

**STORIES IN A NEW SKIN:
APPROACHES TO INUIT LITERATURE IN NUNAVUT**

by

Keavy Martin

*A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Centre for Comparative Literature
University of Toronto*

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ABSTRACT

“Stories in a New Skin: Approaches to Inuit Literature in Nunavut”

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This dissertation examines the ways in which the work of Inuit writers and storytellers from Nunavut might achieve a more prominent position in literary studies. The project engages with a wide range of material (the classic stories and songs of the oral tradition, life narratives, oral histories, and contemporary fiction, poetry and film) in order to examine the idea of an Inuit literary tradition, and to formulate ways in which these texts might be brought into southern classrooms. The first chapter discusses the way in which traditional and contemporary tales about the Tuniit (or Dorset) people work to articulate an Inuit identity, and so lay the foundations of an Inuit ‘national’ literary tradition. The second chapter proposes a series of strategies for reading *unikkaaqtuat* – the myths, or classic tales – as literary texts, and thereby aims to expand the definition of ‘sovereign’ Indigenous literary criticism. The third chapter reads contemporary elders’ oral histories alongside Minnie Aodla Freeman’s autobiography, *Life Among the Qallunaat*, and asks whether a definition of the ‘literary’ might be found in the distinction between *unikkaaqtuat* (classic stories) and *inuusirminik unikkaat* (life stories). The final chapter explores the song traditions recorded by the Greenlandic Inuk anthropologist Knud Rasmussen along with their later iterations in the work of Igloolik Isuma

Productions, and discusses the possibilities and pitfalls of fitting these songs with the label of ‘poetry.’ The dissertation therefore re-dresses Inuit literary forms in ‘new skins’ – or conceptual frameworks – in order to redress southern misunderstandings (or ignorance) of Arctic intellectual traditions. This approach is inspired by the work of the Indigenous Literary Nationalists, and also draws upon theories of nation, oral tradition, and literary history. Most broadly speaking, this project aims to locate aspects of an Inuit literary criticism by exploring the ways in which the texts – and the language of their expression – might instruct readers and listeners in the use, interpretation, and enjoyment of Inuit literature.

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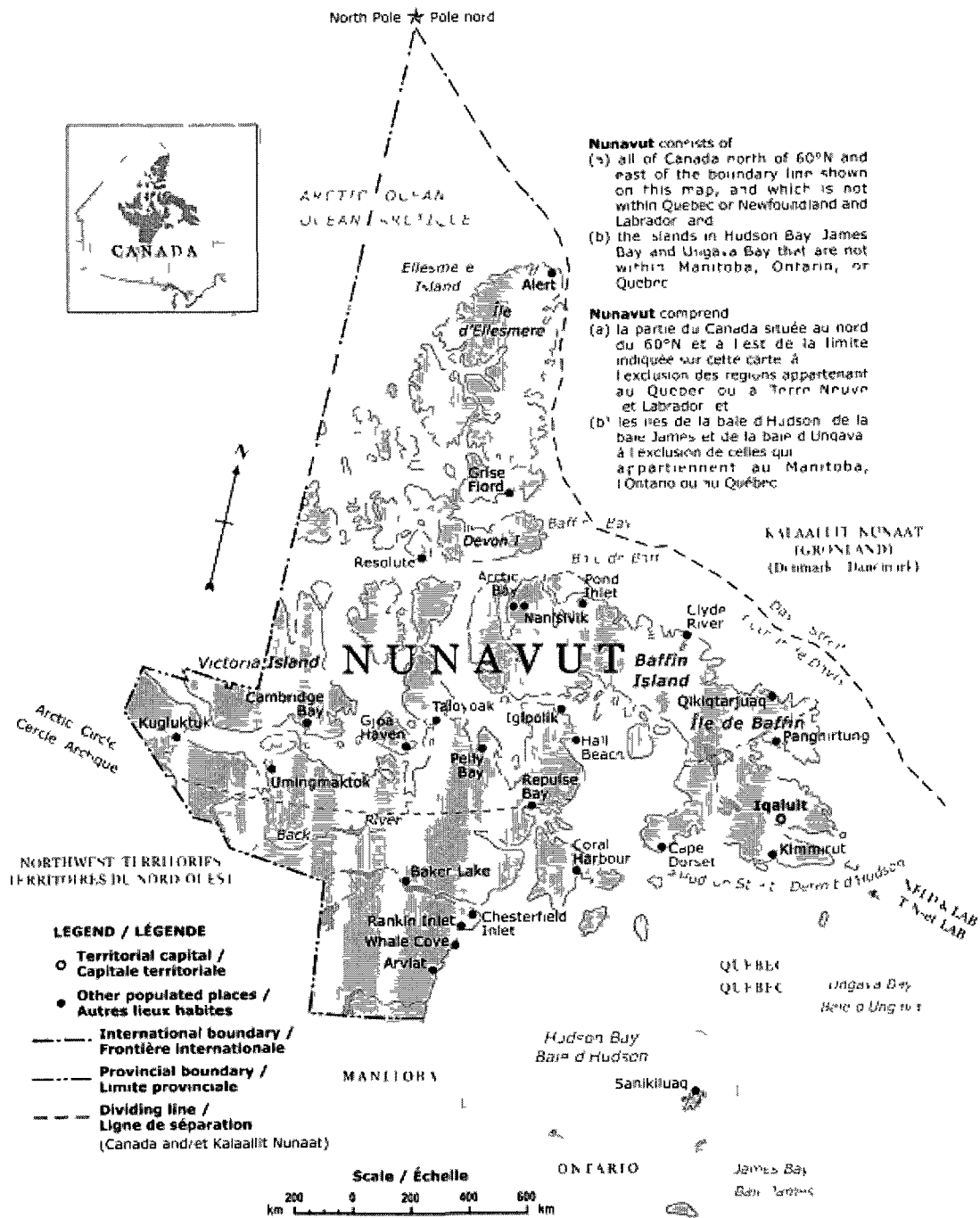
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Map 1: Political Map of Nunavut

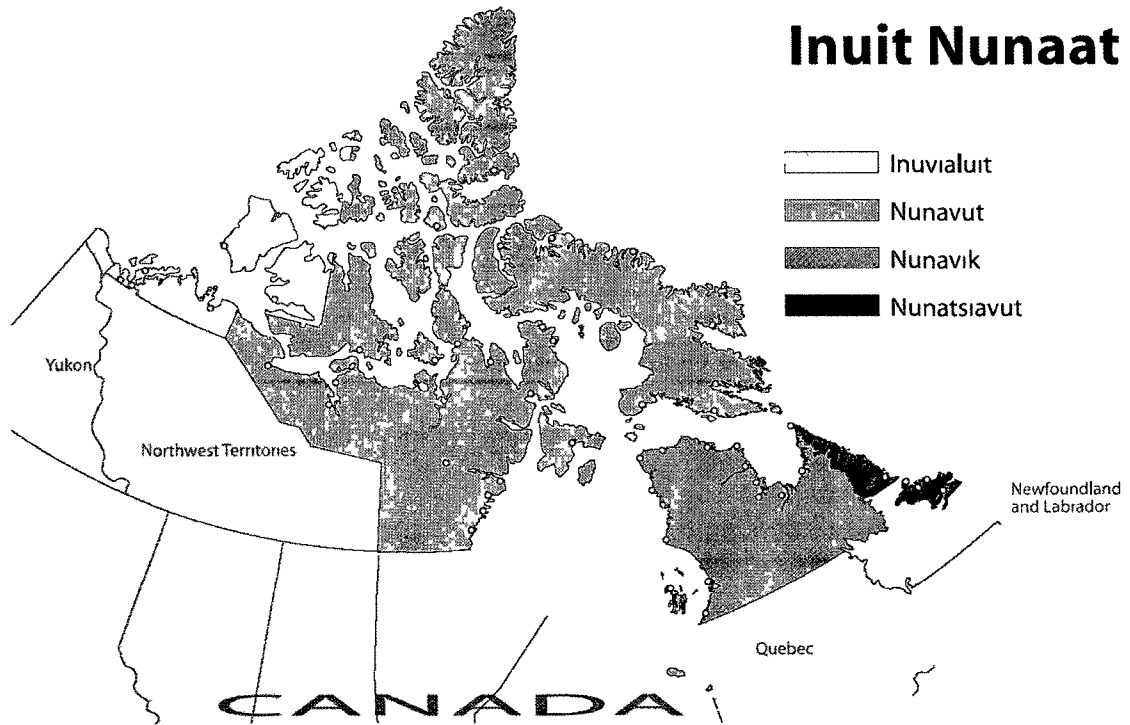


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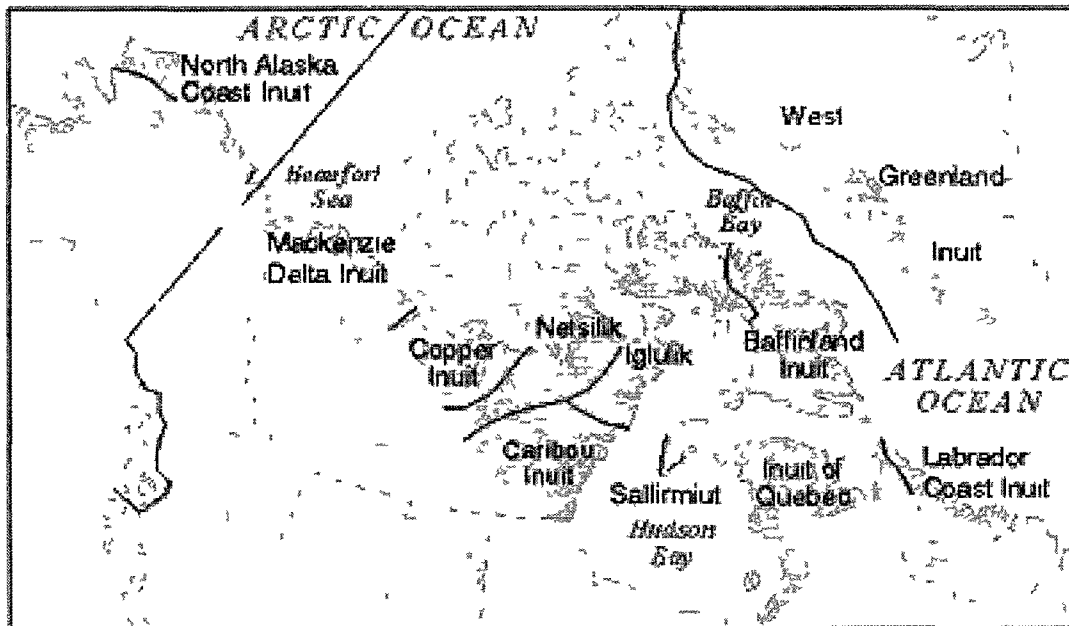
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Map 2: Inuit Regions of Canada



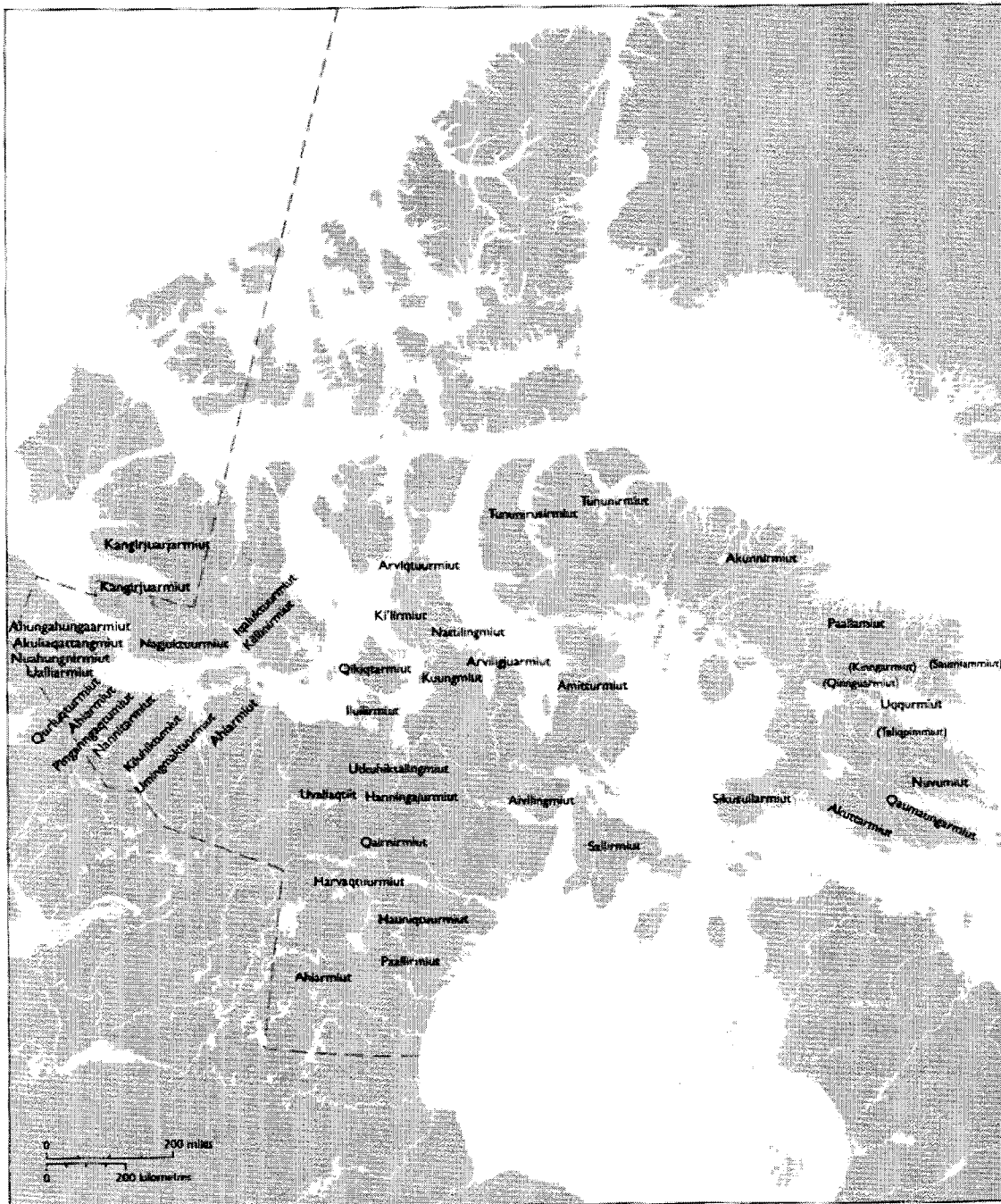
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Map 3: Ethnographic Map of the Arctic



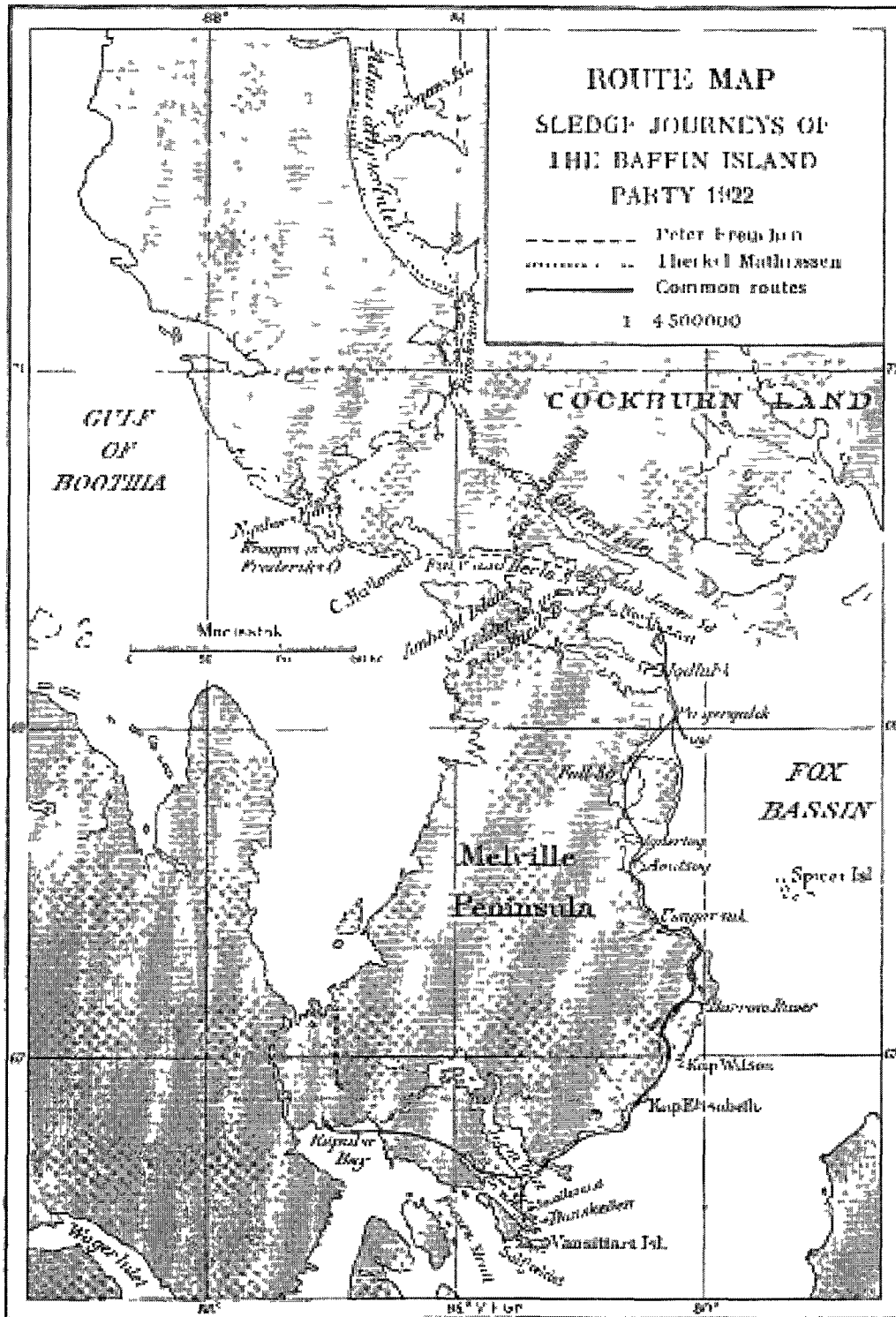
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Map 4: -miut Groups of Nunavut



Reproduced with the permission of McGill-Queen's University Press (© 2004), courtesy of Susan Bennett and Graham Rowley (*Uqalurait: An Oral History of Nunavut*).

Map 5: Route of the Fifth Thule Expedition (Iglulik Region)



Map of the sledge journeys of the Baffin Island party, 1922

This map appears in Vol VI, No 1 of the *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-24* – Therkel Mathiasen's *Material Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos* (Copenhagen Gyldendal, 1945) 45

aijaa ijajaajaaja inngirjaalirlanga

Aijaa ijajaajaaja, let me sing slowly

inngirjaalirlanga pisiksaksiurlungalu

Let me sing slowly and search for a song

ijajaajaaja

Emile Imaruittuq, Iglulik elder

Perspectives on Traditional Law, Interviewing Inuit Elders Vol. 2

INTRODUCTION

The Lost Ones

It is a choice between being isolated or being overwhelmed, between being marooned on an island or drowning in the sea.

-J. Edward Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?*

In August of 2008, Parks Canada announced that it would be funding a new search for the wrecks of the *Erebus* and *Terror* – the ships belonging to the infamous Franklin Expedition. In 1845, Sir John Franklin and his crew set out for Arctic Canada to complete the mapping of the Northwest Passage, but they never made it home. A series of search parties were sent out, and over the years, the discovery of scattered traces of the expedition created an explanation upsetting to the heroic tale of the lost Arctic explorer. Remains found on King William Island (Netsilingmiut territory, near present day Gjoa Haven) suggested that the men had suffered from lead poisoning; instead of making use of local resources, the expedition had relied upon canned food. Furthermore, some of the bones carried knife-marks: it appeared – much to the horror of Victorian readers – that the men’s hunger had driven them to cannibalism.¹ Dozens of search parties have since attempted to atone for this colossal failure, as each new expedition rehearses the thrill of exploration, the possibility of conquest, and the mystery and danger of the North.

Minister John Baird’s announcement of the latest search for Franklin, however, put an unexpected spin on the project. Not only would the discovery of the *Erebus* and *Terror* fill in an important gap in the “shared history” of Canada and Great Britain, but it would also function, he suggested, to bolster Canadian sovereignty in the North. “We

¹ The exploration of the graves during the 1980s – and the discovery of the signs of cannibalism – confirmed the Inuit account of the expedition, which the explorer John Rae had sought out not quite ten years after Franklin’s disappearance (Kenn Harper, “Charles Dickens and the Inuit”).

certainly think that by establishing our long-standing presence in the Arctic,” Baird said, “that can enhance issues of sovereignty” (“Canada Launches”). This reasoning – which connects the possible discovery of the wreckage of a failed British expedition with Canada’s right to control freighter traffic in the Northwest Passage – may be difficult to follow. It functions according to the same kind of frontier logic employed a mere two weeks earlier, when a Russian submarine planted a flag on the seabed floor underneath the North Pole, based on the claim that the point lies on Russia’s continental shelf. As the impact of twentieth-century civilization – the melting sea ice – opens up greater prospects for natural resource extraction and shipping routes in the Arctic, the circumpolar nations have been resorting to these kinds of maneuvers in order to stake their claims. As Prime Minister Stephen Harper declared in a July 2007 speech:

Canada has a choice when it comes to defending our sovereignty over the Arctic. *We either use it or lose it.* And make no mistake, this Government intends to use it. Because Canada’s Arctic is central to our identity as a northern nation. It is part of our history. And it represents the tremendous potential of our future. (“PM announces,” emphasis added)

A few months later, Mary Simon, the president of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami – Canada’s national Inuit organization – published an article entitled “Sovereignty from the North” in *The Walrus* magazine’s Special Arctic Issue. “What does Harper mean?” she asked, “Have Inuit not been using the region for millennia? . . . Without the Inuit, could we really claim to be masters of the Arctic house?” (33). The error that Simon identifies – a way of speaking which erases or undermines *Inuit* sovereignty in the North – is at work in John Baird’s announcement as well. The need to demonstrate “our long-standing presence in the Arctic” via the discovery of Franklin’s ships says quite clearly that the presence which the federal government is concerned with is a Euro-Canadian one

(“Canada Launches”). The far more ancient title of the Inuit does not fit as neatly, somehow, into Canada’s claim.

Mary Simon points out that this Arctic sovereignty crisis, though exacerbated by climate change, is nothing new for Canada; rather, it flares up every ten to fifteen years – as it did during the 1942 construction of the Alaska Highway, during the establishment of the DEW (Distant Early Warning) line in the mid-1950s, or when the American supertanker *Manhattan* passed through the Northwest Passage in 1969 and 1970 on its way to the Alaskan oil fields (32-33).² As a result, Simon argues, the intermittent flurries of activity in federal policy bureaus are endlessly reactionary, and more concerned with “ports or training facilities or military exercises” than with the daily realities and wellbeing of people living in the North (“Sovereignty” 33). Indeed, the instances in which the federal government *has* taken an interest in Northern peoples have resulted in Inuit being used as “human flagpoles” – as in 1953, when several families from Inukjuak and Pond Inlet were sent to establish the new communities of Grise Fiord (Ausuittuq) and Resolute Bay (Qausuittuq) (Simon, “Sovereignty” 34).³ As a result, when the Prime Minister speaks about Arctic sovereignty today, Simon hears disturbing echoes of past administrations (34).⁴

In an August 2006 speech given in Iqaluit, Harper declared, “[t]his is Nunavut – ‘Our Land’ – just as Yukon and the Northwest Territories and the entire Arctic Archipelago are ‘Our Land’” (Harper, “Securing”). Here, the Prime Minister’s

² See also Coates, Lackenbauer, Morrison, and Poelzer’s recent *Arctic Front: Defending Canada in the Far North*.

³ For more information on the High Arctic relocations, see Kulchyski and Tester’s *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic (1939-63)*, and the latest documentary by Igloodik Isuma Productions, *Exile*.

⁴ “How ironic now for Canada to brandish the fact that Canadian citizens—Inuit—live in the Arctic in order to add legitimacy to its sovereignty claims” (Simon, “Sovereignty” 34).

understanding of the –*vut* in Nunavut (‘our,’ he suggests, refers to Canadians, rather than to Inuit) is purposefully loose; Inuit title to the land, and its Inuktitut expression, is subsumed by the state. The language used by Harper evokes the anxiety underlying many southern administrators’ discussions about the North: *is Inuit presence really Canadian presence?* Many Inuit would say yes; the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), after all, often makes use of the slogan “First Canadians, Canadians First.” But John Baird, in declaring the latest search for Franklin to be foundational to the history of ‘our’ presence in the North, seemed unsure. The reoccurring conflicts over Arctic sovereignty, furthermore, suggest that for the community of circumpolar nations, Inuit presence in or ownership of the Arctic homeland can be easily overlooked, taken advantage of, or willfully ignored.

To the distant or untrained eye, the Arctic conveys a sense of emptiness. Southern perspectives linger upon its expanses of snow, its treelessness, its miles and miles of apparently undifferentiated landscape, and its potential for adventure and self-discovery. Scholars and politicians alike recognize this North as a Canadian construct – one which has been “central to our identity as a northern nation” (Harper, “PM announces”). As Renée Hulan writes:

the term ‘frontier’ [has been used] to describe the imaginary North: ‘a wilderness, an empty ‘space’ which, seen from southern Canada is white, blank,’ while the ideological North is that ‘empty page onto which can be projected images of the essence of ‘Canadian-ness’ and also images to define one’s urban existence against. (*Northern Imagination* 5)

In his 1967 radio documentary *The Idea of North*, Glenn Gould admits that “the north has remained for me a convenient place to dream about, spin tall tales about sometimes, and, in the end, avoid” (qtd. in Grace 1). And for many Canadians, the landscape north of the treeline still has a kind of frontier status – simultaneously wild, threatened, and rich in

resources. The problem is that images of frozen, treeless terrain and of polar bears stranded on ice floes are telling an incomplete story about the North, and the majority of southerners are unaccustomed to thinking about the Arctic as a *peopled* landscape, with an extensive cultural and political history. But as changing geological and political climates continue to create challenges for Northerners and Southerners alike, this is now more than ever an essential shift in perspective.

While many southern Canadians are familiar with Inuit material culture (as represented by igloos, inukshuks, and carvings of dancing bears), the idea that the North possesses extensive philosophical, political, and literary traditions has not exactly entered the public consciousness, or even the halls of the academy. The Western tradition, after all, has a tendency to associate serious intellectual and cultural achievement with large, permanent structures, and with particular types of print culture. As a result, when knowledge is passed orally, or even in non-alphabetic forms of writing – such as sewing, carving, or inukshuk-building – it seems to be invisible, or incomprehensible, to those for whom ‘culture’ is fundamentally tied to agriculture.⁵ As such, while most Southern Canadians will have seen prints and carvings of Kiviuq and Sedna, few are familiar with the literary traditions to which these pieces refer, or with the verbal artwork being produced by Inuit writers and storytellers today. Even in Native Literature classes, Inuit texts tend to have a marginal presence, if indeed they are present at all. In the 1980s, Robin McGrath wrote a dissertation and a series of articles on Inuit literature (*Canadian Inuit Literature: The Development of a Tradition*), and in 1988 Penny Petrone published a collection entitled *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English*. Yet these trailblazing texts failed to ignite a great deal of interest amongst literary scholars, and in a 2004

⁵ See Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?* (17-21).

Windspeaker article, the Inuk writer and politician Zebedee Nungak spoke out about the difficulties that Inuit writers face in distributing their work: “[w]ith nobody actively seeking such material . . .” he grieved, “any number of journals, diaries, and manuscripts gather dust in many an obscure shelf” (26).

Another name for the North, or the Arctic, is *Inuit Nunaat* – the ‘land of the Inuit,’ or the ‘land of the people.’ The Inuit homeland extends across the entire Western hemisphere, but it is segmented by the borders of Russia, the United States, Canada, and Greenland. There are further divisions within the nation-states as well; in Canada alone, the self-governing Inuit political regions include the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Northwest Territories), Nunavut, Nunavik (Northern Quebec), and Nunatsiavut (Labrador).⁶ As one might expect, the intellectual culture of this territory is likewise varied and complex; traditions of sewing, carving, printmaking, songmaking, storytelling, writing, and filmmaking take on the particular flavours of the history and geography of each region. In other words, lands and literatures are closely connected, and the fate of one tends to be reflected in the other. The emptiness or blankness, therefore, which southern administrations and the international community associate with the terrain of the North extends into understandings of the intellectual landscape. Just as the signs of human history, occupation and ownership of Arctic lands are often too subtle – or too different – for many outsiders to read, Inuit literary traditions often go largely unrecognized.

This oversight is not due to any shortage of literary material. The traditional or classic Inuit literatures have been collected and published by ethnographers like Franz Boas (*The Central Eskimo*), Diamond Jenness (*Songs of the Copper Eskimos*), and Knud

⁶ See Map 2 (x).

Rasmussen (*Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-24*), and have since been supplemented by more recent publications based on oral history projects, such as Nunavut Arctic College's *Interviewing Inuit Elders, Memory and History and Nunavut, Inuit Perspectives on the 20th Century*, and *Life Stories of Northern Leaders* series, *Inuit Nunamiut: Inland Inuit* (ed. Hattie Mannik), *Uqalurait: An Oral History of Nunavut* (ed. John Bennett and Susan Rowley), *The Arctic Sky: Inuit Astronomy, Star Lore, and Legend* (ed. John MacDonald), and *Saqiyuq: Stories from the Lives of Three Inuit Women* (ed. Nancy Wachowich). In a similar vein, many Inuit – including Nuligak (Bob Cockney), Minnie Aodla Freeman, Alice Masak French, Anthony Apakark Thrasher, Armand Tagoona, and Gideon Enutsia Etorolopiaq (Dracc Dreque) – have also produced memoirs and autobiographies. Writers of fiction, meanwhile, include Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk (*Sanaaq*), Markoosie (*Harpoon of the Hunter*), Rachel Attituk Qitsualik (“Skraeling”), and Michael Kusugak (*The Curse of the Shaman*). Furthermore, the rise of Igloolik Isuma Productions, creators of the films *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)* and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, has drawn international attention to Inuit storytelling traditions and innovations.⁷

A few of these texts have received some critical attention from scholars like Robin McGrath, Dale Blake, Sam McKegney, Sherrill Grace, Renée Hulan, Sophie McCall, Arnold Krupat, and Michael P. J. Kennedy; the films of Isuma, in particular, have captured the critics' interest. Their approaches vary widely, ranging from overviews of the material available to postcolonial declarations of resistance. The contributions of

⁷ This is merely a brief selection; for a more comprehensive list, see the entries on Inuit literature in the *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* (Ed. William H. New) and *The Concise Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (ed. William Toye), or Robin McGrath's *Canadian Inuit Literature: The Development of a Tradition*.

anthropologists, linguists, and historians such as Peter Kulchyski, Frank James Tester, Christopher Trott, Frédéric Laugrand, Jarich Oosten, Bernard Saladin d'Anglure, Louis-Jacques Dorais, Jean Briggs, Béatrice Collignon, Renée Fossett, Marc Stevenson, and Michèle Therrien also provide a rich critical foundation for analysis. In other words, the stage has been set for the appearance of more focused and sustained *literary* studies of Inuit writing and storytelling.

In 1994, the Osage scholar Robert Warrior published a book entitled *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*, in which he argued that critics of Indigenous literatures must strive for 'intellectual sovereignty': in studying Native texts, they must draw primarily upon the context of work by other Indigenous writers, both past and present (87). "[H]ow does construing the field in the terms of intellectual history change the critical landscape?" Warrior asks (xiii). He was soon joined in this project by other scholars in the field of what is now known as American Indian/Indigenous Literary Nationalism. Critics like Craig Womack (Muskogee), Jace Weaver (Cherokee), Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee), and Lisa Brooks (Abenaki) have since explored the ways in which Indigenous literatures are deeply connected to the political lives of the nations which produce them. Other scholars, like Dell Hymes, Dennis Tedlock, Jerome Rothenberg, Arnold Krupat, Brian Swann, Richard Dauenhauer and Nora Marks Dauenhauer, Robert Bringhurst, Julie Cruikshank, and J. Edward Chamberlin, have also contributed greatly toward the understanding of oral traditions as serious literary texts, and the Indigenous Literary Nationalists expand upon this work, emphasizing the critical and political aspects of classic literatures, and the ways in which they continue to inform the intellectual expression of contemporary Indigenous nations.

'Nationalist' studies, therefore, explore the congruence between intellectual and political sovereignties; this methodology aims to locate Indigenous texts within culturally-specific intellectual traditions while maintaining an awareness of the impact of this work on the lives of Indigenous peoples.

In many ways, the project of Indigenous Literary Nationalism is a project of renaming. The use of the term "intellectual traditions" to describe Indigenous writing and storytelling transforms these texts in the minds of the readers and listeners; instead of remaining ethnographic artifacts or historical curios, they become literary and critical masterpieces. In this way, terms like "intellectual tradition" function like magic words, which, as Malinowski observes, "produce an effect on the magician himself, on his retinue and on all those who work with him, under him, and by him" (82). By using the terminology of the academy, then, Indigenous scholars translate these traditions into forms that the institution can recognize. As Daniel Heath Justice explains:

[t]he stories told both *by* and *about* Indian people are vital to the processes of peoplehood, as they help to give shape to the social, political, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of tribal life. Stories are never far from their contexts, as words give shape to stories. 'Sovereignty' is a story, as are 'self-determination' and 'nationhood.' These stories challenge others, like 'Manifest Destiny,' 'savage,' 'assimilation,' 'genocide.' . . . [W]e can use the academy's resources and cultural capital to serve both the pursuit of truth and the dignified decolonization of Indigenous peoples. (207-208)

Craig Womack, however, has written that Literary Nationalism "attempts to find Native literature's place in Indian country, rather than Native literature's place in the canon" (*Red on Red* 11). Justice, who is similarly committed to the political impact of literary study, demonstrates the ways in which these processes are intertwined. Indeed, while recognition by the academy may not be primary goal of Literary Nationalist criticism, it

is an important side-effect – one which can help to transform the understanding of non-Native students and scholars into a form more amenable to the sovereignty of Indigenous communities.

This need to negotiate between the academy and the community is a central concern for many scholars of Indigenous literatures, and the invocation of the institution’s terminology – even in the service of political struggles – is not without controversy. In a 2008 article in *PMLA*, Robert Warrior examines the politics of the use of the term “sovereignty” – both political and intellectual – in Native American and Indigenous Studies. The Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred, Warrior writes,

finds sovereignty so tangled up in Euro-Western dynamics that its use in Indigenous discourses on governance cannot be justified. . . . Alfred argues that it is difficult, if not impossible, to qualify and modify sovereignty and other Euro-Western terms so that they permit Indigenous philosophical concepts to influence contemporary Native governance. (“Organizing” 1687-88)

While Warrior takes these concerns seriously, he finds the position taken by the Lenape scholar Joanne Barker more compelling: “Sovereignty carries the awful stench of colonialism. It is incomplete, inaccurate, and troubled. But it has also been rearticulated to mean entirely different things by indigenous peoples” (Barker qtd. in Warrior, “Organizing” 1689). Concepts such as sovereignty, she implies, can be re-imagined or repurposed by Indigenous scholars and communities; as Justice suggests, the power of the Western academy can be harnessed.

As many scholars have pointed out, Indigenous peoples have always adapted useful concepts and technologies without fear that their cultural purity might be compromised. Craig Womack, for example, asserts that the idea of the ‘traditional’ might be reworked to mean “anything that is useful to Indian people in retaining their values

and worldviews, no matter how much it deviates from what people did one or two hundred years ago. . . . Only cultures that are able to adapt to change remain living cultures; otherwise they become no longer relevant and are abandoned” (*Red on Red* 42). Despite this progressive thinking, however, the traumas of forced assimilation and ongoing marginalization continue to fuel uncertainty about the appropriateness (or, often, certainty about the *in*appropriateness) of Euro-western concepts, tools, and people in Indigenous studies. For Jace Weaver, the dangers of this power imbalance extend to what he calls:

Eurocentric comparisons, such as that which asks with plaintive arrogance, ‘Where is the African Proust?’ or that of Albert Schweitzer, who dubbed South Asian Nobel laureate Rabindrinath Tagore ‘the Indian Goethe.’ In each case there is the clear implication that persons who need the adjectival modifier are something less than their Western counterparts, the ‘actual’ Proust or the ‘real’ Goethe. (*That the People Might Live* x)

Is the comparison implied in the use of a term like “intellectual traditions,” then, likewise problematic? In other words, is the translation of Indigenous writing and storytelling into forms that that the academy will recognize a strategic tactic, or a sell-out?

In 1958, the Oblate missionary Maurice Métayer recorded 109 stories from a group of tellers in Kugluktuk (Coppermine). These were eventually published in 1973 in a three-volume French/Inuinnaqtun collection – *Unipkat: Tradition Esquimaude de Coppermine, Territoires-du-Nord-Ouest, Canada* – by the Centre d’Études Nordiques of the Université Laval. A selection of these stories was later included in Métayer’s much smaller but better-known collection *Tales from the Igloo (Contes de mon iglou)*. One of the stories by Louis Qajuina tells of a group of hunters who paddle upriver to look for

caribou, but never return.⁸ A second group of hunters sets out to search for them, but they too go missing. The community is at a loss, until a poor orphan boy decides that he will go out to find the men. Borrowing a kayak, he heads up the river until he comes to a group of very large snow-houses. He looks inside for the lost hunters, but finds no one there. Suddenly, though, he hears footsteps approaching, and he soon discovers that the settlement which he has stumbled upon is not a village of men, but of bears, and that he is therefore in great danger. Here, Métayer annotates the story, adding that “[m]any times the boy had heard stories of these beasts who lived in igloos like people and *who could take off their outer skins whenever they were inside their own homes. When they were out hunting the bear-men wore their skins and were very, very dangerous*” (Métayer, *Tales* 26, emphasis added). Having wounded one of the bears, the boy tries to hide in a different snow-house, but finds two old bear-women inside. He kills them both quickly, and immediately begins skinning one. And just as the other bears come into the house, the boy has managed to dress himself in the fresh skin. Thus acting the part of the old bear-woman, he is able to escape detection until he has a chance, at last, to escape.

The idea of animals *wearing* their skins – much as humans do – is a trope which appears fairly often in the classic Inuit tales. Another story recorded by Métayer tells of a wolf-couple who take off their skins and appear in human form in order to kidnap a human baby (*Tales* 73-77). The hero Kivuiq, meanwhile, is said to steal the skin of a fox-woman, and refuses to return it until she agrees to become his wife.⁹ In another episode of this story, Kivuiq is married to a wolf whose mother becomes jealous, murders her

⁸ Texte 17, “Visite au village des ours grizzly” (Métayer, *Unipkat* Vol. 1 124-132). In *Tales from the Igloo*, she story appears as “The Orphan and the Bears” (Métayer 25-31).

⁹ See, for example, the version told by Thomas Kusugaq (Spalding, *Eight Inuit Myths* 51-66).

daughter, and dresses in her skin in order to seduce her son-in-law.¹⁰ The front cover of *The Walrus*' Special Arctic Issue, meanwhile, is a lithograph by the Cape Dorset artist Ningeokuluk Teevee, in which a woman unzips her human skin, clothing and all, to reveal the head of a fox. Skins and skin clothing are obviously of enormous importance in Inuit tradition – they were not only fundamental to survival, but also reflected the identity of the wearer. They might even be said to embody the Inuit reliance on and interconnection with the animal world.¹¹ The idea of taking the skin of an animal evokes the ingenuity and skill that have enabled Inuit to live in an environment which – to the rest of the world – is astounding in its extremes.

In framing this project, then, I am interested in the ways in which Inuit intellectual traditions might similarly be dressed in new 'skins' for the purposes of infiltrating the academy. Each chapter thus examines an aspect of Inuit literary and critical traditions, and experiments – in the way of the Literary Nationalists – with the kinds of labels that might assist in bridging the gap between Inuit and Euro-Canadian modes of scholarship. This is not a question of contorting Inuit texts in order to fit them into the expectations of the academy; the slightly gentler metaphor of re-dressing, I find, seems somewhat less damaging to the body of the texts (even if the process of acquiring these 'skins' has its own implicit power dynamics). My hope is to present Inuit literary traditions in a way which preserves their integrity, but which also allows a wider readership to recognize the fact that they represent an important – if underdeveloped – field of study.

¹⁰ See "The Wolf Women and Kiviuq's Homecoming" in the online resource "Kiviuq's Journey" (http://www.unipka.ca/Stories/Wolf_Women.html).

¹¹ This is a reality, of course, which Southerners often prefer to romanticize, rather than to face the graphic details of.

This project, however, is by no means comprehensive. Inuit texts deserve serious and in-depth study, with careful attention to the language – especially the original language – of their expression; it is this rationale, in part, which has led me to limit the scope of the project to literature produced by Nunavut writers and storytellers. The Nunavut border, though reflective of ethnic and political distinctions in the Canadian Arctic, is to some extent arbitrary.¹² But it has allowed me to consider this material in the context of contemporary Northern political movements, to focus on the Inuit regions whose dialects are most accessible to me,¹³ and to put some very necessary limits on the dissertation. In aiming for depth rather than breadth in my analysis, I have also tried to respect the localized nature of Inuit knowledge, and to avoid overarching and authoritative declarations about Inuit literary traditions.¹⁴ In trying to make space for close reading, then, I have had to select only a handful of works, at the expense of many others. For example, I do not have the opportunity here to discuss works from the Northwest Territories (such as Alice Masak French’s *The Restless Nomad* or Anthony Apakark Thrasher’s *Skid Row Eskimo*), from Quebec (such as Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk’s novel *Sanaaq*, or the spoken-word poetry of Taqralik Partridge), or from Labrador (such as the *Diary of Abraham Ulrikab*, or the memoirs of Lydia Campbell and Elizabeth Goudie). Texts from Greenland, Alaska, and Siberia – such as *Words of the Real People: Alaska Native Literature in Translation* (eds. Ann Fienup-Riordan and Lawrence Kaplan), Lela Kiana Oman’s *The Epic of Qayaq, From the Writings of Greenlanders/*

¹² For example, I have included the work of Minnie Aodla Freeman, whose childhood and story were set in the James Bay region, on and around the borders of Ontario, Quebec, and what is now Nunavut. Freeman’s grandfather Weetaltuk and his people were from the Belcher Islands (the southernmost part of Nunavut).

¹³ The eastern Nunavut Baffin (Qikiqtaaluk) region, in particular.

¹⁴ In this, I follow the guidance of Alexina Kublu, Frédéric Laugrand, and Jarich Oosten, who discuss the “nature of Inuit knowledge” in their introduction to the *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series (Angmaalik et al. 8-11). See Chapter 3 (133-134).

Kalaallit atuakkiaannit (Ed. Michael Fortescue), and Aqqaluk's Lynge new book of poetry *Taqqat uummammut aqqutaannut takorluukkat apuuffiannut/The Veins of the Heart to the Pinnacle of the Mind* – are also unfortunately absent, and would merit their own complete studies.

I regret also that I have not found space to discuss one of the best-known Nunavut writers: Alootook Ipellie, who passed away in Ottawa in September of 2007.¹⁵ Ipellie, who was born near Iqaluit, was an established artist and cartoonist, and illustrated texts like *Robin Gedalof's Paper Stays Put: A Collection of Inuit Writing* and the recently published *Diary of Abraham Ulrikab* (ed. Hartmut Lutz). In the early 1990s, he also served as the editor of *Kivioq: Inuit Fiction Magazine*, which produced two installments before being suspended due to a lack of funding (Ipellie, "Thirsty for Life" 101). Ipellie's collection of short stories and drawings, *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares*, is one text which *does* often make into onto Native literature course syllabi, where it works to challenge readers' expectations of Aboriginal expression and their perceptions of Inuit society. Clever, disturbing, and hilarious, *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares* also demonstrates the ways in which illustration does not belong only in children's books, but rather can be a crucial component of storytelling. Ipellie was furthermore rumoured to have been working on a novel entitled *Akavik: The Manchurian David Bowie* (Kennedy 164). His early death is a great loss, as is his absence in these pages.

In the focused group of texts which I have studied closely, however, I have endeavoured to include writing and storytelling from a range of genres and historical periods – the classic stories and songs of the oral tradition, life writing, oral histories, and contemporary fiction, poetry and film – and to consider the ways in which these texts,

¹⁵ I hope to correct this omission in the eventual published version of this work.

though disparate, constitute a literary tradition. I hope to demonstrate a series of potential approaches to the material, and to draw those methodologies from the texts themselves. In other words, I seek to locate – in as much as it is possible for an outsider to do so – an Inuit literary criticism. In order to foreground the way in which the details of the Inuktitut language itself might offer a key to the understanding of the material, I have consulted the original versions of texts wherever available.¹⁶ Again, none of the approaches outlined in this work is meant to be authoritative, or universally applicable. My hope is that they may provoke a discussion, or at least a reading, of these texts (and of others like them) – the vast majority of which are now out of print, or limited by the small scale of their distribution.

My first chapter experiments with the idea – or, to return to my earlier metaphor, the ‘skin’ – of ‘nation.’ This term is almost never applied to or used by Inuit, in part because of the enormous size of the Inuit homeland, and the diversity which exists within it. Are Literary Nationalist readings – interpretations which take Inuit intellectual traditions and political concerns as their primary framework – therefore possible? While no singular or homogenous definition of Inuit identity exists, political organizing by groups such as the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) and the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) have drawn upon the notion of a common land, language, and culture – what some might call a ‘peoplehood’ – in order to establish an international presence.¹⁷ Following their lead, I argue that a ‘national’ literature of sorts exists in the shared, though variable,

¹⁶ Very often, the original language serves to complicate rather than clarify things; there is no doubt in my mind that this is a good thing. Also, the terminology of this field of study is predominantly and necessarily in Inuktitut, and readers are encouraged to make use of the glossary (246) while terms such as *Tuniit*, *unikkaaqtuat*, and *ikiaqtagaq* become more familiar.

¹⁷ I take the idea of ‘peoplehood’ from Tom Holm, J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis’s article “Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies.”

traditions of stories. In particular, I compare elders' tales about the Tuniit (or Dorset – the people displaced by the Thule Inuit) with Rachel A. Qitsualik's imagining of an Inuit/Tuniit encounter in her recent short story "Skraeling." I argue that these texts work to articulate of a kind of national consciousness, or a sense of what it means to be Inuk. In doing so, they both complicate the idea of the 'apolitical' Inuit, and provide the foundations for a Literary Nationalist reading of Inuit literature.

