Canada. Here the newspaper boy, the mixture of classes, occupations and gender, as well as the loose handling of the brush might all be compared to genre development in the United States. The link is strengthened if one sees similarity with the Ash Can School, for like three of the painters of this genre — George Luks, Everett Shinn, and Robert Henri — Bell-Smith came from a newspaper illustration background and concentrated on the figures of people in busy urban streets.¹⁸ Furthermore, Bell-Smith may well have adopted their proclamation: "Art is not academic. Art is democratic. Art expresses life."¹⁹ Newspapers evoked imagery of new technology and new workplace practices, women evoked representations of social liberation, and the buildings evoked a strong sense of empire. With the unravelling of such layers we are able to read the painting contrapuntally.

The title of the painting suggests the extent to which empire and imperialism forged Bell-Smith's attitude towards his subject. Both class and gender can be read off the canvas as incorporated to the point of endorsement, within the imperial project. As Edward Said has pointed out:

With few exceptions, the women's as well as the working-class movement was pro-empire. And, while one must always be at great pains to show that different imaginations, sensibili-

¹⁸On the Ash Can School, prominent in New York City on the eve of World War I, see Marianne Doezema, *George Bellows and Urban America* (New Haven 1992); Milton Brown, *American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression* (Princeton 1955), 9-38; Patricia Hills, "John Sloan's Image of Working-Class Women," *Prospect*, 5 (1980), 157-96.

¹⁹Elizabeth Hutton Turner, *Men of the Rebellion: The Eight and the Associates at the Phillips Collection* (Washington 1990), 8.

ties, ideas and philosophies were at work, and that each work of literature or art is special, there was virtual unity of purpose on this score: the empire must be maintained, and it was maintained.²⁰

The irony, however, is that while Bell-Smith would appear to be holding true to a neo-imperialist viewpoint, he and his work are situated in a post-colonial reality and reflect that dissonance between the brushstrokes. Canada had shifted from white-settler colony status to dominion status with Confederation, which was precisely the moment that Bell-Smith was transposed from empire's heartland to its colonial margins, an awkward passage that could not help but register in the ambiguity of the colony to nation trajectory. Canada remained a monarchy, governed by British institutions and rules, but it was now capable of passing its own laws and before long would sever even more of the ties to the British parliament with the passage of the Statute of Westminster (11 December 1931). It appears that while Bell-Smith upholds empire, Canada is actually in the process of de-colonizing, structuring Bell-Smith's approach as a conservative one. As Said would suggest, however, there is an alternative reading. London remained the heart of the empire. Canada, along with other dominions such as Australia and New Zealand, understandably held their relationship with London as a special status, and they both separated themselves from and reinforced the direct British rule of territories such as India. Bell-Smith's title then, may not so much be a reflection of direct British rule of non-White colonies. After all, *The Heart of the Empire* was an aphorism and, indeed, other artists had painted similar scenes with similar titles as we have seen with Lund.

It is at this point that the distinction between colonialism and neo-imperialism may be made, casting the painting by Bell-Smith more within the framework of the latter. This point has been made with difficulty by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, as well as Raymond Williams, and depends on taking the term imperialism as primarily a description of an *economic* system — as opposed to a *political* order — where political changes in the status of a colony “will not greatly affect description of the continuing economic system as *imperialist*.”²¹ Thus a contrapuntal reading must take account of both processes — that of imperialism on the one hand and resistance to it on the other.²² So the painting is at one moment post-colonialist, then at another neo-imperialist, and I am suggesting that the more complex reading of the painting is the more appropriate one, however much of both interpretations belong together. Thus the palimpsest is formed, and neo-imperialism operates as a

²⁰Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 53.

²¹Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York 1976), 160 (emphasis in original). See also Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York 1993), 3-4.

²²Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 53 (emphasis in original).

rhizomic network of affiliated connections to various features in the artist's painting.

The imperial tradition is not received without an opposition, even if that resistance occurs at an unconscious level. As part of the narratization of society, the tale told here, of modernity in the streets of London, resists the stereotype of the timeless imperial centre. Modernity is thrust at us from the pages of the newspaper boy's papers to the B-type omnibuses. Thus the overlapping territories of nationality, English and Canadian, serve to highlight the realities of a modern empire, one which is rapidly decolonizing and where poverty and prosperity are opposite sides to the same coin of imperialism.

The Heart of the Empire was thus painted at the specific moment when the relationship between the two countries was changing and Bell-Smith was recording that change through the scenes of civilians and military on the streets of the City of London. While the two nationalities are bound together by the colonial experience, the palimpsest of the painting no longer presents a binary opposition of metropolis to hinterland. Rather the painting may be read as layers of a story that ranges from colonial to imperial to post-colonial. The work is thereby deracinated and provides us with a glimpse of the post-colonial mind.

The fact that Bell-Smith did not find a way to express ethnic alterity in this painting speaks volumes for the artist's imagined community. It is social class that is the major reference in *The Heart of the Empire*: people from many walks of life mingling on the street. The different modes of transportation and the presence of women heighten its modernity, but do not provide a complete medley of people.

The Heart of the Empire thus remains among the most challenging of Bell-Smith's works with many layers of meaning awaiting those whose view can unravel them. It opens up a dialogue on post-confederation Canadian painting that has only been touched on to date.²³ The work expresses the artist's full commitment to the subject and heightens our awareness of modernity in 1909, thus introducing the international component to the work where the people of the margins rewrite the history of the metropolis.

I would like to thank Joan Seidl, Curator of History at the Vancouver Centennial Museum for drawing my attention to Frederic Bell-Smith's painting in their collection.

²³See Robert Linsley, "Landscapes in Motion: Lawren Harris, Emily Carr and the Heterogenous Modern Nation," *The Oxford Art Journal*, 19 (March 1996), 80-95.