The second chapter looks at *unikkaaqtuat* – the myths, or classic tales – and discusses the possibilities of literary analysis, or of reading this material as 'literature.' Although the transmission of these stories may not have relied on the use of letters, they are undeniably 'literary' in their style of expression: the *way* in which they are told seems to be equally important as *what* is being told. Through a close reading of Thomas Kusugaq's story "Angusugjuk and the Polar Bears," I explore the ways in which careful attention to the form or aesthetics of the stories can supplement (and indeed, should be inseparable from) an analysis of their historical context and political significance. Drawing on the work both of the Indigenous Literary Nationalists and of J. Edward Chamberlin, I argue that a truly 'sovereign' hermeneutics must take into consideration the autonomy of the text: the way in which the story itself might determine the manner of its own reading. In this way, the *unikkaaqtuat* not only constitute a classic literature, but can act as a guide for the reading of other texts in the Inuit tradition.

Chapter Three examines one of the most popular genres in the Inuit tradition: autobiography, or life-history. The many autobiographical texts produced by collaboration between Inuit and *qallunaat* (southerners) have more recently been supplemented by the publication of oral history projects, such as Nunavut Arctic

College's *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series. In imitation of the Nunavut government's commitment to *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit* – Inuit 'traditional knowledge' – I view these elders as scholars of their tradition, and seek to locate a literary criticism in their stories. In particular, I explore the generic distinction between *inuusirminik unikkaat* ('life stories') and *unikkaaqtuat* (myths, or classic tales). The boundary between these two forms, though permeable, seems to fall between stories which are told from personal experience and those which are told from hearsay. In the latter category, language or the style of expression takes sudden prominence; in this, I argue, we might find a sense of the 'literary' which is not bound by the Euro-Western commitment to the fictional – by the idea that literary traditions progress inevitably toward the production of novels. I explore this thesis with reference to Minnie Aodla Freeman's autobiography *Life Among the Qallunaat* – a text which likewise hovers between testimony and hearsay, and thereby contributes to a sense – or a 'skin' – of the literary, and of literary scholarship.

The final chapter explores the song traditions recorded by the Greenlandic Inuk anthropologist Knud Rasmussen during the 1921-1924 Fifth Thule Expedition, along with their later iterations in the work of Igloolik Isuma Productions. Here, I examine the possibility of dressing the songs (*pisiiit*) with the label 'poetry.' In print, many of the old songs have been presented as lyric poetry, and Sophie McCall – along with the Indigenous Literary Nationalists – has argued that this presentation transforms these texts into decontextualized ethnographic fragments. Although this is a legitimate political concern, I seek to complicate the idea that the songs should never be repurposed – or taken out of context – by exploring the tradition of *ikiaqtagaq*: the 'splitting' or borrowing of songs from previous owners. As we see in Isuma's 2006 film *The Journals*

of *Knud Rasmussen*, songs are regularly re-contextualized to serve as tools and trade-items: they might function symbolically to evoke a particular place or ideology, and they can be bartered for, or bought and sold. As Tom Lowenstein points out, the language and imagery of the songs often underscores this objectification: songs are depicted as craft objects, or as prey, constantly sought (xix-xxii). As such, the political *functionality* of songs is bound up in their aesthetics, and this, I argue, encourages a kind of reading which avoids the unnecessary division between form and context.

‘Inuit as a nation,’ ‘oral traditions as literature,’ ‘elders as scholars,’ and ‘songs as poems’: this series of similes (or skins) is meant to help the academy view Inuit intellectual traditions as suitable for inclusion in the curriculum. As I have already mentioned, the politics of this presentation are complicated, and many will no doubt not approve of them. I take these concerns seriously, but I try also to remember that adaptation is very much a part of Inuit (and Indigenous) traditions, and that the benefits of bringing these traditions into university classrooms are closely related to the wellbeing of Inuit communities. Inuit literature not only provides students with the opportunity to expand their understanding of what constitutes a literary text, but also to recognize the authority and expertise that exist beyond the walls of the institution, and to hear a Northern perspective on the history of colonization, on climate change, on Arctic sovereignty and on the Canadian state. As Robert Warrior and his colleagues suggest, literary recognition is closely linked to political recognition, and the presence of Inuit in the canon will thus benefit universities and communities alike.

As an outsider, I am wary of imposing a perspective on the material; indeed, the goal of this project has been to seek Inuit methods of interpretation, as embodied by the

texts themselves. And although these texts are at times made familiar by the use of Euro-Western labels, we should keep in mind that these implicit comparisons are strategic, and therefore imperfect. Like the borrowing of skins, they are a disguise, and can be as misleading as they are helpful. If the traditions have been mislabeled or mis-clothed, then, I hope that it is in the way in which *metaphor* is a mislabeling. As in a figure of speech, the disjuncture is meant to be productive, or transformative – to allow for a new way of seeing, and of being seen. In other words, the combination of Inuit and Euro-Western traditions of scholarship constitutes the sewing of a new skin, out of which the lost ones may eventually emerge.

A Note on Orthography

Inuit languages are written in a variety of ways. Much of Nunavut uses a version of the syllabic system which was developed by James Evans for the Cree language and later brought north by the Reverend Edmund Peck. The Western dialects of Inuinnaqtun and Inuvialuktun, however, are written in the roman alphabet, while Labrador uses the orthography of the Moravian missionaries. A thorough overview of these variations can be found in Kenn Harper’s “Inuit Writing Systems in Nunavut: Issues and Challenges.” One of the challenges relevant here is that Inuktitut words written in roman letters are rendered in a range of spellings, and even proper names can vary immensely. For example, two of the elders who participated in the *Interviewing Inuit Elders* oral history project are named ᑕᓱᐅ ᐃᓴᐅᐅ and ᐅᓴᓴᓴᓴᓴᓴ ᐅᓴᓴᓴᓴᓴᓴ. Transcribed directly from syllabics, their names would be Naqi Iqquk and Uqsuralik Uttuqi; in English, however, they become Naqi Ekho and Uqsuralik Ottokie. Inuktitut also differs quite substantially by dialect, and although these variations are rapidly being eroded, there is no standardized version of the language in Canada. In discussing texts from different regions, then, I have attempted to preserve the spellings used in the texts themselves. As a result, my spelling of names (such as Ivaluardjuk) or terms (such as *unikkaaqtuaq*) may vary. Regrettably, I may also at times exhibit a bias for Eastern dialects, as I am most familiar with the languages of the Baffin (Qikiqtaaluk) region.

**‘It Was Said They Had One Song’:
‘Tuniit’ Stories and the Origins of Inuit Nationhood**

My father had a short wave radio, and I remembered how my grandmother Jeannie enjoyed listening to the radio and twisting the dial for signals. Living in the bush there were not many radio programs to find. Once in a while, she would come across the BBC and sometimes they would play Greenlandic Inuit songs. Greenlanders are well known for their singing and they have beautiful songs. She would call us to gather around the radio, saying, ‘You have to listen to this. These are our relatives who live in faraway lands.’ And while we listened to these songs, she would tell us that even though they live in distant place called Akukituk (Inuktitut for Greenland), we were all one people and that someday we were all going to get together.

– Mary Simon, *Inuit: One Future—One Arctic*

The process of ‘story-making’ and the process of nation gathering may be one and the same.

– Lisa Brooks, “Afterword: At the Gathering Place”

Introduction: The ‘Apolitical’ Inuit

In the year 1999, the implementation of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Act created an officially-recognized Inuit homeland in the Canadian Arctic. Traditional Inuit territory, however, extends far beyond these new borders: it reaches westward through the Northwest Territories to Alaska and Siberia, and eastward to Northern Quebec, Labrador and Greenland. *Inuit Nunaat* – the Inuit homeland – spans four countries, and almost an entire hemisphere. Because of the vastness of this region, descriptions of Inuit people and communities often use terms like ‘scattered,’ ‘widespread,’ and ‘far-flung’ – passive expressions which construct an image of a people fated to isolation from the world and from each other. In the imagination of Southerners – ‘Southerners’ being people living below the treeline – this idea of the Arctic as a vast, barren, and empty space often translates into impressions of Inuit as a people without history or politics, and certainly without any unified sense of nationhood. As Robert G. Williamson writes:

Traditionally, though the Eskimo conceived of themselves generally and generically as *Iniut* [sic]— ‘The People’, they never had any strong sense of total ethnic-group loyalty, still less of a sense of identification on a pan-Eskimo or national scale. Social commitment is intensely toward the extended family, somewhat less as toward the camp group, which is a changeable constellation, and moderately toward the dialect group as a whole. Beyond the dialect group, the Eskimo felt very little sense of commitment (31)

In 1921, the Greenlandic anthropologist Knud Rasmussen set out to travel 20,000 miles by dogteam across Inuit territory. During this three-year journey – the famous Fifth Thule Expedition – Rasmussen was struck by the similarities in language and culture across the entire Arctic. Considering the geographical and historical distance between groups of Inuit, Rasmussen observed that “it would be natural for the language and traditions of the various tribes to have lost all homogeneity. Yet the remarkable thing I found was that my Greenland dialect¹⁸ served to get me into complete understanding with all the tribes” (*Across Arctic America* xxxvi). As a people, Inuit may have been composed of widespread regional groups, but their language and literary traditions told a different story. They spoke of a connection that surpassed geographical and historical distance.

This hypothesis was confirmed in 1977, when Inuit representatives from Alaska, Arctic Canada, and Greenland gathered in Barrow, Alaska, for the inaugural meeting of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC).¹⁹ Since the time of Rasmussen’s journey, a great deal had changed in the North: the fur trade had collapsed, and southern administrations had significantly expanded their management of Arctic peoples and resources. As Mary

¹⁸ Rasmussen’s mother was Inuk (the singular of ‘Inuit’), and Kalaallisut (Greenlandic Inuktitut) was his first language.

¹⁹ As Philip Lauritzen mentions in *Oil and Amulets: Inuit: A People United at the Top of the World*, Inuit representatives from the Chukotka region in Siberia did not attend the first ICC meeting (23). However, they are now full members of the ICC (Simon, *Inuit: One Future* 14).

Simon, current president of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami²⁰ (ITK), explains, “[a]s a means of insuring [sic] protection of Inuit culture and the Arctic’s resources, [the delegates at Barrow] believed it necessary to establish a unified position on ... issues that might affect their people and homelands” (*Inuit: One Future* 15). The Council laid down a series of resolutions, which began as follows:

WHEREAS, the Inuit of Greenland, Alaska and Canada are *one indivisible people with a common language, culture, environment and concerns*; and

WHEREAS, the Inuit of the circumpolar region declares [sic] the oneness of its culture, environment and land and the wholeness of the homeland and that it is only the boundaries of certain nation states that separate us; and

WHEREAS, we have met in the first Inuit Circumpolar Conference held in Barrow, Alaska, from June 13-18, 1977, to discuss our communal aspirations and concerns; and

WHEREAS, we wish to reaffirm our right to self-determination; and

WHEREAS, there is a need for an international organization of Inuit to study, discuss, represent, lobby and protect our interests on the international level;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

1. That the Inuit Circumpolar Conference is formed.... (Inuit Circumpolar Council, emphasis added)

This approach seemed to mark a radical shift in Inuit self-perception, particularly as the assembled delegates agreed upon the use of the label ‘Inuit’ to refer to their peoples as a whole (Therrien 144). As André Légaré points out, “the generic term ‘Inuit’ was used by [regional] groups only when they were confronted, in traditional times, with Indian groups or more recently, with Europeans” (159). Indeed, for many residents of Arctic communities, the term ‘Inuit,’ which can be translated as ‘the people,’ is not always the identity-marker of choice. Alaskan ‘Inuit’ are more commonly known as ‘Yupiiit,’ ‘Alutiit,’ or ‘Iñupiat,’ while residents of the Mackenzie Delta region are

²⁰ The Canadian national Inuit organization. Its name translates to ‘Inuit are united in Canada’ (Simon, “Inuit and the Canadian Arctic”).

‘Inuvialuit.’²¹ Even in areas where the term ‘Inuit’ is used, the more common and often more meaningful labels are the region-specific *-miut* appellations.²² However, for the purposes of solidarity, an umbrella term was adopted by the members of the Inuit Circumpolar Council; as Michèle Therrien explains:

selon [les Inuit réunis à Barrow], [l’ethnonyme ‘Inuit’] pouvait être utilisé sans porter atteinte aux désignations employées localement. Ce choix répondait à une logique de situation au moment où il apparaissait important de souligner l’unité et non la disparité d’un large groupe culturel soucieux de son devenir en tant que société distincte.²³ (144)

But for Michael Amarook, then-president of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada,²⁴ a change in Inuit self-conception was apparent: “[f]or the first time in history,” he said, “we have become one people” (qtd. in Lauritzen 26).

The words spoken at Barrow, then, were powerful indeed; they seemed to have produced a change in the world. By gathering together and declaring their oneness, the ICC delegates brought the unity of their people into the foreground. In the eyes of many Southerners, however, the growth of inter-regional organizing did not represent a *change* in Inuit politics; rather, it represented a *beginning*. Again, perhaps because Inuit national and circumpolar organizations were largely formed in order to deal with the *qallunaat*²⁵ presence, non-Inuit scholars of Inuit culture have often made the assumption that political consciousness was a European import. For instance, Marybelle Mitchell’s *From Talking*

²¹ Both ‘Iñupiat’ and ‘Inuvialuit’ can be translated as ‘the real people’ (Therrien 144).

²² See Map. 4 (xi). *-miut* means ‘people of’. While traditional ethnonyms like Nattilingmiut or Aivilingmiut are still in use, they have now been supplemented by *-miut* terms for particular communities (i.e., Iqalungmiut – the people of Iqaluit), or for new regional designations (i.e., Nunavummiut – the people of Nunavut). Note that these are now geographic rather than ethnic markers: the term Nunavummiut can include all residents of Nunavut, including the 15% who are non-Inuit.

²³ “[A]ccording to [the Inuit gathered at Barrow], [the ethnonym ‘Inuit’] could be used without undermining local designations. This choice was made in response to a situation where it seemed important to emphasize the unity, and not the disparity, of a large cultural group concerned with its future as a distinct society.” My translation.

²⁴ The previous name of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.

²⁵ *Qallunaat* is the Inuktitut term for white people, or southerners. The singular is *qallunaaq*.

Chiefs to a Native Corporate Elite: The Birth of Class and Nationalism among the Canadian Inuit tracks “the transformation of Inuit relationships from relatively egalitarian, *apolitical*, family-based units to ethnoregional collectivities...” (ix, emphasis added). Robin McGrath, meanwhile, comments in her groundbreaking 1984 dissertation on Canadian Inuit literature that “[f]ormerly, it would have been impossible to talk about the Eskimo political consciousness because such a thing did not exist Traditional Inuit society had no politics” (*Canadian Inuit Literature* 60).

In Barrow, however, Inuit seemed to have spoken their politics – along with their unity and nationhood – into being. Yet if we assume – as many have – that this moment represented the birth of Inuit political consciousness, we simultaneously have to believe that the ICC’s declaration did not represent the reality of the Inuit political situation, but was instead a very persuasive lie. Perhaps the words spoken at Barrow were prescriptive, rather than descriptive; perhaps the phrase “the Inuit of Greenland, Alaska and Canada are one indivisible people with a common language, culture, environment and concerns;” was supposed to work the way that magic words do – by declaring the opposite of what is, in order to make it happen (Inuit Circumpolar Council).²⁶ However, the idea that an Inuit political consciousness was thus generated at Barrow is only feasible if we define ‘politics’ as ‘participation in Euro-American political systems,’ and therefore fail to recognize pre-colonial Inuit society as political. I would like to argue that Inuit political consciousness was in fact *not* conjured out of thin air; rather, the resolutions voiced in 1977 were the product of a long history of pre-colonial Inuit national sentiment.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, Inuit adapted – out of necessity – to the political structures of the Canadian state: they formed regional, national, and circumpolar

²⁶ See Malinowski.

associations, established organizations, elected leaders and spokespeople, advocated for hunting and fishing rights, negotiated land claims settlements, and won the right to self-governance.²⁷ In pre-colonial Inuit life, many of these activities did not take place in the same forms, largely because they were unnecessary. This, however, does not mean that pre-colonial Inuit were ‘apolitical.’ Given a moment’s consideration, the idea that *any* people might exist without politics – that is, without forms of social organization, without systems of authority, without relationships and conflicts with other peoples, without struggles for power – is difficult to entertain. Inuit oral history projects have taken important steps toward educating youth and outsiders about the systems of law and governance that were in place before the intervention of southern governments. For instance, the second volume of Nunavut Arctic College’s *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series, *Perspectives on Traditional Law*, provides an introduction to extremely complex concepts such as *tirigususiit*, *piqujait* and *maligait*. These terms can be very loosely translated as ‘ritual rules’ (elsewhere called taboos), ‘customs’ or ‘customary laws,’ and ‘rules’ (literally ‘things that are followed’), and they give a sense of the precision with which pre-colonial Inuit society was governed (Aupilaarjuk et al., *Law* 1-3).

Many non-Inuit, however, have been hampered by the difficulty of recognizing cultural institutions in unfamiliar forms. Again, this has led to some peculiar contradictions in their understanding of Inuit society. For instance, Mary T. Loughlin observed in 1943 that “[Eskimo] winter camps number no more than two to five families; they need no national rules nor government” (qtd. in Morice 11). She then remarks

²⁷ There are many excellent volumes on the history of Inuit political activism in the twentieth century. See, for instance, Mary Simon’s *Inuit: One Future, One Arctic*, Peter Kulchyski’s *Like the Sound of a Drum: Aboriginal Cultural Politics in Denendeh and Nunavut* and *Kiumajut (Talking Back): Game Management and Inuit Rights 1900-70* (co-authored with Frank James Tester), and Marybelle Mitchell’s *From Talking Chiefs to a Native Corporate Elite: The Birth of Class and Nationalism among the Canadian Inuit*.

almost immediately that Inuit were governed by “[a] network of senseless taboos” (11). In other words, ‘they have no laws, and their laws are senseless.’ To some extent, this confusion was eased by the rise of southern-style Inuit political activity in the latter half of the twentieth century; because this politics takes a form that is far more familiar to southern scholars, it tends to eclipse its traditional antecedents, and to remove them from the field of discussion. The resulting references to pre-colonial Inuit society as ‘apolitical’ are often a mere oversight in the work of individual scholars; however, they can easily become part of a larger problem. As many Indigenous scholars have pointed out, the academy itself has a chronic difficulty in recognizing Indigenous intellectual traditions, and in bringing them into classrooms in responsible ways (Womack, *Red on Red* 1-24). Even today, it is still struggling with the burden of views inherited from nineteenth-century Europe. In “Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies,” Tom Holm, J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis observe that:

Over the years, anthropologists, political philosophers, and Western academicians in general have developed a hierarchical set of definitions of the ways in which human beings organize themselves socially and politically. The lowest and, to use Western terminology, the most ‘primitive’ form of human organization is the band. (15)

From the band – a small group of hunters and gatherers – societies ‘progress’ to the tribe, the chiefdom, and the state (Holm, Pearson, and Chavis 15-16). These “evolutionary or developmental paradigms,” as J. Edward Chamberlin points out, “are pretty well discredited now”; however, the idea that human societies exist in hierarchical formations continues to be pervasive (“From Hand to Mouth” 139). “Scarcely a day goes by” Chamberlin says, “that I don’t hear one or two traces of it in conversation” (“From Hand to Mouth” 140). It is assumed – often subconsciously – that the destiny of every people is

to practice agriculture and commerce rather than hunting and gathering, and to develop a written literature as a way to avoid reliance on the untrustworthy spoken word.²⁸

Similarly, in order to have a political life, and in order to be sovereign, a society must progress out of tribal obscurity and eventually form (or preferably join, or be subsumed by) a state (Holm, Pearson, and Chavis 15-16). With the arrival of colonial forces, this process of 'evolution' is often kick-started. Colonial administrations recognize that 'development' can be a painful process, but they remain absolutely convinced of its necessity. They are bestowing the gift of 'modernity,' as if it were a thing which Indigenous societies somehow lacked.

This chapter will question the assumption that nationhood is an impossibility for the members of a band, and that an Inuit national consciousness is necessarily the result of contact with European culture. While the threat of southern colonialism has certainly inspired Inuit leaders to reformulate their cultural and political identities into shapes which non-Inuit will recognize and respond to, I will argue that Inuit nationalism has roots which go much deeper. Although the Inuit homeland is a vast region which was traditionally never regulated by a centralized government, an articulation of peoplehood – of a uniquely Inuit humanity – is apparent in the tradition of songs and stories which all Inuit communities share. Indeed, lands and literatures are closely connected, and the fate of one tends to be inevitably reflected in the other. The existence of an Inuit peoplehood therefore, forms the foundation for the study of an Inuit literary tradition – here represented by writing and storytelling from the territory of Nunavut.

²⁸ Such ideas, "continue to lurk within the terminology we use to describe those who do not possess what we call writing or who cannot read written texts. Their unwritten past is 'prehistory,' and they are 'preliterate'" (Chamberlin, "From Hand to Mouth" 139).

In a chapter entitled “Reading the Oral Tradition for Nationalist Themes: Beyond Ethnography,” the Muskogee scholar Craig Womack argues that classic Indigenous stories have a deeply political aspect; they serve – and have always served – to articulate a national identity (*Red on Red* 51-74). As Womack puts it, “oral traditions—legends and myths, if you will—performed in their cultural contexts have always been nationalistic and are told for the purpose of cultivating a political consciousness” (61). Stories provide listeners with a sense of communal identity; they describe “what it means to be from a clan, a town, a nation” (62). Womack’s discussion of the political significance of traditional stories is part of a larger critical movement known as American Indian/Indigenous Literary Nationalism. Guided by prominent Indigenous scholars like Simon Ortiz (Acoma), Craig Womack, Jace Weaver (Cherokee), Robert Allen Warrior (Osage), Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee), and Lisa Brooks (Abenaki), Literary Nationalism espouses critical approaches which emphasize the sovereignty of Indigenous nations, and which ground readings of Indigenous literatures in specific tribal intellectual traditions. Both the classics of the oral traditions and more recently-created works of Native literature can be understood, then, as articulating the nationhood of Indigenous peoples. In this political motivation, Native literatures are nationalist.

As this chapter will show, Inuit literature of all historical periods and genres is likewise involved in the project of describing the nation. Texts from the Inuit oral tradition, along with contemporary Inuit writing, take as a central theme the idea of what it means to be Inuit – often by describing what it means to *not* be Inuit. This, I will argue, constitutes a declaration of nationhood which long precedes the 1977 meeting at

Barrow. Despite regional divisions, Inuit are an ‘imagined community,’ as old as the stories themselves.²⁹

The Meaning of Nation

Before discussing the particular ways in which Inuit literature articulates the Inuit nation, I would like to lay out the ideas of nation and nationalism as I will be referring to them. In an 1882 lecture given at the Sorbonne, Ernest Renan asked the question “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” or “What is a nation?” He discusses the factors of shared race, language, religion, and ‘interests,’ and one by one eliminates them as the defining feature of nationhood. Geography, he concedes, is an important factor; however, the true core of the nation lies in a kind of shared consciousness amongst its members – in “the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories ... [and in] the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form” (19).³⁰ This idea that nationhood is determined not by a set of shared characteristics, but rather by a kind of imaginary covenant between members, was later expanded upon by Benedict Anderson. The nation, Anderson said famously, “is an imagined political community” (6). It is based on a constructed narrative of a shared common history, identity, and often a common enemy. As Renan put it, “[f]orgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation [T]he essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common,

²⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

³⁰ “[L]a possession en commun d’un riche legs de souvenirs ... [et] le désir de vivre ensemble, la volonté de continuer à faire valoir l’héritage qu’on a reçu indivis (“Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?”).

and also that they have forgotten many things (11).³¹ Anderson, however, frames this idea differently, asking why scholars of the nation have “assimilate[d] ‘invention’ to ‘fabrication’ and ‘falsity’, rather than to ‘imagining’ and ‘creation’” (6).

However, Renan, like Anderson, is in fact concerned with a particular kind of nation: the nation-state. Along with theorists like Ernest Gellner, Renan believes that “[n]ations, in this sense of the term, are something fairly new in history. Antiquity was unfamiliar with them” (9). Gellner laid down the conditions for this type of nationhood, here paraphrased by Margareta Nikolas:

[Nations] are born out of the transition from the premodern agrarian era to the modern more urban one as societies develop and emerge through the rubric of industrialisation. The emerging new society would be centred on a literate high culture, assimilating any newcomers into it.

An invention of the ‘modern,’ industrialized era, nation-states are political bodies defined by a “fusion of their component populations” (Renan 10). In other words, the nation-state is a political entity which can encompass multiple ‘ethnic’ nations, and is usually endowed with various institutions for managing its citizens. As Max Weber argued in his essay “Politics as a Vocation,” “a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory” (78).

The definition of nation as a political group outfitted with the trappings of statehood, of course, dismisses the possibility of nationhood amongst non-industrialized peoples. However, while the idea of the nation has undergone changes, it has been around much longer than the era of industrialization. The Latin root of the term, *natio*, refers to birth, and evokes a group of people connected by kinship ties (“Nation”). As such, a

³¹ “L’oubli, et je dirai même l’erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la création d’une nation Or l’essence d’une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses” (Renan, “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?”).

nation is a group of people linked by common descent, rather than a centralized administrative system (“Nation”). Thus we get a more general usage of the term, which refers to a group of people, regardless of their political configuration. By this definition, the nation is a concept as old as humankind.

Indigenous literary nationalists, however, have been careful to distance themselves from the often insidious nationalism of nation-states. As Daniel Heath Justice explains in his Cherokee literary history, *Our Fire Survives the Storm*:

[a]ssertions of Indigenous nationhood should not . . . be necessarily conflated with the nationalism that has given birth to industrialized nation-states, for the distinctions are significant. Nation-state nationalism is often dependent upon the erasure of kinship bonds in favor of a code of patriotism that places loyalty to the state above kinship obligations, and emphasizes the assimilative militant history of the nation (generally along a progressivist mythological arc) above the specific geographic, genealogical, and spiritual histories of peoples. (23)

Here, the nationalism of nation-states is revealed as inherently assimilative. When Renan referenced this ability of civic nations to ‘fuse’ divergent ethnicities into the project of statehood, he lauded it as part of a political entity’s journey to “full national existence, such as we see it blossoming today” (“What Is a Nation?” 10). Meanwhile, ‘ethnic’ nations within the state must engage in what Said called “nationalist anti-imperialism” (“Yeats and Decolonization” 10). Indigenous nations, therefore, oppose the nationalism of the American and Canadian states, which time and again have attempted to subsume them. To quote Justice again: “Indigenous nationhood is a necessary ethical response to the assimilationist directive of imperialist nation-states” (*Our Fire* 8).

In order to better articulate their distance from the ideologies of the nation-state, and perhaps to escape the baggage of terms like ‘ethnic nationalism,’ some scholars have employed the concept of ‘peoplehood’ to define Indigenous nations. As explained by

Holm, Pearson, and Chavis, Indigenous peoplehood is dependent on four intertwined and equally-important factors: a shared language, sacred history, ceremonial cycle, and place, or territory (12). This model takes important steps towards complicating understandings of tribal nationhoods; in particular, it avoids the emphasis on ethnicity, or blood, that prevails in discussions of ‘ethnic’ nationalism. As the authors explain, the adoption of outsiders has not been uncommon in Indigenous societies, and “[r]ace, to Native Americans, was not a factor of group identity or peoplehood” (Holm, Pearson, and Chavis 16). Discourses of blood and racial purity were to come later; in the traditional models, peoplehood also was determined by imagination.

The term ‘peoplehood,’ then, is perhaps a better description of Indigenous political groups than the term ‘nation,’ as ‘nation’ can either be dismissed as a generalized ethnic grouping, or confused with a ‘nation-state.’ However, I will continue to make use of both terms, in the hope of keeping the political aspects of peoplehood in the foreground. Holm, Pearson, and Chavis explain that peoplehood “predates and is a prerequisite for all other forms of socio-political organization [i]t is the basis of nationalism and the original organization of states” (17). On its own, however, I would argue that peoplehood is also deeply political – it is the core of social organization, and the source of a community’s authority amongst other groups. As Holm, Pearson, and Chavis point out, “peoplehood is universally understood, and colonizing powers, to further their own goals, attempt to strip from indigenous groups each of the four aspects of peoplehood through the means of territorial dispossession, assimilation, religious conversion, or outright extermination” (17). However, because peoplehood serves as a *basis* – or a starting point – for nationalism, there is a danger that those evolutionary

models may sneak in, and that scholars will begin attributing political qualities to one and not the other, just as they have in discussions of ethnic versus civic nationalisms, or of nations versus nation-states.

‘Ethnic’ nationalism may be, as Nikolas explains, “determined by descent. Attachments are inherited and not chosen” (Introduction). However, the peoplehood matrix reveals that Indigenous nationhood is rooted in more than a gene pool; like nation-states, Indigenous nations are imagined communities. As Womack reminds us, “[t]o exist as a nation, the community needs a perception of nationhood, that is, stories (like the migration account) that help them imagine who they are as a people, how they came to be, and what cultural values they wish to preserve” (*Red on Red* 26). Even if a people inhabits a large territory, and makes use of localized rather than centralized systems of governance, its nationhood is affirmed in its intellectual and artistic traditions – in the stories that it tells.³²

By using the ideas of peoplehood and American Indian literary nationalism to understand Inuit nationhood, I realize that I may be stepping on some toes. This methodology imports Inuit models into the field of Native American studies, despite the fact that for some, the distinction between Inuit and Indians is sacred. In part, the division between the groups seems to originate from the tactics of the Canadian government, which has historically dealt very differently with Inuit than it has with all the other Indigenous groups (as is reflected in the division implicit in ‘Indian and Northern Affairs’). Inuit have no historic treaties, no reserves, and the Indian Act does not apply to them. Furthermore, relations between Inuit and Indian nations have not always been friendly, as Samuel Hearne’s famous account of the 1771 Bloody Falls massacre attests

³²See also Justice, *Our Fire* 207.

(Hearne 32-36). Perhaps for these reasons, Inuit have remained on the periphery of Aboriginal studies; they are assumed to be too far geographically and culturally removed to be fully included. I would like to argue that it would be a very worthwhile endeavour to create more of a dialogue between Inuit and Aboriginal studies – in particular, to encourage scholars of Inuit literature and culture to take the principles of Indigenous literary nationalism into account. While it is true that there are cultural differences and historical political conflicts between Inuit and First Nations, the differences and antagonisms between various Indian nations have not kept them from uniting for strategic purposes. Inuit and Indians may have different experiences of colonization; however, both are currently confronted with the threat of ongoing colonialism. Therefore, I believe that the use of Indian critical methodology in the consideration of Inuit texts does not disregard the distinctness of either group; rather, it may be beneficial to both.

Reading Stories of ‘Others’ for Nationalist Themes

The classic Inuit stories cover a wide range of topics, yet a consistent theme is the presence, and sometimes the threat, of other (non-Inuit) beings. As the editors of *Uqalurait: An Oral History of Nunavut* point out, “Inuit folklore is full of stories about the murderous nature of strangers” (Bennett and Rowley 130). Even when they are not murderous, these others are characterized by a wonderfully disconcerting weirdness. In the brother and sister stories,³³ for instance, a pair of traveling siblings visit the land of the *kukilingiattiaraaluit*, the ‘ones with the long nails,’ and the *itiquanngittut*, the ‘ones without anuses’ (Kublu 171-177). Other stories tell of visits to villages of bears (Spalding 1-14), and of a whole range of *uumajuit* (animal spirits) and *inurajait* (human-like

³³ A series of tales that culminate in the creation of the sun and moon. See “Aningagiik: Brother and Sister Legends” in Kublu 162-181.

beings) (Aupilaarjuk et al., *Cosmology* 51). This latter category includes *ijirait*³⁴ (shapeshifting land spirits or ‘hidden ones’), *inukpasugjuut* (giants), and *inugarulligaarjuut* (little people), to name only a few (Aupilaarjuk, *Cosmology* 51; Bennett and Rowley 150-159). These others often live in ways that parallel Inuit life, but they also inevitably reveal some (frequently horrific) difference, which marks them as distinctly non-Inuit, or non-human. Aside from fantastic beings, the classic stories are also populated with non-Inuit people, like the Iqqiliit³⁵ (Dene), the Allait or Unaliit (Cree),³⁶ the Qallunaat (white people),³⁷ and the Tuniit – the people who inhabited the Central and Eastern Arctic prior to the arrival of the Inuit.

Chamberlin points out that “we all have stories that hold us in thrall and others at bay” (*If This Is Your Land* 2). Indeed, stories of others are an effective way of defining who we are, by reminding us of who we are not. This is particularly the case for national groups which have a great deal of internal diversity, as Inuit do.³⁸ Inuit speak of their difference from Inuit of other regions; however, this is not the same difference that separates them from non-Inuit. Simon Anaviapik, a Tununirmiut³⁹ elder, tells a story about traveling as a child to the Nattilik region.⁴⁰ At first, his family was struck by the strangeness of the other Inuit: “They seemed almost like animals to us in their own dialect” (qtd. in Bennett and Rowley 126). However, similarities quickly became

³⁴ Also called *tarriaksuit* or *tarriassuit* (‘shadow people’) in South/East Baffin (Aupilaarjuk, *Cosmology* 51-54). See also Bennett and Rowley 159.

³⁵ A rather disparaging term meaning ‘louse eggs’ (Spalding, *Dictionary* 30).

³⁶ Allait is from *alla*, stranger (Schneider 19). Like Iqqiliit, the term can also denote ‘Indians’ more generally.

³⁷ Qallunaat appear in the Sedna/Nuliajuk story: they are said to be descendents of the puppies that Nuliajuk had with her dog-husband, who were set afloat in a kamik (boot). In some versions, the rest of the puppies were sent overland to become the Iqqiliit, or Indians (Aupilaarjuk et al., *Law* 189).

³⁸ In fact, as all peoples do.

³⁹ A North Baffin Inuit group, in the Pond Inlet (Mittimatalik) area.

⁴⁰ The Nattilingmiut, or Netsilingmiut (‘people of the place where there are seals’), are from the area around Taloyoak in the Kitikmeot region of Nunavut (*Uqalurait* 340).

apparent, and the strangeness fell away. “[I]t did not take very long for the language difficulty to clear up,” Anaviapik says, “That’s how it is when you’re all Inuit; problems are easily solved” (qtd. in Bennett and Rowley 126).

When different Inuit regional groups encountered each other, it was likely that they would know many of the same stories, and those stories would remind them of their shared peoplehood. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to a discussion of Inuit stories of Others. In particular, I will focus on the various tales of the Tuniit⁴¹ – the people who inhabited the Central and Eastern Arctic prior to the arrival of the Thule Inuit – as examples of narrative nation-building. Tuniit appear in a variety of Inuit literary genres, whether in narratives collected by anthropologists and retold by contemporary elders, or re-imagined in recent fiction, such as in Rachel Qitsualik’s short story “Skraeling.” As all of these accounts will demonstrate, Inuit representations of the Tuniit – also known as the *Sivullirmiut* (the ‘First People’) – are complex and sometimes incongruous constructions (Brody, “Land Occupancy” 186). At times, the *difference* of the Tuniit is emphasized through descriptions of their apparent primitiveness, or strangeness. At other times, the stories convey a sense of admiration for and even kinship with the first people. Both of these tactics, I will argue, contribute to a sense of distinct Inuit humanity and entitlement to the land – in other words, to a sense of peoplehood.

Few southerners will be familiar with stories of the Tuniit, although some may know them as the people memorialized in Al Purdy’s 1968 poem “Lament for the Dorsets.” Here, they are imagined with a kind of prehistoric majesty (and expiration date):

⁴¹ This term has a variety of spellings, and appears in the plural as Tuniit, Tunit, Tunnit, Tunrit, Tornit, Tornrin, or even Tungi, and in the singular as Tuniq, Tunik, Tuneq, or Tunerk. Accounts that emphasize the large size of the Tuniit sometimes refer to them as Tunitjuat or Tunijjuat.

... the Dorset giants
 who drove the Vikings back to their long ships
 talked to spirits of earth and water
 -a picture of terrifying old men
 so large they broke the backs of bears . . .
 they couldn't compete with little men
 who came from the west with dogs
 Or else in a warm climatic cycle
 the seals went back to cold water. (Purdy, "Lament" 3-7; 18-21)

The Dorset people, or 'Dorset Paleo-Eskimos,' first caught the attention of Southern archeologists in 1925, when Diamond Jenness reported a discovery of archaeological evidence of a 'new' Arctic people (Sutherland 1).⁴² Since that time, archeologists have attempted to better understand the identity of the Dorset people, the nature and extent of their interaction with the Thule Inuit, and the cause of their disappearance.

Archaeologists date the arrival of the Thule, or 'Neo-Eskimos'⁴³ – the ancestors of contemporary Inuit – at around 1000AD (Sutherland 12), and the disappearance of the Dorset in the thirteenth or fourteenth century (Pitseolak 31). Another theory regarding the fate of the Tuniit, entertained both by Southern archaeology and by Inuit oral tradition, is that the Sadlermiut, or Sallirmiut – the inhabitants of Southampton Island – were in fact the last of the Dorset (Eber, *When the Whalers* 77-83; Sutherland 13-14). The story of the Sadlermiut fits with the general theme of the disappearance which characterizes tales of Dorset and Tuniit alike: in 1902, the remaining Sadlermiut were wiped out by disease when they came into contact with European whalers (Eber, *When the Whalers* 77). Others believe that the Dorset may have intermarried with the Thule Inuit, adopted their

⁴² While Mathiassen believed that the Tuniit were the Thule people (190), Guy Mary-Rousselière suggested – and contemporary archaeologists agree – that the legends in fact refer to the Thule's predecessors: the Dorset people ("The Tunit" 17, 19). See also Sutherland 6.

⁴³ Also known as the *Taiissumialungmiut* – literally, 'the people of a very long time ago' (Brody, "Land Occupancy" 189).

technologies, and eventually ceased to be as a distinct people (Qitsualik, “Bones” 14).

But in archaeological circles, the history of the Dorset remains something of a mystery.

Inuit oral tradition, however, contains a great deal of information about the Tuniit, or *Sivullirmiut* – the ‘First People’ (Brody, “Land Occupancy” 186). Their stories are told in many versions in the Central and Eastern Arctic, and their descriptions vary from place to place. Sometimes they are described as being exceptionally large, almost giant; elsewhere, they are short and stocky (Mathiassen, *Archaeology* 188). In either case, they are extremely strong, one Tuniq being able to carry a walrus or bearded seal by himself (Bennett and Rowley 143). Tuniit hunters, they say, used to keep lamps under their coats, and their stomachs would often be burned and scarred when, forgetting the fire, they moved to kill a seal (Inuksuk 36; Bennett and Rowley 144). Evidence of their enormous strength can be seen in the remains of their houses – found all over Inuit lands – which are built with stones far too heavy for an average person to lift. Often it is told that Tuniit slept with their legs elevated, so that the blood would drain out and make their feet light and quick (Bennett and Rowley 144-145). Although strong and fast, they were thought to be timid, and not especially bright (Qitsualik, “Skraeling” 40; Bennett and Rowley 146). Their speech was understandable, but different – less articulate; Peter Pitseolak (Cape Dorset) describes the Sadlermiut as “talking like small babies, unable to pronounce correctly” (33). Simon Qirniq (Gjoa Haven) describes the limitations of the Tuniit in a different way: he writes, “*pisiquatunnguuq atausirmik*” – “it was said they had [only] one song” (37). In short, Tuniit are often represented as a kind of ‘primitive’ people: physically powerful, but developmentally deficient.

Interestingly, echoes of this representation – of Tuniit as ‘primitive’ artists on the verge of extinction – can be heard in Purdy’s “Lament for the Dorsets.” Despite their physical strength, the Dorset seem to lack the intellectual ability necessary for adaptation. When Purdy hypothesized the seals out of the polar waters (“Or else in a warm climatic cycle / the seals went back to cold water”), his “puzzled Dorsets scratched their heads / with hairy thumbs around 1350 A.D. / -couldn’t figure it out / . . . And died” (20-21; 22-29). Like Arctic Neanderthals, they seem to be caught in the rip-tide of evolution. Qirniq’s description of a people with only one song is apt here; it portrays the Tuniit as having a knowledge system of very limited range. Perhaps if they’d had other songs, they might have known what to do when the climate changed, or when the people out of the west arrived. If you have only one song, a key-change can mean irrelevance, and death. Similarly, in Purdy’s poem we see “the last Dorset” starving in his tent; instead of one song, he seems to have only one shape – a swan, which he carves over and over. Purdy imagines his name to be Kudluk – an appellation which may translate to ‘thumb,’⁴⁴ and perhaps emphasizes the physical strength, stubbornness, and isolation of the Tuniq carver. Like much art, Kudluk’s swan is useless, and fails to save him from extinction.

Like Purdy’s telling, Inuit accounts of the fate of the Tuniit vary; however, all seem to agree on the cause of their disappearance: the influx of Inuit into Tuniit lands. Therkel Mathiassen recounts a version of these events which was told to Rasmussen by the Netsilingmiut:

Once the Tunit lived at Qingmertoq (Adelaide Peninsula); there the land was taken from them by the Ugjulingmiut. The Tunit fled eastwards to Saitoq but, when they reached Naparutalik, they threw off all their clothes and swam over Kingarsuit. On the little island Pagdlagfik they reached land, but they were so exhausted that they fell forward and died.

⁴⁴ An Inuk name which might elsewhere be spelled Kublu, or Kullu.

They also lived at Itivnarsuk, Back's River, and wept when they were driven away from this good hunting ground. (qtd. in Bennett and Rowley 147)

Kuppaq tells a very similar story in *We Don't Live in Snow Houses Now: Reflections of Arctic Bay*:

There used to be a camp called Sannirut, near Pond Inlet. The people who lived there were known as Tuniit by the Inuit. The Inuit took their land and the Tuniit had to leave. As they were leaving their camp they cried, because the seal hunting was so good there all year round. (qtd. in Innuksuk and Cowan 15)

Other versions are more ambivalent about Inuit responsibility in removing their predecessors from the land, and suggest that it was the timid nature of the Tuniit that caused them to flee. Aipili Inuksuk (Igloodik) writes that "...the Inuit think [the Tuniit] ran away. Yes, perhaps they ran away, maybe they got scared of the Inuit" (36). As Atoat (Arctic Bay) tells it, "...the Inuit frightened [the Tuniit] away. I suppose they were teasing the Inuit and the Inuit got annoyed, so they tried to scare them, and scared them right away" (qtd. in Innuksuk and Cowan 17).

Some accounts even go as far as to depict the Tuniit giving the Inuit their blessing as they flee. In Rasmussen's collection of Netsilingmiut oral tradition, a story told by Samik reports that:

	malerualiqme	nunaqa'rtualo'galuaramik	nuna'ER-
At	Malerualik	they once had a large settlement, but the land	
taufut		suna pi'blugo tusa'manäh'icöq.	nu-
was taken from them	what for	has not been heard.	But
na'ERTaublutijöq		qima'lëramik	
when the land was taken from them, it is said,		and they ran away,	
ima tɔrlulafunaluit:			
this	they	cried:	

‘malERUARlugitle sunASUARPäk’äbtigo, male-
‘By keeping on following them we used to hunt, by keeping
 RUARLUSIukle sunASUARPagumatIra’jaiVarse!’ tuktut
on following them you must now do your hunting!’ They meant
 piIblugit.
 the caribou. (426, emphasis added)

Louis Uqsuqituq’s (Repulse Bay) account, however, pulls no punches: “[b]efore there were any Inuit, the first people were called Tuniit. They were strong, but the Inuit killed them and took the land away” (qtd. in Brody, “Land Occupancy” 186).

A people who were powerful, yet lacking in technological advancements, who were driven from their land, who disappeared, and who entrusted the newcomers with their legacy: this discourse is oddly familiar. Indeed, the body of Tuniit stories has many parallels with European colonial representations of Indigenous peoples.⁴⁵ This may place contemporary readers – who are likely under the influence of postcolonial studies – in a difficult position; as J. Edward Chamberlin writes: “[p]ostcolonialism is . . . extremely uncomfortable addressing what might be called the internal colonialisms of a tradition” (“From Hand to Mouth” 134). In the case of European colonization, dehumanizing characterizations of Indigenous peoples had the effect of validating the newcomers’ claim to the land; as such, they laid the foundations for a new nation.

Can the stories of Tuniit be understood as operating in the same fashion? In some ways, yes. We should be cautious, however, about constructing an unproblematized comparison between Inuit and European colonizers. After all, it is debatable whether the Thule Inuit, following game into the East and engaging in intermittent conflict with local

⁴⁵ See Chamberlin (*The Harrowing of Eden*) and Berkhofer (*The White Man’s Indian*) for a detailed study of colonial representations of Indigenous peoples, or as Berkhofer puts it, the “invention” of “the idea of the Indian” (3).

people in 1000CE, constitute a colonial force.⁴⁶ To assume this, furthermore, may even be to add fuel to the social-Darwinist argument that human history is shaped by a series of conflicts and displacements, and that therefore European colonization was a natural and justifiable undertaking. Meanwhile, if the Inuit are imagined as an imperialist force, then they may be understood as having no special title to their land and resources – at least, no more title than the more recent European arrivals can claim.

One might ask, furthermore, why Indigenous societies are required to be utopian – to have never engaged in conflicts or displacements – in order for their claims to sovereignty to be valid. After all, it is unlikely that such a requirement would be made for a nation-state. To shy away from the problematic or ‘colonial’ aspects of Tuniit stories is to play into the idea that pre-colonial Indigenous societies were peaceful utopias, without their own complex histories of political conflicts and alliances. And this, I would argue, amounts to yet another erasure of Indigenous politics. To imagine Inuit as a colonial force is to use European colonization as a fallback referent for all other land-centered conflicts, regardless of their historical period or cultural context. Once again, we are in danger of assuming that politics is a European invention, and that it arrived in the Americas in the holds of Spanish ships, next to the horses. Indeed, in light of the extent of European colonial violence and wrongdoing, international Indigenous conflicts have often been eclipsed; Indigenous societies are often cast as the victims, rather than the instigators, of conflict and war. However, the idea of pre-colonial North America being a peaceful paradise – although tempting – assumes that politics and the idea of nationhood

⁴⁶ For one thing, unlike the Europeans, Inuit were not extracting resources from the new territory to support the economy of a distant motherland.

are European imports. One function of the Tuniit stories, problematic though they may be, is to prove otherwise.

Indeed, Tuniit stories demonstrate that long before contact with Europeans, Inuit were telling tales which worked to define them as a people. Stories of this kind are told every day, by everybody, in order to delineate the boundaries of the familiar, the normal, and the proper. Chamberlin describes

the ways we divide the world into Them and Us. There are those who doodle and do nothing. That's usually Them. And there are those who work, doing worthwhile things. Like Us. There are those who speak properly, again like Us; and those who babble, more or less meaninglessly, as They do. (*If This Is Your Land* 8)

These kinds of characterizations, wherein one group strategically fails to recognize the intellectual and artistic sophistication of another, can be read in any newspaper, or heard at any dinner table. The victims of these tellings, of course, are the people whose role it is to act as foil – particularly when none of their own identifying stories remain, as in the case of the Tuniit. All that remains of them are caricatures, or simulations: pieces sewn together, revived, and set loose to grow ever more monstrous.

The characterizations of Tuniit in Inuit stories, though invented to offset the humanity of the 'real' people, are by no means straightforward. For one thing, in the versions quoted above, it can at times be extremely difficult to determine the tone in which the story is told. When Louis Uqsuqituq stated that the Tuniit "were strong, but the Inuit killed them and took the land away," he may have been speaking with pride, or with sadness (qtd. in Brody, "Land Occupancy" 186). While reading a translated and decontextualized fragment, we are unable to determine which. Part of the difficulty of interpretation, then, lies in the challenge of encountering oral tradition on the page,

particularly when reading across a cultural divide.⁴⁷ The decision as to whether Uqsuqituq is speaking of the demise of the Tuniit with regret or with relief, however, need not be paralyzing; rather, the possibility of multiple meanings is appropriate and natural for such a varied tradition of stories. It adds layers of nuance to the Inuit understanding of Tuniit, and therefore to the Inuit articulation of Self. Indeed, I would argue that within the body of Tuniit legends there exists a tension between antagonism and sympathy, between differentiation and identification. In short, there are moments where the boundaries between Inuit and Tuniit – the boundaries of the nation – become blurred.

The story “Tunijjuaq” (‘Big Tuniq’) by Joe Patiq (Rankin Inlet), which was published in a 1987 edition of *Inuktitut* magazine, contains an interesting comment on the nature of encounters with Tuniit:

It is said that when you meet them you forget them as soon as you part. You cannot remember anything about them. . . . When an Inuk remembers and starts to tell about it, happy to be telling about meeting such a being, the person just ends up crying a lot. It is said that the person will start to say, ‘Look, I met this...’ then right away the person will start to cry. (39-40)⁴⁸

This passage demonstrates the complexity of Inuit representations of Tuniit. If a person meets a Tuniq, Patiq tells us, he or she will not be able to tell others of the encounter; once they part, the Inuk will mysteriously begin to forget. This forgetting may be a symptom of a lack of understanding; after an encounter with the unfamiliar, the teller discovers that he or she lacks the ability to represent it. It sounds, however, as if this

⁴⁷ For a series of very useful discussions of this challenge, see Murray and Rice.

⁴⁸ “Angirraruvit unipkaarniaraluaq&uni avituarangni taimalu puiguq&uguluguuq. Nauguuq iqqaumannangittualuit tamatkua silaup inugni. inummariugaluittauq taimanna ivaptut iliktut pisuktut. Taimanna qatipluginnguq puigurnaqtualuit. Tagvaguq itqaramiup uqqaumaliramiuk unipkaasigiarimi, imanna katilauqtamanik quviasuk&uni katisilaurami unipkaasigiarimiuguuq tagvaguq qiasialuk&uni” (Patiq 40, my transcription from syllabics).

affliction may be a measure of the Tuniit's own powers of self-preservation: just as they flee to avoid encounters with Inuit,⁴⁹ they have the ability to slip from memory as well. Such a skill would ensure that their image remain autonomous, rather than at the mercy of strangers' re-imaginings. Patiq goes on to say that even when the Inuk does remember the meeting, he or she is once again mysteriously silenced – this time by the sudden onset of weeping. The cause of this sorrow is unclear, and possibly multifold. Perhaps the weeping is both a cause and a symptom: the teller is both struck dumb by grief, and grieving at his or her inability to tell the tale. After all, crying here constitutes another kind of forgetting, as the tale will be lost if it cannot be passed on. This idea of forgetting, then, evokes the central trope in Tuniit stories: their fleeting nature, their tendency to disappear. Patiq's statement can thus be read as a sample of literary criticism, as it foregrounds the challenge of remembering and of *representing* the ones who came before.

Perhaps it is appropriate that the teller's only articulation is of his sorrow: that speechlessness is caused by tears, rather than uncontrollable laughter, or maybe a sudden drowsiness. Tuniit stories, after all, are often sad stories. As seen in the examples given above, they are usually stories of exile, and of death. Perhaps, then, the teller grieves simultaneously for both the remembrance of the Tuniit as well as for the forgetting. In any case, the result is that in place of a story about Tuniit, a profound sorrow is conveyed. Even if the teller is trying to describe the defeat of an enemy, he or she expresses an involuntary sympathy, and cannot help but identify with the subject of the tale. As Patiq's statement indicates, Tuniit stories are heavily nuanced, and often contain multiple and

⁴⁹ Patiq goes on to tell a story of a Tuniq who ran away to avoid meeting Inuit (40).

conflicting attitudes toward the first people. At times, Tuniit are fearsome enemies, barely human; elsewhere, they are almost kin.

To further demonstrate the variability in attitudes towards the first people, I would like to tell two brief anecdotes from my own experience with Tuniit lore. The first story takes place in the kitchen at the Attagoyuk high school in Pangnirtung, where I studied for five weeks in the summer of 2007. One of my fellow *qallunaaq* classmates had an interest in Tuniit, particularly in the various theories of their disappearance. As I mentioned earlier, some believe that the Inuit and Tuniit most likely intermarried, and that the Tuniit were gradually assimilated into Inuit culture (Qitsualik, “Bones”; Sutherland 11-56); however, this is not a hypothesis that is readily entertained by the Tuniit stories of the oral tradition. Nonetheless, this southern student had made a habit of discussing it with local people, asking, ‘don’t you think it’s possible that the Tuniit and Inuit intermarried, and so – *that your ancestors might be Tuniit?*’ On this particular occasion in the kitchen, a young man replied rather emphatically to the student’s suggestion, saying “I am not a Tuniit!”

The second story takes place a few hours outside of Pangnirtung, near the Sanirut islands in Cumberland Sound. Joanasie Qarpik had been teaching the students about the four types of *inuksuit*, some of which were made by the people who inhabited the land before the Inuit. He told us (through the interpreter, Marie Uvilluq) that one of their old campsites was nearby, and before we knew it we had piled into the boats and were heading out into the Sound. Ten or fifteen minutes along the shoreline we got out and walked a short ways, over a rocky beach, through a boggy, low-lying field. Impossibly, the bleached remains of a large tree were resting there. We stopped on the hillside in an

area scattered with large rocks. I could see no signs whatsoever of human habitation, until Joanasie pointed out that we were in fact *standing* in the remains of a house. Suddenly it became clear – the oval-shaped ring of stones, the raised sleeping platform, the entranceway. Joanasie and Uviluq, along with Jaco Ishulutaq and Noah Metuq, began telling us about the people who had built these houses. They were very strong, as we could see from the size of the stones they had moved. Noah mentioned that they used to sleep with their feet up against the wall to make them lighter – faster – and that this was why the bed platforms were so short. One of the students asked Joanasie how he knew about this place, and Uviluq translated his answer: he knew about this place because this was his country, and he knew it intimately. As for the way these people lived, Uviluq said, he knew “by instinct.” They had no metal tools, and no guns, but they had been extremely resourceful, and they had thrived.

In the first story, the idea of Inuit having been descended from Tuniit was offensive, because it was informed by a tradition of storytelling which describes the first people as timid, slow-witted, technologically inferior, and ultimately doomed to extinction. In the second story, however, there is no trace of derision; rather, those ancient people were spoken of with admiration, and perhaps even with a sense of kinship. This sense of a connection or sympathy with Tuniit, interestingly, is almost as common as the characterizations of the first people as primitive and beast-like. In fact, there are many accounts in which the firm lines of differentiation between Inuit and Tuniit become blurred. In an article entitled “In the Bones of the World,” Rachel Qitsualik describes Inuit and Tuniit as long-lost cousins who failed to recognize one another. “It is interesting,” she says, “that Inuit tradition has always referred to the Tunit as a separate

people — to be completely honest, a separate species altogether, when in fact there is a great deal of archaeological evidence to demonstrate that Inuit and Tunit derive from the same root culture.” Joanassie Ilkalee of Qikiqtarjuaq (Broughton Island), meanwhile, recognizes the humanity of the First People: “I’ve heard that Tuniit ran to the north,” he says, “away from this part of land, because of war. *Yes, they were Inuit*, but they were very strong people” (qtd. in Brody, “Land Occupancy” 186, emphasis added).

Other accounts go as far as to suggest a link between the ancestors of the contemporary Inuit – the Thule – and the Tuniit. Qikiqtani Inuit Association has created an online compilation of the characters in Inuit legends, and the section on the Tunit/Tunitjuat contains the following statement, which seems to combine both the sense of derision and of association found in Tuniit stories: “If you ever come across a thick and strong person dressed in skins and *using the tools of our ancestors*, it might be the Tuniit! If this being speaks to you, answer slowly and don’t use big words” (§3, emphasis added). The reference to the ancestors in this context is somewhat surprising; it emphasizes the intellectual inferiority of Tuniit, yet suggests that they live in ways that parallel the lifestyle of the Thule. It is highly unlikely that this is meant a slight toward the ancestors; rather, it seems to subtly acknowledge a certain esteem for the first people. The Tuniit, like the Thule ancestors, lived on the land without the convenience of European products, such as guns or gasoline. This in itself earns the respect of many contemporary Inuit, especially in a time when there is a resurgence of interest in ‘traditional’ culture. Rachel Qitsualik points out that “in the story of Inuit meeting Tunit, west meeting east, it is the Tunit who are most ‘traditional’” (“Bones”). In this context, then, the Tuniit take on a new significance; as ‘traditional’ people, they become a source

of pride. As such, “when the Inuit of today tell their stories, talk about the past and about the first occupants of the Arctic, they are also talking about themselves” (Brody, “Land Occupancy” 186).

This blurring of the boundaries differentiating Inuit from Tuniit can also be observed in the varying forms of particular stories. The second Tuniit story told to Rasmussen by the Netsilingmiut, for instance, describes a lazy Tuniq, who instead of hunting would lie down and rub his kamik (boot) soles against a stone, thereby creating the impression that he had been walking all day (Rasmussen, *Netsilik* 426-427). However, when Maurice Métayer copied down this story from the ‘Copper Eskimos’ (people of the Kitikmeot or Central Arctic region) the main character was not a Tuniq, but an Inuk – a “lazy son-in-law” (*Tales from the Igloo* 113). Now, it is not clear which version of this story came first – perhaps it was a story about a lazy Inuk, who was replaced by a Tuniq when the story traveled east. Or perhaps the originally Tuniit identity of the character was lost, and he became marked merely as lazy, rather than as Tuniq. In either case, this shift in the identity of the protagonist further demonstrates the malleable nature of the classifications ‘Inuit’ and ‘Tuniit.’

Perhaps it is this fluctuating sense of difference between Inuit and Tuniit which allows Patiq’s storyteller (the one who could only weep when trying to recall the Tuniq he or she had met) to find his or her words again. After all, although the representation of Tuniit is said to be prevented by forgetfulness and weeping, the very existence of Tuniit stories indicates that some tellers must have been able to break the spell. Patiq himself demonstrates this incongruity: he writes of the impossibility of remembering and telling, and then moves seamlessly into a dry-eyed rendition of a Tuniit tale. Perhaps this is

because the tellers recognize that the stories they are telling are not really about Tuniit, but (as Brody says) about themselves (“Land Occupancy” 186). The Tuniit of the stories, then, are not ‘real’ Tuniit; they are constructed characters who work to contribute to an articulation of Inuit identity. As such, while the sense of connection between Inuit and Tuniit may seem antithetical to the process of describing a distinct national Inuit group, I would argue that it is a strategic identification. It is another means of articulating Inuit nationhood. By establishing a sense of kinship with the first people, Inuit storytellers represent themselves as the inheritors of Tuniit territory – as another manifestation of the original people.

Of course, this is another nation-building strategy which resonates with the European colonial process; the Canadian nation, for instance, routinely adopts elements of Indigenous culture in order to legitimate its claim to the region. The problems of such comparisons have already been discussed; however, here the similarity may be useful, as it draws attention to the troubles inherent in any process of articulating nationhood. In order to discuss these issues, I would like now to turn to a contemporary telling of a Tuniit tale – the short story “Skraeling” by the Igloolik writer Rachel A. Qitsualik – and to examine the ways in which it represents a critical engagement with the classic representations of Tuniit, and with the process of nation-building more generally.

The setting for “Skraeling” is Baffin Island in 1000CE – the era in which the Thule Inuit were beginning to arrive in the land of the Tuniit. Qitsualik begins by contextualizing this time period, and describes the concurrent goings-on in a variety of locations around the world: the Mayan empire, Egypt, Ghana, China, France, Russia, Norway, and Denmark. These are times, she implies, in which many young nations are

coming into being, and struggling with other groups for dominance. By providing her story with this international context, she effectively removes it from ‘prehistoric’ times (or rather the time before Europeans were present), which is where many readers might automatically place it. As the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami publication “Inuit History and Heritage” declares:

[w]hen we speak about the origins and history of our culture, we do so from a perspective that is different from that often used by non-Inuit who have studied our past. For example, in our culture we do not divide the past from the present so we do not like to use terms such as ‘prehistory.’ Our history is simply our history and we feel that the time has come for us as Inuit to take more control over determining what is important and how it should be interpreted. (4)

Qitsualik, in agreement, emphasizes the idea of the Inuit people as a young nation engaged in the process of defining themselves, exactly like the other ‘great’ civilizations referenced.

Qitsualik’s main character is Kannujaq, a young man traveling alone, eastwards, into the land of the legendary Tuniit. Kannujaq has heard stories of these other people, as well as of the “Iqqiliit” (Indians), who live among the trees in the West. When Kannujaq first finds himself in Tuniit country, he is extremely apprehensive. Even the sight of the *inuksuit*, raised in order to direct the caribou into kill zones, gives him the chills (37). This sensation is only intensified by a sudden chorus of wolf-howls, and the realization that it is the *Tuniit* who are howling, trying to drive the caribou. Notably, Tuniit are not visible at the beginning of the story; rather, their presence is indicated by simulations: the *inuksuit* – imitations of men – and the mimicry of wolf-song. Not only does this removed presence evoke the mysterious and elusive nature of the Tuniit characters, it subtly hints that even the Tuniit who do appear to Kannujaq may not be real, but rather may likewise

be imitations of Tuniit – simulations based on legend, and filtered through the words of storyteller and author alike.

Kannujaq's understanding of the Tuniit is based on what he has heard in stories: "Tunit—while immensely strong—were supposedly cowards, running whenever they saw real people. They might resemble humans, albeit shorter, more squat, but they were little more than beasts" (40). Both relieved and disturbed by this knowledge, he leaves the place where the still unseen Tuniit are hunting, and continues on his journey. With a storm gathering, he is relieved to see a settlement up ahead, but once he is close enough to be noticed, he has the alarming realization that the figures running towards him are not Inuit at all. "He, like his dogs, no doubt, had assumed this was a human encampment. What a mistake. Now he would be ripped apart by Tunit" (41). What follows is the process by which Kannujaq learns to see through, at least partially, the prejudices and fears that have been instilled in him, and which inform his first impressions. Initially, Kannujaq perceives people with "dark faces twisted up in fear," with "shabby, sooty tops" and "short, squat frames" (41). The community has, in fact, just been attacked by murderous strangers. But when Kannujaq sees the bodies of the dead, "who lay like so many seals dragged up from the shore," he assumes that the Tuniit are involved in some kind of "feud" with another group (42, 43). "*This is a place of murder,*" he thinks, suggesting – despite the evidence – that the Tuniit are the killers, rather than the victims (42, emphasis in original). The grief of the survivors, rather than being humanizing, seems to only heighten Kannujaq's sense of the Tuniit's uncivilized behaviour, as all around him people weep, stagger, and clutch (43, 47). Even those who seem to have some control over themselves nonetheless fall short of civilized: the boy who attempts to

speak to him is incomprehensible and overly aggressive, while the village leader Angula is corpulent, tyrannical, and clumsily pretentious (41, 43, 50).

After the initial surge of images of barbarism, however, Kannujaq gradually begins to rethink his first impressions. The story progresses with moments of realization, as the Inuk begins to perceive that not all aspects of Tuniit society are unfamiliar. Since Kannujaq arrived, the young boy has been attempting to speak to him, but the Tuniit dialect is too unfamiliar. However, as Kannujaq witnesses the chaotic state of the community, the word that the boy has been repeating at last becomes clear: “*He’s saying ‘Help,’*” Kannujaq suddenly realized. *It’s ‘Help’*” (43, emphasis in original). Such moments of clarity are layered over and under Kannujaq’s impressions of primitiveness. Gradually, though, the glimpses of Tuniit humanity become more frequent. As he watches the young boy weep over the body of a murdered friend, Kannujaq thinks, “*A dead person was not very much like a seal, after all*” (45, emphasis in original). Although struck by the Tuniit’s strangeness, Kannujaq comes to see that “*they are human, after all*” (46, emphasis in original).

In writing this encounter, characterized as it is by Kannujaq’s oscillating impressions of the Tuniit, Qitsualik reproduces the opposition which is present in the Tuniit stories of Inuit oral tradition: she alternates between depicting Tuniit as unavoidably primitive and different, and as nearly human – even sympathetic. As Kannujaq begins to gain understanding of Tuniit beyond what he knows from his people’s stories, Qitsualik – it could be argued – comments on the tradition of Inuit representations of Tuniit. The Tuniit of Inuit stories, she acknowledges, are not fully developed characters, and there is a humanity and a complexity to the first people that is

beyond the scope of outside depictions. Yet although Qitsualik recognizes this shortcoming, she does not attempt to rectify it in her own story. There are no fully-developed, 'human' Tuniit characters in "Skraeling"; the young boy Siku turns out to be the son of an Inuk mother and a Viking father. Qitsualik creates sympathy for Kannujaq, for the boy, and for both of his parents; meanwhile the Tuniit remain in the background, largely un-narrated. Perhaps Qitsualik recognizes the impossibility of fully representing the Tuniit, as her attempts will always be second-hand: based on Inuit stories, archaeological data, or her own imaginings. The focus of her tale reaffirms the message of the earlier accounts of the First People: that Tuniit stories are in fact Inuit stories.

These mimetic limitations are appropriately reflected in Kannujaq's own inability to completely shed his prejudices toward the people he is visiting. Although Kannujaq comes to recognize the humanity of the Tuniit, he persists in viewing them as timid and incapable – almost childlike. This, of course, is problematic; however, I believe that it is also intentional. The opinions of Qitsualik should not be confused with those expressed by her main character; rather, she might even be understood as writing a comment on the difficulties of overcoming cultural prejudice. For all his good intentions, after all, Kannujaq is a kind of Inuk cowboy. Out of a sense of pity for the poor Tuniit, he stays to solve the community's problems. He kills the despotic Tuniq leader Angula in self-defense, and then teaches the people how to defeat the marauding Vikings with guile: by drugging and then ambushing them. In the meantime, Kannujaq learns the story of the boy's mother, Siau, who stands out immediately amongst the Tuniit: "Kannujaq saw the first beautiful thing that he had seen since coming here. It was a woman, one with eyes like dark stones beneath sunlit water. . . This was no Tuniq! This was a woman of his

own kind” (51). Apparently, Siao’s husband had died, and she was beginning to starve when the Tuniit found her. She was taken in by them, but made to work for the cruel Angula, who valued her superior sewing skills. At the story’s end, Kannujaq offers to take her away, but Siao refuses, saying “that she was no longer comfortable among her own” (65). In other words, she has ‘gone Tuniq.’

When one considers the plot from this angle, it reads remarkably like an Arctic *Dances with Wolves*. The lone hero visits a misunderstood and exotic people, assists them with their struggles, dazzles them with his foreign goods, and falls for a woman of his own kind – a sweet surprise in an unfamiliar place. At the end, the tone of nostalgia dwindles into a poignant sense of the impending downfall of the host community. The ‘wolves’ whom Kannujaq is ‘dancing’ with here signify both of the non-Inuit peoples in the story. At the beginning, as you may recall, Kannujaq hears the Tuniit imitating wolves, and shudders at their beast-like behaviour (39-40). Later in the story, the Vikings are referred to as wolves, preying on the herd of helpless Tuniit “caribou,” and Kannujaq kills them in the same way that his people hunt wolves – by using their own greed and gluttony against them (61). The reason for this association between Tuniq and Viking becomes apparent at the end of the story, when Kannujaq is haunted by the image of the Viking leader floating away on his ship, helpless and alone, unable to maneuver it by himself. The Tuniit will likewise disappear, Qitsualik tells us, and will exist only in the legends of the Inuit (66). Notably missing in this account, of course, is any mention of possible Inuit responsibility in the disappearance of the Tuniit. Elsewhere, Qitsualik has imagined that the Tuniit had simply assimilated into Inuit culture, attracted by “the benefits of ‘Thule’ cultural innovations” (“In the Bones” §14). “It is possible,” she says,

“that many of the Tunit themselves did not care, embracing the Inuit lifestyle until the end; until those last few Tunit wept when they could no longer remember the old songs sung by their great-grandparents” (§16). Here, the Tuniit seem to be largely responsible for their own decline. Either that, or they are victims of an inevitable assimilation: a side-effect of an encounter with a more ‘technologically-advanced’ culture.

Once again, the temptation here is to view the Tuniit story as a colonial analogue. And in this case, for once, the association may be appropriate, because a critique of colonial tactics is undoubtedly one of the aims of this story. It is unlikely, after all, that Qitsualik would have failed to notice the similarity between Kannujaq’s feelings about the Tuniit and *qallunaat* attitudes toward Inuit;⁵⁰ after all, Qitsualik grew up witnessing the European colonization of the Inuit homeland. Her depiction of Kannujaq’s misconceptions and continued cultural bias, therefore, might be read as a comment on the dangers and challenges of cross-cultural encounters more generally. Europeans, after all, are present in this story not only in the form of the murderous Vikings, but in the cultural make-up of the readership, with which Qitsualik is in constant negotiation. In her preface to the story, for instance, she declares that she is quite purposefully *not* providing a great deal of autoethnographic information, because, she says, “if the reader wants to understand a people, he or she has to live with those people for a while. And a story is the ultimate magic by which this may occur” (36). Throughout the story, then, Qitsualik works to maintain an Inuit perspective, and to not cater to the understanding of her non-Inuit readers. That said, the story is peppered with explanations, whether they be

⁵⁰ Or toward Indigenous people in general.

translations of Inuktitut terms,⁵¹ or more lengthy cultural commentaries.⁵² This constant awareness of the gaze of *qallunaat* readers makes European colonization part of – or at least analogous to – the subject matter of the story.

In view of the long history of *qallunaat* misrepresentations of Inuit, stories such as “Skraeling” become instruments by which Inuit articulate their own identity as a people. The Tuniit people, meanwhile, become a tool to facilitate this process. It may seem ironic that in order for Inuit storytellers to articulate a sense of self, they have to dehumanize another group. Qitsualik, however, is able to use this irony as a tool in her story; by telling a Tuniit tale to a mainly *qallunaat* audience, she is able to subtly critique the cross-cultural misconceptions which are so prevalent in Southern discussions of the North. As readers witness the persistence of Kannujaq’s prejudice, they may perhaps recognize the shortcomings of their own assumptions about other peoples. Although classic representations of Tuniit may be problematic, Qitsualik demonstrates the way that they may be used to simultaneously establish a sense of Inuit nationhood, *and* to critique colonial attitudes in general.

At the end of the story, when Kannujaq and Siku are leaving the community (Siku, Qitsualik says, “had never felt comfortable among the Tunit”), the boy asks Kannujaq: “What ... am I to say my mother is, if not a Tunik? *What are we?*” (65, 66, emphasis added). “‘I don’t know,’ Kannujaq replie[s]. But he thought about a word his grandfather had used. ‘Perhaps we are *Inuit*’” (66, emphasis in original). In this moment,

⁵¹ Interestingly, the format that Qitsualik uses in providing translations varies widely. On page 38, when she writes “oh, how he and the others had brought in *tuugaaliit*, those small, dark whales with the spiralled tusks!” she privileges the Inuktitut by withholding the English term (‘narwhals’). On page 46, meanwhile, she provides a literal and immediate translation: “the boy’s name turned out to be Siku (‘ice’).”

⁵² See, for instance, page 43, when the boy Siku grabs Kannujaq by the wrist: “[n]o one had ever dared behave so aggressively toward him. Among his own kind, physical aggression occurred only between the most dire enemies—and never openly. Otherwise, it was a symptom of madness.”

it is clear that although the year is 1000CE, it is also 1977, when the ICC declared the ‘oneness’ of the Inuit people. One might imagine that Qitsualik is writing an antecedent to the meeting at Barrow – that she is positing a much earlier origin of Inuit national consciousness. Note, however, the difference in tone. The resolution at Barrow was full of certainty, and couched in a particular legal style. Kannujaq, however, speaks the Inuit nation into being with words of a casual, speculative quality: “*Perhaps* we are Inuit,” he says (66, emphasis added). It is as if he is trying out the term – testing for its magical properties. The readers know that he has chosen the right word. But what exactly has Kannujaq conjured with this utterance?

The term ‘Inuit’ is deceptively simple. It is a term whose meaning shifts depending on context, and within these multiple meanings there is a message of nationhood. Spoken in Inuktitut, the primary meaning of ‘Inuit’ is simply ‘people’ – human beings. It is the plural of *inuk*, ‘person.’ Using my own, very simplistic Inuktitut, I might look out at the boats leaving the Pangnirtung shoreline and say “*amisuit inuit aullaqtut ullumi.*” “A lot of people are going out today.” I would not be saying anything in particular about who these people were; there might even be a few Qallunaat or Iqqiliit among them. But spoken in another context (such as in the English language), the word ‘Inuit’ becomes a marker of ethnicity, and therefore a political statement, containing the subtle semantic possibility that those who are not Inuit are not people – not human. As Chamberlin points out, “the names of many native nations ... mean ‘the people,’” and they carry with them a sense of predominance – of being “*the people*” (*If This Is Your Land* 15). As the Tuniit stories demonstrate, those who are not Inuit are literarily ‘not human.’

Yet the significations of the term ‘Inuit’ do not end there. When Kannujaq first speaks it, the word has little meaning for Siku, other than the idea of being neither Tuniq nor Viking. Kannujaq explains: “[i]t means something like ‘those living here now’” (66). This is a definition that Qitsualik has insisted on elsewhere, as well:

Now, I have read too many interpretations of ‘Inuit’ as meaning, ‘Humans’ or ‘The People’.... However, having been a translator for 30 years, I can guarantee you that ‘Inuit’ is a specific term. It precisely means, ‘The Living Ones Who Are Here.’ It denotes a sense of place, of having arrived, a memory that Inuit knew they had kin somewhere else. (“‘Eskimos’ or ‘Inuit’?”)

Indeed, the phrase “*inuuvunga*” (composed of the root *inuk* + *-u-* (‘to be’) + the first person declarative ending *-vunga*) can mean ‘I am a person,’ ‘I am an Inuk (a member of the Inuit people)’ and ‘I am alive.’ Michèle Therrien, in her book *Le Corps Inuit*, mentions other core meanings of the term: “habitant” and “propriétaire” (‘inhabitant’ and ‘owner’) (146). Furthermore, in the possessive form *inua* the word designates the soul (both human and animal, depending on the region) (Therrien 146).⁵³

It is difficult for a non-native speaker of Inuktitut to understand to the extent to which these various meanings are entertained in the mind simultaneously. The meaning of the term “*inuuvunga*” is highly dependent on context, and can no doubt be quite straightforward. However, it does seem as if there would be great potential for punning, or for subtext – for instance, in declaring ‘Inuitness’ a people might also be asserting their (superior) humanity (or their survival – their state of being alive). As Therrien argues, in Inuktitut “[l]’être humain non-inuit apparaît décentré, l’organisation linguistique le situe

⁵³ Therrien explains the *inua* as being the ‘owner’ of a person (or animal, as per the usage in Nunavik) (147).

à part: les termes le désignant ne réfèrent pas à l'idée d'humanité" (164).⁵⁴ As such, she claims emphatically that "[a]u travers de leur langue, et dans la réalité, les Inuit envahissent, saturent le champ de l'humain" – that "through their language, and in reality, Inuit *invade* and *saturate* the field of the human" (164, my translation, emphasis added).

Such a thing would be a political coup indeed; however, the idea that the Inuit language holds strangers to be non-human is complicated by the multiple meanings of the root *inuk*. After all, to say that someone *inuunngittuq*, that he or she is not *inuk*, could mean that the person is not Inuit and not a human being, but it could also mean that he or she is *not alive*, and it is frankly unlikely that this connotation is intended. (Similarly, when an Inuk dies, he or she does not lose his/her membership in the nation. A corpse, or *inuviniq*, is a 'former person,' not a former Inuk, as if the body had somehow changed its ethnicity in its last moments.) Furthermore, as Therrien says, "[I]'étranger peut, dans certains circonstances, être promu au rang d'Inuk" (149).⁵⁵ As in the peoplehood matrix, 'Inuitness' is not fully determined by ethnicity; almost every southern anthropologist who has worked in Inuit country has a proud story about the moment when somebody first told them that they were an Inuk – or better, an *Inummarik* (a real, adult Inuk). It is almost like an accreditation in the field. The category of Inuit, then, is not so reified as to be impenetrable, and the boundaries of Inuit peoplehood are not rigid. This use of the term 'Inuit,' then, is hardly the dehumanization of the Other as practiced by expansionist nation-states.

Perhaps this is why Qitsualik is so emphatic about 'Inuit' meaning "those living here now" ("Skraeling" 66). Such a definition is inclusive, not jingoistic; technically, it

⁵⁴ "The non-Inuit human being appears de-centred, the linguistic system sets it apart: the terms that designate it do not refer to the idea of humanity." My translation.

⁵⁵ "The foreigner can, in certain circumstances, be promoted to the rank of Inuk." My translation.

excludes only the non-present and the non-living. And, as Qitsualik says, “[i]t also betrays the fact that Inuit once knew they were not the original peoples of their lands” (“‘Eskimos’ or ‘Inuit’”). Like Qitsualik’s story, then, this definition of the term ‘Inuit’ attempts to *acknowledge* rather than to deny the peoplehood of former inhabitants, and perhaps even attests to its own role in their displacement. The term ‘Inuit’ thus refers to a highly complex and self-consciousness nationhood: it defines itself against the foil of subhuman others, yet simultaneously acknowledges an affinity with them. These nuances point to the complexities of Inuit peoplehood; to have any hope of understanding it, as Qitsualik demonstrates, one has to go much further back than 1977, or the arrival of the *qallunaat*.

Conclusion: The ‘Problem’ of Inuit Diversity

Tuniit stories, as I mentioned earlier, are told in the Central and Eastern Arctic; as such, they are not universal to Inuit. Indeed, although we can look to shared tales as evidence of a national consciousness, it would be impossible to find stories which are told in exactly the same way throughout the Inuit homeland, and therefore which encapsulate a homogenous Inuit identity. However, I would argue that homogeneity is not essential to the literary articulation of Inuit nationhood. The more important national trait is the tradition of telling of stories which work to define Inuitness by raising the spectre of Otherness. The classic and contemporary Tuniit stories thus point to a tradition of self-articulation which *is* common to all Inuit groups. I would argue, furthermore, that national self-definitions based on a shared difference from Others might even allow for more flexible *internal* definitions of national identity: Inuit can maintain all kinds of regional differences, while still agreeing on their shared distinctness from Tuniit, Allait,

and Qallunaat. This, therefore, has the potential to be a nationhood, and a national unity, which does not necessarily demand homogeneity.

Still, if Inuit stories are so diverse and regionally-specific, why emphasize their commonalities? Why is cohesion – whether of a people, or of a literature – is so politically compelling? In other words, why does a monolithic tradition get more attention than a fragmented or miniscule one? Is it part of a literary sensibility – a desire for narrative unity? Or is it pure military strategy? A nation which spans four countries is formidable, and the same goes for its literature; that kind of breadth, we think, must equal value, or at least a respectable design. If nations and literatures are large and organized enough, then it is clearly unwise or impossible to ignore them. On the other hand, the current need for cohesion – or a broad view – in studies of Inuit literature might simply be a side effect of the material’s obscurity in the mainstream. The possibility of learning about Inuit literary traditions might be appealing to many students, especially with the groundwork laid by Indigenous studies and Igloodik Isuma Productions.⁵⁶ However, the availability of Yupiit, Inupiat, Inuvialuit, Nattilingmiut, Aivilingmiut, Iglulingmiut, Nunavimmiut, Nunatsiavummiut, or Kalaallit literatures for study might be a bit overwhelming for most southern students; indeed, it might send them back to the comforting embrace of Milton, or N. Scott Momaday.

Robert Warrior, in his discussion of Indigenous literary nationalism, points out that “[Edward] Said understood nationalism as something problematic, but also something necessary to the mobilization of groups of people toward political goals” (*American Indian Literary Nationalism* 180). The imagining of literary traditions can be similarly strategic; this we know already from reading national literary histories, which

⁵⁶ The makers of *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)* and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*.

play a key role in affirmations of nationhood. However, the danger is that in articulating national literatures strategically – in order to resist the assimilationist tactics of the colonial nation-states – critics may inadvertently downplay the diversity that exists *within* tribal traditions. Daniel Heath Justice returns to this issue in his contribution to *Reasoning Together*, observing that “...no community is monolithic and without dissent or even conflicting ideas about what exactly constitutes the group” (“Go Away, Water!” 153). The dangers of emphasizing coherence and unity exist whether the critic is imagining nations or literatures; indeed, the possibility of creating totalizing narratives is one that literary history as a discipline has struggled with.⁵⁷ As David Perkins explains,

[t]he writing of literary history involves selection, generalization, organization, and a point of view. It selects for representation only some of the texts and relevant events in the tract of past time it supposedly describes; it collects these into general entities (e.g., romanticism); it adopts a point of view toward them; and it makes them constituents of a discursive form with a beginning, a middle, and an end, if it is Aristotelian narration, or with a statement, development, and conclusion, if it is an argument. (19)

In Hayden White’s terms, the literary history is ‘emplotted,’ and therefore subject to the desires of the literary historian.⁵⁸ As a narrative, it attempts to give shape to an entire tradition, and to bestow a logical coherence onto that tradition’s components.⁵⁹ It is inevitable, then, that certain elements will be omitted, and that the specificities of individual texts will be subordinated to the character of the literature as a whole.

As Rasmussen points out, stories from the various regions of Inuit Nunaat do have remarkable similarities; this alone might indicate the possibility of a unified vision of the

⁵⁷ Linda Hutcheon, “Adventures in Literary Historyland.”

⁵⁸ See Hayden White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact.”

⁵⁹ As Perkins says, “unless one perceives such syntheses, one cannot write literary history. The assumptions that the various genres, periods, schools, traditions, movements, communicative systems, discourses, and epistemes are not baseless and arbitrary groupings, that such classifications can have objective and valid grounds in the literature of the past, is still the fundamental assumption of the discipline, the premise that empowers it” (4).

literature. However, attempts to make stories from one region harmonize with stories from another will always require some selective listening, and will by necessity downplay the unique cultural and political contexts of the different regions. A more acceptable strategy for a study, therefore, might be to consider the way in which the form and function of the literature – rather than its content – remains consistent. Justice, in his contribution to *Reasoning Together*, comes to the conclusion that “though there are many different ways of understanding what it is to be Cherokee—some more suited to the preservation of Cherokee nationhood, communitism, and decolonization than others—each way is still an attempt to give shape to an idea of what it is to be, think, and live Cherokee” (“Go Away, Water!” 153). Here, the idea of the nation – and by extension the literary tradition – is not so much a clearly definable *thing*, but rather a *process*. As works of Inuit literature from different regions and historical periods endeavor to describe what it means to be Inuit, they are involved in the process of nation-building, or imagining communities. And this is the thread that might pull them together – or if not together, at least in the same direction.

The idea of an Inuit nation may not be the primary political framework of Arctic communities; indeed, it might only flicker to life in moments of encounter, as people recognize their differences from others, or their similarities to each other. The rest of the time, it might be the more tangible, local realities which take precedence: the questions of Nunavut identity, of Labrador dialect, or of Alaskan oil-drilling. But those occasional moments of unification – that theoretical sense of peoplehood, or nation – might be justification enough for an Inuit literary nationalism. Indeed, let’s not forget that this

tying together – this search for connective sinews, or threads⁶⁰ – is strategic, ultimately, as nationalisms always are. Like the ICC’s declaration of unity, the idea of a coherent Inuit literary tradition has the potential to confer a sense of sovereignty onto Inuit literature, and to “re-affirm [its] right to self-determination” (Inuit Circumpolar Council). In other words, this kind of study might encourage students and scholars to recognize Inuit literature as a distinct and self-sufficient artistic tradition, deserving of serious study.

Once Inuit sovereignty and literature have a more viable position in the southern imagination, we can look forward to specific, regional studies that take the full complexity of local history and geography into account. At the moment, however, it might be most prudent to explore the strategic potential of the ICC’s narrative of Inuit cultural unity for literary studies. In an age where southern power-holders look north and see only vacant polar landscapes, isolated communities, and exploitable resources, it is important to point out that the Inuit homeland is in fact a region united by shared intellectual traditions. It would be advisable for scholars of Inuit culture to recognize this literary and political history; otherwise, like Purdy’s Dorsets, they may be doomed to recreate the same tired image, sadly repeating their only song.

⁶⁰ In Inuktitut, the word *ivaluk* can mean both ‘sinew’ and ‘thread.’

A Very Strange Set of Tracks: Reading *Unipkaaqtuat*, the Classic Inuit Tales

It is an assumption that understanding sophisticated oral traditions comes naturally to the sympathetic ear. It doesn't. Just as we learn how to read, so we learn how to listen; and this learning does not come naturally.

-J. Edward Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?*

Native languages, traditional stories, and written texts contain incredible insights into what it means to be a human being, what it means to write, and what it means to participate in a thinking world. On all of the ideas cultural theory seeks to understand, to deconstruct, or to reconstruct, our traditions have much to say.

-Lisa Brooks, "Digging at the Roots: Locating an Ethical, Native Criticism"

Introduction: The Lost Classics

In the winter of 1950, a man named Thomas Kusugaq told eight *unipkaaqtuat* – eight myths, or classic tales – to Alex Spalding, a Hudson Bay Company clerk working in Repulse Bay (Aivilik/Naujaat). These stories include the one about the blind boy whose sight is restored by the loons, about the unlucky hunter whose fortunes are changed when he earns the help of a bear-spirit, and about the quick-tempered hero Kiviuq, and his long journey far from home.⁶¹ They were eventually published as *Eight Inuit Myths: Inuit Unipkaaqtuat Pingasuniarvinilit* – or Canadian Ethnology Service Paper No. 59 – as a part of the National Museum of Man (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization) Mercury Series. It is one of the rare collections of Inuit stories that includes the text of the original Inuktitut telling, along with two English translations – one morphemic, and one 'literary.' Unfortunately, *Eight Inuit Myths* was never meant for wide distribution. With its drab, bureaucratic cover, it can be found primarily in university libraries (where it often does not circulate), and is now out of print. And while this obscurity may have saved Kusugaq's stories from the kind of rigorous editing that might be thought

⁶¹ "Aningaat" (33-50), "Nassiqsuittuarjuk" (23-32), and "Kiviuq" (51-66) in Spalding, *Eight Inuit Myths*.

necessary to prepare them for mainstream audiences,⁶² it has also caused an invaluable classic text to go largely unnoticed in literary circles.

As the editor of this text, Spalding appears to be interested in Kusugaq's stories at least partially as linguistic evidence. In the preface, Spalding explains that

[w]hile these myths were related to me in Aivilik (Repulse Bay) dialect, the dialogue or speech of the mythical characters was most often given in Nassilik (Pelly Bay, Boothia, King William Is.) dialect and, because of this, the glottal stop (‘) was sometimes employed where normally it would be absent if speaking *Aivilingmiutitut*. (*Eight Inuit Myths* vi)

This kind of commentary seems to be aimed at readers who have a background in Inuktitut linguistics. Likewise, Spalding's morphemic parsing, while of great use to Inuktitut-language learners, is not the kind of feature usually found in translations of literary texts.⁶³ Spalding's preface, however, actually devotes very little time to linguistic commentary; instead, he crosses into the field of literary criticism,⁶⁴ reflecting at length on the aesthetic value and meaning of Kusugaq's stories. "The quality of these myths," Spalding says:

is of the first magnitude or the first water. They come bathed from a depth of the human spirit where the most grievous travail and the most glorious achievement of a people are complemented and fused with one another, where the banal and the profane is raised to the level of the special and the miraculous, and where, embodied in the accounts of everyday pursuits and customs, the most important and mysterious spiritual quests and battles have their rise and fulfillment. (*Eight Inuit Myths* v)

Although Spalding's ear is certainly that of a linguist, he seems to have the heart of a poet. We might think, here, of John Swanton, the young linguist who in 1900 arrived at

⁶² See McGrath, "Editing Inuit Literature: Leaving the Teeth in the Gently Smiling Jaws." The tastes of casual southern readers are probably better suited to collections like Maurice Métayer's 1973 *Contes de mon iglou*, which features bite-sized legends in translation accompanied by vibrant illustrations.

⁶³ For example, the first line of the morphemic translation is "Angusugjuk / they say good hunter / was he / really / very away / in a state of being / while / he they say / arriving home / he doorway / his own / in dog / small / very seeing / because he grabbing / he / it going in / he" (Kusugaq 1).

⁶⁴ The boundary between these two fields, as Robert Bringhurst has pointed out, is at times somewhat indeterminate. See *The Tree of Meaning* 211.

Haida Gwaii, intending to spend six months studying the language. As Robert Bringhurst describes it in *A Story as Sharp as a Knife*:

The linguist found himself confronted by great art, great devastation and great literature. His teacher had forewarned him to expect the devastation and the visual art as well. It was the literature that took him by surprise. And so for three and a half years he did nothing whatsoever but transcribe, translate and study Haida mythtexts, stories, histories and songs. (13)

Alex Spalding seems to have been struck with a similar wonder. ‘Of the first water’ – the phrase he uses to describe Kusugaq’s stories – is an old expression from the gem trade; it denotes the highest quality of diamond (“Water”). Spalding reiterates this geological metaphor later in his commentary: “[i]n the words of Shakespeare,” he says, “[these myths] have ‘suffered a sea change into something rich and strange.’ They are surely the diamonds, pearls, and sapphires of the Inuit spirit” (*Eight Inuit Myths* vi). Here, we are led to envision the myths as being underwater, or underground, and to imagine that they have been forged by mysterious and unseen forces, only now to float to the surface, or to be pulled from the rock. Although Spalding’s figures of speech ring strangely and prophetically of the language of resource extraction, and although he seems to imagine Kusugaq’s stories as being endowed with a kind of ‘primitive’ purity,⁶⁵ his appreciation for the aesthetic calibre of the material is never in doubt.

Spalding went on to earn a PhD in English literature at McMaster University, where he chose to write his doctoral thesis on “Wordsworth as a Pastoral Poet.” The year was 1974, and Spalding was fifty years old. After receiving his degree, however, he returned quite quickly to his work in Inuit studies, and went on to publish a North Baffin dialect grammar (1979, 1992), a book of poetry entitled *The Polar Bear and Other*

⁶⁵ Owen Barfield mentions the (now outdated) association between the ‘primitive’ and the poetic – the idea that “the ‘infancy of society’ [was peopled with] an exalted race of amateur poets” (73). I discuss this further in Chapter 4.

Northern Poems (1993), a memoir on his time spent in Repulse Bay (1994), and an Inuktitut dictionary⁶⁶ (1998). After he passed away in Toronto in early 2002, Spalding's ashes were sent back to Repulse Bay, and that is where he was laid to rest ("Inuktitut Linguist"). When looking back over a life and career so devoted to Inuit language and culture, though, one has to wonder good-naturedly why Spalding chose to spend his years in graduate school studying English Romanticism. Did he ever consider the Inuit literary traditions, which he had spent years listening to and documenting, as a possible dissertation topic? Or did the climate of a Canadian English department in the 1970s make it necessary for him to devote his research to the work of a canonical writer?⁶⁷

Traditional Indigenous stories, after all, have received comparatively little attention from literary scholars; more often, they are studied by anthropologists not for their artistic merit, but rather to illustrate the features of a society. Indeed, this is the method which Spalding falls back upon after his initial praising of the aesthetics of Kusugaq's tales: "[w]ithin [these myths] is a whole compendium of practices and customs which *bear authentic witness to their truth to Inuit life*," Spalding says, and then goes on to list their descriptions of distinctive customs, such as communal feasting, contests of strength, and the tattooing of women (*Eight Inuit Myths* vi, emphasis added). He also notes that the stories often contain satire, and that they have a didactic

⁶⁶ The dictionary was also compiled with the assistance of Thomas Kusugaq.

⁶⁷ Although he had moved away from Inuit subject matter, in his thesis Spalding did seem to have maintained his interest in myth. The first line of his dissertation declares that "Wordsworth is a mythopoeic or mythmaking poet" ("Wordsworth" ii). He goes on to explain that "in working through Wordsworth's spiritual odyssey, I discovered that he had lived through or acted out at least three ancient pastoral myths..." (vii). He argues further that Wordsworth may not have done this consciously, but rather out of "psychological necessity ... by struggling and journeying in the realm of [his] own spirit" (vii-viii). A comparison of Spalding's treatments of Kusugaq and Wordsworth might be interesting, if somewhat obscure.

component⁶⁸ (vi). In other words, despite his interest in literature (as demonstrated by his later graduate studies), Spalding's evaluation of Kusugaq's stories *as literary works* is somewhat limited. Instead, he attempts an ethnographic reading; he is more concerned with evidence of wife-swapping and drum-dancing than with the aesthetics of the stories. Yet this is an interpretive lens, I would argue, which makes it difficult to see Indigenous storytellers as creative individuals who are continually re-inventing and extending the traditions that they have inherited. Rather, the tellers appear to be involved in a kind of semi-voluntary mimesis, reflecting their culture and worldview in a series of transparent tales. Art, in other words, is transformed into artifact.

Much has changed in the academy since 1974, but stories like Thomas Kusugaq's have still not found a home within the study of literature. English courses introduce students to the discipline by having them read texts like *Beowulf* and *The Odyssey*, which are rooted in the oral traditions of other places.⁶⁹ Courses in Indigenous literatures have gone a long way toward decolonizing the curriculum, but their focus tends to be on more contemporary Native writing – novels, poetry, and drama – and they predominantly feature literature from southern Canada and the United States, drawing only rarely on texts from north of the 60th parallel. From the perspective of the academy, then, the *unipkaaqtuat* or classic Inuit tales – being northern, Indigenous, translated, 'oral,' and often out-of-print – are located somewhere on the remote edges of the conceptual margins.

⁶⁸ "Above all, these myths are lessons in humanity to all of us, instructing us to be more courageous, more compassionate and wiser, less prone to jealousy, anger, and greed, more social and helpful" (*Eight Inuit Myths* vi).

⁶⁹ Robert Bringhurst, *The Tree of Meaning* 29.

While Inuit texts still play a fairly minor role in the study of literature in the South, however, Indigenous oral traditions more generally have been the focus of a fair amount of critical attention. In many ways, this work has reflected the debates that have occurred in mainstream literary criticism, as they oscillate between form and context, or between aesthetics and politics. Beginning in the late 1960s, scholars like Jerome Rothenberg, Dell Hymes, and Dennis Tedlock – working in a field known as ‘ethnopoetics’ – devoted painstaking attention to the *form* of classic Indigenous stories and songs; they have since been criticized for removing the material from its social and political contexts, and for failing to acknowledge *contemporary* Indigenous writing, as if it were somehow less authentic.⁷⁰ The 1980s and ‘90s saw a renewed interest in orality, but critics like Walter Ong were constrained by their sense that oral traditions represented an earlier stage in literary and cognitive development.⁷¹ Later work (by people like Richard and Nora Marks Dauenhauer, Simon Ortiz, and J. Edward Chamberlin) recognized that Ong’s position was deeply problematic, and grappled instead with the difficulty – and the possibility – of putting oral literatures on the page.⁷²

Recent scholarship in the fields of Indigenous literary criticism, finally, is further helping the academy to recognize what should be an obvious point: that ancient – or classic – Indigenous texts have artistic, critical, and political merit, and therefore are deserving of the attention of literary scholars. The Muskogee critic Craig Womack, writing in the context of the United States, argues that tribal literatures are not just a branch of the American canon, they are “the *tree*, the oldest literatures in the Americas, the most American of American literatures. *We are the canon,*” he says (*Red on Red* 7).

⁷⁰ For an example of this critique, see Womack, *Red on Red* (63-67).

⁷¹ See Ong (4-15), or Goody (148-166).

⁷² See Murray and Rice.

Robert Bringhurst, the somewhat controversial poet and scholar, writes in *The Tree of Meaning* about coming to this realization. He had benefited from a fairly well-rounded literary education; he had studied Spanish, Latin, Greek, classical Chinese, and Arabic, but one day, he said, “it dawned on me that really I knew nothing of the *literary heritage of the land in which I lived*” (12, emphasis added).

For students and scholars of literature in the Americas, this is a fairly typical affliction. In 1999, when the territory of Nunavut came into being, I was busy reading Shakespeare, Keats, and T. S. Eliot. The idea that the Arctic might have a literary tradition had never occurred to me. Years later, I learned that many classics of the Western tradition – the *Bible*, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, *The Odyssey* – had been taken to the North, and (in translation) are considered to be the foundations of its print culture.⁷³ Inuit stories and songs were also brought to the South, but they were heavily edited, often marketed as children’s books, and they rarely made it into university classrooms.⁷⁴ Richard Dauenhauer and Nora Marks Dauenhauer have commented upon this “reluctance of the educational establishment to accept contemporary oral literature as serious, adult literature” (“Paradox” 24). The simple reason for this rather enormous oversight, I believe, may be that many literary scholars do not have much of an idea *how* to approach classical Indigenous texts. Some may simply have given little thought to the existence of an Indigenous literary heritage; other, better-known traditions will have occupied their time. Others might even dismiss the material as not being ‘literary’ enough for serious

⁷³ See McGrath, *Canadian Inuit Literature: The Development of a Tradition* (27-29). As a side note, Alex Spalding spent the later years of his life diligently translating Steinbeck and Edgar Allan Poe into Inuktitut. Thanks to Alana Johns, and to Spalding’s executors – Leslie and Terry Ryan of Dorset Fine Arts – for this information, and for access to Spalding’s papers.

⁷⁴ See Robin McGrath’s “Editing Inuit Literature: Leaving the Teeth in the Gently Smiling Jaws” and “Monster Figures and Unhappy Endings in Inuit Literature.”

study. In the current climate, however, when we have been deeply influenced by postcolonial studies and identity politics debates, many scholars fear that they lack the necessary cultural knowledge to understand and teach traditional literatures.

They are probably right. As the Dauenhauers point out, “oral literature performance is highly situational and contextualized”; as such, an understanding of the text requires a good deal of background knowledge (“Paradox” 7). When a story is told to an audience of cultural insiders, details which are obvious to everyone present will often go unstated (“Paradox” 7). Storytellers “use narrative genres familiar to anyone sharing their cultural background but not always clear to cultural outsiders A written text of their accounts, then, does not unambiguously speak for itself” (Cruikshank, *Life Lived* ix). Or rather, it does not speak to everyone. Here, there is a marked difference from the Indigenous literature that has been written in the last fifty years. Indigenous novels, plays, and poetry are often written with at least some awareness of a wider, non-Indigenous readership; as such, authors tend to provide enough cultural and linguistic glossing to allow their readers to follow. And even when outsiders face cultural barriers, they generally find a foothold in the now-canonical themes of colonization and resistance.⁷⁵ In approaching Indigenous oral tradition, however, the majority of scholars encounter something alien and unfathomable – wonderful in its strangeness,⁷⁶ but impossible to grasp.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ These motifs, while highly relevant to an understanding of Indigenous writing, at times provide an overly comfortable and somewhat predictable approach to the text.

⁷⁶ See Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?* 122.

⁷⁷ Much of the time, Inuit oral tradition is not only conceptually, but physically difficult to access. In the summer of 2007, I visited the community of Pangnirtung, and learned that in the visitor’s centre there was a sizeable collection of interviews recorded with local elders in the 1990s. Some had been translated into English, but there’d been no transcription of the Inuktitut originals. One elder had been asked by the interviewer if she knew any *unikkaaqtuat* – any old stories. She said that she did, but that she didn’t tell them anymore – not since she became a Christian. Other elders did tell their stories; and oral history

This chapter examines potential ways of reading classic Indigenous texts. In disciplines as wide ranging as folklore, anthropology, ethnopoetics, and Indigenous literary criticism, a variety of approaches have already been suggested. Even mainstream critical theory had a period of interest in myth, largely due to the influence of Northrop Frye. I maintain, however, that although classic stories have found their ways into various corners of the academy, their ability to simultaneously delight and instruct remains understudied. Concluding with a discussion of Kusugaq's story "Angusugjuk and the Polar Bears or Angusugjuk Nanuillu" this chapter explores the possibility of an inclusive hermeneutics – one which draws on a variety of interpretive approaches – and which keeps at its core an attention to language and form. In this way, we might hope to avoid the mistakes that have previously kept the academy from acknowledging the literary classics of this continent.

Myth as Literature

This chapter is founded on the idea that the classic stories of Indigenous oral tradition are works of literature. It is true that the root of the English word *literature* is the Latin *litera*, or 'letter,' and refers in a strict sense to a written, or alphabetic, text ("Literature"). However, I will be employing an evolved definition of the term, something along the lines of *word-art*, or *language-art*, which easily includes the classic Indigenous tales. Critics who have recognized the aesthetic dimension of oral tradition have also employed the term 'oral literature,' as well as the neologism 'orature.' But for the most part, I will be attempting to avoid qualifying these texts with the prefix 'oral.'

projects have been undertaken in many Nunavut communities, as part of the territory's mandate to promote traditional culture, language, and the expertise of elders. But even when they are published, the distribution of these texts is quite small. Often, they don't make it into university libraries – never mind onto university syllabi.

Terms like ‘orature,’ though useful and precise, are somewhat unwieldy, and perhaps even draw excessive attention to the *difference* of classic Indigenous traditions from Euro-western literature. At the present moment, I find it unnecessary to emphasize that distinction. In a recent keynote address to the Canadian Comparative Literature Association, J. Edward Chamberlin discussed the history of academic approaches to Indigenous literary traditions, stating:

I used to think the problem had a lot to do with the differences between oral and written traditions, despite generations of scholarship on them. But Homer and Shakespeare, with their wonderful confusions of text and performance, are among our icons; and our courts, our churches, our parliaments and our schools are arenas of highly formalized oral performance, so we must know something about this. And while I am the first to insist that we need to understand both oral and written traditions better . . . I also think we need to close the gap that scholarship has opened up between them, and concentrate instead on the ways in which both sustain core elements of human community and creativity.⁷⁸ (8)

Indigenous art is already stalked by difference. In the classroom, in the media, and in daily conversation, Native cultures are often defined by their otherness. As Chamberlin points out, a great deal of print has been devoted to wrestling with the disparities between so-called oral and written modes of expression. As such, it might be more useful now to remind scholars of the similarities, or at least the parallelism, of these artistic traditions.

‘Literature’ is a term with cultural capital. Applied to the classic tales, it reminds students and scholars that they are encountering elaborate and sophisticated traditions, in which artists are very consciously employing language for aesthetic, pragmatic, didactic, and political purposes. “I know of no other word,” says Chamberlin, “that catches the way in which language—the medium of literature, after all—figures largely in these traditions [of oral performance] . . .” (“Do You Hear?” 9). Whenever I mention ‘Inuit

⁷⁸ I am grateful to Ted Chamberlin for providing me with a copy of his address.

literature,’ whether in academic or everyday conversation, people have a tendency to ask, “But isn’t it mostly *oral* tradition?” This might simply be a measure of innocent surprise at the unusual or unfamiliar nature of the material, but I am always left with the suspicion that a conceptual barrier has suddenly arisen, and that the oral is somehow being separated from the literary – and therefore from the artistic and intellectual. As such, I am interested in the ways in which familiar terms like ‘literature,’ though somewhat lacking in precision, can open up awareness and admiration for unfamiliar traditions.

One of the reasons why Alex Spalding did not quite recognize Thomas Kusugaq’s stories as literature—or as suitable for literary analysis—might be that he had classified them in a different category: the genre of myth. Myths have a somewhat indeterminate position within the field of literary studies. Although there was a spike in interest in myths in the late 1950s and ‘60s, after Northrop Frye published his *Anatomy of Criticism*, academic tolerance for universalisms, or the idea of the collective unconscious, has since dropped off sharply. Today, while myths may receive some attention as intertexts for canonical written works (i.e., Shakespeare), they are almost never studied for their own sake. After all, they tend to not have a single author, a specific time of origin, or even a definitive version. The world that they describe seems to be far removed from any recognizable historical moment. Their politics are difficult to pinpoint. On the whole, many of the features that we tend to rely on for aid with interpretation are absent.

“A mythology is an ecosystem of myths,” says Robert Bringhurst in his recent book *Everywhere Being Is Dancing: Twenty Pieces of Thinking* (63). And a myth, he says, “is a theorem about the nature of reality . . .” (63). The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition is similar: a myth is “[a] traditional story, typically involving supernatural

beings or forces, which embodies and provides an explanation, aetiology, or justification for something such as the early history of a society, a religious belief or ritual, or a natural phenomenon” (“Myth”). In other words, a myth is an answer to a riddle – a way of making sense of a mysterious world. However, this is by no means *all* that a myth is, as Bringhurst knows well. Indeed, his *Masterworks of the Classical Haida Myhtellers* series, though embroiled in controversy relating to Haida protocols of intellectual property, has been instrumental in teaching scholars to acknowledge the literary merit of Indigenous intellectual traditions. A myth may answer a question, but it is also a riddle in itself, and there is a danger in finding the key too quickly. We might fall into euhemerist⁷⁹ interpretations; that is, in our rush to figure out *what* the story means, we might forget to consider *how* it means.⁸⁰

Indeed, by far the majority of academic attention given to myths, or classic stories, has been within the field of anthropology. The work of Claude Lévi-Strauss helped lay the foundations for structuralist analysis, and subsequent generations of anthropologists have examined the components of Indigenous stories in order to confirm hypotheses about social organization and customs. For better or for worse, anthropology has been engaged in the study of oral traditions for much longer, and with greater seriousness, than the literary critics have. However, the place where anthropological reading strategies fail, and where literary critics have a chance to do some remedial work, is in the recognition of classic stories as artistic creations with intrinsic merit, rather than simply as vehicles for cultural information. Reframing ‘myths’ as ‘literature’ is an effective way to demonstrate that “these texts deserve an attention that acknowledges

⁷⁹ The OED defines Euhemerism as “[t]he method of mythological interpretation which regards myths as traditional accounts of real incidents in human history.”

⁸⁰ Or as Chamberlin says, “the ways in which [texts] show, rather than tell” (“Doing Things with Words” 86).

their aesthetic and intellectual character, their beauties and—inseparably—their truths, *instead of reducing them to evidence in a cultural, historical, political, or psychological casebook*” (Chamberlin, “Do You Hear?” 9, emphasis added).

In his keynote address this past May, Chamberlin took his audience back to the origins of New Criticism, when Joel Elias Spingarn called for a methodology that would “replace the grab-bag of sociology, psychology, dogmatic historicism, reactionary idealism and decadent impressionism that passed for literary criticism in his day” (“Do You Hear?” 13). Central to this approach was the practice of close reading, and the directive to base critical interpretations on the text itself, rather than drawing from extraneous information (such as the details of the author’s life, or speculations about her/his intentions).⁸¹ Close reading is a stratagem which we regularly return to, and which we continue to employ, even when it is not in vogue. In the 2007 edition of the MLA’s *Profession*, Jane Gallop argues that “[literary studies] became a discipline . . . when we stopped being armchair historians and became instead painstaking close readers” (183). The skill of close reading, therefore, is “the most valuable thing English ever had to offer . . .” (Gallop 183).

Interestingly, one of the last strongholds of New Criticism was a field devoted to the study of Indigenous oral traditions: the ‘ethnopoetics’ of Jerome Rothenberg, Dennis Tedlock, and Dell Hymes. The school was not strictly literary – it overlapped in many places with anthropology and linguistics – but it nonetheless displayed a very literary devotion to formal and structural analysis. While there are a number of drawbacks to this

⁸¹ See Searle, “New Criticism.”

approach, mostly centering around its use of the prefix ‘ethno-,’⁸² the above-mentioned scholars were committed to recognizing the aesthetic value of Indigenous oral texts. As Rothenberg predicts in his 1971 preface to *Shaking the Pumpkin: Traditional Poetry of the Indian North Americas*, this work “may hopefully mark the real emergence of Indian poetry into the consciousness of the non-Indian world” (xxi).

As an interpretive approach to Indigenous literatures, however, ethnopoetics has been roundly dismissed, in part due to its apparent interest in ‘authenticity.’ On one level, critics like Dell Hymes were simply struggling to create translations and transcriptions that would most accurately reflect the song’s original performance. However, this commitment meant that they largely ignored the quantities of more recent, *written* Indigenous literatures, which were most often in English, and in the form of novels, plays, and poems. As Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver argues in his book *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community*, “[f]or too many non-Native scholars like Arnold Krupat and John Bierhorst, the only ‘genuine’ Indian literature consists of oral myths” (x).⁸³ As a variety of Native scholars have argued, this leads to a static and stereotypical understanding of Indigeneity, which excludes most contemporary aspects of Native life. In the words of Anishnaabeg scholar Niigonwedom J. Sinclair, methodologies like ethnopoetics have a tendency “to

⁸² ‘Ethno’ seems to imply a particular perspective; namely, that of the Euro-Western academic, whose ethnicity is so naturalized as to appear non-existent. What are the prerequisites to having an ethnopoetics, as opposed to a poetics? In an essay posted on the Ethnopoetics website curated by Rothenberg, Dennis Tedlock explains that “our main interest will indeed be the poetries of people who are ethnically distant from ourselves, but it is precisely by the effort to reach into distances that we bring our own ethnicity, and the poetics that goes with it, into fuller consciousness” (“Ethnopoetics”). Aside from an Orientalist desire for self-understanding through an experience of the Other, this statement effectively defines ethnopoetics as a field in which Indigenous people cannot have any critical input, seeing as they already have a marker of difference – a prefix – attached to them.

⁸³ And as Vine Deloria Jr. writes: “Every book on modern Indian life [has been] promptly buried by a book on the ‘real’ Indians of yesteryear” (qtd. in Warrior 96).

depoliticize these literatures and replace Native voices with non-Native critical ones, a process I call ‘Doing Native Studies Without Native Peoples’ (“The Truth About Nations” 30).⁸⁴

This indictment is in line with a larger critique, which argues that scholars like Dell Hymes, in their close attention to form and aesthetics, have removed oral traditions from their social, historical, and political contexts. New Criticism, after all, faced similar allegations, particularly during the rise of New Historicism in the early 1980s (Cazdow, Conway, and Traister). In response to this, Craig Womack’s groundbreaking 1999 book *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, “seeks to politicize the oral tradition and argue for a deeper investigation of narratives that goes beyond the simple structural categories of creation, hero, journey, monster slayer, and so on, in which the stories most frequently get cast” (17). Classic stories, he argued, come out of particular political contexts, and are often concerned with tribal nationalism; they “are told for the purpose of cultivating a political consciousness” (*Red on Red* 61). These stories, then, are of great relevance to the social and political concerns of Indigenous literatures and communities today.

In his extensive introduction to the recent critical anthology *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*, Womack gives an encyclopedic account of the history of Native literary criticism. Nine years after the publication of *Red on Red*, he retains his strong belief in the political importance of Indigenous literatures, even going so far as to suggest that Indigenous artists have an obligation to develop “an increased commitment to social realism” (“Single Decade” 8). This somewhat controversial call for writers to

⁸⁴ “The Truth About Nations Is That’s All We Are: The Rhetoric of Indigenous and *Anishnaabeg* Nationhood” is a currently unpublished manuscript written for a doctoral candidacy exam. My thanks to Niigonwedom for allowing me to cite it here.

serve their people by “commenting . . . on social policy and articulating community strategies for increased health” is likewise extended to literary critics of Indigenous texts. Contributors were asked to “[d]escribe an ethical Native literary criticism”; for Womack, that ethical methodology involves serious attention to context – in particular, it means the rigorous historicization of Indigenous texts. “[W]e need to do much more historical work,” he says, “instead of relying so heavily on thematic studies” (“Single Decade” 95, 101). Although Womack does admit that “[h]istorical specificity . . . [is] not the only direction, but a useful one” (“Single Decade” 39), one also has to wonder how close reading figures in his model of an ethical Indigenous literary criticism. In his ninety-eight page introduction, and in his contribution to the anthology (“Theorizing American Indian Experience”), the question of form or aesthetics comes up only rarely.

At the other end of the spectrum, David Treuer’s (Leech Lake Ojibwe) 2006 book *Native American Fiction: A User’s Manual* spends a good amount of time engaged in close-reading, and advocates rigorous attention to the language of Indigenous literatures. “To treat [a text] as culture is to destroy it as literature,” he says (68). One of the most useful moments in his book, therefore, is the section in which he conducts a close reading of Ojibwe-language texts (17-23, 49-55). However, Treuer – whose prose suffers regularly from an overly authoritative tone – largely fails to connect his literary discussions to the political concerns of Indigenous communities (not to mention to the work of other Indigenous scholars). In other words, he makes the mistakes of New Criticism (although he never acknowledges this theoretical school as an influence). Indeed, the goal of his book seems to be to prove that Indigenous novels are not really Indigenous – that their Indigeneity is in fact a simulation – a mimicry. Their attempts at

representing Native culture and language, he argues, are in fact reflections of European traditions.⁸⁵ This argument, of course, is bound up in the old debates over authenticity, and fails to acknowledge the possibility that Indigenous traditions might change and adapt. Although form may get its due attention in Treuer's work, political and community concerns fall far behind.

My question – and it may seem a naïve one – is this: why do we have to choose between close attention to form and context, or between aesthetics and politics? Are these things not joined beyond separation? As Chamberlin writes, this kind of distinction is a “false choice between reality and the imagination . . . the choice between being marooned on an island and drowning in the sea. Nobody should have to make such a choice. Nobody can” (*If This Is Your Land* 126-127). The folly of past attempts to return ‘home’ to close reading seems to be their conviction that social, historical, and political contexts were secondary – or even irrelevant. Likewise, contextually-aware critics have felt the urge to abscond to the fields of history and political science, and so have often failed to pay adequate attention to structure and style.⁸⁶ From this perspective, the history of literary criticism plays out like a series of alternating knee-jerks.⁸⁷ Why can't we settle on middle ground? After all, many university teachers – the better ones, anyways – do not adhere that strictly to specific theoretical schools; instead, they demonstrate a range of methodologies, and ensure that their students learn the skill of close reading as well. In

⁸⁵ Treuer's critique of Louise Erdrich's (Anishnaabeg) work is more convincing than his indictment of Leslie Marmon Silko's (Laguna Pueblo); he declares Silko's myths to be inauthentic, but fails to cite a single Pueblo source (115-152).

⁸⁶ Once again, I am drawing on Chamberlin here: “[Postcolonialism's] pseudo-political fascination with what is behind or beneath or bearing down on or uprising from texts turns them into documents of public and private conditions, rather than monuments to the human imagination and its capacity for belief. Nothing wrong with that, of course—it can provide admirable cultural history—but it is not what we do” (“Do You Hear” 7).

⁸⁷ A more in-depth discussion of this history is contained in Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature*.

print, however, scholars seem to be drawn to a rhetoric of extremes – of all-or-nothingness. After all, caution and moderation rarely attract disciples; as such, we feel compelled to write only attention-grabbing and highly quotable statements. “The death of the Author!,” we shout, “In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art!”⁸⁸ Or, as David Treuer proclaims, “Native American fiction does not exist” (195).⁸⁹ Yet these critical positions are all places that we eventually needed to come back from.

Sovereign Hermeneutics

In the following section, I would like to discuss a series of interpretive strategies which – though radical in many ways – have the potential to capture this balance between form and context. I am referring to the Indigenous critical interest in cultivating what we might call a sovereign hermeneutics. Versions of this idea have been echoing in Indigenous critical writing for years; scholars have looked to the literary history of Native writing, to the classic texts of Indigenous oral traditions, and to the form and style of the texts themselves in order to locate alternatives to mainstream literary theory. In 1993, Kimberley M. Blaeser’s (Anishnaabe) essay, “Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Center,” spoke to the necessity of finding “a way to approach Native Literature from an indigenous cultural context, a way to frame and enact a *tribal-centered criticism*” (53, emphasis added). At the time, Native literature had begun to receive a great deal more critical attention; however, the strategies employed in reading Indigenous texts tended to

⁸⁸ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” trans. Stephen Heath, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001) 1466-1470; Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation,” *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrer, Strauss & Giroux, 1966) 4-14.

⁸⁹ I have yet to grasp Treuer’s rationale for this statement, and suspect that it was written mostly to spark controversy. If curiosity gets the better of you, see his final chapter, “Some Final Thoughts about the Non-Existence of Native American Fiction” (195-203).

draw upon established theoretical schools. Although these methodologies are often geared toward the recognition of marginalized groups and toward the unsettling of established power centres, they invariably originate *outside of* the body of Indigenous literature and criticism, and they do not attempt to draw upon Indigenous knowledge systems. As Abenaki scholar Lisa Brooks points out,

[s]cholars are encouraged to acquire some textual knowledge in [Native American, African American, Chicano/a, and Asian American studies], and to compare them, using, as the foundation of their analysis, the tools of critical theory as they exist within mainstream cultural studies. Native American literature is perceived as a relatively undeveloped area of inquiry, which can benefit from the application of the longer tradition of European-based literary theory to its growing field of texts. (“Digging” 234)

As a result, Indigenous scholars have been working to create a more *autonomous* criticism – one which takes Indigenous intellectual traditions as its primary referent. For example, when Robert Warrior (Osage) published his 1995 book *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*, he made a point of grounding his interpretations in work by Indigenous authors: “A guiding principle of my work, from its inception several years ago, has been to produce a book that explores the extent to which, after more than two centuries of impressive literary and critical production, critical interpretation of those writings can proceed primarily from Indian sources” (xvi). Warrior is largely concerned with drawing attention to Indigenous writers “of earlier periods” (xiii); he aims to demonstrate the way in which their work can provide an intellectual context for contemporary Native writing. For instance, Indigenous critics might turn to the work of literary ancestors like Samson Occom (Mohegan) and William Apess (Pequot), rather than to the canonical Euro-western theorists; in this way, Indigenous literary criticism becomes self-referential, and increasingly self-sufficient.

While Robert Warrior is quite specific about his interest in *written* Indigenous traditions,⁹⁰ other scholars have attempted to foster a tribal-centered criticism by looking to classic stories out of the oral tradition. In *Red on Red*, Craig Womack comments on the need “to articulate how the oral tradition provides the principles for interpreting our national literatures” (76). “[W]hen we have looked at enough of these stories,” he writes, “we need to ask ourselves what we have learned from them that might help us formulate interpretive strategies” (*Red on Red* 76). In *Red on Red*, the primary message that Womack draws from the traditional tales is that they “...have always been nationalistic and are told for the purpose of cultivating a political consciousness” (61). As such, they are highly relevant to contemporary political struggles, and to the interpretation of more recent Indigenous literatures as likewise engaged.⁹¹

The recent collectively-edited volume *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective* – which gathers together work by prominent Indigenous scholars like Womack, Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee), Lisa Brooks (Abenaki), Robert Warrior (Osage), and Christopher B. Teuton (Cherokee) – contains a range of essays which turn to classic tales for critical inspiration. The directive to “[d]escribe an ethical Native literary criticism” involved for many of the contributors a return to the foundations of

⁹⁰ “The period [when Russell Thornton commented that “We ... have no disciplinary traditions” (1978)] ... was one in which scholars and writers were... focused mainly on oral traditions; the present moment, in contrast, more fully offers the possibility of understanding contemporary intellectual production in the context of over two centuries of a written, Native intellectual tradition” (Warrior, *Tribal Secrets* 1-2). ‘Written’ here refers to the tradition of alphabetic texts by Indigenous authors; it does not take up the forms of writing more often associated with ‘oral’ traditions, i.e., wampum, birch-bark biting, etc. See Chamberlin, “Do You Hear What I Hear?” and Niigonweddom J. Sinclair, “Natives Never Wrote? Think Again!” Other Indigenous scholars, such as Malea Powell (Miami), are examining the ways in which material culture can impact interpretive strategies; in other words, they are exploring what Powell calls “the rhetoricity of things” (“Meaning & Reason”).

⁹¹ As Womack says of his highly political criticism: “I will seek a literary criticism that emphasizes Native resistance movements against colonialism, confronts racism, discusses sovereignty and Native nationalism, seeks connections between literature and liberation struggles, and, finally, roots literature in land and culture” (*Red on Red* 11).

Indigenous intellectual traditions: the oral traditions (95). Daniel Heath Justice's essay "Go Away, Water!: Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative," begins with a telling of the story of Water Spider, who was able to fetch Fire for the Animals (147). Once she had managed to secure the fire in a silk-woven bowl, Justice says, "Water Spider could have hidden this rare and wondrous warmth from the others. . . . But she honored her kinship obligations and brought Fire to share with all the Animals in the Middle World" (147). Justice employs this symbolic moment to discuss the importance of practicing kinship principles in Indigenous criticism – in other words, the importance of enacting a criticism that is concerned with its impact on and relationship with community. Kinship, Justice reveals, is far more meaningful to Indigenous communities than is the discourse of race and identity.⁹² Here, a principle exemplified in a classic story is taken as a guiding principle for Indigenous scholarship.⁹³

While Justice's discussion of the Fire story acts as a kind of jumping-off point for his discussion of kinship criticism, Christopher B. Teuton's contribution to *Reasoning Together* examines the possibilities and significance of "Applying Oral Concepts to Written Tradition" (193). He begins by telling the Cherokee earth-diver story⁹⁴ of Dayunisi the Water Beetle, and points out that "[j]ust as Plato's allegory of the cave is about more than climbing out of a hole to catch some sun, the Cherokee creation story is about more than diving into water to bring mud to the surface" (194). This may seem an obvious point, but readers of classic tales often do need reminding that these works have

⁹² As Justice puts it, "...kinship criticism is far more responsive to the historicized contexts of Indian communities in all their complexity, whereas race-reading—rooted as it is in Eurowestern stereotypes and deficiency definitions—can only view Indians through a lens of eventual Indian erasure" ("Go Away, Water!" 159).

⁹³ In the interest of brevity, I am glossing over the complexities of this essay. I would highly recommend much closer attention to the entire volume.

⁹⁴ Earth-diver stories are Iroquoian origin tales in which one of the animals dives to the bottom of the ocean and returns with a piece of earth, which then grows to form the land (sometimes on the back of a turtle).

symbolic potential. Even David Treuer, that proponent of close analysis of traditional stories, argues in a discussion of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* that

...myth is actual ... it doesn't mean anything beyond its subject. When Hummingbird and Fly [—characters in a tale employed by Silko—] go down to the fourth world, they are not metaphorically flying down there, they are actually flying down there, and *their flight does not signify anything*. (135, emphasis added)

This type of critique is remarkably blind to the literary, social, political, and historical dimensions of stories. While Treuer might simply be enacting an anti-allegorical critical stance (à la Susan Sontag's "Against Interpretation"), his comments serve to undermine the theoretical potential of classic literatures. And, as Teuton⁹⁵ argues, "[c]laiming oral cultures do not analyze their worlds portrays our oral contemporaries and ancestors as incapable of objective analysis and critical thought" (195).

Teuton maintains that texts like the story of Dayunisi are "richly theoretical" (194). Like Justice, he sees in the tale a directive for readers and scholars:

A tribally centered interpretation of the Cherokee origin story might conceptualize the reader as an analogue of Dayunisi. Like Dayunisi, the reader leaves the ordered world of stable, static knowledge, the Upper World, in order to dive deep into the unexplored depths of chaotic and mysterious potential in the Under World. (Teuton 197)

I find this analogy compelling; it seems a tidy lens through which to view the tale. I only wish that Teuton had spent more time thinking about the story – perhaps to *take on* that readerly aspect of Dayunisi, and to explore the "chaotic and mysterious" depths of the tale (Teuton 197). The bulk of his analysis is instead spent (helpfully) detailing aspects of the history of Indigenous criticism, and in constructing an analysis of vision as a motif in N. Scott Momaday's (Kiowa) *The Way to Rainy Mountain*.

⁹⁵ To clarify: in this chapter, the name "Teuton" refers to Christopher B. Teuton, not to his brother Sean Kicummah Teuton, whose work also appears in *Reasoning Together*.

The idea of reading classic stories for the tropes and paradigms which speak to us – such as allegorical readers entering into the unknown – is one way of reading oral traditions ‘as theory.’ It is a helpful way in to the stories, and it is one that I will return to later. However, I also worry about the way in which it might encourage readers to believe that they know what the story ‘means.’ After all, the sense of relief that occurs when the unruly text suddenly becomes manageable is not always a good thing. It generally indicates that we are missing something, or that our criticism has become stagnant. We therefore have to ask critics to clarify what they mean when they say, as Teuton does, that “American Indian oral stories ... may be read as theories or may be used as theoretical templates” (194). What constitutes a theory? What kind of theories have been identified, and which perspectives do they promote? To what extent are they evident in the text, and to what extent have they been extracted and polished by the critic? Finally, what is the significance of using them to read other texts?

Lisa Brooks’ contribution to *Reasoning Together*, “Digging at the Roots: Locating an Ethical, Native Criticism,” likewise seeks a tribal-centered criticism that is grounded in oral tradition, but she also problematizes this approach. “How can we keep our writing home?” she first asks (235). For her, there are three sources that provide answers: “language, traditional stories, and the texts of the northeastern Native writing tradition” (236). She considers the Sky Woman story,⁹⁶ and draws a number of messages from it – for instance, “about how we might participate as humans in the processes that transform and sustain the land we inhabit” (238). This lesson is connected to “participatory thinking,” or theorizations that are geared toward the well-being of

⁹⁶ As Brooks says, this Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) story is “one of the most canonical Native texts in our literary tradition” (“Digging” 238). Generally, a woman from the sky-world falls through a hole in the ground and into our world, which at the time has only ocean. It is often the prequel to earth-diver stories.

communities (“Digging” 247). Brooks’ analysis is thorough and sophisticated, and her essay goes on to engage closely with the work of Samson Occom,⁹⁷ William Apess,⁹⁸ Joseph Brant,⁹⁹ and Hendrick Aupaumut,¹⁰⁰ as well as with a range of contemporary Indigenous critics. My focus here, however, is on her discussion of oral tradition as a source of literary theory.

Language and oral tradition, Brooks argues, “offer crucial interpretive ‘keys’ that unlock meaning in Native-authored texts” (“Digging” 236). However, she suggests that these are not mystical keys, which once acquired will overcome every obstacle, and leave the critic with nothing further to do. Brooks points out, after all, that oral traditions “are inextricably intertwined with the written traditions that have taken root and grown up alongside them over the past few hundred years” (236). Classic tales, rather than being esoteric and boundless, are grounded in specific textual forms, as spoken or written down by particular people, in particular contexts. As Craig Womack observes:

Rather than advocating the much-heard call to return to tradition, as if the oral tradition is a transparent set of interpretational principles and a standard for living, Brooks realizes the way in which the tradition itself *demands critical work from us*. The oral tradition, like the elders’ advice previously alluded to, is not an injection available from a syringe. It requires an analytical engagement, the work of criticism, interpretation, and especially, historicization that occurs in response to storytelling. (Womack, “Theorizing” 401, emphasis added)

In other words, the classic stories may contain keys to ‘unlock’ Indigenous literary texts, but these open to reveal *more* mystery and complexity. Furthermore, we should not forget that the traditional tales have their own series of locks – many of which are far more daunting than the ones chained around contemporary novels and plays. The work being

⁹⁷ Mohegan writer (1723-1792).

⁹⁸ Pequot author (1798-1839).

⁹⁹ Mohawk leader (1743-1807).

¹⁰⁰ Mohican leader (1757-1830).

done to glean theoretical approaches from the classic stories, and to connect them to current writing, is hugely important, but we should not forget that the oral traditions are in need of close attention as well.

This is my primary criticism of some of the excellent work done by Robin McGrath, who has written a large amount of the criticism about Inuit literary traditions. In her essay “Oral Influences in Contemporary Inuit Literature,” she demonstrates the ways in which Inuit writing often draws structurally and thematically upon the classic tales. For instance, she points out that *I, Nuligak* – the memoir of the Inuvialuit writer Nuligak – evokes the story of the orphan Kaujjarjuk, while Peter Pitseolak’s self-representation “is more like the hot-tempered Kivviok” (McGrath, “Oral” 161, 162). Yet although McGrath foregrounds these tantalizing connections, she does not take the time to consider them in depth; understandably, her concern seems to have been to survey the material available, rather than to study it closely. Nonetheless, the connections that she points out between Inuit writing and storytelling go a long way toward an understanding of Inuit literature as a tradition. Furthermore (and in contrast to the title of McGrath’s dissertation), they remind readers that Inuit literature is *not* an ‘emerging’ or ‘developing’ field.¹⁰¹ Technically, all literatures are ‘developing,’ in that they are continuing to grow and adapt. But we would hardly say this of the English tradition, as we have been educated to have a strong sense of its history. Likewise, contemporary Inuit literature has strong roots; they have simply gone largely unrecognized. In the field of Inuit literature, there remains much work to be done on the foundations that McGrath has laid. We have

¹⁰¹ As Lisa Brooks writes, “[a]lthough a growing body of scholarship supports Robert Warrior’s vital affirmation, in *Tribal Secrets*, of a long-standing Native intellectual tradition, ‘Native literature’ and ‘Native American studies’ continue to be regarded, within the academy and the popular imagination, as ‘new’ or ‘emerging’ fields” (234). McGrath’s dissertation is entitled *Canadian Inuit Literature: The Development of a Tradition*.

to be careful, however, that in using classic stories as the ‘keys’ to contemporary writing, that we do not sacrifice close attention to either text. Drawing connections between the old and the new will lead to conclusions about cultural continuance; these are hugely important, but as literary scholars, there has to be more that we can say.

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This has been a brief and gap-filled overview of the ways in which Indigenous oral and written traditions are being employed to create a tribal-centered criticism.¹⁰² I would like to move now to the final source of interpretive keys that is often mentioned in discussions of Indigenous theory: the oft-mentioned but somewhat mysterious method of drawing interpretative strategies *from the text itself*. When Kimberly M. Blaeser in 1993 called for “a tribal-centered criticism,” she specified that she “[has] been alert for critical methods and voices that seem to arise out of the literature itself” (Armstrong 53-54). Here, “the literature” may refer to Indigenous literature as a whole, but it also smacks of the New Critical approach method of drawing meaning from the linguistic and structural features found within a single text. The move toward a tribal-centered criticism, after all, came largely as a response to the application of non-Indigenous critical methods to Indigenous texts. Here, the body of the text becomes the body of the nation, while theories that originate externally resemble a kind of colonizing force. A slightly more extreme form of textual autonomy, then, would be to privilege the interpretive theories that can be gleaned from the story, poem, or novel alone. After all, even interpretive keys drawn from other Indigenous sources are to some extent pressed upon the text, and will affect a reader’s understanding of its meaning.

¹⁰² More complete critical histories can be found in Christopher B. Teuton’s and Lisa Brooks’ essays in *Reasoning Together*, and especially in Craig Womack’s extensive introduction.

I do not mean to suggest that ‘outside’ factors such as historical context or authorial biography should not be part of the discussion; rather, this is a polemical attempt to draw more critical attention to the aesthetics of classic stories (without, hopefully, repeating the mistakes of New Criticism and ethnopoetics). As Chamberlin writes, “[m]uch contemporary criticism is so preoccupied with encoded meanings and deep structures and political themes that it forgets about these surface features, forgets even about the textures of the language itself, and the sounds and sights, the touches and tastes and smells that are a part of its performance” (*Talking on the Page* 78-79). Richard Dauenhauer agrees, saying that “straight exegesis” is the best thing to do with an oral text.¹⁰³ As was discussed earlier in this chapter, this kind of close attention to language is what literary specialists are uniquely good at, and (contrary to the beliefs of some) this kind of work *is* a useful contribution. After all, the form of the story is always inextricable from its context; as Lisa Brooks writes, “[p]erhaps the oppositional framework of which we should be most wary is a critical stance that divides ‘pure’ art and thought from embodied action, poetry from the political” (“Digging” 257). Without trying to sound too Derridean, the precise delineation of what is and what is not outside of the text – where form ends and context begins – is often unclear. So while I agree with Lisa Brooks that it is necessary “to root our work in analysis that is spatially and historically specific, that is grounded deeply in knowledge of our particular cultural, political, and intellectual traditions and the places that we call home” (“Digging” 258), I would simply point out that language is intimately connected to every item on that list, and is therefore worthy of more scholarly attention.

¹⁰³ Personal conversation, which I am paraphrasing here.

Indigenous literary criticism, as it becomes increasingly tribal-centered, therefore involves many layers of sovereignty. The body of Indigenous writing (which itself contains a wide range of autonomous regional, cultural, and theoretical groups) grows steadily more self-referential, as critics turn to the “literary ancestors” of Indigenous oral and written traditions (Brooks, “Digging” 244). But at the heart of this sovereignty, we might discover, is the autonomy of the text, and of the classic stories themselves. Often, they reveal themselves to be too complex, too wonderfully nuanced, to fit into a single theoretical model – no matter how fashionable the approach may be. If we look at these stories closely – if we follow that old directive of connecting form to content – we just might be able to take the idea of literary sovereignty to a new level.

I may be going out on a limb here, but I like to think that the way that we read texts should remain somewhat mysterious. As Ted Chamberlin likes to say, “I don’t know what I’m doing, but I know how to do it.” Looking back over the critical history, it seems that we get into trouble whenever we try to pin down exactly what it is we do – or what we *should* be doing. The desire to create memorable methodologies which are stirring in their simplicity is always tempting, but we should remember that it is largely a result of the culture of publishing, which seems to prefer that its ponies have only one trick. This doesn’t always serve us well. I say that we resist sound-bite criticism that appears to offer simple solutions, or the ‘right’ approach. Engagement with artistic texts should be a creative process – a stretch of the imagination; “[h]istory must be dreamed,” says Craig Womack, in a call for a scholarship of “imaginative vision” (372, 375). Let’s read, then, like the good teachers do – drawing from a range of approaches, rather than excluding any on principle, and remembering, as Jane Gallop says, that “the very thing

that made us a discipline” is the skill of close-reading – itself a somewhat mysterious process.

“Angusugjuk and the Polar Bears”

In this final section, I would like to look more closely at the text compiled by Thomas Kusugaq and Alex Spalding, and to put a few of these theoretical principles into practice. First, though, I would like to clarify the question of authorship in books like *Eight Inuit Myths*. The tendency when discussing these kinds of texts has been to attribute them to the collector (here, Spalding), as if the great labour has been in locating and tapping into a source of oral tradition, rather than in the remembering and telling itself. The teller, here, is more like a natural resource than a vital individual interpreter of a tradition. Indeed, it is Spalding’s name, and not Kusugaq’s, that appears on the book’s cover. While some might refer to Kusugaq as Spalding’s ‘informant,’¹⁰⁴ Spalding speaks of him primarily as a teacher and friend. In the Preface, he recalls that Kusugaq “was ... very patient for a young man and carefully explained customs and concepts to me when I showed in my manner that I was at a loss to follow Above all, he was my good teacher and I am always in his debt for that” (*Eight Inuit Myths* v). The first step in reading these stories, then, is to allow for a shift in our understanding of their authorship. These are not just Inuit stories – they are also Kusugaq’s stories. They may take place in that ‘time immemorial’ of myth-settings, but they were told to Spalding in a particular time and place, and under particular circumstances.

¹⁰⁴ As Spalding does, once, in the dedication (ix).

Thomas (Thomasie) Kusugaq was originally Nassilingmiut,¹⁰⁵ but in 1950 he and his wife Kukik (Theresa Kusugak) were living in Repulse Bay.¹⁰⁶ The area had been a destination for European whalers for hundreds of years; that industry was later replaced by the fur trade, and by carving. The Hudson Bay Company had opened a permanent trading post in 1919, and it provided the Kusugaq family with some income, employing Thomas as a handyman, and Kukik as a cleaner and washer of furs. In 1950, Kukik gave birth to the couple's second son, Amaujaq (Jose), who would later grow up to become the president of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.¹⁰⁷ Ten more children would follow. In his spare time, Thomas Kusugaq schooled Spalding in Inuit language and oral tradition; later, the two would collaborate in the production of an Inuktitut dictionary.¹⁰⁸ One by one, the Kusugaq children went away to residential school in Chesterfield Inlet (Igluligaarjuk), and in 1960, Thomas and Kukik moved to Rankin Inlet, where a nickel mine had opened up. The mine closed only two years later, however, and in 1973, Thomas Kusugaq was killed in a boating accident. Kukik survived him until 2003.¹⁰⁹

As Peter Kulchyski and Frank James Tester write in *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic 1939-63*, “[i]n the late ‘40s and early ‘50s ... the fur trade was failing miserably” (7). The collapse of the fur trade in turn led to a shift in administrative policy: while the government had been “promot[ing] traditional economies because it was thought this would avoid the creation of dependency,” the collapse of the

¹⁰⁵ Or Netsilingmiut (‘people of the place of the seal’). *Nassilik* literally means ‘it has seals,’ and –miut is the ending meaning ‘people.’

¹⁰⁶ The people of this region are the Aivilingmiut (‘people of the place of the walrus’). From *Aivilik* -- ‘it has walruses.’

¹⁰⁷ The couple's first son, born in 1948, is Michael Arvaaluk Kusugak, the well-known children's book author.

¹⁰⁸ *Inuktitut: A Multi-dialectal Outline Dictionary (with an Aivilingmiutaq Base)*.

¹⁰⁹ At the time of Kukik's death, Jack Anawak, a member of the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut, spoke of her to the House as “one of the leaders and the pillar of the community [in both Naujaat and Rankin Inlet]” (Anawak).

fur trade meant that “a more interventionist approach” was deemed necessary (Kulchyski and Tester 7). This meant the creation of permanent settlements, and, for the majority of Inuit, the transition off of the land and into a wage-based economy. As Jimi Onalik tells it:

In 1955, North Rankin Nickel Mines began production. Many Inuit hunters and trappers moved with their families to Rankin Inlet and became miners, working for a wage underground and in the mill. Inuit were brought in from Repulse Bay, Coral Harbour, Chesterfield Inlet, and Arviat to take part in what was viewed as a bold new experiment. This experiment was to introduce Inuit to the necessary skills for hard-rock mining and to a lifestyle of shift work and paycheques.

In Repulse Bay, the year 1950 – when Thomas Kusugaq told his eight tales to Alex Spalding – was a time bordering on great change. In this context, Kusugaq’s telling of the old stories is a powerful testament to the history, culture, and future of his people.

In reading these stories, we should also keep in mind the context of the original performance. Kusugaq was not speaking to a group of Inuit; rather, he was telling his stories to Alex Spalding – an informed *qallunaaq*,¹¹⁰ but an outsider nonetheless. We can assume, then, that Kusugaq adapted his telling to his audience. Spalding describes the narration as follows:

[Kusugaq] knew these *unipkaaqtuat* by heart, having heard them many times as a child, and gave them to me with all the detail and relish he could bring to it, slowing down or repeating only because of the need to give me time to write. His delivery was spontaneous and enthusiastic and it was obvious that he was grateful and pleased to find someone who was willing to listen and take the trouble to set them down and relish their fine points just as I was grateful and pleased to find someone who would be patient and obliging in the transmission of them and to get them at first hand from a genuine source in the Inuit oral tradition. (*Eight Inuit Myths* 5)

¹¹⁰ ‘white person’

Here, Spalding emphasizes the authenticity of Kusugaq's stories. Yet we might also imagine the telling as a highly context-specific *lesson*, as Kusugaq takes the opportunity to educate the *qallunaaq*. "In the course of our discussions on myth and language," Spalding recalls, "[Thomas] brought me up straight when I was silly, teased me when I was over-serious or naive, was annoyed at me when I was over-taxing in my questions, or would just tell me that he couldn't take anymore and go off" (*Eight Inuit Myths* 5). Here, it is Kusugaq who is in charge of representing Inuit to the South, and we should try not to forget the rhetoric that such a situation necessarily includes.

The story that I would like to take a closer look at here is the first tale in the collection: "Angusugjuk Nanuillu," or "Angusugjuk and the Polar Bears." The full tale – in the Inuktitut original, and in both the morphemic and literary translations – is included as Appendix A, but I will summarize it here:

Angusugjuk¹¹¹ is returning home from hunting when he finds a puppy in his doorway. Taking it inside, he is surprised to see a woman in his house. "*Qiturngara qaijjuk!*" she says, "Bring me my child!" (1). Angusugjuk, seeing an opportunity, refuses to give her the puppy unless she agrees to become his wife. She finally agrees, but after they are married she exhibits strange behaviour, eating nothing but fat. One day, after being scolded by her mother-in-law, she leaves for the floe edge. Angusugjuk tracks her there, and notices that while one of her prints is human, the other is the print of a polar bear. When he finally catches up with her, she is rolling on her back in the snow. She tells him that she is going out into the ocean to visit her relatives. Angusugjuk is determined to go with her, so she lets him ride on her back as she swims out to sea.

¹¹¹ His name means 'Great Man.' Angu(t) = man; -sugjuk = superlative (Spalding 1).

Partway through the journey, they reach some solid sea ice, and as they walk on it the wife tells Angusugjuk that there is land ahead, but that there will be also be fierce bears, and that he should take her walking stick to defend himself. Thus warned, Angusugjuk rides on her back once again as she swims toward the land.

Sure enough, as soon as they arrive at the camp, our suspicions about Angusugjuk's wife are confirmed – her people are bears, and they are coming out of their houses to attack Angusugjuk. He, however, follows his wife's instructions, striking the first bear in the jaws, and causing it to fall on its behind, and then to flee, “nothing but a skull [they say]” (5, 12).¹¹² After this initial confrontation, Angusugjuk and his wife go to visit her parents,¹¹³ who are the “chiefs”¹¹⁴ of the community. The other bears all then come to visit, in order to get a look at Angusugjuk, and the biggest one seems to be eyeing him fiercely. And indeed, as soon as that big bear has gone home, his wife comes to shout that her husband wants to challenge Angusugjuk to a contest of diving for jellyfish.¹¹⁵ Angusugjuk's mother-in-law, however, advises against accepting this challenge, as “one's face keeps getting covered and because [jellyfish] are extremely ticklish”¹¹⁶

¹¹² “*Niaquinnarmiguuq*” (5). *Niaquq* = head; *-innaq-* = exclusiveness (‘just’/‘only’); *mi* = (likely the direct object marker *-mik*); *guuq* = ‘it is said.’ I refer to Spalding's dictionary, and Kenn Harper's *Suffixes of the Eskimo Dialects of Cumberland Peninsula and North Baffin Island* (as will be the case for most of my attempts at linguistic analysis). Thanks also to Alana Johns.

¹¹³ Spalding's translation says “parents,” but the original is “*anaanakkukka*,” which he parses as “mother / association of / [my (pl)]” (5, emphasis added). An alternate translation might be ‘people related to my mother,’ or ‘my mother's household.’ Indeed, the mother turns out to be a key figure; we never hear about the father. Thanks to Alana Johns.

¹¹⁴ “Chiefs” is Spalding's translation; he also uses “boss” (Kusugaq 5, 12). The term used is “*isumataq*” (5); with its root ‘*isuma*’ (‘think’), it perhaps has the sense of ‘the ones who do the thinking’? Spalding's dictionary says that this is the usual Aivilingmiutitut term (as opposed to the Baffin term ‘*angajuqqaq*’ – now usually translated as ‘boss’) (33).

¹¹⁵ Just a point of interest: the word for ‘jellyfish’ used here is *nuvak'iq* (‘blobs of phlegm’) (6). The challenge is actually phrased “*nuvak'iqsiuqatigijumavaa*” (does he want him for a jellyfish hunting-partner?).

¹¹⁶ This is not ‘*quinangnaqtuq*’ – ‘it tickles’ (lit. ‘it makes you pee’); instead, the phrase used here is “*uimanaqtualuungmata*,” which Spalding parses as “excitement / causes / that which / very / are / because they” (6). The root is ‘*uima*,’ as in ‘*uimajuq*’ – “he is excited; loses his head or loses control of himself” (Spalding dictionary 179). The jellyfish are apparently something that really make you lose your head.

(13). An alternate contest is proposed – a lifting match – and the mother-in-law advises Angusugjuk to accept, for she will tell him how to win:

She told him that the big slippery lifting-stone was very round and wickedly smooth, and that there were absolutely no places on it to hold on by. She said, however, that there were four tiny indents on it, enough for two fingernail grips, and that these were the only dents. She said that, when he was about to pick it up, he must pretend to pat the surface of the stone lightly in order to find the little indents and that, when he found them, he was to draw the stone towards himself and carry it forward to the mark. If he was able to bring it back, she said, he was, first of all, to carry it back and place it in its spot and then run very swiftly to enter the house and to refrain from looking back. (13)

Angusugjuk listens to her instructions, and during the contest, when even the big bear cannot lift the stone, he is able to carry it and place it back on its mark. As warned, he hears the “terrible biting and snapping noises” behind him as he flees to the safety of his in-laws’ house (9).

Then, for the third time, the wife of the big bear shouts out a challenge; this time, the game is hunting seals. Once again, the mother-in-law gives him instructions (although Angusugjuk is already a “very great hunter” [12], here it seems that he has to hunt bear-style). She tells him that there are three seal breathing-holes, and that the big bear will wait over the middle one. Angusugjuk must dive down through the farthest one, swim past the middle one (without coming up for air, where the big bear might nab him), and reach the closest hole. There, he must get the “little black thing” from the seal’s nest, climb out of the hole, and run quickly towards home without looking back. And once again, things go just as the mother-in-law said. He grabs the “little black thing” in his teeth, runs home with the “terrible snapping and biting noises” behind him, and gets “a pleasant surprise when he discovered that the little black thing was a seal which his wife

Meanwhile, the *Inuktitut Living Dictionary* translates *uimajuq* as ‘he acts rapidly,’ or ‘to hurry.’ Clearly there is another story here, but I’m afraid I don’t know what it is.

placed up on the meat bench” (14). There the story ends, with Angusugjuk having survived the challenges, and even having brought home a meal for his new family.

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At first glance, this story may seem to be like that large smooth stone that Angusugjuk has to lift: difficult to get a grip on. Its events are strange, and its references are unfamiliar. Indeed, the reader,¹¹⁷ like Angusugjuk, is headed into strange territory – a dangerous place, with different rules and customs. However, Angusugjuk is wise enough to listen carefully to the instructions that he is given, and when he obeys them, he finds that the surface of the lifting-stone is not as smooth as it appears – that there are grooves where his fingers can get purchase. I like to think of moments of non-understanding as being like fissures in a text – they are markers of a place where with a bit of work one can climb in, or get a grip.

As a way of searching for a fingerhold – or of patting the surface of the stone – I am going to follow the examples of the Indigenous critics whose work I discussed earlier, and think first about the ways in which this tale might function allegorically. As I mentioned, Kusugaq told this story in a time of great and often devastating change – the fur trade was collapsing, and more and more Inuit were being forced to move into permanent settlements, where the government could provide them with welfare services, and the churches could educate their children. Interestingly, the story of Angusugjuk is also a parable of man making the transition into a strange new culture. In the village of the bears, there are different rules of behaviour, and the villagers are powerful and dangerous. But Angusugjuk is ultimately able to adapt, and by the end of the story he has

¹¹⁷ Here, I am for practical purposes positing a reader who is unfamiliar with the story, as the vast majority of university students of literature would be. Even young Inuit might not know the tale.

learned the skills that he needs to survive.¹¹⁸ Having learned a few bear-tricks, he bests Nanualuk (the ‘Giant Bear’) and so maintains his role as Angusugjuk, the ‘Great Man’ – a hunter and provider for his family. The story ends with the image of a stable and prosperous home, as Angusugjuk’s wife lifts the seal up onto the meat bench of her mother’s house. In Repulse Bay in the 1950s, this is a story of great hopefulness; it prophesies sensible adaptation, and also the preservation of the old ways. This kind of reading, of course, continues to be highly relevant today.

Earlier I mentioned the rhetorical possibilities in Kusugaq’s narration, especially when we recall that his audience was composed of a single outsider.¹¹⁹ Perhaps Angusugjuk, then, is not only a role-model for Inuit listeners; perhaps he has a thing or two to teach Spalding as well. Is it possible that the tale of Angusugjuk resonated with Spalding, as a fellow stranger in a strange land? If so, we might imagine that Kusugaq was subtly passing on pieces of prudent advice to the young Titirarti.¹²⁰ In *Uqalurait: An Oral History of Nunavut*, Paallirmiut elder Margaret Uyauperk Aniksak refers to appropriate behaviour in visiting new territory:

It is said that, often the land is very sensitive to strange people. In the old days people who are strangers to the land used to offer small items as a token of peace. Strangers were required to produce the offering.... So whenever you step foot on a stranger’s land, you must produce a small offering. That was our way of living at peace with the land. (Bennett and Rowley 131)

No such offering is made by Angusugjuk, but he does display a humility and awareness in new surroundings, and listens closely to the advice of the local people. By the end of

¹¹⁸ One of which is to avoid the jellyfish, which can make you lose your head.

¹¹⁹ I am assuming here that Spalding was the only audience member, as the telling would have had to be paced to allow him to keep up with the transcription (v). However, it is always possible (even probable) that others were present, and they too might have influenced the manner Kusugaq’s telling.

¹²⁰ Titirarti (lit. ‘writer,’ or clerk) was Spalding’s Inuktitut name (Irniq, “Mourning”).

the story, he even seems to have become bear-like, having adapted to customs that are unusual for a man: diving down through seal breathing-holes, and catching seals in his teeth.¹²¹ To tell this story to a visitor like Spalding, then, is to remind him to listen carefully, to be adaptive, and to show respect for local ways of being.

This kind of allegorical interpretation certainly has its place. Many of our favourite works of literature exhibit this potential to be interpreted in a variety of ways; this is what ensures that they remain relevant. However, we should harbour a degree of suspicion for allegory; after all, a clever reader can make a text mean all kinds of things. As an approach, it has the tendency to be a little too tidy: we are allowed to choose carefully what we want to see in the text, and to ignore other things. A bit of oversight or skewing is permissible, even, in the interests of making the argument work. That said, I would like to experiment with one more allegorical reading – one which comes a bit closer to the interests of literary scholars. What happens if we read “Angusugjuk” as a parable for readers and listeners – in other words, for literary critics?

We know from early in the story that Angusugjuk is a reader. As his new wife leaves to return to her people, and heads off toward the floe-edge, she tracks a text into the snow, and it is half-human, half-bear. Here I am once again invoking Chamberlin, who has written about the *literacy* of tracking (“Hunting, Tracking and Reading”).¹²² The woman’s writing resonates with the other signs of her bear-nature: the fact that she eats only fat, as bears prefer to, her rolling in the snow, her ability to swim long distances in

¹²¹ Interestingly, during the seal-hunt contest the Giant Bear hunts in the manner of a *man* – poised with a spear over a breathing-hole (10).

¹²² As Chamberlin puts it, “[l]earning about representation; learning to recognize the distinction between a thing and the representation of a thing--the difference between a bear and the word ‘bear’ or the spoor of a bear, for example; learning about the contradictions of signification . . . this is what tracking is all about. It’s also what we do when we learn how to read” (“Hunting” 67).

cold water. We might walk for a moment, though, with Angusugjuk as he trails his missing wife. As he follows her tracks, he reads a tale of departure, maybe even of sadness. Most of all, though, he is reading a mystery – how can a woman be half-human, and half-bear? This riddle is left unresolved throughout the entire story. Although we watch Angusugjuk climb on his wife’s back as she swims through the icy waters, and although we learn that her village is a village of bears, we never actually *see* her in bear-form – we never hear her bear-body described. When Angusugjuk catches up with her at the floe edge, Kusugaq tells us that “*sunauvva sinaani nalajuq*” – ‘much to his surprise, she is lying on her back at the floe edge’¹²³ (2). Very notably, he does *not* say ‘Angusugjuk was surprised to find that his wife *had transformed into a bear*, and was rolling on her back in the snow.’ She is never actually *seen* walking on one human leg and one bear leg. Her dual nature is instead implied; her tracks are symbolic, not literal. They are a signifier whose meaning seems to escape Angusugjuk, but which titillates the readers, who may be getting an idea of what the protagonist is heading into.

Throughout the story, Angusugjuk also spends a good amount of time listening to stories, as his wife and mother-in-law tell him about the challenges that he will have to face. Again, however, figurative language is somewhat lost on him. While he listens carefully, and follows his in-laws’ instructions with diligence, he occasionally misses details, or fails to connect different parts of a story. For instance, when Nanualuk’s (the Giant Bear’s) wife comes to announce that the third contest will be seal-hunting, the word ‘*nassiq*’ (ringed seal) is used twice (9). The mother-in-law’s instructions, however, tell Angusugjuk that he must swim to the first hole and grab the “little black thing”

¹²³Here, I am rephrasing Spalding’s morphemic translation, which runs “much to his surprise floe edge / on the lying on her back /she” (2).

(“*qirniqtukulungmik*”)¹²⁴ (10). Angusugjuk does as she says; he takes the “little black thing” in his teeth, climbs out, runs home, and drops it in the doorway (11). Then, Kusugaq tells us “*Sunauvvaguuq taamna qirniqtukuluk nassiunirmat*” – “much to his surprise, they say, that little black thing turned out to be a seal”¹²⁵ (11). Somehow, the rather transparent epithet for ‘seal’ was lost on Angusugjuk. Like any reader or listener, he struggles at times, and occasionally misses obvious things. The important point for critics to take note of, though, is that even though Angusugjuk at times lacks understanding, he does not let that interfere with his belief in the story; rather, he continues to track and dive for these mysteries, with faith that comprehension – or at least reward – will be forthcoming.

We will return momentarily to our determined hunter-critic, but first, a few words about the literary attributes of this story. “Angusugjuk” is not a well-known tale; it lacks the circulation¹²⁶ of “Kiviug,” or of the “Uinigumasuittuq” (Nuliajuk/Sedna) cycle. Readers of “Angusugjuk,” then, are largely unprepared for the story’s proceedings. And one of the things that can make classic tales so intimidating – or alternately, so enticing – is the *strangeness* of their events. Most of the time, scholars seem to throw up their hands and accept that their status as cultural outsiders prevents them from accessing these texts. Otherwise, they may turn to the ethnographies, and find ways in which the story is merely reflective of Indigenous social structure, or of a succinct moral. For example, in the foreword to Maurice Métayer’s collection of Copper Eskimo stories, *Tales From the*

¹²⁴ Epithets are common in hunting songs and stories. As McGrath points out, hunting songs often “used the language of incantation in which a seal is ‘blubbery one’” (“Oral” 165).

¹²⁵ My rephrasing of Spalding’s morphemic translation.

¹²⁶ Which, admittedly, is not wide.

Igloo, Al Purdy recounts Métayer's interpretation of the legend of "The Magic Drum,"¹²⁷ in which a skeleton-woman, having emerged from the sea, drums the flesh back onto her bones, and the youth back into the body of the drum-maker: "You see now," says Métayer, "the very important message of this story: a woman is not fully a woman without the love of a man. And a man will never grow old as long as he has the love of a woman" (6). Purdy expresses some dissatisfaction with Métayer's didacticism (6). Indeed, are we so uncomfortable with the unfamiliar that we have to drain the story of its magic, just to be able to feel at ease? I believe that there are other ways of dealing with strangeness, and I will list three of them here:

1. Consider the possibility that some events in the story are *supposed to be strange, to anyone.* There is an episode in the "Kiviuiq"¹²⁸ story – an extremely long *unipkaaqtuaq*, which tells the tale of a hero lost at sea – in which Kiviuiq comes to the house of a strange old woman. In the version included by Penny Petrone in *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English*, the woman is Aissivang ('Spider'); in James Houston's recent film version of the tale, she is Igutsaqjuaq ('Big Bee [Woman]') (*Kiviuiq*). Kiviuiq approaches the house to see who is inside, peering in through a hole in the roof. In some versions, he spits on the woman to see what she will do. When she looks up to see where the leak is coming from (or to see why her light has disappeared, making sewing difficult), her eyelids block her vision. Quickly, she takes her ulu¹²⁹ and slices off her eyelids, popping them into her cooking pot – or, in some versions, straight into her mouth. I will admit that when I first heard this story, I was a bit discouraged. Its

¹²⁷ For a slightly different – and truly wonderful, telling of this story – see Mary Carpenter's contribution to John Moss' *Echoing Silence: Essays on Arctic Narrative* (225-230).

¹²⁸ Also spelled Kivioq, Kiv(v)iok, or Keeveeok.

¹²⁹ Semi-circular woman's knife.

bizarreness made me dizzy (not to mention queasy). Soon, however, I realized that this strangeness is part of the story; Kiviuq himself is appalled at this sight, and knows immediately that the woman is dangerous. Far away from home, he is struck by the peculiarity of foreigners, and the reader shares in this sensation.

2. Seek out other stories from the same tradition – and lots of them. As we read, patterns and motifs begin to emerge and repeat themselves; things that were strange at first soon become the identifying features of a tradition.¹³⁰ For example, readers and listeners who are familiar with classic Inuit storytelling will find a very familiar motif in the opening scene of “Angusugjuk” – the wooing of the animal-wife. Often, the protagonist of an *unipkaaqtuaq* will encounter a strange woman who has taken off her animal skin to reveal a human form; the protagonist can then hold the skin as a bargaining chip until the woman agrees to marry him.¹³¹ In the “Kiviuq” story (which happens to be the fifth story in *Eight Inuit Myths*), we hear the episode of the fox-wife: Kiviuq returns home to find that a fox is entering his tent while he is out, and doing the tasks of a wife (Spalding 55-56, 64-65). She has also hung her skin up to freshen outside. Kiviuq seizes the skin, and refuses to return it until she agrees to become his wife.¹³² This

¹³⁰ Bringham puts it beautifully: “When we hear stories one at a time, we’re still in a sense trapped in the bus with the tourists. A single story might reseed itself, like a tree -- a monoecious tree, like a pine or a spruce. (Other stories, I think, are dioecious, like willows: they need another companionable story with which to mate.) But even an orchard of trees, all the same species, is not the same as a forest. A coherence system of storytelling is like a system of science and mathematics. And like a forest, it is more than the sum of its parts. So long as it remains alive, a literature is a system of storytelling, not just a collection of stories or myths.” (*Tree of Meaning* 28)

¹³¹ Interestingly, this bears some resemblance to the Celtic tales of selkies – seals who could remove their skins to become women. If her skin were stolen by a man, the selkie would have to remain on land and become his wife, although her longing for the sea would never end. As in the Inuit stories, these marriages never seem to end well.

¹³² This story also appears as “Fox in Human Form” in Mark Kalluak’s *How Kabloonat Became and Other Inuit Legends* (62-67), and in James Houston’s *Kiviuq* film.

motif is repeated later in the “Kiviuq” cycle, when the hero woos his goose-wife.¹³³ The story of Angusugjuk is somewhat different, in that the hero is not aware of the animal-nature of his love interest (and instead of her skin, he has her puppy-child). However, the appearance of a strange woman in his house, and the bargaining for her hand in marriage, would certainly evoke for many listeners the tales of the animal-wives.

The idea of the bear-village is likewise not so uncommon. Again, many stories tell of animals (often wolves and bears) who put on their skins like clothing, and remove them when they go into their houses, which are like the houses of people. Métayer’s *Tales from the Igloo* contains a story called “Kidnapped by Wolves,” in which a wolf-couple removes their skins in order to steal a human baby. Rasmussen also recorded a story, told by Aisivak from Northwest Greenland, about “[a] woman who had had a miscarriage [and] had run away from her family. As she ran she came to a house. In the passage lay the skins of bears. She went in. The inhabitants turned out to be bears in human shape” (qtd. in MacDonald 278).¹³⁴ Some critics might comment upon the ecological perspective that these kinds of stories describe: if animals are people – in-laws, even – then there needs to be a great deal of care taken in how one treats them, especially when they are the primary source of food and materials.

But I am also interested in the way in which the bear-village in “Angusugjuk” functions within a network of stories. While Angusugjuk is traveling to an unknown place, many of the listeners are headed somewhere familiar – and that place is signposted for them along the way. When Angusugjuk and his wife climb out onto the sea-ice – a

¹³³ In the version told by Samson Quinangnaq (recorded by James Houston for the film), Kiviuq takes the goose’s socks. As Quinangnaq explains “The story is that in those days, birds wore socks on their feet.” In other versions, it is the feathery skins which are stolen by the hero. See “Kiviuq’s Journey” (http://www.unipka.ca/Stories/Goose_Wife.html).

¹³⁴ From Rasmussen’s *The People of the Polar North*, 1908.

kind of threshold, or stop-over, for the land that is their destination – the wife says “*taunani nunataqarmat taima ilakka taunaniiliqput. Taima iglumit tugliqpaamit anijuqarniarmat nanualungnik . . .*” ‘Down there is the land of my relatives; they are down there now. The ones who come out of the next house are going to be giant bears....’¹³⁵ *Taunani* (‘down there’) the speech begins, and before the phrase is over it appears again: *taunaniiliqput* (‘they are down there now’) – a rhythmic reminder of the place that is approaching, and of the people who will be met. Lucien Schneider’s translation of the word *taunani*, furthermore, adds an element that Spalding’s translation is missing: *taunani*, it says, can mean ‘below there,’ but also ‘at sea,’ or ‘toward the sea.’¹³⁶ The land she is referring to is away, further out at sea, deep in the wilderness of the ocean. Imaginatively, the journeying listeners are shifting worlds – about to enter the most mysterious of places. Yet it is a place that they are uncannily familiar with, as the repeated word *taunani* conjures both the direction of the sea, and also every tale that has happened down there: the legends of Kiviuk in his kayak, who in a sudden storm is swept far away from home, of the Qalupalik, who comes up from beneath to steal children, of the skeleton-woman, of the narwhal who was once the cruel mother of the blind boy, and of Nuliajuk, or Sedna, the angry spirit of the ocean-bottom who traps the sea-mammals in her free-floating hair. ‘That is where we are going,’ Angusugjuk’s wife says, and the listeners shiver with excitement, or dread. ‘*They* are down there now.’

Angusugjuk – like the listeners – is thus warned of what is coming, and this is a pattern that is repeated throughout the story. Events are pre-narrated, and then unfold.

¹³⁵ My rephrasing of Spalding’s “away down there / in land / has / it so relative / s / my away down there / in / are / now / they. So house / from next / very / from going out / ones who / have / will / because it polar bear / fierce / s.” Note that in Spalding’s literary translation this speech is reported, but in the original it is direct.

¹³⁶ Inuktitut has an extremely detailed system of indicating directions.

Before both of the contests, Angusugjuk's mother-in-law tells him in detail what will happen, and what he must do to succeed. Yet this plot event is no one-liner; Kusugaq does not just say 'Angusugjuk's mother-in-law told him how to defeat the great bear.' Rather, we hear *in detail* what she tells Angusugjuk, and then we have the pleasure of seeing her words verified as the challenges unfold – in full detail, again. There goes Angusugjuk to the lifting-stone, and there he finds his grip – now watch as he heaves it forward and wins the challenge, just as she said he would. This device has a moral, certainly: listen to your elders, and take their advice. This is doubly important if you are in unfamiliar territory. But this narrative feature also serves to connect this tale to a network of related stories – a tradition which often features what we might call the trope of instructions.

Characters in the *unipkaaqtuat* often turn to supernatural beings for assistance; think, for instance, of the orphan boy Kaujjarjuk training with the spirit of his brother,¹³⁷ the blind boy Aningaak being healed by the loons,¹³⁸ or the abused wife asking the moon-man for help. In "Ululijarnaak," the version of the latter story told in 1990 by Igloodik elder Hervé Paniaq, the moon-man takes the woman away with him, but warns her that she will face a series of dangers (MacDonald 220-222). When they reach the moon, he tells her, she will go into a house where an old hag will visit, and try to make her laugh. "When that happens she should place her hands under her own *kinniq* [the front flap of a woman's parka] and shape them into the form of a *namukinniq* [a model of a polar bear] and imitate the sound of the bear" (221).¹³⁹ She follows these instructions, and when she

¹³⁷ See Petrone, "Revenge of the Orphan Boy" (17)

¹³⁸ "Lumaajuq, the Story of the Blind Boy," *Inuit Unikkaaqtuangit: Inuit Legends Vol. 2*.

¹³⁹ I have read several versions of this story, but have yet to grasp For the moment, it is a mystery that will have to remain strange (see list-item #3).

makes the sound of a bear the old hag rushes from the house. The woman learns that had she laughed, the old hag would have torn out her intestines. But when she fails to follow the moon-man's final set of instructions – that upon returning home she should not eat anything caught by her husband – she dies, along with her child.

If we think about these kinds of instructions – such as those given by Angusugjuk's mother-in-law – as storytelling, then we return to the idea of Angusugjuk as a reader of stories. He is no post-structuralist critic; rather, he exhibits a total faith in the stories he is told. Kusugaq's audience, then, learns the same kind of trust, as the mother-in-law's stories turn out to be true, and Angusugjuk is rewarded for listening. We have to have faith, then, that although the lifting-rock may appear to be smooth, slippery, and unmanageable, there are fingerholds in its surface – one simply has to take the time to find them. As readers – especially as readers of unfamiliar tales – we have to listen carefully, pay attention to the signs, and above all, listen to people who know, who are at home in these unfamiliar places.

This brings me to the third item of my list of strategies for dealing with difficult texts: **3. Revel in the strangeness.** As Chamberlin says:

it is the uncomfortability, the strangeness, that is crucial—the defamiliarization, the alienation, the incompleteness, the indeterminacy, the ungrammaticality—which remind us that the belief, and the knowledge, that we embrace (or that embrace us) are always accompanied by doubt, and that the literariness that we look for in a text is to be found in the strange ceremonies that certify beauty and truth and goodness. (“Do You Hear?” 4)

Chamberlin has written extensively on this subject, and it is not an easy one to come to terms with – especially when we have become adapted to scholarly trends that insist we be unfailingly critical, that we see through discursive constructs, and flush out the latent

ideologies in everything. These approaches have enabled us to do a good deal of important reflection, and have taken great steps towards unsettling patterns of oppression, but they have an unfortunate side-effect: at times, they have a tendency to drain the pleasure out of our work. Delight, we have learned, is not critical, and neither is nostalgia. And these, many times, are the reason we were drawn to art in the first place. Here we come back to the importance of close reading, and attention to language. These habits allow us to slow down, to take pleasure in the text, rather than worry about the ways in which it may be slipping something past us. After all, *panic* about non-understanding often leads us to make our worst critical decisions, as we search desperately for methodologies that will make quick and easy sense of the unruly text. As students, this kind of relief is our worst enemy – it means the end of struggle, the end of learning.

In looking for an interpretive key in “Angusugjuk” – for the story’s own advice on how to approach it – I would focus on two of its features (although there are no doubt many more possibilities). First, the tale is itself composed of a series of stories; storytelling is a key theme. And secondly, Angusugjuk is twice confronted with riddles, and both times he is rather delayed in solving them. Kusugaq describes the strange prints and behaviour of Angusugjuk’s wife, but never feels the need to openly declare her bear-nature. Likewise, Angusugjuk is not reaching for conclusions. And when his mother-in-law slips a kenning – “little black thing” – into her story, Angusugjuk does not struggle to decode it. He simply carries out his instructions, and at the end of the challenge is surprised to find that he has fetched a seal. Riddles, the story says, do not necessarily need to be solved. It is far more important to have faith in the stories, and in the people

who tell them. It is this belief that builds relationships of trust, of mutual responsibility and mutual respect.

In critical analyses of Indigenous classics, there is no need to separate the political from the aesthetic. While it is crucial that we ask how these stories functioned politically in their historical settings, and how they continue to be socially relevant today, we can also search for the ways in which the form and language of the text is bound to these same concerns. There is no separation between a people and their literature; as Thomas King famously wrote, “[t]he truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (2). The aesthetic features of a tradition are a crucial part of peoplehood, and a nation’s artistic merit is linked directly to its intellectual might. If critics allow the text to speak, rather than trying to speak for it, then they will truly be engaged in a tribally-centered criticism.

In reading the *unipkaaqtuat*, then, we might take moments of non-understanding as opportunities to feel challenged, and to feel humbled, and to recognize the vast complexities and sophistication of traditions which – in most cases – are not our own. We can also take a kind of joy in not knowing, even if this is not something that the academy looks favourably on. After all, the tale of Angusugjuk has many more mysteries – many more *agluit* (seal breathing-holes) to dive down through. Kusugaq’s is only one version of the Angusugjuk story; meanwhile, there are another seven in the collection. *Eight Inuit Myths*, furthermore, is only one collection of many – and there are even more that have yet to be published. Elders continue to tell these stories, and younger Inuit artists continue to re-create them in their work. In other words, there is a great deal to learn *taavani*, over there.

Would we want it any other way?

**Tall Tales and Truth-Telling:
Inuit Life Writing, Oral Histories, and Literary Criticism**

...the very loose and unreliable nature of the Esquimaux representations (on which it would be necessary to receive with great caution)...”

– Charles Dickens, “The Lost Arctic Voyagers”

Aren’t there two kinds of literature, true and false?

– Plato, *Republic* (Book II)

In 2006, the RCMP filed a 725-page internal report to address allegations that police officers stationed in the Arctic between 1950 and 1970 had systematically slaughtered sled-dogs in an effort to force Inuit to move into permanent settlements. The report declared that “despite the thousands of pages reviewed, there is no documentary evidence, or *any anecdotal or oral history other than that of certain Inuit elders*, to support these allegations” (RCMP 5, emphasis added). On December 6, one week after the report was tabled in the House of Commons, the Qikiqtani Inuit Association¹⁴⁰ and the Makivik Corporation¹⁴¹ released a joint statement, expressing their frustration with the RCMP’s self-exoneration. “‘From Kuujjuarapik to the High Arctic, there is clear evidence the RCMP and other persons in authority killed Inuit sled dogs systematically and determinedly,’ said [Makivik President] Pita Aatami, ‘to state otherwise is to say that Inuit Elders who live thousands of miles from each other have conspired to lie’” (Makivik, “Press” 1). The Inuit organizations had already been making arrangements for a Truth Commission, which would provide a forum for Inuit accounts of the dog

¹⁴⁰ The Baffin Region affiliate of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI), which represents Inuit under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement.

¹⁴¹ “Makivik is the development corporation mandated to manage the heritage funds of the Inuit of Nunavik provided for in the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA)” (*Makivik*).

slaughter, and in 2008 a series of hearings were held in thirteen Baffin communities (“Qikiqtani”).¹⁴²

Meanwhile, in January of 2007, *Maclean's* magazine published an article entitled “The Myth of the Sled Dog Killings,” which discussed the “clash between native lore and white history” that the RCMP’s report had provoked (Taylor). The author, Peter Shawn Taylor, wrote that “oral history [makes] a better source for emotions than statistics,” and that “to conflate all this into a government conspiracy appears slanderous and untrue.” Although the RCMP review team attempted to gain access to Makivik’s interviews with Inuit elders,¹⁴³ it also implicitly questioned the accuracy of “those Inuit elders who believe . . . what they remember seeing some 35 to 55 years ago, or being told of by their families . . .” (RCMP 5). As Jack Granatstein, professor emeritus of History at York University, told *Maclean's*, “[i]f there is a basic rule of oral history . . . it’s that ‘Old men forget and they remember selectively’” (qtd. in Taylor).

These kinds of statements demonstrate the peculiar amnesia which tends to overcome administrators and experts (especially during discussions of Aboriginal rights and redress) as they invoke the apparent contrast between the written and the oral: the idea that theirs (or ours) is a tradition of facts and of reason, of documentation and of empirical truths, while the knowledge of Indigenous peoples is allegedly fluid, intuitive, and ultimately unreliable.¹⁴⁴ Advocates of this binary forget, as J. Edward Chamberlin points out, that “the most important institutions of this culture – the churches, the courts,

¹⁴² In 2002, Makivik Corporation had already completed 200 interviews.

¹⁴³ “The review team met with executives from the Makivik Corporation and the Qikiqtani Inuit Association to obtain access to their statements, that related to the unlawful destruction of Inuit sled dogs by RCMP members, and to discuss the specifics of their complaints. A meeting was held, but the statements were not provided” (RCMP 6).

¹⁴⁴ This observation derives from (and is discussed in much greater detail in) J. Edward Chamberlin’s *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?*.

and the parliaments – are places where speech has a considerable presence” (“From Hand to Mouth” 138-139). For many, somehow, witnessing, remembering, and speechmaking seem to lose their validity outside of particular institutional configurations. So when the RCMP – the law enforcers – becomes the accused, oral testimony is suddenly reduced to the status of gossip and hearsay.

In Nunavut, however, oral traditions do not seem to be troubled by these stigmas; indeed, oral history has played an important role in the project of Inuit self-determination (Laugrand, “Écrire” 91-100). The Government of Nunavut is committed to “ensuring that Inuit culture and language [are] an integral part of the society,” and one of its primary strategies for achieving this goal is the incorporation of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*¹⁴⁵ (IQ), or Inuit traditional knowledge, into the workings of all government offices (Government).¹⁴⁶ As Qikiqtani Inuit Association policy analyst Jaypetee Arnakak explains, IQ is not a set or finite body of knowledge; rather, it is “a set of teachings on practical truisms about society, human nature and experience passed on orally (traditionally) from one generation to the next It is holistic, dynamic and cumulative in its approach to knowledge, teaching and learning. . .” (Arnakak). IQ is difficult to pin down or to define, but it is most readily manifested in the knowledge and memories of Nunavut elders, who are able to provide information about what Inuit life was like before residential schools, welfare, and permanent settlements changed the face of Arctic Canada.

¹⁴⁵ ‘Knowledge that Inuit have had for a very long time.’ The term sometimes also appears as *Inuit Qaujimanituqangit*. The meaning is the same; in the latter case the root is *qaujimaniq* (‘knowledge’) rather than *qaujimajaq* (‘that which is known’).

¹⁴⁶ See also Frédéric Laugrand’s “Écrire pour prendre la parole: Conscience historique, mémoires d’ainés et régimes d’historicité au Nunavut,” which discusses the process of creating a ‘collective memory’ for political purposes.

Along with Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* is attracting more and more interest in the South, especially as wildlife management officials have to negotiate with Inuit assessments and protocols, which are often radically different from their own.¹⁴⁷ In 2003, a book entitled *In the Words of Elders: Aboriginal Cultures in Transition* made important steps toward the recognition of elders as scholars, and discussed the importance of “showing a new respect for the thought of Aboriginal cultural, spiritual, artistic, and political leaders . . . [and for] providing a greater legitimacy in academic settings for the teachings of those leaders” (Kulchyski, McCaskill, and Newhouse xi). However, as the sled dog controversy demonstrates, many Southerners still do not have a great deal of confidence in Inuit as scholars of their own reality. IQ may be tolerated for its romantic appeal, but it has yet to be taken seriously as an intellectual tradition.

With increasing calls in Native Studies for the recognition of Indigenous traditional knowledge, *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* will no doubt be a term that students and scholars interested in the North have the pleasure of grappling with, and this will be facilitated by the availability of texts produced by oral history projects. This chapter explores the possibility of bringing *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* into literary studies. After all, while elders’ narratives are often explored for principles that will guide policy, administration, and everyday life, they also have a great deal to say about stories and storytelling. Like life writing (a prominent genre in Inuit literature), oral histories are predominantly read as testimony, or ethnography; I will endeavour to demonstrate how

¹⁴⁷ See Kulchyski and Tester’s *Kiumajut (Talking Back): Game Management and Inuit Rights 1900-70*. Stories about disagreements over wildlife quotas and appropriate conservation methods are in the Northern media almost constantly. See Bird, “Baffin Bay Bear Quota Raises Southern Ire” or “Joint Study Needed on Baffin Bay Polar Bear Numbers: Expert.”

the principles of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* support a *literary* reading of texts – one in which the methods of the storyteller are deemed as important as the information that he or she conveys.

The chapter begins with an overview of Inuit life writing and oral history in Nunavut; together, these two modes of storytelling form the majority of Inuit literary texts. Furthermore, both genres have a strong ethnographic impulse, and are often formed through processes of collaboration. In Inuktitut, they can be called *inuusirminik unikkaat* – ‘life stories’ – and are distinct from other forms of storytelling, such as *unikkaaqtuat*¹⁴⁸ (traditional or classic tales). I will argue that the Inuit distinction between these genres hovers around the idea of truth-telling, and so is highly relevant to debates about literary versus historical readings. In the final section, I will attempt to apply some of the principles of literary *Qaujimajatuqangit* to one of the most prominent Inuit autobiographies – Minnie Aodla Freeman’s *Life Among the Qallunaat*.

Inuit Life Narratives

Most scholars of Native life-writing stress the idea that autobiography is not an Indigenous genre. In *Haa Kusteeyi, Our Culture: Tlingit Life Stories* – the third volume of the *Classics of Tlingit Oral Literature* series – Richard Dauenhauer and Nora Marks Dauenhauer describe the reluctance of Tlingit elders to talk at length about themselves, and admit that

...the process of gathering data for such a book is at worst an exercise in bad manners. So we preface our introduction to the genre of Tlingit biography with the cultural disclaimer that it is an un-Tlingit genre, and

¹⁴⁸ Sometimes also spelled *unipkaaqtuat*; the difference is dialectal. In Baffin dialects the double consonant ‘pk’ is assimilated or geminated to ‘kk.’ Other spellings (*unikkaartuat*; *unikkaatuat*) are also possible, but I will endeavour here to use the same spelling as the text under discussion.

one indulged in by the elders only with much begging and cajoling on the part of well-meaning folklorists, anthropologists, and oral historians. . . . In other words, biographical and autobiographical narratives are “non-classics” or perhaps “anti-classics” of Tlingit oral literature and are therefore potential heresy in the canon of this series. (ix-x)

Arnold Krupat’s *For Those Who Come After: A Study of Native American Autobiography* shares these concerns: “Indian autobiographies are not a traditional form among Native peoples, but the consequence of contact with the white invader-settlers, and the product of a limited collaboration with them” (xi). The reason for this, he explains, has to do with the genre of autobiography itself, which he sees as distinctly European in the way that it is “marked by egocentric individualism, historicism, and writing” (*For Those* 29). Indeed, although life-writing has been a part of the Western tradition from the time of the Bible, of Isocrates, and later of Augustine, the genre truly came of age in the eighteenth century – the age of Enlightenment (Misch 1-18; Smith and Watson 2; Krupat, *For Those* 29; Cruikshank, *Life Lived* ix).¹⁴⁹ As a result, the readerly expectation of life stories is that they will narrate a subject’s development, with particular emphasis on the things that make him or her exemplary; the subject is expected to overcome obstacles, triumph over adversity, and generally progress toward a state of intellectual grace.¹⁵⁰ Critic after critic remarks upon the incompatibility of these narrative expectations with Indigenous traditions.

¹⁴⁹ “‘Autobiography’ . . . described writing being produced at a particular historical juncture, the early modern period in the West with its concept of the self-interested individual intent on assessing the status of the soul or the meaning of public achievement. By the eighteenth century notions of self-interest, self-consciousness, and self-knowledge informed the figure of the ‘Enlightened individual’ described by philosophers and social and political theorists” (Smith and Watson 2).

¹⁵⁰ “Those of us raised in a Western tradition tend to approach life history with certain preconceptions about what constitutes an ‘adequate’ account of a life. The familiar model comes from written autobiography--an author’s chronological reflections about individual growth and development, often presented as a passage from darkness to light” (Cruikshank, *Life Lived* ix).

Yet while many elements of the autobiographical narrative are no doubt of European origin, we should be cautious about declaring that all traditional Aboriginal literatures are non-linear, communally-oriented, and self-effacing. In the interests of promoting a more nuanced understanding, we might think for a moment about the autobiographical elements of Inuit song traditions – in particular the hunting songs and ‘songs of derision’ that Rasmussen recorded during the Fifth Thule Expedition (1921-1924). The shaman Avva¹⁵¹ of Igloolik, for instance, sang a number of songs to celebrate his hunting prowess. One of them concludes with this verse:

So listen, boastful men
 from distant fjords,
 so eager to draw breath
 in praise of your own skill:
 fill your lungs
 with songs
 about the daring exploits of a stranger! (qtd. in Lowenstein 61-62)

As in the songs of derision, the singer of this verse has little interest in humility; instead, Avva proudly narrates the events which have distinguished him, and demands that others recognize his achievements. Song traditions will be discussed in depth in the final chapter; for the moment, this example can be used to complicate the idea that Inuit life-writing, as Penny Petrone puts it, “mark[s] a break from the ancient oral tradition” (103).

Julie Cruikshank points out that “recording a life history is usually a social activity. It is the collaborative product of an encounter between two people, often from different cultural backgrounds, and incorporates the consciousness of an investigator as well as that of a subject” (*Life Lived x*). Indigenous autobiography, in other words, is in many ways an ethnographic genre. Just as writers of autobiographical texts enter into

¹⁵¹ Rasmussen used the spelling ‘Aua.’ In a 2000 letter to *Nunatsiaq News*, CBC North producer Joanna Awa explained that this was a mis-spelling of her great-grandfather’s name (“The Story of a Name”).

what Philippe Lejeune refers to as a ‘pact’ to represent themselves truthfully, Indigenous memoirs are expected to provide accurate witness to the reality of Indigenous life.¹⁵² In addition to *unikkaaqtuat* and songs, Rasmussen collected a variety of autobiographical narratives during the Fifth Thule Expedition.¹⁵³ In 1922, when Rasmussen visited Igloolik, Avva recounted the story of how he had gained his powers; Penny Petrone then includes this memoir in the “Personal Narratives” section of her anthology *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English* (120-125). Although Rasmussen was probably less interested in his informants’ personal development and articulation of Self than in gathering evidence with which to form hypotheses about Inuit culture and beliefs, this document is exemplary of an autobiographical tradition that extends well into contemporary Inuit literature.

Versions of alphabetic and syllabic writing were introduced in the Arctic by European missionaries,¹⁵⁴ and like other useful technologies (such as rifles and radio) the people had no qualms about making this one their own. McGrath explains, furthermore, that

[t]he ability to read and write was necessary for Bible study, so missionaries provided paper, and natives were encouraged to write out their life stories to practice these newly acquired reading and writing skills. Keeping diaries was also encouraged as a way of ensuring that the Sabbath was identified and observed as a day of prayer and reflection, and these diaries frequently took on the form of autobiographies or were later used in their composition Of 783 works published by Inuit prior to 1981, more than one quarter can be identified as being primarily reminiscent or autobiographical. (“Circumventing” 223-224)

¹⁵² Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique*.

¹⁵³ See, for instance, the first chapter of *The Netsilik Eskimos: Social Life and Spiritual Culture* (Volume VIII, No.1-2 of the *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition*), entitled “Eskimo Life: Descriptions and Autobiographies” (7-83).

¹⁵⁴ The first Moravian mission was established in Labrador in 1771; in the late nineteenth century, Reverend Edmund Peck introduced James Evans’ syllabic writing system to Inuit in Northern Quebec and Cumberland Sound. It quickly gained popularity, and is used now (with some variations) in Nunavut and Nunavik (McGrath, *Canadian* 22-23).

In order to give a sense of the extent of this tradition, I will provide a brief overview of some of the major autobiographical texts here.

One of the earliest known diaries¹⁵⁵ was written in 1880 by a Labrador Inuk named Abraham Ulrikab, who agreed to travel to Europe to take part in the ethnographic displays put on by the Hamburg entrepreneur Carl Hagenbeck. The ship left Hebron, Labrador on August 26, 1880, and by January 16 of 1881, the entire family, which included Abraham's wife, Ulrike, their children, Sara and Maria, and Ulrike's nephew Tobias, had died of smallpox. Abraham's diary and letters were recently published in English translation by Hartmut Lutz, with an introduction by the late Iqaluit writer and illustrator Alooook Ipellie.¹⁵⁶ Back in Labrador, memoirs soon began to follow diaries, and in 1893, 74-year old Lydia Campbell began writing her *Sketches of Labrador Life*, which was first published in the St. John's *Evening Telegram* (McGrath, *Canadian* 84). In 1940, a Labrador woman named Anauta (Lizzie Ford Blackmore), who was working in the United States as a performer/lecturer, published an autobiography entitled *Land of the Good Shadows: The Life Story of Anauta an Eskimo Woman*.¹⁵⁷ And in 1964, Lydia Campbell's great-grandniece Elizabeth Goudie wrote a memoir that was later published under the title *Woman of Labrador*.

In other parts of the Canadian Arctic, many other memoirs and personal reminiscences were also appearing; many were serialized in Northern publications like *North*, *Inuktitut*, *Inuit Today*, *Inukshuk*, and *Nunatsiaq News*, and never appeared as

¹⁵⁵ Inuit writing in the form of letters goes back to the second half of the eighteenth century. See "What Great Creatures Are These': Early Contact Literature" in Penny Petrone's *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English* (55-99)

¹⁵⁶ The diaries were translated from a nineteenth-century German translation by Moravian missionary Brother Kretschmer; the Inuktitut original has been lost (Ulrikab xxvi).

¹⁵⁷ Co-written with an American friend, Heloise Chandler Washburne. See McGrath, *Canadian Inuit Literature* 85.

independent monographs. Robin McGrath's thorough research in the 1980s documents hundreds of texts of this kind. Her doctoral thesis, *Canadian Inuit Literature: The Development of a Tradition* (published in 1984 by National Museums of Canada) provides an excellent overview of the texts available at the time, as does her 1979 *Canadian Inuit Literature: An Annotated Bibliography*. In 1980, she published selections of contemporary Inuit writing in a small anthology entitled *Paper Stays Put: A Collection of Inuit Writing*, beautifully illustrated by Alooook Ipellie.¹⁵⁸ Penny Petrone's larger 1988 anthology *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English* also excerpts an extremely wide range of material, and includes a section entitled "'When All Meat Was Juicy and Tender': Personal Narratives, Letters, and Transitional Literature" (101-198).¹⁵⁹

In her article "Circumventing the Taboos: Inuit Women's Autobiographies," McGrath argues that "Inuit men writing about themselves frequently use some or all of the elements of the narratives of the two major epic heroes, Kaujarjuk and Kiviok" (224).¹⁶⁰ In particular, she noticed that the structure of *I, Nuligak* – the memoir of an Inuvialuit man whom the whalers called Bob Cockney – follows the structure of the tale of Kaujarjuk, the maligned orphan.¹⁶¹ Maurice Métayer, the Oblate priest who edited and translated Nuligak's text, also noted this resemblance: "The Eskimo legends of the fatherless little orphan are continually recalled," he says (Nuligak 9). McGrath goes on to

¹⁵⁸ McGrath published this text under her former married name, Robin Gedalof.

¹⁵⁹ Readers looking for a thorough study of Inuit life-writing should consult these texts. Here, unfortunately, I do not have room to discuss Margaret Baikie's *Labrador Memories: Reflections at Mulligan*, Bernard Irqugaqtuq's "The Autobiography of a Pelly Bay Eskimo," Armand Tagoona's *Shadows*, or *The Recollections of Levi Iqalujjuaq*.

¹⁶⁰ This thesis is also detailed in McGrath's 1987 article, "Oral Influences in Contemporary Inuit Literature."

¹⁶¹ Orphans play an important role in the *unikkaaqtuat*, and a number of versions of the Kaujarjuk story warn against their mistreatment. In most versions, the orphan boy acquires a spirit helper who trains him to become very strong, and he takes bloody revenge on the community. See "The Revenge of the Orphan Boy" in Petrone (17-19), or Selma Van London's "Mythology and Identity Construction Among the Inuit."

argue that the Cape Dorset photographer Peter Pitseolak – author of the 1975 life story *People from our Side* – “is more like the hot-tempered Kivviok,” and that “the episodic structure of the work mirrors the circular journey pattern of the Kiviok myth” (“Oral Influences” 162; “Circumventing” 224).¹⁶²

McGrath’s treatment of Inuit women’s autobiographies, meanwhile, does not draw these connections with *unikkaaqtuat*. While she writes that “we are unfamiliar with the bulk of Inuit folklore,” and that therefore “the patterns of narrative that are specific to the culture are invisible to us,” she is most interested in the idea that Inuit women are restricted by a cultural ‘taboo’ which prevents them from drawing attention to themselves (“Circumventing” 226, 224). The Cape Dorset artist Pitseolak Ashoona, for example, apparently received a great deal of criticism from the community when she published her 1971 oral biography *Pitseolak: Pictures Out Of My Life* with Dorothy Harley Eber (“Circumventing” 225-226). McGrath sees similar restrictions at work in Inuvialuit writer Alice Masak French’s two memoirs, *My Name Is Masak* and *The Restless Nomad*, as Masak’s recollections of life in residential school and of the transition back into her old way of life are tales of hardship and culture-shock, but not of abuse and misery (“Circumventing” 228). McGrath speculates that these details may have been left out, as “[g]ood little Inuit girls don’t make scenes or complain openly about mistreatment” (“Circumventing” 228). She goes on to argue that *Life Among the Qallunaat*, the autobiography of Minnie Aodla Freeman, focuses mainly on a critique of Southern society, rather than detailing the actions or achievements of the protagonist (“Circumventing” 228-229).

¹⁶² As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Kiviuk is an epic hero who undertakes a long journey through strange lands. In 2006, John Houston directed a film based on the story (*Kiviuk*), and has compared Kiviuk with Odysseus.

In 2000, a Labrador-born scholar named Dale Blake responded to McGrath's interpretations in a doctoral dissertation entitled "Inuit Autobiography: Challenging the Stereotypes." Blake argues that the representations of Self embodied in Inuit autobiography are marked by their occurrence at "sites of métissage," and she examines the way in which the authors resist or manipulate stereotypical understandings of Inuit (6). As such, she questions the extent to which Alice Masak French and Minnie Aodla Freeman – as characters in autobiographies – represent typical or ideal self-effacing Inuit women; instead, Blake argues, "we observe the individual wrested from the oral community, still linked to it, but continuing to express her own distinctive needs and opinions" (124).

Although the popularity of ideas of 'hybridity' or 'métissage' has declined since Blake wrote her dissertation (especially in the field of Indigenous literary theory), her work helpfully aims to contextualize Inuit autobiography with reference to the particular cultural realities of the authors. Indeed, Inuit memoirs are important historical documents, and their representation of particular moments in Canadian history is no doubt a major factor in their readership's interest. In his recent book *Magic Weapons: Aboriginal Writers Remaking Community after Residential School*, Sam McKegney discusses the Inuvialuit writer Anthony Apakark Thrasher's autobiography *Thrasher: Skid Row Eskimo* – a text bound by the reality of the author's situation. Thrasher's life took him from residential school to the streets of Edmonton; charged and eventually convicted of manslaughter, he wrote his book from a prison cell. In many ways, both Thrasher and his autobiography can be understood as evidence of the trauma of urban Aboriginal life in the 1960s and '70s. This was certainly one of the reasons that Thrasher's lawyer

encouraged him to write as he was awaiting trial: he “intended to use the manuscript in Thrasher’s defence” (McKegney 62). McKegney, however, sees another kind of potential in this text. He points out that “[f]ew residential school survival narratives have found their way to publication *as literature*. . . . [They] are mainly invoked as testimonial evidence and discussed in distinctly non-literary terms” (59, emphasis added). As such, McKegney’s analysis is careful to describe the ways in which the formal aspects of the text reflect its situation: “. . .rather than mapping a path from institutionalized oppression to intellectual and spiritual emancipation, Thrasher’s writing remains mired in unfreedom, powerfully symbolized by the cage from which he writes” (61). He argues that *Skid Row Eskimo* is “in many ways antithetical to the *Bildungsroman* structures of other survival narratives” and of the autobiographical genre more generally (61).

McKegney draws attention to a major issue in the study of life-writing – the testimonial quality of the genre, and the overwhelming interest in the historical and ethnographic data contained in autobiographical texts. Because life-writing is assumed to be based on fact, its literary character is often forgotten or denied. In *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*, Paul John Eakin writes that “most readers naturally assume that all autobiographies are based on the verifiable facts of a life history, and it is this referential dimension, imperfectly understood, that has checked the development of *a poetics of autobiography*” (3, emphasis added). Although I do not wish to deny the pragmatic usefulness of autobiography and oral history – they provide historical perspectives, cultural information, and life lessons which are of undeniably value – I would like to reiterate the thesis of my previous chapter: questions of language and literary form are *inseparable* from the historical and political qualities of texts, and to

pay close attention to them recognizes the individuality and autonomy of storytellers, rather than understanding them as involuntary cultural ambassadors, and their tales as ethnographic artifacts. As this chapter demonstrates, both autobiography and oral history are haunted by the prerogative of truth-telling, and recognition of their literary merit is often deficient – particularly when the authors are Indigenous.

For both Robin McGrath and Penny Petrone, life-writing is a “transitional” genre – an early stage in a literature’s ‘development’ (Petrone 105). As McGrath explains:

There are a number of reasons why autobiography is one of the first forms of written literature to emerge in a newly literate society. First, one of the most obvious subjects for a new writer to attempt is that which he or she knows best – the self; second, the contact that promotes literacy constitutes a major disruptive force in the lives of pre-literate people, and autobiographies seem to thrive during times of political, technological, or environmental upheaval; and finally, autobiography has a pre-determined chronological structure, a limited subject matter, and generally requires little research or invention, but at the same time it is flexible enough to accommodate the inclusion of oral songs and stories, religious or spiritual speculation, political opinion, or history. (“Circumventing” 223)

McGrath’s terminology (‘newly literate’; ‘pre-literate’) tends unfortunately to evoke now-discredited ideas of social evolution, and there is a sense that literary traditions, too, have a predetermined developmental path. Soon, it is expected, Inuit writers will no longer have to rely on the ‘easy’ genre of the memoir, and can progress toward the production of novels.¹⁶³ The idea seems to be that in order for a text (or a tradition) to be truly literary, it must be predominantly fictional.¹⁶⁴ A literary text, here, is not defined as one in which form matters as much as content; rather, it is understood to be directly

¹⁶³ These sentiments are echoed in Noah Richler’s curious account of his visit to Igloolik, in which he seems to be arguing that the production of novels is an indication of a people’s concern for the human rights of individuals (*This Is My Country: What’s Yours?* 57-98).

¹⁶⁴ Experience tells me that the novel is still understood by many to be the true currency of a literature, or a sign of its maturity. After ‘isn’t it mostly oral tradition?’, one of the most common questions that I hear when discussing my research is ‘are there any novels?’

related to narrative creativity or inventiveness. Theories of autobiography, however, have revealed the ways in which subjects create themselves as literary characters and endow their life stories with narrative conventions; as Roland Barthes said, autobiography is the “novel that dares not speak its name” (“Roland Barthes” 1460). These realizations have allowed for literary readings of autobiographical texts, such as those proposed by McKegney, and also by Cruikshank¹⁶⁵ and Krupat¹⁶⁶; however, it is fair to say that amongst mainstream readers of life-writing, the expectation of truth-telling still has a powerful hold.

Oral History and *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (IQ)

Over the last thirty or so years, the readership of Inuit literature has drastically changed, as Inuit growing up in the settlements have become interested in what life was like before the massive government interventions of the 1950s and ‘60s. The pragmatic, ethnographic aspects of life-writing or life-telling have been harnessed by Nunavummiut, as Frédéric Laugrand argues, “pour affirmer encore mieux la continuité de leurs valeurs ancestrales, comme si l’histoire ne les avait jamais bousculées” (“Écrire” 111).¹⁶⁷ These ancestral values have been codified in the canonization of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (IQ), or Inuit traditional knowledge. Again, IQ is a priority for the Nunavut government, and a

¹⁶⁵ “Over the years, I have become increasingly attentive to the ways Mrs. Sidney, Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Ned mobilize traditional dimensions of their culture--in oral narrative, songs, names of places and people--to explain and interpret their experiences. . . . In addition to having a sense of order about how their lives should be told, elders have evolved a world view regarding the intellectual history of their people, so that we begin to see oral tradition not as ‘evidence’ about the past, but as a window on ways the past is culturally constituted and discussed” (Cruikshank, *Life Lived* x, 14).

¹⁶⁶ “An adequate reading of these texts requires consideration of the language, culture, and history both of Native American and of Euramericans; yet, I will contend, such a reading must be centrally a *literary* reading...” (Krupat, *For Those* xi)

¹⁶⁷ “to better affirm the continuity of their ancestral values, as if history had never displaced them.” My translation.

source of many of its protocols. As the Nunavut Department of Human Resources declares on its website, “[i]t is the department’s mandate to incorporate IQ in the delivery of our programs and services. Our policies and practices must be consistent with the beliefs, customs, values and the language of Inuit” (“Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit”). The primary sources for these cultural principles are the memories of Inuit elders, and as a result, the years of political organizing that resulted in the creation of Nunavut were also marked by a renewed interest in the collection of oral traditions (Laugrand, “Écrire” 98). Christianization, tuberculosis, residential schools, community relocation, and the influence of television have all interfered with the transmission of Inuit knowledge, but the life-narratives of elders can help to compensate for these interruptions. As a result, institutions and communities across the Arctic have established oral history or oral traditions projects, and some of these have resulted in published volumes. As Laugrand says, “[I]es Inuit devenaient maintenant les acteurs principaux d’un mouvement destiné à valoriser et sauvegarder leurs traditions” (“Écrire” 98).¹⁶⁸ Again, I will give a brief overview of these publications here.

In 1976, a small collection entitled *Stories from Pangnirtung* – the result of a series of locally-initiated interviews with eleven elders – was published by Hurtig, with illustrations by renowned Iglulingmiut artist Germaine Arnaktauyok (Akulujuk et al.). In 1989, Hattie Mannik began interviewing members of the Baker Lake Elders group, and in 1998 she published *Inuit Nunamiut: Inland Inuit*, a collection of elders’ memories and reflections. This project was funded by various governmental offices and organizations, such as the Government of the Northwest Territories Department of Culture and

¹⁶⁸ “The Inuit were now becoming the principal actors in a movement destined to validate and safeguard their traditions.” My translation.

Communications' Oral Traditions and Cultural Enhancement programs, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, and the Nunavut Research Institute (NRI). In 1998, NRI and the Royal Ontario Museum published *The Arctic Sky: Inuit Astronomy, Star Lore, and Legend* – the product of John MacDonald's work with the Igloodik Oral History Project. And in 2004, McGill-Queen's University Press published *Uqalurait: An Oral History of Nunavut* – the result of more than ten years of work by David Webster, Suzanne Evaloardjuk, Peter Irniq, Uriash Puqiqnak, David Serkoak, John Bennett, Susan Rowley, and dozens of Nunavut elders.

Nunavut Arctic College in Iqaluit, meanwhile, has made an enormous contribution to the body of Inuit oral history; since 1999, it has published five volumes in its *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series, three volumes in its *Memory and History in Nunavut* series, and four volumes in its *Inuit Perspectives on the 20th Century* series. It is also currently publishing a series of books entitled *Life Stories of Northern Leaders*, which features the recollections of prominent Inuit politicians: Abraham Okpik,¹⁶⁹ John Amagoalik,¹⁷⁰ Paul Quassa,¹⁷¹ James Arvaluk,¹⁷² and Peter Itinnuar.¹⁷³ These life stories are unique in the fact that they are available in both Inuktitut and English versions. Like

¹⁶⁹ Born near Aklavik, NWT, Abe Okpik is perhaps best known for his role as the head of "Project Surname," which aimed to provide Inuit with family names to replace their government identification numbers.

¹⁷⁰ Born near Inukjuaq, Quebec, Amagoalik was highly influential in the creation of Nunavut, and served as the president of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada.

¹⁷¹ Quassa, who is Amitturmiut (from the Igloodik region), has worked as a Land Claims negotiator and as president of President of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (the organization responsible for the implementation of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement).

¹⁷² Originally from Coral Harbour, Arvaluk has served for many years on the Legislative Assemblies of the Northwest Territories and (later) Nunavut.

¹⁷³ Born in Chesterfield Inlet, Peter Freuchen Itinnuar was the first Inuk to be elected as a Member of Parliament. Most recently, he ran as the Green Party candidate representing Nunavut in the 2008 federal election. Although there are a number of high-profile female Inuit leaders (such as Mary Simon, Ann Meekitjuk Hanson, Sheila Watt-Cloutier, and now, Leona Aglukkaq and Eva Aariak) the 'Northern Leaders' series features only men. At the recent 16th Inuit Studies Conference in Winnipeg, Dr. Susan Sammons (a senior instructor in the Language and Culture Program at Arctic College) explained that the women they had approached to be involved in the series had declined to participate.

the other publications released by Nunavut Arctic College, they are instrumental not only in preserving an Inuk view of Northern history, but in fleshing out the narrative of Inuit self-determination. Unfortunately, Nunavut Arctic College's remarkable body of work is not yet in wide distribution.

Many more oral histories have been collected, but have yet to find their way into print. The Angmarlik Interpretive Centre in Pangnirtung, for instance, has a number of taped interviews with elders (many of whom are now deceased); some of these have been translated into English, but no plans for further transcription or publication were in place in 2007.¹⁷⁴ The archives of the Igloolik Oral History Project, meanwhile, contain a great deal of unpublished material;¹⁷⁵ part of this collection is also housed at the NWT Archives in Yellowknife, along with the Ulukhaqtuurmiut (Holman Region) History project, the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation Elders Project, and many others. The Baker Lake Hunters and Trappers Organization and Inuit Heritage Centre have also sponsored a number of other oral history and land use studies; the resulting reports contain incredibly detailed maps, stories, and legends about Utkuhiksalingmiut and Akilinirmiut territory.¹⁷⁶ These are only a few examples of the existing cultural organizations and archives.

Projects of this kind fulfill an important cultural function; as the editors of the first volume of Nunavut Arctic College *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series put it, “[i]n a rapidly changing society, the preservation of the knowledge of the Inuit elders is of great value to the cultural identity of modern Inuit” (Angmaalik et al. 1). Frédéric Laugrand reminds us, however, that oral history projects have a political dimension as well (“Écrire” 102). In

¹⁷⁴ Thanks to Ooleepeeka Arnaq, who showed me the collection.

¹⁷⁵ Thanks to Ian MacRae for this information.

¹⁷⁶ My thanks to Dr. Andrew Stewart of Archaeological Services Inc., who gave me access to his collection of reports – several of which he had researched and co-authored – from the Kivalliq region.

the case of Land Use and Occupancy Projects – such as the 1976 ITC¹⁷⁷-commissioned *Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project* led by Milton Freeman, or the 1977 *Our Footprints Are Everywhere: Inuit Land Use and Occupancy in Labrador* – oral histories are tied directly to land claims. Laugrand expands upon this, arguing that in accordance with the political movements of the 1970s and ‘80s, oral traditions have also been used to create a sense of a collective social memory – “une prise de parole jugée nécessaire à une époque où l’idéologie dominante consiste précisément à nier les différences culturelles” (“Écrire” 102).¹⁷⁸ In my first chapter, I questioned the notion that ideas of Inuit collective identity are entirely a late-twentieth-century invention; I might further take issue with the suggestion that a *collective* history is necessarily a *homogenous* history.¹⁷⁹ However, I agree with Laugrand that elders’ reminiscences have a nation-building function; indeed, the concept of *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit* is in many ways a political tool (and the subject of many a politicized debate).

Beyond the creation of a collective memory, the act of remembering and of telling stories about the past might itself be thought of as a deeply political act. Elders’ testimonies give Inuit a venue in which to tell (or read) their own version of history, and they bring a particular reality to the history of Arctic administration, as Inuit talk about the experience of residential school, of the deaths of their dogs, of life in the settlements, of relatives who disappeared into medical ships and never returned. In this context, oral histories become acts of resistance, or of healing. Inuit also have the opportunity to

¹⁷⁷ Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (the former name of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, or ITK – the Canadian national Inuit organization).

¹⁷⁸ “A discursive move deemed necessary in an era when the dominant ideology was defined by the denial of cultural differences.” My translation.

¹⁷⁹ Laugrand argues that elders remain hesitant about the idea of a communal history, as they are suspicious of generalized claims that do not reflect the diversity and specificity of their experience (100). I would be interested in exploring the possibility that a communal history *might still be able* to reflect local diversity.

remember, or to conjure, the time before the rapid cultural changes of the late-twentieth century; autoethnographic narratives about the ways of the *inummariit* – the ‘real Inuit’ – are radical and empowering, particularly in the hands and ears of Inuit youth.

Furthermore, the implicit recognition of elders as *scholars of an intellectual tradition* marks an important step in the dismantling of cultural hierarchies.

Oral history projects, then, in many ways are efforts to canonize Inuit knowledge. But as Alexina Kublu, Frédéric Laugrand, and Jarich Oosten outline in the introduction to the *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series, this is a problematic task, largely because of the very real differences in Inuit and *qallunaat* understandings of knowledge and knowledge production. As the editors explain, “[m]ost ethnographic texts tend to reconstruct Inuit knowledge as an objective body of knowledge. The idea that knowledge should be objective and true has a long history in the West” (Angmaalik et al. 8). This desire for objectivity and authority, however, necessarily separates knowledge from its context; in an effort to move from specific examples to general theories and conclusions, knowledge is “freed . . . from the constraints of social relationships” (Angmaalik et al. 8). For Inuit audiences, the editors argue, this is a method that makes absolutely no sense. “In Inuit society, we are dealing with a completely different tradition of knowledge. All knowledge is social by nature and the idea of objectified true knowledge holds little attraction or fascination” (9). Indeed, in an article entitled “What Is Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit?” Jaypetee Arnakak admits that he “deliberately tried to keep IQ from becoming an official policy, knowing that separating IQ from the contemporary realities renders something that is profound, enriching and alive into something that is meaningless, sterile, and awkwardly exclusionary” (Arnakak).

The purpose of these observations is not to declare that ‘Inuit do not generalize,’ as such a statement would – ironically – provide exactly the kind of convenient conclusion that I am trying to avoid. Furthermore, as I have already mentioned, Inuit have never been overly concerned about adapting the Southern practices that struck them as useful. In the process of infusing administrative policy with traditional knowledge, for instance, the Government of Nunavut ultimately *has* codified Inuit knowledge in a way that makes it accessible to Southern governments, and easily applicable in various bureaucratic settings (Laugrand, “Écrire” 99). Most descriptions of IQ, however, guard against totalization by explaining that it is a diverse and flexible canon of knowledge.¹⁸⁰ In the process of transforming Nunavut, ‘our land,’ into a federally-recognized territory, Inuit discourse has adapted Southern methods for strategic purposes.

Similarly, during the Nunavut Arctic College course which resulted in the *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series, participants reported finding the college’s setting and procedures a bit discomfiting, but ultimately useful. “The interview situation was by no means a normal situation,” the editors explain, “as elders are held in great respect, students were not accustomed to subjecting them to long lists of questions” (Angmaalik et al. 2). The unfamiliar context of the classroom, however, created a space in which this breach of conduct could be acceptable, and the elders encouraged the students to question them (Angmaalik et al. 3-7). As Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet) elder Elisapee Ootoova put it, “[y]ou shouldn’t be wary of asking us any questions as we are not at home” (Angmaalik et al. 4). The editors explain further that students struggled with the process of writing

¹⁸⁰ Indeed, this flexibility (or tolerance) of diversity itself becomes one of the principles of IQ. See Angmaalik et al. (9-10).

their course-papers, which seemed to require them to talk about the elders' stories in a strangely general and objective way. Ultimately, though, the papers were

written from a totally different perspective, in which the authority of the elders remains unchallenged. In this way, the students succeeded in connecting traditional patterns of thought and knowledge to modern Western ones. We hope that in the future, young Inuit will be more and more successful in integrating their own ways of thinking with the requirements of modern Western society. It is quite clear that if Inuit are to succeed in preserving their own cultural identity, they should not just adopt Western ideas and values, but transform them so that they make sense in their own society and culture. (Angmaalik et al. 12)

So rather than creating an unbreachable chasm between Western knowledge systems and *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit*, I would simply like to highlight some of the characteristics of Inuit intellectual discourse, many of which have to do with the importance of *contextualizing* knowledge.

As Kublu, Laugrand and Oosten point out, one of the most consistent features in the elders' testimony was the stipulation – usually given at the beginning of a session – that the elders were only going to speak about things that they had personally experienced, rather than things that they had only heard about. The editors quote the following discussion between Julia Shaimaiyuk (one of the students), and Saullu Nakasuk and Pauloosie Angmarlik from Pangnirtung:

Julia: Sometimes when you are telling about something, I hear you saying, "I can't talk about what I haven't experienced." Did you get told...?

Saullu: Yes.

Julia: One is not to talk about something without having experienced it?

Saullu: Yes. One is not to talk about something just from hearsay, because it is too easy to speak a falsehood. It is not desirable to tell untruths. (Angmaalik et al. 5)

To speak from my *own* experience, I have heard this from other Pangnirtung elders as well: they would often surprise me by saying that they didn't know the answer to a question,¹⁸¹ and they would often preface a story or explanation by saying, 'I am only going to tell you what I know from experience.' Throughout the *Interviewing Inuit Elders* Series, students raise topics that the elders may not have personal experience with; at times, they explain that they cannot answer: "Nobody ever really told me the full story so I can't pass it on to you," says Lucassie Nutaraaluk of Iqaluit;¹⁸² "I don't want to guess, since nobody has ever really told me the whole story" (Aupilaarjuk et al., *Law* 185). At times, though, the elders indicate that they have heard about the topic from another person, and may share a few details – though always with the qualification that the knowledge is second-hand. "I can tell you the story as I heard it," Nutaraaluk says (Aupilaarjuk et al., *Law* 183).

As Kublu, Laugrand, and Oosten explain, these protocols lead to a body of knowledge that – once again – is dynamic and variable (Angmaalik et al. 9-10). "Each elder had his own knowledge and experience and was prepared to acknowledge the value of different opinions and experiences related by others," the editors write: "[i]n the course of the interviews, the elders professed great interest in each other's comments" (Angmaalik et al. 10). Laugrand has written elsewhere that the idea of establishing a communal Inuit identity and cultural history is unappealing to many elders: "Pour eux, une telle opération risque d'aboutir à des généralisations abusives et peu compatibles avec leur souci de respecter la diversité des expériences, des traditions et des histoires

¹⁸¹ My training in Southern institutions, by contrast, has taught me to try to invent answers when I don't know them.

¹⁸² Nutaraaluk is originally from Kinngait (Aupilaarjuk et al., *Law* 10).

locales” (“Écrire” 100).¹⁸³ As Nutaraaluk says when asked to tell the story of Sedna, “I’ll tell you the story as I heard it. I think our stories vary from community to community even though they are the same *unikkaqtuat*. I want you to know there are variations” (Aupilaarjuk et al., *Law* 188). This diversity, however, provides a real challenge for Southern scholars, who are often eager to reconcile differences, iron out inconsistencies, and work toward the development of theories.

Richard Dauenhauer and Nora Marks Dauenhauer explain that they “prefer to offer details of ordinary lives, and report what actually happened to identifiable people, in contrast to making generalized abstractions about ‘the culture’ or how ‘they’ used to do things ‘in the old days’” (*Haa Kusteeyi* xi). Likewise, the critical discourse of Inuit elders is geared toward the telling of individual truths, rather than the discovery of Truths, as the latter will – ironically – almost always be too general to be accurate. The genre of the life history, however, is an effective way of ensuring that knowledge transmitted through life histories remains grounded in the context of individual experience.

The transmission of *Inuit Qaujimagajatuqangit* is an important function of Inuit life histories. However, it also ensures that oral histories suffer from the same affliction as autobiographies: they are viewed primarily as vehicles for information. As such, their literary qualities – the *ways* in which they do the work that they do – tend to go unnoticed. And this, I would again argue, constitutes a step away from the recognition of the individual autonomy of the teller. In the next section, I will explore the possibility that Inuit knowledge systems make room for literary readings, and that we might locate a

¹⁸³ “For them, such a project risks the formation of inaccurate generalizations that would not be compatible with the desire to respect the diversity of local experience, traditions, and histories.” My translation.

kind of literary *Qaujimajatuqangit* within the oral histories of the *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series.

Bringing IQ into Literary Studies

The English term ‘literature’ does not translate very easily into Inuktitut. A literal translation – *titirarniq*, or ‘writing’ – has the same limited scope as the source language, as it does not include the ancient traditions of story and song. There is, however, a complex set of terms to refer to the various genres of stories and storytelling. In her introduction to the recent book *Words of the Real People: Alaska Native Literature in Translation*, Ann Fienup-Riordan writes that

Yupik and Iñupiaq people¹⁸⁴ distinguish between two broad, overlapping narrative types. . . . The first includes legends or tales told by distant ancestors and passed down from generation to generation—what James Ruppert and John Bernet aptly call distant-time stories. . . . Such legends are designated *unipkaa*q (singular) among the Iñupiat of north Alaska¹⁸⁵. . . . The second broad story category consists of historical narratives related by known persons, labeled *quliaqtuaq* in North Slope Iñupiaq. . . . (xix)

Similarly, in a footnote to the Inuvialuit memoir *I, Nuligak*, Maurice Métayer explains that there are two types of stories: “unipkat, [which] mingle fantasy and the fantastic with the real” and *kroliat*,¹⁸⁶ or “stories he maintains to be true and relates in great detail, giving at times a magic interpretation to real-life situations” (*Nuligak* 68).¹⁸⁷ Now, the word *quliaqtuaq* does not appear in the Eastern dialect dictionaries of Lucien Schneider or Alex Spalding, but in the process of thinking about Inuit literary *Qaujimajatuqangit*, I

¹⁸⁴ Alaskan peoples who speak languages in the Eskimo-Aleut group.

¹⁸⁵ Fienup-Riordan also gives a number of related terms used by different groups (the Siberian Yupik of St. Lawrence Island, the Alutiiq of the Alaska Peninsula, the Cup’ig on Nunivak Island, and the Central Yup’ik of Western Alaska). I cite only the North Slope Iñupiaq here, as it is closest to the language(s) spoken in Nunavut.

¹⁸⁶ In some orthographies, ‘kr’ is used instead of ‘q,’ and ‘o’ appears instead of ‘u’; as such, I assume that ‘kroliat’ is a variation of ‘quliaq’ or ‘quliaqtuaq.’

¹⁸⁷ See also Fossett 201.

began to wonder if the distinction between fantastic and historical narratives might be preserved in the distinction between *unikkaat* and *unikkaaqtuat*.¹⁸⁸

My suspicions were first aroused when I read the following passage in the first volume of the *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series:

Were you told unikkaaqtuat [when you were a child]?
Paniaq¹⁸⁹: Just any old story?¹⁹⁰

Can you tell us a story that you have heard?
Paniaq: Yes, are we also here for that?

The reason why we are here is to leave words behind for our descendants.
Paniaq: There is one person [Alexina Kublu¹⁹¹] who can tell a story now. She taped one today and two the other day. If we start story-telling now, the day is going to be too short. (Angmaalik et al. 52-53)

I was interested in Paniaq's reluctance to tell an *unikkaaqtuaq* in the middle of his life-narrative. I had experienced something similar in the summer of 2007, when I spent five weeks in Pangnirtung as a summer student. The program coordinators¹⁹² invited a number of local elders – including Evie Anilniliak, Joannasie Karpik, Jaco Ishulutaq, Enoosie Nashalik, and Jamesie Mike – to come and speak to the students; they also hired an interpreter, Marie Uvilluq from Igloolik, to facilitate these lessons. Uvilluq made it very clear to us that she was not a 'translator' – she was not there to simply repeat what was said, and therefore to efface herself in the process. Rather, she *moderated* the discussions, and was very strict in instructing us about the appropriate protocols to use

¹⁸⁸ My thanks to Peter Irniq, Kenn Harper, Louis-Jacques Dorais, Christopher Trott, Alana Johns, and Saila Michael, who shared their thoughts on this question.

¹⁸⁹ Hervé Paniaq, an elder from Igloolik.

¹⁹⁰ "*Kisumik unikkaaqtuarulutuinnamiik?*" (56). Note that the word 'old' found in the translation is a colloquial usage – 'any old.' The postbase *-rulu-* means something along the lines of 'dam,' and *-tuinnaq-* refers to ordinariness. Paniaq did not specify an *old* story; the importance of this will become apparent.

¹⁹¹ Alexina Kublu (Iglulingmiut) was one of the course instructors. Volume 1 of the Series contains a number of *unikkaaqtuat* that she learned from her father, Michel Kupaaq Piugattuk, who unfortunately passed away during the final week of the course (Angmaalik et al. 2).

¹⁹² Peter Kulchyski, Chris Trott, and Ian Mauro of the University of Manitoba.

when addressing the elders. Often, instead of translating, she would tell us that our question was not appropriate, or did not make sense, and that we should think of a different one. One of the most common corrections that the students received was about changing the subject – if the elders had come to talk about climate change, then we should ask questions about climate change. I gradually became aware of our tendency to propel a discussion from one topic to another; in our view, anything loosely associated with the theme was fair game. Once, during a visit by Jamesie Mike and Enoosie Nashalik, we were allowed to change the subject, but we had to first establish that we were doing so, and only with the elders' approval.

This experience led me to speculate that when the Nunavut Arctic College students asked Hervé Paniaq to tell an *unikkaaqtuaq* during his interview, he was surprised by what he perceived as a change in topic. “Are we also here for that?” (Angmaalik et al. 52). In clarifying the parameters of the discussion, he seemed to be creating a distinction between the kind of story that he was telling – *inuusirminik unikkaaq*,¹⁹³ or life story, and the kind of story that the student requested – an *unikkaaqtuaq*, or traditional story. *Unikkaaq* and *unikkaaqtuaq* quite evidently have the same root, meaning ‘narrate,’ or ‘tell a story’ (Dorais, *Parole* 170). *Unikkaaq* is a fairly general term for ‘story’; as Peter Irniq says, it “could be any story.”¹⁹⁴ *Unikkaalanga-junga*, you could say, ‘I am going to tell a story,’ and it could be about the trip you took last week, or about a time when your father was young.¹⁹⁵ *Unikkaaqtuaq*, however, is a

¹⁹³ *Inuusiq* means ‘one’s life; one’s experience’ (Spalding 27). *Inuusirminik unikkaat* is the term used in the *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series.

¹⁹⁴ Personal correspondence. Peter Irniq is an Inuk cultural teacher, and the former Commissioner of Nunavut.

¹⁹⁵ My thanks to Saila Michael, who taught me about this word. Michael, who is from Iqaluit via Coral Harbour, teaches Inuktitut at York University, and has also co-taught the Inuktitut language classes at the University of Toronto with Alana Johns.

more specific genre, and is soon as it is mentioned, the definition of *unikkaa*q seems to narrow. The glossaries of the *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series, for instance, define *unikkaaqtuat* as “traditional stories,” “stor[ies] passed from generation to generation,” “old stor[ies],” and “very old stories,” while the definitions for *unikkaat*, which follow immediately after, are “modern stories” and “stor[ies] of recent origin” (Angmaalik et al. 213; Ekho and Ottokie 136; Attagutsiak et al. 318). As Peter Irniq explains, “Unipkaaqtuat are ‘legends’ such as Kiviui. They are from another time, at another place.”¹⁹⁶

The distinction here seems to be temporal; *unikkaat* happen in time that people (or their grandparents) can remember, while *unikkaaqtuat* are located in a kind of mythological time, when the world was a bit different. This explanation, however, is complicated by the ending that creates the latter term: *-tuaq*. Louis-Jacques Dorais explained to me that *-tuaq* is “a lexicalized form of *-tuaqtaq* or *-tuagaq*. *-tuar-* is a frequentative (“does it frequently, or for a long time”) and *-taq* or *-gaq* is the passive form. So, *unikkaqtuagaq* [became] *unikkaqtuaq* [meaning] “which is told for a long time.”¹⁹⁷ In *La parole inuit: langue, culture, et société dans l’Arctique nord-américain*, Dorais writes that ‘*unikkaatuaq*’ designates “toute histoire de bonne longueur rapportent des événements récents ou remontant à un passé pas trop lointain” (170).¹⁹⁸ Here, the sense of *unikkaaqtuat* happening in the distant past vanishes in favour of a denotation that the story is simply very long. Saila Michael confirms this definition, explaining that an *unikkaaqtuaq* is a story that goes on for a very long time, *regardless* of its temporal

¹⁹⁶ Personal correspondence.

¹⁹⁷ Personal correspondence.

¹⁹⁸ “a good-length story, which recounts events that are either recent, or of a not-very-distant past.” My translation.

setting.¹⁹⁹ If this was the definition that Hervé Paniaq was working with, it could explain why he was reluctant to interrupt his life history: “If we start story-telling now, the day is going to be too short” (Angmaalik et al. 53).

But to add to this complex web of meaning, Dorais identifies another genre-term – *unikkausiq* – which he explains as “une légende ou un mythe ... considéré comme imaginaire ou s’étant déroulé il y a très longtemps” (170).²⁰⁰ Literally, the term means “something which is habitually used for telling a story.”²⁰¹ Alex Spalding translates it as “way or manner of telling myth or fairy tale” (185), while Saila Michael explained it as ‘something that is always there for the telling.’²⁰² If I were to speculate, based on these definitions I might say that *unikkausiq* refers to a kind of canonical story, existing in the collective memory, which can then be used for storytelling but must be reproduced in a particular way.²⁰³ Peter Irniq explains that in his Aivilingmiutaq dialect, the word *unipkausiq* itself means “a fictional story. Something that is not real.”²⁰⁴ However, this is more likely a comment on the perceived factuality of the classic tales or myths, and may not actually refer to the *invention* of a story (as the word ‘fictional’ may imply). An *unikkausiq*, after all, is something that has to be told in a particular way; this would be a difficult rule to apply to the brand-new story of an individual teller.

¹⁹⁹ Personal communication.

²⁰⁰ “a legend or myth . . . considered to be imaginary, or occurring a long time ago.” My translation. Dorais considers *unikkausiq* to be distinct from *unikkaaqtuat*, although he qualifies this by saying that the boundary between the genres may be permeable (personal correspondence).

²⁰¹ Dorais, personal correspondence.

²⁰² Personal communication, which I am paraphrasing.

²⁰³ As Dorais says, “In the eastern Canadian Arctic, [the term *unikkausiq*] has pragmatically (but probably not [in a] semantically strict sense) taken the meaning of what we translate by ‘myth’ or ‘legend’, because among Inuit, besides ‘myths’ and ‘legends’, there do not really exist any ‘habitual story materials’, i.e. narratives which are repeated in more or less the same way every time they are told (and about which people are conscious that they should be repeated quite exactly as they were heard).”

²⁰⁴ Personal correspondence.

I began to wonder if the distinction between these terms – aside from the intricate and oscillating connotations of length or temporal setting – might have something to do with fiction or factuality. Could *unikkaat* and *unikkaaqtuaq*, or *unikkaaqtuaq* and *unikkausiq*, distinguish between true, historical narratives and stories of a mythical or fabulous nature? The answer, as you may expect, is no. The Nunavut Arctic College students asked the elders about the factuality of *unipkaaqtuat*:

Were the stories about animals turning into humans true? [Taimaqai takkua inuruuqqaningit sulimmata?]

Imaruittuq: They were probably true. That's why there are stories about this. [*Sulingmata kisiani taimauvaktuq.*]

Nutaraaluk: They have to be true. [*Taimaak kisiani sulimmata...*] All animals could turn into people, according to what we were told. They turned into people a long time ago before there was Christianity. (Aupilaarjuk et al., *Law* 196; *Maligatuqaliriniup* 203)

Similarly, in Volume 3, *Childrearing Practices*, a student asks Uqsuralik Ottokie from Kinngait, “Are *unikkaaqtuat*, the old stories, beneficial to children?” (Ekho and Ottokie 114). She answers:

The *unikkaaqtuat* are beneficial to children. *At one time these stories were true, but because they are so old they just became stories.* They are very useful for children. There are all sorts of stories that can be told to children. Most times, children start settling down when you tell a story. Most of the stories that we heard were true and they have a definite benefit for children. (114, emphasis added)

The stories are true, the elders suggest. Or, they used to be true, but then the world changed its rules. That said, the extent to which the veracity of the old stories is confirmed varies from teller to teller. Again, we want to be wary of generalizing statements like ‘the elders believe these myths to be true’; it is important to keep in mind that an *unikkaaqtuaq* may be what J. Edward Chamberlin refers to as “a ceremony of

belief . . . not a chronicle of events” (*If This Is Your Land* 179). After all, the elders often mention the entertainment value of the *unikkaaqtuat*, whether in putting children to sleep, or scaring them. As Imaruittuq says, “[t]he *unikkaaqtuaq* of the ptarmigan myth²⁰⁵ made children squeamish about baby lemmings. It was for pure entertainment” (Aupilaarjuk et al., *Law* 179). They sometimes address the possibility that the storytellers were bending the truth; Naqi Ekho, who was born in Uumanarjuaq (Blacklead Island), discusses the stories that she was told about *inugarulliit* (little people), saying: “[m]aybe we were being fooled, but on the other hand, maybe it was true” (Ekho and Ottokie 117).

The idea of fiction – of creative or inventive narratives – also does not translate very easily into Inuktitut. For instance, it is difficult to find a term that describes something like Rachel Qitsualik’s “Skraeling.” To call it simply an *unikkaa*, or story, does not address its fabricated nature. I asked Saila Michael if we could perhaps say ‘*unikkaaliuqtuq*’ (‘he or she is *making* a story’) but she explained that that would mean that a person is writing a story down – giving it physical form, rather than inventing it from scratch. Lucien Schneider’s dictionary lists the word “*unikkausinnuaq*” as “parable, fictional story”; the *-nuaq* ending, according to Harper, indicates either “resemblance, likeness” or “simulation, pretension, unguineness” (Schneider 452; Harper 53). Dorais mentions this term as well: “Pour souligner l’aspect fictif d’un tel récit, on peut le qualifier d’*unikkausinnuaq* ‘un *unikkausiq* fabriqué’” (170).²⁰⁶ In other

²⁰⁵ A child asks for a bedtime story; her grandmother tells one about baby lemmings and tickles the child, who is so frightened that she turns into a bird (or dies, in some versions) and flies out the window. The distressed grandmother, with her red-rimmed eyes and croaking voice, turns into the ptarmigan. See *Inuit Unikkaaqtuanguit: Inuit Legends Vol. 2*, or Alexina Kublu’s “*Ingutarjuapiga nauk?*” (“Where is my dear grandchild?”) in Volume 1 of “Interviewing Inuit Elders” (Angmaalik et al. 188-191).

²⁰⁶ “To underline the fictitious aspect of such a story, we can qualify it as an *unikkausinnuaq*, ‘a made-up *unikkausiq*’” (my translation).

words: an *unikkausinnuaq* is ‘something which resembles or imitates an *unikkausiq*’ – a false story.

Although the terminology for fiction is difficult to pin down, and although the genre of fiction-writing is still a fairly small part of the Inuit literary canon, the *idea* of invented stories is certainly not alien to Inuit tradition. After all, there are words for lying (*saglujuq*), for gossip (*uqausitsaqtuqarulujaq* or *tivviaqtainiq*), and for truth-telling (*sulijuq*) (Aupilaajuk, *Law* 142-144; 146-147). Given the elders’ emphasis on speaking truthfully from experience, the ability or tendency to invent stories does not exactly seem to be valorized. Imaruittuq mentions the story of Atanaarjuat, in which a lie told by Atanaarjuat’s second wife causes feuding and murder (Aupilaajuk et al., *Law* 144). In the *unikkaaqtuat*, lying is often – though not always – pejorative; there are many malicious people and spirits who are deceitful, such as the mother of the blind boy²⁰⁷ and the bird-husband of Nuliajuk.²⁰⁸ However, the heroes of the stories also sometimes use trickery or deception to deal with difficult situations. Kiviuq is a great liar, and tricks a number of the dangerous spirits that he encounters.²⁰⁹ In another story, a man who is being pursued by an angry bear (or a giant, in some versions) lies his way out of getting eaten.²¹⁰ We should be wary, then, of assuming that fiction is un-Inuit, or that it does not exist as a concept in Inuktitut. After all, when one of the students asked Imaruittuq what

²⁰⁷ Although he is blind, the boy manages to shoot a bear. The cruel mother, however, tells him that he has accidentally shot their dog instead, and hides the bear-meat from him. See *Inuit Unikkaatuangit: Inuit Legends Vol. 2*.

²⁰⁸ He conceals his true bird-form, and tricks Nuliajuk into marrying him by offering her a life of plenty. See *Inuit Unikkaatuangit: Inuit Legends*.

²⁰⁹ This is perhaps another justification for comparisons of Kiviuq with Odysseus.

²¹⁰ As the bear chases after him, he draws a line on the ground, and a river appears. The bear is confused, and asks him how he managed to get across. ‘I drank up the river,’ the man says. When the bear tries to do the same, she bursts; some say this is the origin of clouds. See “La légende de la rivière Coppermine” (Métayer, *Contes* 78-81) or “Uloqsaq and Ipkahuaq: The Origin of the Clouds” (Petronne 33).

used to happen to liars in the old days, he answers, “I think they used to cut off the tip of their tongue! [joking] I don’t know, I’m just teasing you!” (Aupilaarjuk et al., *Law* 143).

Yet the possibility of narrative invention or trickery does seem difficult to reconcile with earlier assertions about the importance of truth-telling, or speaking from personal experience. This is a protocol that does not seem to fit well with traditions of storytelling, which necessarily pass stories from person to person, many tellers removed from the original event. Perhaps this is why *unikkaaqtuat* seem to be in a different category than life stories; when one tells an *unikkaaqtuaq*, it is necessary and acceptable to speak of things beyond one’s experience. ‘I can tell you what I have heard,’ the elders say. They might also add the suffix *-guuq*, used for reporting discourse; in the Siglit dialect of Tuktoyaktuk and Sachs Harbour they insert the postbase *-niq-*, which indicates hearsay²¹¹ (Harper, *Suffixes* 18; Lowe 124). Elders tend not to say that the *unikkaaqtuat* are false, but the fact that the stories are second-hand introduces the possibility that they might not be true.

A number of scholars have pointed out, meanwhile, that the factuality of stories is more of a Southern concern.²¹² As Ann Fienup-Riordan writes, “legends and historical accounts are considered equally reliable sources of information, simply referring to different time periods—the distant past and recent times. As such, legends and historical accounts exist along a continuum and are not mutually exclusive” (xx). And because elders often say that *unikkaaqtuat* are true, or were once true, it is evident that a different idea of fact and fiction is at work. I would like to propose that the Southern distinction between factual and fictional narratives is paralleled in the elders’ distinction between

²¹¹ Thanks to Alana Johns for this information.

²¹² Dorais writes, “I’m not sure Inuit make any clear-cut distinction between history and myth” (personal correspondence).

narratives that are told from personal experience, and those that are second-hand – those categories which roughly correspond with *unikkaat* and *unikkaaqtuat*. The boundary between them may be drawn differently, and it may at times be flexible, but ultimately a distinction does exist. Imaruittuq said that “Kiviuq used to be an *unikkaaq* but since it is so old we call it an *unikkaaqtuaq* today” (Aupilaarjuk et al., *Law* 179). The distinction here is temporal – once the story became old enough, it switched genres. However, the switch might also be related to a sense of distance from the original teller, or from the imagined experience of the original events. Having been passed from person to person, the story passes deep into the realm of hearsay, and as such its truth becomes less certain (though not impossible).

The elders interviewed for the *Interviewing Inuit Elders* Series are all telling *inuusirminik unikkaat* – life stories – and as such, they are all storytellers. However, the moments where they draw attention to their ability as storytellers, or to the form in which stories are told, occur overwhelmingly in relation to the *unikkaaqtuat*. When the students are interviewing the Igloolik elder Emile Imaruittuq, they ask him to tell the story of Kaugjagjuk, the orphan. “I can tell you the story of Kaugjagjuk,” he says, “but I am not a very good story teller” (Aupilaarjuk et al., *Law* 186).²¹³ They then ask him if he has heard about Ailaq and Papik (188).²¹⁴ “I’ve heard about them,” Imaruittuq say, “but I’m a very bad story teller. As I keep telling you, I’m terrible at telling stories” (Aupilaarjuk et al. *Law* 188). In Volume 1 of the same series, we hear something similar from Alexina Kublu before she tells the *unikkaaqtuat* that she heard from her father, Michel Kupaaq

²¹³ “*Iilaagaangugaluaq, unikkaaqtuaqsitiunngittualuugama*” (Aupilaarjuk et al., *Maligatuqaliriniup* 191)

²¹⁴ A story of a family dispute; Papik kills his brother-in-law Ailaq, and then lies to his mother-in-law about it (188).

Piugattuk: “I am not what in Inuktitut is considered to be an ‘*uqamminiq*’²¹⁵ someone who is linguistically nimble,” she says (Angmaalik et al. 151).²¹⁶ There is a strong sense of the way in which *unikkaaqtuat* are supposed to be told; these issues are far less prominent in the context of *inuusirminik unikkaat*, or life-stories.

One exception to this occurs when Nutaraaluk is asked to talk about *akitsirarvik* – a place where traditional trials were held.²¹⁷ Nutaraaluk says that he is not able to talk about it, as he has not heard the full story, and then adds, “I long for my uncle Paujungi because he used to be an excellent story teller and had a lot of knowledge.... I am not a very good story teller” (Aupilaarjuk et al., *Law* 185). Interestingly, Nutaraaluk’s expression of concern about his storytelling abilities is not in response to a request for an *unikkaaqtuaq*; rather, he is being asked to speak about something that he has heard about, but not experienced. Form and style, this would suggest, are especially important in relating hearsay. When communicating second-hand information, the teller is under the obligation not just to do it, but to do it well. This is as close as I can currently get to the idea of fiction, and to a sense of what constitutes a *literary* genre of storytelling – one in which form matters as much as content.²¹⁸

If distance (remoteness, or second-handedness) is part of what makes an Inuit story literary, what happens when tellers are removed entirely, and a story appears in book-form? I am somewhat reluctant to resurrect a topic which ten years ago was consuming discussions of orality: the question of the transformation undergone by oral

²¹⁵ The exact meaning of this term is not yet clear to me. *Uqaq* means tongue, and *uqaq-* is the verb root meaning ‘to speak’; *-miniq* means former, past, or ex- (as in *natsiminiq* – seal meat, or ‘an ex-seal’) (Spalding 189; Harper, *Suffixes* 44). Although the term *uqamminiq* looks to me as if it means a ‘dead tongue,’ it no doubt has a better explanation.

²¹⁶ Note that the very good storytellers often seem to be other people.

²¹⁷ See Wright. The Inuit law program at the University of Victoria is named Akitsiraq.

²¹⁸ Concepts of the literary are not exclusively narrative; they also arise in the context of Inuit song-traditions. See Chapter 4.

traditions when they are written down on the page.²¹⁹ My intention here is not to resurrect this topic (along with all the anxieties which accompany it), but to reframe the issue slightly. The technology of printing takes the story far from its original telling; according to some, this is a decontextualization which strips it of its meaning and potency. However, in a tradition in which distance from the original increases formality and attention to narrative skill, is it possible that printing might serve to augment, or to recast, the literariness of stories? With some of the principles of literary *Qaujimajatuqangit* in mind, we cannot be certain of the accuracy of printed stories; this loophole might work to free us from the impulse to read life stories for ‘true’ ethnographic and historical data, and allow us to conduct literary readings of texts.

Julie Cruikshank encountered this issue in a different context, when she was working with Yukon (Tagish/Tlingit) elders Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned. Cruikshank writes:

Under their tutelage my interests have shifted away from an oral history committed to documenting changes in social reality and toward an investigation of narrative forms for talking about, remembering, and interpreting everyday life. Potentially, an oral history attuned to narrative conventions provides an observatory from which to assess the shifting boundary between what we call *history* and what we call *myth*. (*Live Lived* x)

In the context of Inuit discourse about stories and storytelling, we might similarly take the diverse and dynamic statements about the boundaries of *unikkaat*, *unikkaaqtuat*, and *unikkausiq* as a way to *break free of concerns about the testimonial or evidentiary nature of life stories*. The IQ embodied by the interviews with Inuit elders seems to say that all stories have a truth to them – it is tied directly to the authority of the speaker.²²⁰ Rather

²¹⁹ See Murray and Rice, *Talking on the Page: Editing Aboriginal Oral Traditions*.

²²⁰ See Angmaalik et al. 8-10, on the importance of connecting knowledge to individuals.

than focusing on whether or not the stories are accurate – and therefore whether they provide accountable ethnographic or historical data – we might follow Cruikshank’s example, and focus on the narrative skills and strategies of the storytellers, or on the way in which the stories function. In other words, readers of life stories might shift their critical focus toward literary – rather than historical or anthropological – interpretations.

***Life Among the Qallunaat* as a Literary Text**

In this final section, I will attempt to apply some of the critical principles that I have discussed in this chapter so far. Minnie Aodla Freeman’s autobiography, *Life Among the Qallunaat*, performs that multi-faceted task of autobiography – it is simultaneously a representative account of the way in which Inuit life changed in a fifty-year period, and it is also a personal act of literary invention, as Freeman the author creates Minnie the character, and occasionally even strays from the genre of life-telling. This doubleness is mirrored in the book’s enactment of Inuit genres as well; most of the time, Freeman speaks from personal experience, and appears to be committed to truth-telling. At other times, she exits the boundaries of *inuusirminik unikkaat* (life story), and explores the realm of hearsay, or of fiction. According to the principles of IQ suggested in *Interviewing Inuit Elders*, these might be the moments when the form of the storytelling increases in importance. This final section, therefore, will focus primarily on them. First, however, I would like to provide some introduction to the text, and to give a brief overview of its critical reception.

Life Among the Qallunaat was published in 1978, and tells the story of Freeman’s childhood in the James Bay region, and of her eventual 1957 journey to Ottawa, when

she was twenty years old, to work for the Department of Northern Affairs. This is where the book begins, *in medias res*, with Minnie newly arrived in the nation's capital, negotiating the unfamiliar landscape of the big city. One third of the way through the book, the narrative makes a leap, and Freeman begins to tell us about her early childhood, when she made the seasonal rounds with her people – the Cape Hope Islanders, led by Weetaltuk.²²¹ Their homeland is by far the southernmost region of what is now Nunavut, and as a result Minnie's family often comes into contact with Cree people, with Hudson's Bay Company traders, and with French clergy. Intermittently, Minnie goes to the residential schools, works at the hospital in Fort George, spends time as a tuberculosis patient in Hamilton, and eventually, the narrative comes full circle – Minnie accepts a job in Ottawa, and heads south for a true immersion in *qallunaat* culture. We learn that although she goes home occasionally to visit, Minnie stays in the South, having married a *qallunaaq* – the anthropologist Milton Freeman.

Although *Life Among the Qallunaat* is now out of print, it has received a fair amount of critical attention.²²² As I mentioned earlier, Robin McGrath writes about it in her dissertation, *Canadian Inuit Literature: The Development of a Tradition*, and in her article "Circumventing the Taboos: Inuit Women's Autobiographies." Again, McGrath

²²¹ Weetaltuk, Minnie's maternal grandfather, was an important local leader. An area in Sanikiluaq (the Belcher Islands) is named after him, and Freeman mentions that he navigated for Robert Flaherty (the maker of *Nanook of the North*) in 1913 (69). She also tells of a time when her outspoken cousin came to visit her in Moose Factory, where she was working as a nanny. "You are Weetaltuk's granddaughter," the cousin says, "you can do better than this" (203). At the end of the book, Freeman learns of what happened to her people after her grandfather's death: "the James Bay group had no leader, no one who kept them together... It was as though my group had dispersed into nothing, the proud people were no more. Grandfather had taken it all with him when he died" (201).

²²² It is probably one of the more prominent Inuit texts, if we gauge prominence by critical popularity. Recently, however, it might have been surpassed by the film *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*. I would speculate somewhat cynically that this attention in part is due to the fact that *Life Among the Qallunaat* is one of the longest books authored by a single Inuk writer, and therefore resembles the literary forms that southern critics are most accustomed to. It was also written in English (although it uses plenty of Inuktitut vocabulary), and makes use of a fairly conventional autobiographical style.

mostly focuses on the idea of a cultural taboo that prevents Inuit women from “draw[ing] attention to themselves as adults” (*Canadian* 90). This is the reason, she argues, that the narrative stops when Minnie comes of age (*Canadian* 90). McGrath also understands Freeman as a kind of cultural critic, saying that *Life Among the Qallunaat*

is in many way a ruthless indictment of white culture There is a strong sense of the anger, bitterness, and isolation experienced by young Inuit in residential schools and in the South, and Freeman is direct in her description of the sexual harassment native girls suffered at the hands of white teachers and employers. . . (“Circumventing” 228-229).

McGrath’s description comes as part of an overview of Inuit women’s autobiography, and she does not have time to discuss these claims in depth. As a result I was somewhat surprised by her description; personally, I would characterize the book as poignant in its accounts of hardship, but mostly light-hearted, gentle, and funny. It has a very different tone from Anthony Apakark Thrasher’s *Skid Row Eskimo*, or the more recent *Iliarjuk: An Inuit Memoir*, by Gideon Enutsia Etorolopiaq.²²³

Another critic, Heather Henderson, is less convinced that Freeman represents an ideal of Inuit womanhood; rather, she is concerned with Minnie’s cultural in-betweenness. In a short essay entitled “North and South: Autobiography and the Problems of Translation,” she describes the way in which Minnie’s job as a translator is representative of her cultural situation more generally. The article is somewhat cursory in its analysis; mostly, it recounts events from the book in which Minnie feels out of place, or expresses bewilderment at Southern ways. This works loosely toward a thesis about Freeman as a cultural translator, interpreting between two worlds (one of which, apparently, is “pre-historic” and “disintegrat[ing]”) (61; 66). Henderson does make an

²²³ Etorolopiaq was born in Iqaluit; this book was published last year under the pseudonym Dracc Dreque. ‘*Iliarjuk*’ means ‘orphan.’

intriguing mention of the importance of language in the text, when she points out that “Freeman’s deceptively simple style belies her narrative sophistication and concern with language. For how, indeed, could a translator . . . be other than sensitive to the power of words?” (61). Unfortunately, Henderson does not carry this suggestion through to any kind of discussion of Freeman’s literary abilities. Instead, she is distracted by the poignant image of the displaced Inuk.

Dale Blake’s doctoral dissertation, “Inuit Autobiography: Challenging the Stereotypes,” picks up on similar themes, but in a more convincing way. Following contemporary theories of autobiography, Blake is interested in Inuit writers’ representations of Self “in the context of continuing transformation in their societies” (20). She invokes Mary Louise Pratt’s idea of the “cultural contact zone,” and discusses the way in which Inuit authors write from “sites of métissage,” or in-betweenness (6). Blake also employs a methodology that is somewhat unusual for a literary critic – she interviews the authors of the autobiographies, and then allows their own descriptions of their work to hold prominence: “...numerous critics,” she says, “although not well-informed concerning Inuit cultures, choose not to consult Inuit writers. Instead, they speak for them as if granted an intuitive knowledge of their opinions, in effect, skewing the images of the autobiographers” (122). Blake thus allows Freeman to talk back to literary critics; she tells Blake that her book “has never had any intention . . . to be political at all,” and Blake believes her (147).

Bina Toledo Freiwald, however, makes a compelling case for the political nature of Freeman’s book. In her essay, “‘Covering Their Familiar Ways with Another Culture’: Minnie Aodla Freeman’s *Life Among the Qallunaat* and the Ethics of Subjectivity,”

Freiwald argues that “the writing and reading of autobiographical narratives can provide ‘a site for cultural critique and social change,’ as essentialist notions of identity are challenged and the effects of discourses on subjects are exposed” (275). The project of creating one’s personal identity, furthermore, is tied to the task of establishing national identity – in particular, to ethnic nationalism.²²⁴ Here, Freeman is cast as a postmodern cultural critic, as her book serves to complicate essentialist notions of personal and national identity (291-292).

This interpretation resonates in many ways with Laugrand’s argument about the role of oral history in the creation of cultural memory (“Écrire” 93); the postmodern framework, meanwhile, is not so alien to elders’ protocols about speaking from experience – subjectivity – and to the emphasis on contextualized and polyvocal knowledge. Indeed, Freeman is of the same generation as some of the elders interviewed by Nunavut Arctic College; because of the location of her home, however, the *qallunaat* world had a greater impact on her early life. A novelistic autobiography in the southern style does not seem like the most likely vehicle for *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit*, but in many ways Freeman’s texts demonstrates some of the same principles as the *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series, especially when it comes to narrative. So rather than focus on Freeman the historian, the cultural critic, or the feminist, or on the author’s representation of Self, I would like to talk about Freeman the storyteller, and the way in which she experiments with genre-switching between fiction and truth-telling.

Life Among the Qallunaat was not Freeman’s first effort to tell her story. In 1971 she wrote a play, *Survival in the South*, which was performed at the National Arts Centre

²²⁴ In an interesting and challenging move, Freiwald invokes the history of Quebec nationalism as a foil to Freeman’s project.

in Ottawa (McGrath, *Canadian* 91). Robin McGrath later included it in her collection *Paper Stays Put* (Gedalof 100-112). The main character is called Minnie Aodla, but the story is to some extent fictionalized; rather than recounting specific moments in Freeman's experience, it constructs a representative story of arrival – and confusion – in the South:

NARRATOR...

(Cue for red light, traffic stops)

Why have we stopped?

(Cue for green light, traffic starts)

Oh, so many things to see, so many stores . . . so many people walking fast and looking so sad . . . look at the height of that house. (Gedalof, *Paper* 104)

Here we have the trope – also found in Thrasher's *Skid Row Eskimo* – of the Inuk lost in the city, overwhelmed by cars and the rules of traffic. As such, *Survival in the South* frames Minnie's story in a way that fits the expectations of Southern audiences.

This earlier text might be viewed as setting a precedent for Freeman's later work. Although *Life Among the Qallunaat* is an *inuusirminik unikkaa*q, Freeman is not committed to speaking from experience exclusively. At times, she invokes the tradition of *unikkaaqtuat* – although she does not use the term – and uses it as a way to move into fiction. In a section entitled "School Is Not the Only Place of Education," Freeman talks about the winter in which her grandmother told her many stories, including one about a man who was stingy, and so lost his humanity; he turned into *inuppak*, the giant. Freeman writes:

Some of my ancestors were very good storytellers and the stories were passed on verbally from generation to generation as we did not have a way of writing. Everything had to be told from memory, just as we always memorized the landscapes of our hunting areas. Each generation had to carry them in their heads and tell them year in and year out. Sometimes, someone would invent a new one. Here is my contribution to this

tradition, a story that I invented, but a story that is not very delightful to pass on to my children. (109)

She goes on to tell a story about a young husband and wife, Nakuk and Maviak, who are excited to have a new son. Nakuk imagines that his son will be a great hunter of muskox, and names him Malittak, “he is followed,” explaining that “maybe the muskox would follow the birth of their son and the herds would be many again” (110). Nakuk plans a feast to celebrate Malittak’s birth, and a ceremony to help bring the herd back. But no sooner has the ceremony been completed when the community sees a strange boat approaching, and Nakuk goes down to talk to two *qallunaat* strangers. He returns with disconcerting news: “The two officials from the *qallunaat* world have asked us not to hunt muskox for the next fifty years” (111). The story does not end on a sad note, however; in a split second, Nakuk adapts, and begins telling a new story about his son’s life: “We are very fortunate that our son will never have to know how to hunt muskox, for he is fresh and will have the strength to be a great seal, polar bear, whale and narwhale hunter. Yes, he is very fortunate, for this we will name him Arlu – Killerwhale – the most feared and relentless hunter of the seas” (112).

Like the stories that Freeman tells about her own life, this one is a kind of parable, and it deals with the theme of storytelling directly. The *unikkaaqtuaq* opens with Nakuk narrating the course of his son’s life; he creates a kind of prophecy in which the son’s birth is synonymous with the return of order to the world, and the reestablishment of the old ways (109-110). The community uses all kinds of magic to make this happen, and the story is a key part of it. Then comes the almost cinematic intrusion of the *qallunaat*, who boss people around in their characteristic way, and threaten to shatter the community’s ties to its traditions. But this story is not *Dances with Wolves*, and at the end the people

do not tragically disperse, or abandon their lifestyle. Instead, they demonstrate the way in which stories can be adapted, or invented, and can put a community back together. Nakuk refuses to be victimized; rather, he quickly renarrates the government ban on the muskox hunt, and makes it his own. It is his son's destiny to hunt other game – and of that, he suggests, there is plenty. With a new story, he can maintain his family's link to tradition, and close the breach that the *qallunaat* policies have created.

In telling this story, Freeman emphasizes its newness; like her character, Nakuk, she is creating a narrative with a particular purpose. Although the intervention of the *qallunaat* in the story evokes Minnie's own experience with colonial policy and cultural change, she locates this story within a long-established system of knowledge-making and adaptation: "Here is my contribution... to this tradition, a story that I invented..." (109). In this way, Freeman's story is didactic; it reminds readers of the usefulness of storytelling.

The students and elders in *Interviewing Inuit Elders* are similarly concerned with the moral of stories. When the students ask Imaruittuq about the story of Ailaq and Papik, they say that "[t]he reason that we are asking specifically about them is because it is a story with a message for people's lives" (Aupilaarjuk et al., *Law* 187). Although literary scholars may (rightly) be wary of reducing stories to their lessons, and therefore making them easy, portable, and convenient, it is also important to accept this very pragmatic side of storytelling. As Imaruittuq says, stories "made each one of us think, made us think hard.... [S]torytelling can be very beneficial. For example, hunters will exchange stories about where the dangerous parts of the ice are, how they survived a blizzard, et cetera. These stories are very useful in our lives" (Aupilaarjuk et al., *Law* 179). In an interview with Dale Blake, Freeman said that "[h]er main purpose in writing

Life Among the Qallunaat was to keep memories from dying out: ‘We need to put it on paper for our future children, for Inuit by Inuit’” (Blake 147).

The pragmatism, however, does not need to separate Inuit literary criticism from concerns about language, especially because – as I have already outlined – so many *unikkaaqtuat* and discussions of *unikkaaqtuat* deal directly with the theme of storytelling. There are moments then, when literature transforms into literary criticism; often these are the same moments when *inuusirminik unikkaat* become *unikkaaqtuat*. In literary *Qaujimagatuqangit*, this is narrative distance – the story is removed from the immediate experience of the storyteller; in the South, we might call it critical distance. In either case, these are moments in which language becomes especially important, as the storyteller/critic suddenly has to represent something much larger than him- or herself – whether he or she is adding to the tradition of knowledge-production, or laying out a literary theory.

In discussing the *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series, I pointed out that questions of style or narrative skill arose predominantly when elders were asked about stories beyond their personal experience, whether they were formalized *unikkaaqtuat*, or simply hearsay. Evidence of this connection between the second-hand and the literary can also be found in *Life Among the Qallunaat*. Freeman remembers a time when she was traveling with her family, and a terrible storm blew up (97). It was so bad that they could not even make camp, and they had to crowd together in a make-shift tent held down by overturned sleds. The next morning, however, the sky is clear and beautiful – it “was just like *pinguartuk*, like fantasy,” Freeman says (97). They see their destination, Charlton Island, right ahead of them. Freeman recounts, “[w]e passed an old cabin which stood up

amongst the trees. Grandmother said, ‘You used to live there when you were a baby.’ *She did not actually say it like that; instead she remarked that my little foot marks were up there near the cabin”* (98, emphasis added).

Note, here, Freeman’s attention to language, and the way in which she divides the story into content and form: ‘here’s what my grandmother said, and now here’s how she said it.’ The purpose of this story is in its content – it indicates that a homecoming is occurring, as the family returns to the place where Minnie was a baby, and it is made especially meaningful after the long, difficult night of the storm. In a way, this might be a metaphor for the entire book, as Freeman imaginatively finds her way back to her origins, or tracks her own footprints. But Freeman, in relaying her grandmother’s comment, is also aware of the necessity to pass on the *way* in which the story was told – here, through a beautifully poetic metonymy: “my little foot marks were up there near the cabin” (98). Her grandmother was telling a fiction; she was speaking figuratively, we can assume, as Minnie’s baby footprints are not actually still visible in the snow. More than half a century later, Freeman pays homage to her grandmother, as she too creates an *unikkaaqtuaq* out of her life, and adds it to her people’s tradition.

Inuit literary criticism, it is safe to say, is not new territory. If we know where – and how – to look, we can see that it is tracked through with the foot marks of elders and students, writers and storytellers. And by reading the life stories and oral histories being produced in Nunavut for literary theory and practice, rather than only for ethnographic, historical, or political information data, we are one step closer to recognizing the validity, and the poetry, of *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit*.

**‘Let me sing slowly and search for a song’:
Inuit ‘Poetry’ and the Legacy of Knud Rasmussen**

These songs don’t arrive like fragile orchids from the hot-houses of professional poets: they have flowered like rough, weather-beaten saxifrage which has taken root on rock. And they ought to matter to us.

–Knud Rasmussen, *Snehyttens Sange*

I put some words together,
I made a little song,
I took it home one evening,
mysteriously wrapped, disguised.
Underneath my bed it went:
nobody was going to share it,
nobody was going to taste it!
I wanted it for me! me! me!
Secret, undivided!

–“Song to a Miser,” from Angmagssalik, East Greenland²²⁵

In *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, the 2006 feature film by Igloodik Isuma Productions, the shaman Avva and his family arrive at Igloodik after a long and difficult journey.²²⁶ Food supplies had been running low, and then had run out, and by the time Avva reaches the settlement, he and his people are starving. They are greeted outside the houses by a group of Inuit singing a hymn and wanting to shake hands in the *qallunaat* way. In residence at Igloodik, we learn, is the Umik the Prophet, who welcomes the travelers, particularly when he sees that they are accompanied by Christians – namely, by Peter Freuchen and Therkel Mathiassen of the Fifth Thule Expedition.²²⁷ Umik is leading a group of newly Christianized Inuit, and he invites Avva to join them: “We eat after we pray,” he says: “[t]he hunters bring their meat first to me and we all eat together after my

²²⁵ Found in Lowenstein 46.

²²⁶ Although Rasmussen uses the spelling “Aua,” “Avva” is more correct. See Joanna Awa, “The Story of a Name.”

²²⁷ The Fifth Thule Expedition (1921-24), led by the Greenlandic anthropologist Knud Rasmussen, aimed to document the culture of the “Central Eskimos” of the Canadian Arctic and Alaska. Peter Freuchen, a cartographer and biologist, was Rasmussen’s long-time expedition partner; Therkel Mathiassen was a cartographer and archaeologist (Mathiassen, *Report on the Expedition* 7-12).

sermon. Will you join us?” (329). “Maybe some day,” Avva replies. His people are then faced with a choice: convert, and share in the feast, or keep the old ways, and continue to starve.

Avva and his family build their houses a short distance away. They are cold, sick, and weak from hunger. Freuchen and Mathiassen have given in; they have gone to pray – and to eat. Avva goes to visit an old friend, Anguliannuk, who (because Umik collects and then distributes the catch) has very little food to share:

ANGULIANNUK (WITH DEEP CONCERN) Old friend, you had a very difficult journey. (A HANGING SILENCE) Those songs. They are not so hard to learn....

AVVA Remember all the songs we used to sing when we were young and waiting for weather to change?

ANGULIANNUK (SMILING) Certainly! Our mouths never stopped flapping.

AVVA Hmmm, those were the days! I have no more room in my head to learn any new songs, my friend. (Kunuk and Cohn 335)

The conversion from the practice of *angakkuniq* (shamanism) to Christianity – from the singing of *ajaja* songs to the singing of hymns – forms the central conflict of *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*. In the early 1920s, the era when the film is set, the region that is now Nunavut was in the midst of a cultural shift. Although the Moravians had been in Labrador since the late eighteenth century, and although whalers, explorers, and Hudson’s Bay Company traders had arrived intermittently throughout the nineteenth century, the first Christian mission was not established until 1894, when the Anglican Reverend Edmund J. Peck arrived at Umanarjuaq (Blacklead Island), in Cumberland Sound (Laugrand, Oosten, and Trudel 3-9). A Roman Catholic mission was eventually built in Igloolik in 1931, but in the 1920s Inuktitut Bibles and hymnbooks were already in circulation, and local proselytizers like Umik and his son Nuqallaq were already

promoting Christianity (Blaisel, Laugrand, and Oosten 379-383).²²⁸ One of their commandments, as recounted in the screenplay of *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, is that the converts should “[s]ing only Jesoosie’s songs. Do not sing the old songs that bring Satanasi to tempt Inuit through the drum, to burn forever in Hell” (Kunuk and Cohn 337). In other words, the arrival of Christianity meant the eventual banning of the activities of the *qaggiq* (the communal feasting-house) – in particular, the singing of the old songs.

When Knud Rasmussen arrived at Repulse Bay (Naujaat) in 1921, he was pleased to find that the people there “were still entirely primitive in their views and unaffected by outside influences” (Rasmussen, *Iglulik* 16).²²⁹ He was particularly interested in finding those who would be willing to share with him “the ancient traditions of [their] tribe” (*Iglulik* 17). Matthiassen describes Rasmussen’s “peculiar knack of quickly getting on terms of friendship and confidence with strange Eskimos” (*Report* 28); as the Padlermiut²³⁰ leader Igjugarjuk put it, Rasmussen “was the first white man he had ever seen who was also an Eskimo” (Rasmussen, *Across Arctic America* 64). In fact, Rasmussen was born in Jakobshavn (Ilulissat), Greenland, and his mother was Inuk.²³¹

²²⁸ They were doing so, however, without the approval of the Church. For further details of the activities of Umik and other Inuit religious leaders, see Blaisel, Laugrand, and Oosten’s article “Shamans and Leaders: Parousial Movements Among the Inuit of Northeast Canada.” Umik and his son Nuqallaq had come to Iglulik from Pond Inlet, where Nuqallaq had killed the trader Robert Janes after Janes became a threat to the community. Nuqallaq was later tried, and convicted, in the first government-run murder trial in what would become Nunavut. See Shelagh Grant’s *Arctic Justice: On Trial for Murder, Pond Inlet, 1923*.

²²⁹ This is an exaggeration (and a popular construct of anthropologists); the Netsilingmiut, Aivilingmiut and Amitturmiut Inuit of the region traded regularly at the Hudson’s Bay Company post in Repulse Bay, and had been in contact with *qallunaat* for over a hundred years.

²³⁰ The Padlermiut, or Paallirmiut (“Willow-people”), are part of a larger group which the Expedition called “Caribou Eskimos” – people living in the Kivalliq region just west of Hudson Bay.

²³¹ “It was my privilege, as one born in Greenland, and speaking the Eskimo language as my native tongue, to know these people in an intimate way. My life’s course led inevitably toward Arctic exploration, for my father, a missionary among the Eskimos, married one who was proud of some portion of Eskimo blood. From the very nature of things, I was endowed with attributes for Polar work which outlanders have to acquire through painful experience. My playmates were native Greenlanders; from the earliest boyhood I

His fluency in Kalaallisut (the Greenlandic Inuit language), and his prior knowledge of Inuit traditions seems to have endeared him to elders like Avva, who related a number of their stories and songs. The result of the Fifth Thule Expedition, then, is an unparalleled collection of Inuit literary and critical traditions – a reservoir of the kind of material that would soon be obscured by the arrival of Christianity. Indeed, soon after the missionaries arrived in the Arctic, the term for *ajaja* or drumdance songs – *pisiit* – was itself converted; today, the primary signification of *pisiit* is ‘hymns.’²³²

In Volume VII, No. 1 of the *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition (Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos)* Rasmussen gives a detailed description of the tradition of Inuit songs. “The great song festivals at which I have been present during the dark season,” he writes,

are the most original and the prettiest kind of pastime I have ever witnessed. Every man and woman, sometimes also the children, will have his or her own songs, with appropriate melodies, which are sung in the qag·e, the great snow hut which is set up in every village where life and good spirits abound. Those taking part in a song festival are called qag·ifut; the poem recited is called piseq, the melody of a song ivnerut...” (227).²³³

In amongst the Inuktitut song-terms, here, Rasmussen has casually placed another term of great significance: ‘poem’ (*digt*, in the Danish). Like Franz Boas before him, Rasmussen identifies Inuit song-making as *poetry*, and often refers to the singers as poets.²³⁴ Wisely sidestepping the philosophical mind-twister that is the attempt to define ‘poetry,’

played and worked with the hunters, so that even the hardships of the most strenuous sledge-trips became pleasant routine for me” (Rasmussen, *Across Arctic America* xxxii).

²³² The singular is *pisiq*. In the Kivalliq region it is often spelt *pihiq*

²³³ qag·ifut (or *qaggijut*) means ‘they are assembled,’ or ‘the ones who are assembled’ (Schneider 277). *Qimik* is another term for ‘melody’; the one given here, ivnerut (or *imngirutu*), means literally ‘a tool for singing’ (Imaruittuq 219).

²³⁴ Franz Boas, who visited Cumberland Sound in 1883-1884, writes that “[a]mong the arts of the Eskimo poetry and music are by far the most prominent” (240).

Rasmussen does not spend much time glossing his use of the term, and uses it almost interchangeably with ‘song.’ Rather, the word ‘poem’ – with its connotations of refinement and deliberate craftedness – demands quite casually a recognition of the *artistry* or *literariness* of these compositions. As such, through his contributions to the *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition* – the major source text for almost all future studies of Inuit tradition – Rasmussen can be understood as having created a canon of Inuit poetry.

In identifying the poetic nature of Inuit song, there can be little doubt that Rasmussen was drawing upon the popular contemporary idea of the ‘primitive’ as an involuntary poet. Rasmussen notes that when he himself attempted to participate in the song-festivals, “it was not easy to equal the natural primitive temperament in [the song’s] power of finding simple and yet poetic forms of expression. . .” (*Iglulik* 230). He goes on to note that

when one tries to talk to one of these poets on the subject of poetry as an art, he will of course not understand in the least what we civilised people mean by the term. He will not admit that there is any special art associated with such productions, but at the most may grant it is a gift, and even then a gift which everyone should possess in some degree. (*Iglulik* 233)

Owen Barfield, in his 1927 *Poetic Diction*, surveys the idea of a long-distant ‘metaphorical period’ in human history, when “myths, which represent the earliest meanings, were not the arbitrary creations of ‘poets’, but the natural expression of man’s being and consciousness at the time” (102).²³⁵ Though Barfield is somewhat skeptical of this hypothesis, he does dwell upon a perceived similarity between “primitive language and . . . the finest metaphors of poets” (86). Rasmussen’s use of the term ‘poetry,’ then,

²³⁵ Barfield refers, for example, to Macauley, who “assert[s] that half-civilized nations are poetic *simply* because they perceive without abstracting, and absolutely regardless of *what* they perceive” (84).

may resonate disconcertingly with the idea that the expression of tribal peoples, because of some apparent difference in cognitive function, are naturally and unintentionally ‘poetic.’ Rasmussen’s actual discussion of the songs, however, would indicate quite the opposite: with an approach rare for an ethnographer of the 1920s, Rasmussen carefully depicts the *individuality* of each singer, and leaves no doubts about the very intentional *artistry* of their songs. I am interested, then, in the ways in which the use of the label ‘poetry’ – though somewhat of a misnomer – might have a useful side-effect: the recognition of the songs as belonging to a literary tradition. This final chapter explores the various forms in which Inuit song traditions have survived and adapted, and the ways in which they may (or may not) suit the category of ‘poetry.’ This reconceptualization serves to open this tradition to readers and listeners outside of the songs’ communities of origin – a goal that I share (not unproblematically) with both Rasmussen and with ethnopoetics.

Even if this re-labeling does result in a broader recognition of the literary merits of Inuit song traditions, interpreting the song-poems is no simple matter. Not only do they make use of a specialized and often purposefully ambiguous vocabulary, but in the pages of Rasmussen’s *Report* – and in the many other anthologies that followed – the songs are far removed from their original performance in the *qaggiq*. Indeed, the process of reconceptualizing oral traditions as ‘poetry,’ which was again taken up in the latter half of the twentieth century by scholars like Jerome Rothenberg, Dell Hymes, and Dennis Tedlock, involves an inevitable excision of context; indeed, this forms the basis of most critiques of the field of ethnopoetics.²³⁶ As Laura J. Murray and Keren Rice explain:

²³⁶ The Muskogee scholar Craig Womack, for instance, writes that he is “concerned about what happens to the political intent of the stories when they are separated from their tribal contexts” (*Red on Red* 62).

Many native people fear the loss of control that comes with the reproduction of their words, on tape or on paper, because they have seen the dire legal effects of having their words misconstrued (or at least reconstrued with other people's interests in mind) in treaties and court decisions, and the crippling cultural effects of having their songs and histories reduced to quaint fairy tales or parables. (*Talking on the Page* xiii)

Indeed, scholars of oral tradition – such as Richard Dauenhauer and Nora Marks Dauenhauer, Simon Ortiz, Julie Cruikshank, and J. Edward Chamberlin – have pointed out the complications of translating performance onto the page: although this process ‘preserves’ the songs and stories, it also deprives them of the framework in which they make sense, and in which they fulfilled their original purposes.²³⁷ As ‘poetry,’ then, Inuit songs are arguably removed from the tradition that produced them; “[t]he ‘Inuit voice,’” as Sophie McCall writes, “becomes monumentalized, static, transhistorical. It is not considered part of a dialogue but becomes showcased as an icon from the past” (26). As the shaman Avva’s conversation with his friend Anguliannuk suggests, songs are closely tied to the circumstances in which they are performed, and to alter them – or to give them up – could have major consequences.

Since Avva’s time, the old songs have taken on a variety of different forms; some of these have remained closely connected to Inuit artists and communities, while others have wandered far from home. Yet the tendency to transform, I will argue, has been a part of Inuit song-tradition since long before the arrival of Europeans. This chapter will look, for example, at the tradition of *ikiaqtagait* – old songs that have had new words put to them – and at the ways in which these are used by contemporary Inuit artists, like the makers of *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*. I will suggest that even within Inuit tradition, the old songs have undergone a decontextualization – and a commodification – that in many ways parallels (and maybe precedes) their treatment in the South.

²³⁷ See, for instance, Chamberlin, “Doing Things With Words: Putting Performance on the Page,” in Murray and Rice (69-90).

Understood figuratively as ‘objects’ of great craftsmanship and value, songs can be traded, borrowed, and recycled for a whole range of purposes; for Inuit artists, as for ethnocritics, that purpose is often the symbolizing of ‘tradition,’ in its many forms. The problem with understanding these songs as ‘poetry,’ then, is not decontextulization, but rather the alienation of the songs from the control – and benefit – of the community. It may be, then, that a poetic – or decontextualized – analysis of these song-texts is not as wholly alien and colonial as some critics would like to believe. In this chapter, the song becomes a tool to complicate the distinction between the artifact and the art-piece, or between the political and the aesthetic.

Ivaluardjuk, the ‘Little Thread’,²³⁸

When Rasmussen arrived at the HBC trading post at Repulse Bay (December 5, 1921), he had the good fortune to meet an elder named Ivaluardjuk, “one of the oldest members of his tribe” (*Iglulik* 17).²³⁹ With his “long white beard and red, rheumy eyes, worn dim with [sic] over many blizzards,” Ivaluardjuk comes across as a kind of Ancient Mariner; indeed, Rasmussen suspects that he may have a story to tell:

I discovered at once, in the course of our first talk, that Ivaluardjuk, though very careful about what he said, was remarkably well acquainted with the ancient traditions of his tribe. In order to draw him out a little, I narrated a few of the stories common in Greenland. These proved to be well-known here, and the surprise of the natives at finding a stranger from unknown lands able to relate old tales they fancied were exclusively their own, was such that in a short time the house was filled with inquisitive listeners. Thus I gained the old man’s confidence, and we were soon

²³⁸ *ivaluk* ‘sinew, thread’ + *-arjuk* ‘smallness’

²³⁹ The Amitturmiut, or the people of the Melville Peninsula. Known to Rasmussen as the Iglulingmiut (the people of Iglulik). Ethnonyms such as Iglulik, Netsilik, and Copper are anthropological in origin; I have attempted to give the more precise designations, courtesy of Bennett and Rowley’s *Uqalurait: An Oral History of Nunavut* (458-464).

discussing the folk-lore of his people as experts, the reserve he had shown at first being gradually discarded. (*Iglulik* 17)

Having thus bartered for a story, Rasmussen listens as Ivaluardjuk recollects the old days “when all meat was juicy and tender, and no game too swift for a hunter” (17). “Now,” Ivaluardjuk says, “I have only the old stories and songs to fall back upon . . .” (17). With the encouragement of the gathered people, he agrees to sing one. The women begin “a monotonous air” – likely the *ajaja* refrain – and Ivaluardjuk sings:

Cold and mosquitoes,
 These two pests
 Come never together.
 I lay me down on the ice,
 Lay me down on the snow and ice,
 Till my teeth fall chattering.
 It is I,
 Aja – aja – ja.

Memories are they,
 From those days,
 From those days,
 Mosquitoes swarming
 From those days,
 The cold is bitter,
 The mind grows dizzy
 As I stretch my limbs
 Out on the ice.
 It is I,
 Aja – aja – ja.

Ai! but songs
 Call for strength
 And I seek after words,
 I, aja – aja – ja.

Ai! I seek and spy
 Something to sing of
 The caribou with the spreading antlers!

And strongly I threw
 The spear with my throwing stick (sic!).²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ This disclaimer appears in Calvert and Worster’s text. The source of their concern is not apparent to me.

And my weapon fixed the bull
 In the hollow of the groin
 And it quivered with the wound
 Till it dropped
 And was still.

Ai! but songs
 Call for strength,
 And I seek after words.
 It is I,
 Aja, aja – haja – haja. (*Iglulik* 18-19)

Here, in a trope common to songs performed at an assembly, the singer recalls a successful hunt. His quest for game, furthermore, is paired with the other central feature of this tradition: a reflection on the process – and the difficulties – of song-making. Both are occupations that “call for strength,” and both are heavy with the possibility of failure. The two come together in the fourth stanza (“Ai! I seek and spy / Something to sing of...”); as the hunter acquires his target, the singer – and the singer’s audience – acquires the subject of the song.

But that was all many years ago. Now, in 1921, the elderly Ivaluardjuk is too weak to pursue caribou; now, he is a hunter of songs. “Memories are they / from those days,” he sings: “[t]he cold is bitter, / The mind grows dizzy / As I stretch my limbs / Out on the ice.” Even in this recollection, the hunter’s body is becoming still, supine, perhaps stiffening with the cold. His mind, however, “grows dizzy” – swarms, even, mosquito-like, as he seeks after the memory, and for the song to convey it. Now, when his limbs seem permanently stiff, and he can no longer leap up to hurl his spear, the songs are his prize – the sustenance that he brings to the community. Indeed, Rasmussen reports that “[t]his utterance of an old man, who recognized that for him the joyous days of life were long since over and past, brought the noisy listeners to silence When sung, it

produced an altogether extraordinary effect on those present” (19, 232). But the precise nature of this effect is rather mysterious. Rasmussen notes the silence – the settling of the crowd, and perhaps of the metaphorical mosquitoes that plague them. He senses “piety and reverence,” as if something sacred has occurred (19). But the exact significance of the song – one which the community knows well – is not known to him, and so neither does that meaning survive in the pages of *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*.

Indeed, Ivaluardjuk’s search for words, song, and memory is something that contemporary readers can sympathize with, even if they have never lain down on the ice as a herd of caribou passed by. Encountering Ivaluardjuk’s song in the midst of Rasmussen’s narrative is comparable to the rush of spotting the prey, but this particular *tuktu* is like a creature out of the myth-world – one who may be in the process of transformation, or whose form has not quite settled.²⁴¹ Rasmussen himself warns us of this possibility, as he explains that he heard the song performed, and then wrote it down afterwards:

The ideas and expressions, and the general effect, of Eskimo songs are so unlike anything we are accustomed to in our own that it is not always possible to translate literally. The following is, however, as close a rendering of the original as can reasonably be given when endeavouring at the same time to reproduce something of the charm and the unconscious art displayed in the utterance of the Eskimo singer. (*Iglulik* 18)

“Cold and mosquitoes,” then, is a song that has undergone many transformations. If we believe Ivaluardjuk, it came into being one day when he was out on a hunt, or perhaps it was soon after recollected in tranquility.²⁴² It would then have been sung in the *qaggiq*, likely many times, as it is now a piece that is well-known by all. Finally, it is sung for

²⁴¹ *tuktu* = caribou.

²⁴² Lowenstein notes that “in most cases [of song-composition], a quasi-Wordsworthian process took place, in which the poet retired into the solitude of nature, and struggled to fit words to the tune he had previously composed” (xx).

Rasmussen, who – like a good listener – does not attempt to write it down during the performance.²⁴³ The version that appears on paper, then, is based entirely on a recollection. Rasmussen’s memory was no doubt excellent, and he knew the language extremely well, but it is certain that major discrepancies²⁴⁴ exist between the published version and the one that was heard at the trading post in 1921, which produced that remarkable effect on the listeners.

Many of the songs that Rasmussen includes in the *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition* are given in Inuktitut as well in translation; sadly, Ivaluardjuk’s own words did not make it into the published version. Instead, the song was translated from Rasmussen’s Danish by William Worster and W. E. Calvert for the 1929 English-language volume *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*. Rasmussen also included the song in his 1930 collection *Snehyttens Sange* (‘Songs from the Snow-hut’); a German edition of this collection, *Schneehüttenlieder*, was produced by Aenne Schmücker in 1947. Calvert and Worster’s English translation of the song has perhaps become the most ‘canonical’ version, in that it has been reprinted in Robin Gedalof’s *Paper Stays Put: A Collection of Inuit Writing* (1980), John Robert Columbo’s *Poems of the Inuit* (1981), and Penny Petrone’s *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English* (1988).²⁴⁵ In 1973, Tom Lowenstein retranslated Ivaluardjuk’s song, along with many others from *Snehyttens*

²⁴³ Rasmussen expresses his regret that he was not able to make any recordings of the songs, as the phonograph was “out of order” (*Iglulik* 230).

²⁴⁴ Rasmussen tells us, for instance, that the song began when Ivaluardjuk’s wife “chanted in a clear voice a monotonous air, consisting of but a few notes constantly repeated” (*Iglulik* 18). Many lines of Inuit song-poetry begin with the refrain *aja*; in the text of “Cold and Mosquitoes,” however, that chorus appears only at the end of each stanza, rather than at the head of the line. Verses such as “aja – aja – ja” (8) or “Aja, aja – haja – haja” (38) may simply then be representative traces of the poem’s original sung form, rather than precise records of its structure.

²⁴⁵ The first three lines of the song also appear in *Uqalurait: An Oral History of Nunavut* (215). Father Guy Marie-Rousselière’s 1961 *Beyond the High Hills: A Book of Eskimo Poems* includes Ivaluardjuk’s preamble to the song (“...those days . . . when all meat was juicy and tender”) but does not acknowledge his authorship (29).

Sange, for inclusion in his collection *Eskimo Poems from Canada and Greenland*. The poem that Lowenstein produced – based on Rasmussen’s Danish – is called “A Hunting Memory,” and it differs in subtle and significant ways from Calvert and Worster’s (Lowenstein 25).²⁴⁶ The most notable change is perhaps in the final stanza, which

Lowenstein gives as follows:

Aj! But songs
require strength
and I search
for words.
Here is the song.
Here is the memory.
It’s only I who sings.
Aja-aja-haja-haja! (Lowenstein 26)

Strangely, the stanza here contains three more lines than Calvert and Worster’s 1929

version:

Ai! but songs
Call for strength,
And I seek after words.
It is I,
Aja, aja – haja – haja. (Rasmussen, *Iglulik* 18-19)

In Lowenstein’s translation, the simple refrain “It is I” has mutated into “Here is the song. / Here is the memory. / It’s only I who sings.” As it turns out, however,

Lowenstein’s version is closer to Rasmussen’s Danish:

Aj! Men sange bruger styrke og jeg søger efter ord.
Her er sangen, her er mindet.
Og det er kun mig, der synger. (Rasmussen, *Den store Slæderejse* 17)²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Several different translations of this song are included in Appendix B.

²⁴⁷ “But songs use strength and I search for words,

Here is the song, here is the memory.

And it is only I who sing.”

Thanks to Professor Marianne Stenbaek for the translation.

The final line – omitted in Calvert and Worster’s translation, but included in Lowenstein’s – seems to provide some useful insight on the song’s mysterious refrain. “It is I,” sings Ivaluardjuk, as he recalls himself lying on the ice. “What is?” we might ask. Clearly, whatever it is is something important, as the singer keeps coming back to it. The word “I” even becomes part of the sung refrain, as it blends into the first syllable: “aja – aja – ja.”²⁴⁸ Lowenstein’s translation hints at an answer to this riddle: “It’s *only I who sings*” (26, emphasis added). Rather than creating an inflated image of self, and a hyperbolic account of the deed (as is common in hunting songs), the singer finishes by admitting that it is *only* him, and only a song. This idea, in turn, might resonate with the fleeting and elusive nature of memory in the poem. Alternately, we may get a sense of the singer’s isolation as an elder who remembers such things; there may be a kind of impotence suggested in the verse, as he is *only* singing, while others now hunt.²⁴⁹ Whether or not this is an accurate representation of Ivaluardjuk’s own feelings is uncertain, though Rasmussen himself was certainly caught up in, and convinced by, his masterful performance.

Though enjoyable, these kinds of reflections on the words chosen by Lowenstein, or by Calvert and Worster, are of questionable value. Ivaluardjuk, after all, never said anything of the kind – at least, not in the same language. So to try to connect these English or Danish or German phrases with the now-distant situation described in Rasmussen’s *Report* is a bit of a hopeless enterprise. What is the purpose of such scrutiny when the original cannot be found? In their unceasing search for points of access to the

²⁴⁸ Although this sound feature is not present in the case of the Danish refrain “*Det er mig*,” it was likely at work in the original, which could have used the word “*uvanga*.”

²⁴⁹ As Chamberlin writes: “[o]ne of our oldest conflicts is between *those who dream about things and those who do things*, between those who sing songs and tell tales and those who raise meat, grow vegetables and cook supper. Doodlers and doers. The useless and the useful” (*If This Is Your Land* 28, emphasis added).

mediated song-text, contemporary readers of Ivaluardjuk’s poem (both despite and because of their distance from the song-house), will comprehend the travail of his singer with ironic ease. Rasmussen’s readers – especially those trained in literary study – are placed in the strange position of wanting to read the songs closely, especially because Rasmussen has created such beautiful poems out of them. The result is a kind of siren song for literary scholars – we are irresistibly drawn to these texts, but approach them at our peril.

Emile Imaruittuq and the *Ikiaqtagait* (Adapted Songs)

More than seventy-five years after the historic meeting between Knud Rasmussen and Ivaluardjuk, another Igloolik elder, Emile Imaruittuq, sings an *ajaja* song for a roomful of captivated listeners. This audience is also hoping to learn about Inuit traditions, but this time, the situation is slightly different: the performance takes place in a classroom of Inuit students at Nunavut Arctic College, and Imaruittuq has been flown in to Iqaluit as a visiting elder. The students have been asking him about *unikkaaqtuat* – stories. Imaruittuq knows a few, but he tells the students that he is much better with *pisiiit* – songs.²⁵⁰ “Our ancestors used to create songs,” he says,

Sometimes the people who put the words to the song would like the tune. Sometimes they would make alterations to make the song suit themselves. This song was changed by one of my relatives, Maniq was her name. She made changes to this song that I am going to sing. This is Maniq’s song. Because there were changes made to this *pisiiq*, it is an *ikiaqtagaq*.

Maniup pisivininga ikiaqtaliavininga[:]

Maniq’s song, with her changes[:]

[1] aijaa ijajaajaajaa inngirjaalirlanga

Aijaa ijajaajaajaa, let me sing slowly

inngirjaalirlanga pisiksaksiurlungalu

²⁵⁰ Imaruittuq, along with Abraham Ulayuruluk, was one of the elders who composed the *ajaja* songs for *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*.

Let me sing slowly and search for a song

ijajaajaajaa

[2] **aijaa ijajaajaajaa pisiksaninngiliqpunga**

Aijaa ijajaajaajaa, I have not acquired a song

pisiksaninngiliqpunga nunguusimangmatigut

I have not acquired a song because they have finished them on us

ijajaajaajaa

[3] **aijaa ijajaajaajaa nunguusimavatigut**

Aijaa ijajaajaajaa, they have finished them on us

nunguusimavatigut sivullitta pisiksamik

They have finished them on us, our ancestors of any song

ijajaajaajaa

[4] **aijaa ijajaajaajaa maliktarigaluaqpit**

Aijaa ijajaajaajaa removing incoming snow

maliktarigaluaqpit apivalliajuq manna

Are you removing incoming snow from this that is becoming snow covered

ijajaajaajaa

[5] **aijaa ijajaajaajaa iqqaqtulirivara**

Aijaa ijajaajaajaa, I remember

iqqaqtulirivarali ijjannguqturnira inna

I remember my difficulty in breathing

ijajaajaajaa

[6] **aijaa ijajaajaajaa nunguusimavatigut**

Aijaa ijajaajaajaa, they have finished them on us

nunguusimavatigut sivullilitta pisiksamik

They have finished them on us, our ancestors of any song

ijajaajaajaa

[7] **aijaa ijajaajaajaa nungugiaqsinnarivug**

Aijaa ijajaajaajaa, it is about to come to an end

nungugiaqsinnarivug tainiksaqanngimmata

It is about to come to an end because they have no title

ijajaajaajaa (Imaruittuq 203-204, emphasis in original)²⁵¹

Rasmussen's rendition of "Cold and Mosquitoes" has its own share of riddles, but

Imaruittuq's song – with its very literal translation – is clearly home to a different kind of

obscurity. Its narrative is much more difficult to discern; its referents are often

mysterious. At the end of the performance, Imaruittuq says that he is "just singing part of

²⁵¹ Readers are encouraged to now listen to the track on the included audio CD. This song, "Inngirajaalirlanga" ("Let me sing slowly") was performed by Imaruittuq in 1992 for an Isuma CD entitled *Unikkaat Sivunittinnit: Messages from the Past*. Despite a few variations, I believe it is the same song that Imaruittuq performed later at Nunavut Arctic College (Maniq's song, quoted here with the permission of Nunavut Arctic College). The lyrics can be found in Appendix C (I).

the song. There is a lot more to it” (204). What we have here, then, is a fragment of sorts – a distilled version of a longer song, and of an event long past.

Not only has the song been shortened, but it has also been adapted, as Imaruittuq is careful to point out. Although he refers to it as ‘Maniq’s song,’ he specifies that it is an *ikiaqtagaq* – a song that has had changes made to it (219). In other words, although Maniq has had a hand in the song’s creation, she is not its original (or sole) composer. Imaruittuq says that “[i]k iaqtaaq means, it’s another person’s song I am using but I am creating my own words” (201). *Ikiaqtaq*, as Peter Irniq explains it, literally refers to splitting; an *ikiaqtagaq* (with the passive ending *-gaq*), is something that has been split.²⁵² In other words, the tune of the song (*qimik*) has been separated from its original words, and new words have been added (Imaruittuq 219). When later the students ask Imaruittuq if he has a *pisiq* (song) of his own, he responds “I have an *ikiaqtagaq*” (211).²⁵³ Here, he demonstrates the importance of acknowledging the song’s history: namely, the identity of the song’s composer (or adapter) and the fact that it is a borrowed tune. Irniq says the singer *must* acknowledge this, perhaps by saying “*pisiruna ikiaqtaq qanurlikiaq aturnialirivara*” – ‘how am I going to use this *ikiaqtaq*?’²⁵⁴

Imaruittuq’s song, like “Cold and Mosquitoes,” is a text with a history. Imaruittuq calls it “*Maniup pisivininga ikiaqtaliavininga*” (‘Maniq’s song, with her changes’); she has added words to a borrowed tune. Meanwhile, I suspect that Imaruittuq’s rendition, while based on Maniq’s words, may have undergone a few changes as well. In 1992,

²⁵² Thanks to Peter Irniq for clarifying this (personal communication). *Ikiaqtaq* is from *ikiaq*, which Spalding defines as “the in-between layer: insulation between two walls; inner shirt between underwear and jacket; the inner lining of a coat or garment” (19). This root seems to speak to the mediating or intervening nature of the song.

²⁵³ See Appendix C (II). Imaruittuq’s own song is similar in theme and expression to Maniq’s song.

²⁵⁴ Personal communication.

Imaruittuq recorded a song called “*Inngirajaalirlanga*” (“Let me sing slowly”) for a song collection by Isuma; its lyrics are very similar, though by no means identical, to the song performed for the students at Nunavut Arctic College (*Unikkaat*).²⁵⁵ In other words, there seems to have been further ‘splitting’ of Maniq’s song. An awareness of these transformations may evoke the same kind of interpretative challenges we face when reading Rasmussen’s song-poems; in this case, however, the song has been adapted and performed by an Inuk elder, in Inuktitut. While the form of the song is not as rigid as it might be in a print tradition,²⁵⁶ I believe that it is nonetheless deserving of some attention.

The song begins with a trope that should be familiar: “*Inngirajaalirlanga pisiksaksiurlungalu*” – “let me sing slowly and search for a song” (§1). For Rasmussen (and his translators), this idea was expressed as “songs / Call for strength / And I seek after words” (*Iglulik* 18). The idea of searching for “*pisiksaq*” – the material for a song – is an extremely common theme; the infix *-siuq-* (as in ‘*pisiksaksiuq-*’) here denotes ‘looking for,’ or ‘hunting,’ as in *natsiqsiuqtuq* – ‘he is hunting seals’ (Harper, *Suffixes* 71).²⁵⁷ Here, it opens up an immediate contradiction, as the speaker is – strangely – looking for a song *while singing*. The third line only confuses matters, as the singer claims that he “ha[s] not acquired a song,” even though by this point, he is well into one. We get the sense, perhaps, that it takes more than singing to make a song; in the opening lines, the singer tentatively tests the waters – singing *slowly* – seemingly uncertain whether he will find something to sing about, or whether a whole *pisiq* will be formed out of the raw musical matter.

²⁵⁵ Again, see Appendix C (I) and the enclosed audio CD.

²⁵⁶ This is not to say that printed texts don’t also have a tendency to change; see Appendix B.

²⁵⁷ *-ksaq-* means ‘material,’ or ‘future,’ as in *pualuksaq* (material for mittens) or *nuliaksaq* (future wife, fiancée) (Harper, *Suffixes* 33).

These opening lines, then, are a trace of the process of composition, which then itself becomes a key subject of the song. As Tom Lowenstein observes:

[t]he struggle to create form was . . . largely the poet's own responsibility: an imperative which was keenly and often crushingly felt, as is indicated by the frequent allusions to the difficulties of composition and a fear of failure—failure to perfect the song itself, and then to perform it in the feasting-house without forgetting the words. (xvi)

Lowenstein quotes Piuvkaq, an Utkuhiksalingmiut singer: “It’s wonderful to make up songs: / but all too many of them fail” (45).²⁵⁸ The precise nature of this failure is not made apparent. However, the conditions for success do seem to include a certain degree of restraint in the storytelling. There is little superfluous detail; rather, the singers convey great emotion, or an important event, with rare precision.²⁵⁹ Part of this, no doubt, is enabled by the audience; as Rasmussen says of one of Avva’s hunting songs, “[i]t has been conveyed so often that Aua can make do with but the briefest reference in his text to the course of events” (*Iglulik* 238). The effect on the reader, however, is the impression that each word (or each post-base²⁶⁰) seems to have been chosen with great care, and must be of great significance.

In the case of Imaruittuq’s “Let me sing slowly,” there is a known story behind the song. Because many of the young listeners are not familiar with it, Imaruittuq fills in the blanks for them:

²⁵⁸ The original is *pija-niajai’kiga*, which Rasmussen translates as “But I often do it badly” (*Netsilik* 517). Piuvkaq connects this anxiety to the fear of failure at the hunt: “It’s wonderful / to hunt reindeer: but all too seldom / you succeed, / standing like a bright fire / on the plain” (Lowenstein 45).

²⁵⁹ In translating these verses for a European audience, then, Rasmussen tended “to ‘fill out’ the prayers in terms of what he considers more intelligible poetry” (Wiebe 59).

²⁶⁰ In Inuktitut, post-bases (or infixes) such as *-siuq-* (look for) or *-ksaq* (material, future) are roughly equivalent to English words. As a result, an Inuktitut word such as *pisiksaqsiuliqpunga* is in English conveyed in a sentence: “I am searching for a song.” *Pisiq* (song) + *-ksaq* (material for) + *-siuq-* (looking, hunting) + *-liq-* (right now) + *punga* (I). Alana Johns points out, however, that like the morphemes in an English word, the post-bases are not usually perceived by native speakers as distinct and easily separated chunks (personal conversation).

A lot of songs were stories. . . . The part about having difficulty breathing has a lot of meaning to it. At that time, there had been people buried in a blizzard. If they camped where snowdrifts tended to form, then they would be buried. So, they were cautioned to be aware of what would be covered in a blizzard. They were also told not to build an *iglu* under an *aluiqqaniq*, snow overhang. I have been told not to camp under an *aluiqqaniq* because it could collapse and bury the *iglu*. Then it becomes very difficult to breathe. My father too was buried in his *iglu* and it is very difficult to breathe. The air hole gets covered and you can't breathe. In the song, the word *maliktarigaluaqpit* refers to keeping the air hole free of snow by removing the snow. In the song because she had difficulty removing the snow from the air hole she had difficulty breathing. That's the meaning of the song. (Imaruittuq 204-205)

This story – a cautionary tale, perhaps – is conveyed in only four lines in the song: “. . . removing incoming snow / Are you removing incoming snow from this that is becoming snow covered[?] / I remember / I remember my difficulty in breathing” (§4-5). In many ways, this crisis functions like the sighting of the caribou in “Cold and Mosquitoes”; it is “something to sing of” – the subject of the song (*Iglulik* 18). But here, instead of the central theme of song-making being partnered with the search for game, the process of composition is expressed in tandem with the work of digging out a buried snow house. This potentially dangerous scenario adds a new dimension to the opening words: “let me sing slowly,” the speaker begins – sluggish, perhaps, in the heavy air. The search for a song – and the concern about not having acquired one – suddenly becomes a far more urgent occupation. As the Netsilingmiut shaman Orpingalik famously told Rasmussen, “. . . I call this song [‘My Breath’], for it is just as necessary for me to sing it as it is to breathe” (*Netsilik* 321).²⁶¹

Again, for the students hearing the song at Nunavut Arctic College, this context may not be apparent; the reference to “removing incoming snow” may be – as it is for

²⁶¹ This statement may have led Edmund Carpenter to declare that “[i]n Eskimo the word to make poetry is the word to breathe; both are derivatives of *anerca*, the soul, that which is eternal: the breath of life” (*Anerca* n.pag.). I have found no other evidence of this usage.

most southern readers – mysterious. The singers consulted in the pages of both the *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition* and of the *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series suggest, however, that such confusion is not necessarily out of place. Imaruittuq explains that there are three kinds of traditional songs:

- [1] *pisiit*, or *qilaujjarusiit*, which are *pisiit* sung with a drum . . .
- [2] *iviutiit*, which were songs used to embarrass people, to make fun of them, to make fun of their weaknesses. They created songs to make fun of others.
- [3] There are also *sakausiit*, songs used by *angakkuit* [shamans].
(Imaruittuq 202)

Rasmussen noted these categories as well, although he divided *pisiit* into two categories: songs of sentiment (or mood), and hunting songs (*Netsilik* 323).²⁶² *Iviutiit* he called “songs of derision”; these are the verses used in song-duels between rivals, or less antagonistic “song cousins” (*Iglulik* 231; Lowenstein 107). At one point, Imaruittuq sings the students an *iviusiq*, and one of them asks: “[w]hat does the song mean? I didn’t understand it at all” (Imaruittuq 208). “Probably because you were not meant to understand it,” Imaruittuq says: “[t]hat’s the way these songs were, these *iviutiit*” (208). In this case, the song might include a series of riddles that would obscure the insult – or heighten it, perhaps, as the audience guessed its meaning.

In Imaruittuq’s song, this tension between obfuscation and clarification plays out in each of the song’s seven sections (each section is framed by the *ajaja* chorus, and repeats the same tune). The first lines of these sections each present a kind of riddle, or half-completed thought, which the second line then answers, or completes. “Let me sing slowly,” begins the singer. The second line repeats this phrase, and then adds to its

²⁶² He notes in *Snehyttens Sange*, however, that hunting songs “are difficult to separate from the songs of mood as so many of the songs touch on game, and the joys and disappointments of the hunter” (qtd. in Lowenstein 107).

meaning: “Let me sing slowly and search for a song” (§1). The slowness of the singing here is explained by the action of the search; the singer is slowly feeling his way towards a song. “I have not acquired a song,” he then sings – again, oddly, as he is now repeating the melody that he began with, thereby suggesting that he has indeed found a *pisiq*. His next line hints at an answer, but only barely: “I have not acquired a song because they finished them on us” (§2). In this way, the riddle of each section is never quite solved, as the answers set up further confusion, and carry the listeners along to the next question.

By the third section, we seem to be moving towards a kind of revelation; the mysterious phrase “*nunguusimavatigut*,” “they have finished them on us,” is clarified by a subject – “*sivulitta*,” “our ancestors,” or the ones who went first – and by an object – “*pisiksamik*,” the ‘material for a song’ (here qualified by the direct object marker *-mik*) (§3).²⁶³ Something that is *nungusimajuq* can also be translated as “what is used up and remains so” (Schneider 224); the ancestors, in other words, have used up all the songs. Here, the singer seems to be revealing a central problem or cause for his sung reflections: he apparently is suffering from the anxiety of influence, as he laments the difficulty of creating an original piece. But just as we reach this crucial and revealing line, the song takes an unexpected turn, and a new riddle is introduced: “removing incoming snow / Are you removing incoming snow from this that is becoming snow covered[?]” (§4). In light of the opening verses of the song, this imagery is compelling; figuratively, the singer is being suffocated, or snowed under, by the immense canon of the ancestors’ songs.

Indeed, the reference to the snow-house is flanked by the repeated verse

²⁶³ As may be apparent, the phrase “*nunguusimavatigut*” uses a construction that is difficult to translate (and to understand). I will try to parse it here. *Nuunguu-* is to finish, use up, or wear out; *sima* is the present perfect tense, and describes a completed action. The ending *-vatigut* indicates that the action is being performed by a third-person plural subject (‘they’) and is directed towards a first-person plural (indirect) object (‘us,’ or ‘for us’) (Harper, *Grammar* 33).

“*nunguusimavatigut*” (“they have finished them on us”) (§3, 6). Sweeping conclusions about the oppressive nature of tradition are likely inappropriate here; rather, we might understand that the singer – in accordance with conventions of modesty – is humbling himself before the task of trying to add to the great wealth of song.

For Maniq (the relative to whom Imaruittuq attributes the song), the solution to the problem of originality seems to have been to borrow a song; once again, this is an *ikiaktaq* – a song that has been adapted (Imaruittuq 203). As Imaruittuq explains it, “[i]n this song, she said she was searching and searching for a song. She finally found a song which she made changes to. Because she wanted to make changes to the song, she asked the person who owned the song. He agreed. When she started to sing it, it had no title, for our ancestors had used up all the titles” (204). This last problem – the lack of a title – is only made apparent at the end of the song. “*Nungugiaqsinnarivug*” (“it is about to come to an end”) echoes the previous uses of the verb *nungu-*, to finish, or use up. Here, the song is about to be used up because, the singer explains, “*tainiksaqanngimmata*” – literally, “because they do not have a subject” (§7).²⁶⁴ The need for *pisiksaq*, the material for the song, here becomes a lack of *tainiksaq*, the material for naming – a subject, or title.²⁶⁵ Here, the singer again is humbly (and paradoxically) dismissive of the song; having failed to gain a title – and therefore, perhaps, a sense of wholeness or completion – the song has to come to an end. Like Imaruittuq’s explanation, the last stanza picks up on the themes of the song, but leaves the audience with an appropriate

²⁶⁴ The use of the plural, here, is curious; it seems to indicate that the grammatical subject has changed since the previous line, which was the (singular) song.

²⁶⁵ Imaruittuq says that “*Tainiq* means the title of a song” (219). Schneider translates it as “the fact of naming oneself” (387). Peter Irniq clarifies, saying that *tainiq* is, a “‘subject’ to sing about” (personal correspondence). In other words, it is the organizing principle of a song. Imaruittuq’s own *ikiaktaq* (adapted song) contains similar references to titling; the lyrics can be found in Appendix C (II).

sense of mystery. There is a certain amount of trickery going on here; despite the singer's claims that the song has not been found, and that it is incomplete, or that all the good ones have been used up, this song itself has gained a kind of canonicity, as Imaruittuq liked it enough to borrow it from Maniq, who in turn had borrowed a part of it from someone else.

The search for a song, like the lament for a title, are conventions; they come up again in Imaruittuq's own *ikiaqtagaq*, which he sings later on in the interview.²⁶⁶ In other words, the song's sense of uncertainty, or of striving, is ironically something that the audience can find security in. As the elders point out, it is not always expected that the song will make perfect sense, or will reveal all of its mysteries. As Rasmussen learned from the Innuinaq (Copper) shaman Heq, "there are some songs that 'ordinary people do not have to understand. The wisdom in them is often concealed . . .'" (Lowenstein xxi). The ones that conceal their wisdom most often tend to belong to the final category of songs – the *sakausiit*, which Rasmussen called "magic words," or charms (Imaruittuq 202; *Iglulik* 157-168, *Netsilik* 278-293). As Rasmussen says, these "are not poems or songs in the same sense as the others" (qtd. in Lowenstein 108). Instead, as he explains in *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*: "[m]agic words, magic songs or magic prayers are *fragments of old songs*, handed down from earlier generations. They can be bought, at a high price, or communicated as a legacy by one who is dying; but no other person save the one who is to use them may hear them, otherwise they would lose their force" (157, emphasis added). These kinds of songs are often present in the *unikkaaqtuat* (the old stories), even though, as Rasmussen points out, the words themselves are often omitted (*Iglulik* 157). Rasmussen, however, was able to barter for many of them, and

²⁶⁶ See Appendix C (II).

learned that “[i]t is the usual thing that ordinary speech is not employed, but the special language of the shamans.²⁶⁷ Sometimes they make use of ancient words that have fallen into disuse in daily parlance, or vague and incomprehensible phrases, all intended to increase the effect and mysteriousness” (*Netsilik* 278). Rasmussen made lists of this vocabulary, which is characterized by its use of epithet, as in the term “mamaicɔq,” “the ill-tasting one,” to refer to the sea, or “hilauA-rtɔq” – “the one who has no breath,” meaning a corpse (*Copper* 110, 112).

Rasmussen came to believe that the Inuit song tradition grew out of this poetic, or magical, vocabulary. The word for the drum, he points out, is *qilaut*, which

means literally ‘that by means of which the spirits are called up’.²⁶⁸ This term for the drum, which with its mysterious rumbling dominates the general tone of the songs is doubtless a reminiscence of the time when all song was sacred. For the old ones believe that song came to man from the souls in the Land of the Dead, brought thence by a shaman; spirit songs are therefore the beginning of all song. (qtd. in Lowenstein 120-121)

The obscurity or opacity of the songs, then, has its origins in a sacred aesthetic. The things that the singers do not explicitly say, but rather allude to, are the things that are conjured in the minds of the listeners, as they work to solve the riddles. In the same way, the absence of a seal in a term like *qajuaq* – “the one who gives soup” – is also its presence; the hunters call the animals by opening up a discourse in which they are not there (*Copper* 109). Likewise, in the Imaruittuq’s performance, it is the stated lack of a song – *pisiksaqningiliqpunga* – that causes the song to emerge (§2).

²⁶⁷ In *Intellectual Culture of the Copper Eskimos*, Rasmussen notes that this special vocabulary was “also used by *agLertut* – women observing taboo after a birth, miscarriage or menstruation, or death” (108).

²⁶⁸ As he explains it, *qilaut* is “a term possibly related to the *qilavɔq* previously mentioned: the art of getting into touch with spirits apart from the ordinary invocation” (qtd. in Lowenstein 120).

Editors, Ethnographers, and the Aesthetic of the Fragment

In Innuinait (Copper Eskimo) territory, Rasmussen attended a song-festival with a man named Netsit, who told him about the *inERLrait pihe* – the “songs of the departed ones” (*Copper* 162). “These songs are particularly popular,” Rasmussen learned; “Sometimes they recall the name of the man who first sang it, but everything else about him has been forgotten beyond the fact that ‘he once lived in our land’; only his song is remembered and sung in the dance-house” (162). As Rasmussen learned from the Arviligjuarmiut (Netsilik) shaman Orpingalik, magic songs are “fragments that are supposed to have their strength in their mysteriousness or in the very manner in which the words are coupled together” (*Netsilik* 13). Like magic words, the songs of the departed ones are fragments, and their mysterious origins add to their appeal.²⁶⁹ As in Imaruittuq’s song, this is the aesthetic of omission – it is what is not said, or what must be filled in by the audience, that endows the words with a literary quality.

If this mystery was part of what drew local audiences to the *pisiit*, their broader appeal was only enhanced when they passed through another layer of existence, and appeared on the printed page. Indeed, the songs that Rasmussen recorded from Ivaluardjuk, Avva, Orpingalik, Netsit and others have been reprinted not only in the previously mentioned anthologies by Robin Gedalof (McGrath), Tom Lowenstein, and Penny Petrone, but in collections such as Edmund Carpenter’s *Anerca* (1959), Jerome Rothenberg’s *Technicians of the Sacred* (1968) and *Shaking the Pumpkin: Traditional Poetry of the Indian North Americas* (1991), Richard Lewis’ *I Breathe a New Song*:

²⁶⁹ As Barfield writes: “almost any kind of ‘strangeness’ may produce an aesthetic effect, that is to say, an effect which, however slight, is qualitatively the same as that of serious poetry. On examination, the sole condition is found to be this, that the strangeness shall have an *interior* significance; it must be felt as arising from a different plane or mode of consciousness, and not merely as eccentricity of expression. It must be a strangeness of *meaning*” (170-171).

Poems of the Eskimo (1971), James Houston's *Songs of the Dream People: Chants and Images from the Indians and Eskimos of North America* (1972), Charles Hoffman's *Drum Dance: Legends, Ceremonies, Dances and Songs of the Eskimos* (1974), Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie's *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English* (1991) and Neil Philip's *Songs Are Thoughts: Poems of the Inuit* (1995). These collections vary widely in scope and quality. While there are some editors, like Lowenstein, who take care to include as much of the context of the song as possible, many others erase the individual authorship of the singers. Edmund Carpenter attempts to justify this by saying that "[s]ome [songs] were created spontaneously. . . . Others are age-old and belong to all. In neither do poets take care to be remembered as individuals, but simply disappear, as it were, behind their works; the poems, therefore, have been assigned to neither singers nor makers" (*Anerca* n. pag.).²⁷⁰ As is demonstrated in the case of the *inERLrait pihe* – the "songs of the departed ones" – a song whose origins have long been forgotten is somehow more sublime (*Copper* 162). The names of Inuit singers, therefore, have a tendency to disappear.

In the process of acknowledging the artistry of Inuit song-traditions, many editors have gotten carried away with the inherent adaptability and ambiguity of Inuit songs. In 1973, for example, the American poet Edward Field published a book entitled *Eskimo Stories and Songs: Collected by Knud Rasmussen on the Fifth Thule Expedition*. In the late 1960s, Field had been commissioned to write "a children's book of translations of

²⁷⁰ In a related gesture to the perceived vastness and homogeneity of the Arctic, editors and publishers have also had a tendency to print tiny rectangles of text on enormous white pages, possibly with a few igloos or bears drawn in the corner (see Colombo and Carpenter). One can almost hear the howling Arctic winds.

Eskimo poetry” for an elementary school social science curriculum (Johnson).²⁷¹ Field drew his material from Volume VIII of the *Report of Fifth Thule Expedition (The Netsilik Eskimos: Social Life and Spiritual Culture)*, with ‘translations’ “[r]etold from the literal English renderings” by Calvert and Worster (Field iv). Predictably, the names of the individual singers are not included; rather, the source material is attributed to Rasmussen, who got it from “the Netsilik Eskimos, a remote tribe who live along the coast above the Arctic Circle” (Field xi). The volume is beautifully illustrated with prints by the Cape Dorset (Kinngait) artists Kiakshuk and Pudlo, who (unlike the singers) are credited for their work.²⁷² Field himself has mastered the genre of the ‘Eskimo poem’ – a style which, you will recall, is predominantly southern – and his work is compelling in its vividness and simplicity. In his lively rendition of “Magic Words for Hunting Caribou,” he writes

You, you, caribou
 yes you
 long legs
 yes you
 long ears
 you with the long neck hair—
 From far off you’re little as a louse:
 Be my swan, fly to me, long horns waving
 big bull
 cari-bou-bou-bou.(59)²⁷³

Field’s homage to the hunting charm-song contains traces of the original genre, with its use of epithets to refer to the game. But here, we see perhaps the reason why Field was unable (or unwilling) to credit these songs to their original authors: this poem is a

²⁷¹ Many books of Inuit stories and songs are marketed at children. Richard Dauenhauer and Nora Marks Dauenhauer have commented on “the reluctance of the educational establishment to accept contemporary oral literature as serious, adult literature” (24).

²⁷² This disparity may speak to the southern recognition of Inuit as sculptors and printmakers, but seldom as writers and storytellers. Both artists were members of the West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative. Kiakshuk was born in Nunavik in 1886, and died in Cape Dorset in 1966. Pudlo Pudlat was born in 1916 near Kimmirut, and died in 1992 in Cape Dorset.

²⁷³ The full version, along with the originals by Orpingalik, Inūtuk and Nakasuk, is given in Appendix D.

combination of at least three magic songs that Rasmussen collected from the shamans Orpingalik, Inūtuk and Nakasuk, and which were later published in *The Netsilik*

Eskimos.²⁷⁴ As Orpingalik sings,

kumaruaq niutōq
You, louse-like, you, long legs

siuktōq tiṅajoḱ
You, long ears, you with the long neck hair,

ataunaṅaṭ
Run not past below me. . . . (*Netsilik* 279)²⁷⁵

Clearly, Field has used quite a bit of poetic license in his renditions. His ‘right’ to do this could be a subject of much debate, particularly as the originals are magic words – sacred songs that did not circulate freely (*Netsilik* 278). The current subject of discussion, however, is the way in which the stories and songs which inspired Field’s poems have themselves been decontextualized, and later reframed as authentic representations of Inuit literary tradition. Field’s work, after all, has become quite popular, and *Eskimo Songs and Stories* has become a source text for several other artists. Jerome Rothenberg’s *Shaking the Pumpkin*, for example, used Field’s versions of the songs to represent Eskimo poetry (Rothenberg 41-44).²⁷⁶ And in 1989, the composer Raymond Luedeke created a symphony for narrator and orchestra entitled *Tales of the Netsilik*, which also made use of Field’s text.²⁷⁷ At the beginning of the 2008 performance at Toronto’s Roy Thomson

²⁷⁴ See Appendix D for the full versions.

²⁷⁵ Even Rasmussen’s translation is not word-for-word; he has added much of what is implied – in particular the vocative tone of the verses: “You, louse-like,” he says, instead of the more literal translation of kumaruaq: “big louse” (from kumak, ‘louse’ and –ruaq ‘largeness’). Schneider translates kumaruaq as “tiny insect (paper spider, or any tiny insect)” (151).

²⁷⁶ To Rothenberg’s credit, he also consults Rasmussen’s *Netsilik Eskimos*, and re-inserts the names of the original singers where possible.

²⁷⁷ Although the program notes simply attribute the stories to Rasmussen, the sections titles – “Earth and the People, Magic Words, Day and Night: How They Came To Be, The Things in the Sky, Sun, and Moon, Thunder and Lightning, How We Know About Animals, Hunter, Heaven and Hell” – are a clear

Hall, the audience members were asked to imagine themselves in the Arctic, in an igloo – in the wild and dark world of the Netsiliks at the time when Rasmussen visited.²⁷⁸

Clearly, it is not the 1920s which are being evoked; rather, it is a kind of exotic, ahistorical space, into which Rasmussen has been fortunate enough to stumble. Yet despite the attempt to conjure a sense of authentic Eskimo-ness, Field's texts, and Luedeke's adaptations, are only faint echoes of the original performances.

In performing their songs for Rasmussen, singers like Ivaluardjuk and Orpingalik must have known that there was a chance their *pisiit* (songs) would become *ikiaqtagait* (adapted songs). The transformations that they have undergone in English-language print, however, are likely beyond any forms that the singers imagined. For example, while riding home one day on the Toronto subway, I was amazed to see the following poem up on display between the ads for debt-counselling and cellular phones:

And I think over again
My small adventures
When with a shore wind I drifted out
In my kayak
And thought I was in danger.

My fears,
Those small ones
That I thought so big,
For all the vital things
I had to get and to reach.

And yet, there is only
One great thing,
The only thing:
To live to see in huts and on journeys
The great day that dawns,

indicator that Field's *Eskimo Songs and Stories* was the source text. Perhaps appropriately, Field's own authorship has here been obscured. My sincere thanks to Linda Hutcheon for drawing my attention to this performance.

²⁷⁸ I am paraphrasing.

And the little light that fills the world.²⁷⁹

This piece appeared as a part of the Poetry on the Way program, a Canada Council for the Arts initiative which brought (mostly Canadian) verse to the city's transit system (Hall). This particular song was drawn from John Robert Colombo's 1989 *Songs of the Great Land*, an anthology of poems based on various Indigenous North American oral traditions.²⁸⁰ In the collection, the poem is simply signed "Mackenzie Eskimo" (98), but Colombo's notes – and the reference on the subway – attribute the song to Rasmussen's *Intellectual Culture of the Copper Eskimos: Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition, 1921-24*.²⁸¹ Uncharacteristically, Rasmussen does not credit the singer, or provide any details of the performance; rather, he recalls the song in the pages of his journal as "a little Eskimo song from Kent" – an appropriate one to have in mind that day (January 16, 1924), as his team left Kent Peninsula²⁸² in "[c]old, drifting snow and 42°C. below zero right in our teeth" (8). The poem evokes a hunter who has been blown off course; the sudden danger, and the distance from the shore, provide him with a shift in perspective, and he humbly expresses his hope to see another dawn. Rasmussen himself, "wind-buffed and pretty well exhausted," may have identified with the singer's implied longing for home, and also with his concurrent desire to journey further. That unnamed hunter clearly made it home to tell the tale, but his song was caught by the wind, and as it was carried from Rasmussen's journals to the *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition* to Colombo's anthology to a poster on the TTC, it lost the memory of the singer.

²⁷⁹ Reproduced with the permission of Oberon Press.

²⁸⁰ Thanks to Charis Wahl and Denis Deneau of the Poetry on the Way program for identifying the poem.

²⁸¹ The 'original' can be found (with minor variations from Colombo's version) in *Intellectual Culture of the Copper Eskimos* (53), or in *The Mackenzie Eskimos: After Knud Rasmussen's Posthumous Notes* (8); Colombo conflates these two references.

²⁸² Kent Peninsula is located in Western Nunavut, on the mainland just southwest of Cambridge Bay (Iqaluktuuttiaq).

Sophie McCall, in a 2004 article on the significance of songs in *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*, discusses the ways in which popular anthologies of Inuit poetry have simultaneously “constructed the songs as imagist poems and isolated them from their original contexts” (McCall 21). In other words, although the collections by Mary-Rousselière, Colombo, Lewis, and Carpenter may acknowledge the poetry of Inuit song-traditions, they simultaneously function to sustain popular (and stereotypical) understandings of the Arctic. Edward Field, for example, introduces his work by reminding the reader that Inuit “live in one of the bleakest and most forbidding parts of the world, where winter lasts for ten months, where the temperature drops to 50 degrees below zero, where there are no trees, where the ocean freezes solid for seven months” (xii).²⁸³ When people are perceived as being thus constantly locked in a struggle for survival, the significance of poetry – in all its frivolity and power – is even more extraordinary. As Edmund Carpenter puts it: “[t]he mystery is . . . that within this prison of ice and wind they are able to draw from themselves images powerful enough to deny their nothingness” (*Anerca* n. pag.). The ‘Eskimo poet’ here becomes a kind of existential icon – the human being crying out his “Song of Myself,” in the face of impending annihilation. This is no doubt appealing to those who rage against the futility of existence in their living rooms, or in their cubicles, or in the tunnels of the Toronto subway.

McCall quotes Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: “The artfulness of the ethnographic object,” she says, “is an art of excision, of detachment, an art of the

²⁸³ This popular sense of the ‘harshness’ of the Arctic environment is almost ubiquitous in southern descriptions. As Marshall Sahlins writes: “Having equipped the hunter with bourgeois impulses and paleolithic tools, we judge his situation hopeless in advance” (4). These characterizations differ markedly from Inuit conceptions of their environment and lifestyle, which, though realistic about the challenges of cold temperatures and occasional food shortages, often emphasize the beauty and bounty of the land. Inuit writers or lecturers do occasionally invoke the discourse of Arctic ‘harshness,’ usually to emphasize the ingenuity of Inuit traditional knowledge.

excerpt” (qtd. in McCall 20). While the decontextualization of the songs may thus enhance their poetry,

[t]he presentation of the songs as isolated fragments ignores the storytelling interactions and the social contexts of the exchanges. It also ignores how the songs may be embedded in complex narrative frames in which the storytellers say where, when, and from whom they first heard the story, the reasons for retelling it, and what the formative role of the listener is. (McCall 21)

This absence of background in the print versions of songs not only increases the difficulty of interpretation, but it creates a political problem as well: “the aesthetics of the ethnographic fragment,” McCall says, “ideologically reinforce the trope of ‘vanishing primitive cultures’” (21). Removed from their precise political and cultural contexts, the songs are recast as “the roots of a genuinely ‘Canadian’ literary tradition” and so become part of a nationalist project to harness the ideological power of the sublime Canadian North (McCall 24-25). Here, the fragmentation (or decontextualization) of Inuit songs simultaneously transforms them into art and artifact; they are admired for their aesthetic value, and then quickly placed under glass, or onto bookshelves.

McCall’s critique is based on the exposed similarity between the work of mid-to-late twentieth-century anthologizers and the practices of earlier ethnographers. Indeed, one of the other major print sources for traditional Inuit song was compiled by the renowned New Zealand-born anthropologist Diamond Jenness. Jenness was a member of Vilhjalmur Stefansson’s Canadian Arctic Expedition (1913-18), which visited the Western Arctic almost ten years before the Fifth Thule Expedition. While Stefansson went north to the Beaufort sea, Jenness went to work in the region of Bernard Harbour,²⁸⁴ where he recorded a great number of local songs on wax cylinders. The resulting book,

²⁸⁴ Bernard Harbour is located in western Nunavut, just north of Kugluktuk, on the mainland side of Dolphin and Union Strait.

Songs of the Copper Eskimo (1925) – which was co-authored with the musicologist Helen H. Roberts – is a remarkable collection of music and text. It is also a perfect example of what McCall calls the “radical decontextualization” of Inuit songs (25); although the Inuinnaqtun texts are painstakingly transcribed, and appear with their musical notation and an attempt at a literal translation into English, Jenness provides almost no background information about the singers or their performances.

Indeed, from what Jenness does tell us, the context and performance of the songs seems to be something that he recalls with some distaste. Much of his discussion carries an undertone of frustration at the challenging conditions in which he was working. Because the cool temperature inside the snow-houses caused the wax cylinders to harden, he had to record local songs inside the expedition’s station house (Jenness and Roberts 7). Although this allowed him to create a more controlled environment for the scientific work that he was undertaking, the performers themselves seemed unwilling to adopt the appropriately somber demeanour. Rather, he reports that they “were inclined to play pranks, ejaculating, laughing or talking in the middle of a song to create more amusement when the record was played over. The texts of the songs are full of this extraneous matter” (7). The songs, he seems to be suggesting, were *tainted* by the presence of the singers. Jenness acknowledges that laughter, talking and joking were also present in the performances in the dance-houses, but on the whole, he seems to be concerned that the task is not being taken seriously.

This situation was exacerbated, no doubt, by Jenness’ own inability to communicate with the local people, and by the difficulty in finding a translator who could relieve him of this problem. The work of transcription and translation, he says, “was long

and tedious, and very few of the natives showed the necessary aptitude and patience” (7). He names his interpreters only as “a Mackenzie river Eskimo” and “an Alaskan half-breed”; neither was local, and neither spoke English fluently, and as a result Jenness was skeptical of the accuracy of their translations. The originals that he sought to document, furthermore, were troublesome in themselves; he notes that they were *constantly being modified* as they passed from person to person, and that they would occasionally be blended with parts of other songs (12). He and Roberts also struggled to grasp the distinction between the two categories of songs that were performed (*pisik* and *aton*), and note that at times, the “Copper Eskimo assistants . . . themselves did not know how to classify certain songs” (9). In other words, Jenness had gone to the Arctic to document “the real wealth of song,” but found that these living traditions did not easily become artifact; the songs turned out to be slippery creatures, constantly shifting and changing. Rather than being solemnly and faithfully recited, they were sung with laughter and variation, and with meanings and classifications that eluded the social scientist. “For all these reasons,” Jenness writes,

it is only to be expected that a large proportion of the dance-songs are virtually unintelligible. All the individual words—except, of course, the burden syllables—may be capable of translation, yet taken together they will yield no meaning. . . . There are cases probably where the obscurity lies in the translation rather than in the original, owing to my imperfect knowledge of the language and the inadequacy of my interpreters; but *in the majority of instances the songs themselves are at fault* . . . (13, emphasis added).

For Jenness, then, the songs of the ‘Copper Eskimos’ hardly constitute a sophisticated poetic tradition; rather, he seems to understand them merely as tools for recreation, largely devoid of any meaning in themselves.

Yet despite Jenness' curmudgeonly tone, and his failure to recognize the unique artistry of the song-traditions, his collection – *Songs of the Copper Eskimo* – has its own merits. Once the introductions are past, the text is mainly a straightforward inventory of the songs themselves. In Helen Roberts' section ("Music of Songs"), readers can find the songs written in musical notation, with laughter, refrains, and spoken words all precisely noted. Thus presented, the songs gain a kind of formal security that would no doubt please any scholar of ethnopoeitics. Jenness' section ("Texts and Translations") follows after, and attempts to give a precise verse by verse translation. Again, however, the resulting texts are – save for the names of their singers – totally removed from context, and as a result can be quite difficult to understand. But as Lowenstein notes, "many of the literal versions Jenness made are very beautiful, and the fragments, too, should not be 'found at fault'" (x-xi).

Song No. 29, for example, a "Dance Song (pisik), sung by *Kän'uva*, a Coppermine river boy" begins as follows:

It is pleasant
The game, there is no song about it.
Words [for a song] being far away [hard to find]—
Seals on the ice down here—
When I obtained a few [words] I attached them [to the music]—
To their breathing holes they departed. (Jenness and Roberts 439)²⁸⁵

Here, as in Ivaluardjuk's song, the action of song-making and the action of hunting go hand in hand. The lyrics are somewhat ambiguous – no doubt purposefully so – as they simultaneously evoke the pursuit of the game, and of the words to describe it.²⁸⁶ The

²⁸⁵ The Inuinnaqtun original and full translations are included, along with the musical notation, as Appendix E.

²⁸⁶ This device makes for wonderful poetry, and it also may have a practical purpose. In the second volume of the *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series, Imaruittuq (Iglulik) and Nutaraaluk (Kinngait/Iqaluit) have the following exchange:

singer initially notes the absence of these words, but then, notably, “obtain[s] a few” immediately after catching sight of the seals on the ice – “*uqculyyuit·i tcikumi camani yai ya*” (439).²⁸⁷ The subject is especially unclear in the last two lines: “When I obtained a few . . . I attached them . . . / To their breathing holes they departed” (439). Jenness appears to have tried to resolve the confusion somewhat by the addition of a few extra words, but he prudently keeps his suggestions in parentheses. The inspecificity, in fact, is wonderfully appropriate at the moment when the singer/hunter is struggling to get hold of his own object – the seals, who are escaping toward the *agluit* (breathing holes).

Jenness, as Lowenstein points out, “presents the song as anthropological data rather than as poetry” (x). Ironically, however, Jenness’ text bears a marked resemblance to the collections of Inuit poems that appeared more than half a century later. Relieved (or deprived) of the complications of context, Jenness’ readers gain the impression that they are handling *raw material*, or some kind of untempered literary iron-ore; this is no doubt the same sensation that the ethnocritics of the 1960s would come to savour

Imaruittuq: I used to sing to basking seals while I was approaching them. Some of the seals seemed to dance.

Nutaraaluk to Imaruittuq: You could really get close to the seals by singing to them.

Imaruittuq to Nutaraaluk: Sometimes the seal flippers seemed to flip back and forth as if they were dancing.

Nutaraaluk to Imaruittuq: If that’s the case, then they really like music. When someone was playing an accordeon in a boat, they would come close. Animals like the sound of music.

Imaruittuq to Nutaraaluk: When you are at the floe edge, you can play your harmonica and seals will come right up to you.

Nutaraaluk: Once, I was spending time in a camp on an island and I got very close to a seal. I didn’t even bother using my seal blind. When you chant to a bearded seal, especially when you are in a *qajaq*, they can really come up to you. My father would say, “*Avaa, avaa,*” before he shot a bearded seal. When we were in the boat we said, “*Avaa, avaa,*” to young bearded seals. We got so close we harpooned three of them. (Imaruittuq 214-15)

²⁸⁷ “Seals on the ice here.” This is not a dialect (or orthography) that I am very familiar with, but it appears to me that the singer is using an epithet for seals, involving the word “*uqsu*” – blubber, or oil.

(McCall 24). It seems that the ethnographic artifact, as Kirschenblatt-Gimblett suggests, is not so different in form from the art-piece (qtd. in McCall 20).

Knud Rasmussen, on the other hand, was deeply committed to preserving a sense of the artistry in the performance of the songs. Unlike Jenness, he spoke the language fluently, attended *qaggiit*, and often wrote down the songs after the performance – perhaps to avoid spoiling the listening. Rather than simply publishing a catalogue of texts, he weaves the songs into his narrative, providing pages and pages of detail about their singers, their performances, and the events which inspired them. But even this, he notes, does not seem to solve the problem of translation from performance to page. “There are many songs,” he says, “which presuppose a thorough acquaintance with the events described or referred to, and would thus be untranslatable without commentaries that would altogether spoil the effect” (*Iglulik* 235). In the end, despite his understanding of the importance of context, he finds it impossible to adequately convey the magic of a song performed in the *qaggiq*. As he writes in *Snehyttens Sange*:

...when I remember the inexplicable way in which words, music and dance mingled into one great wave of feeling that lifted us up and for a moment made us forget everything else, I can understand more clearly than ever, how difficult it is to take the songs of the Eskimos out of their own context. For the words of the songs are only part of the whole intended effect. Read an opera libretto without music, staging and performers, and you have a comparison. . . . Whatever I did, I finally lacked all the things that gave the songs life in their country of origin. How could I recreate the sound of the drum—whether resonantly festive, noisy and defiant or softly lamenting—let alone the choruses which would rise and continue rising until the ecstasy suddenly beat them down into the hushed hissing of the spirit songs—those choruses which are to the song as breath which runs back and forth in the human throat? (qtd. in Lowenstein 107, 109)

In order to convey the effect or spirit of the songs to audiences back in Europe, Rasmussen ultimately has to adapt the ‘poetry’ that he records. At times, his very

presence meant that the song was modified, as when Avva – singing one of his hunting songs – inserts a few explanatory passages for the benefit of his visitors (*Iglulik* 236).²⁸⁸ At other times, Rasmussen would ask the singers to fill in the blanks afterwards – to tell the story of the original event, which the rest of the community already knew.²⁸⁹ In *Intellectual Culture of the Copper Eskimos*, he simply acknowledges that he is giving a “freer translation” in an attempt to convey the “wonderful poetry” of the songs sung to him by Netsit of the Inuinnait,²⁹⁰ and he advises the reader that the literal translations will be available in another chapter.²⁹¹ Again, Rasmussen’s precise meaning in the use of the term ‘poetry’ is not glossed, but evokes rather a sense of artistry, or of aesthetic achievement. In many ways, however, he seems to be echoing the words of Imaruittuq: “I have not acquired [the material for] a song because they have finished them on us” (Imaruittuq 203).

Ultimately, readers – like Rasmussen – may have to give up on the possibility of accessing the original songs, or of fully grasping the significance of their original performance. There may be some consolation, however, in the knowledge that adaptation and change are very much a part of Inuit song-tradition, and that while the pages of the *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition* can only ever provide us with a second- or third-hand understanding of the *pisiit* of Ivaluardjuk, Avva, Orpingalik, and Netsit, they do contain a remarkable collection of Rasmussen’s own *ikiaqtagait*. As Robin McGrath

²⁸⁸ “This hunting song can, however, be directly translated without comment beyond the two parenthetical passages inserted by Aua out of consideration for ‘the white men’. The first of these passages merely indicates that the object of the chase was a walrus, which, he states, need not have been explained to his fellow-countrymen, as it would be apparent from the song itself” (*Iglulik* 236).

²⁸⁹ See *Iglulik*, when Rasmussen asks Aua for the story behind the “Bear song” (238), or when he begs for a fuller version of “Caribou hunting” (239).

²⁹⁰ More specifically, of the Umingmaktuurmiut, the ‘Musk-Ox People’ of Western Nunavut.

²⁹¹ These ‘originals’ are usually (but not always) included. Ivaluardjuk’s “Cold and Mosquitoes” is one exception.

points out, “Rasmussen was not just an accomplished linguist, theologian and ethnographer, but was also an Inuit poet himself” (“Reassessing” 20).

In *Snehyttens Sange*, Rasmussen tells a story about an old man named Satdlagé, who – the story goes – never opened his mouth at a song-festival. Finally, someone asked him why he never would contribute a song, when everyone else in the *qaggiq* was singing. Satdlagé told them the following tale:

Once, when I was a young man, I wanted to compose a song about my village, and for a whole winter evening, I walked up and down in the moonlight, trying to fit words together which would go with a tune I was humming. I did find the words: excellent words which would convey to my friends the beauty of the mountains, and every delightful thing I saw when I went outside and opened my eyes. Pacing up and down on the frozen snow, I became so preoccupied with my thoughts that I quite forgot where I was. Suddenly I stop and lift my head. And look! In front of me, the mountain near our village rises higher and steeper than I have ever seen it. It was almost as if it was very slowly growing out of the earth and coming to lean over me: dangerous and threatening. It was then that I heard a voice coming from the air: ‘Little man!’ it cried. ‘The echo of your words has reached me! Do you really think I can be contained in your song?’ I was so frightened that I almost fell over backwards, and in the same moment, all the words I had put together in my song fled from my mind, and I ran home as fast as I could and hid in my hut. Even since then I have never attempted to put words together. I had become afraid. (qtd. in Lowenstein 101)

Satdlagé describes a fear known well to both the folklorist and the literary critic. How does one contain a thing of such great beauty? Is it foolish even to try? Rasmussen knows that he cannot preserve the experience of the *qaggiq* for the readers back in Europe, and he is aware that his own presence is changing the songs. But thankfully, he did not choose to remain silent. Rather, like Imarittuq, he acknowledges the history of the song, and the fact that it has been adapted, and then he sings it anyways.

Isuma, or the Day When the Mountain Speaks Back

In *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, Rasmussen writes:

...now that I have to describe, as far as I can, the performance as a whole, I can only say that the general feeling, the emotional atmosphere in a qag'e among men and women enlivened by song is something that cannot be conveyed save by actual experience. Some slight idea of it may perhaps be given some day, when the 'talking film' has attained a higher degree of technical perfection – if it gets there in time. . . . (*Iglulik* 230)

These words are strangely prophetic, as they seem to anticipate the event that has taken the Inuit literary scene by storm: the rise of the video storytelling of Igloodik Isuma Productions. Isuma, a film production company founded by Zacharias Kunuk, Paul Apak Angilirq, and Pauloosie Qulitalik of Igloodik with the New York-born video artist Norman Cohn, was founded in 1985, and began by producing short dramatized films like *Qaggiq (Gathering Place)* (1988), which recreated community life from the time before Inuit moved into permanent settlements. In 2001, Isuma released its first feature film, *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*, which won the Camera d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. The second feature film, *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, appeared in 2006, and brings this story full circle.

The Journals of Knud Rasmussen carries a somewhat misleading title; although the Fifth Thule Expedition provided much of the historical data used in the creation of this film, Rasmussen himself is a fairly minor character. Instead, the plot centres on the family of the shaman Avva, and their eventual conversion to Christianity. In the scene with which this chapter opened, we can see how the issue of *siqqitirniq* – crossing over, or conversion – is represented by a conflict between two kinds of songs: the *pisiit* and *sakausiit* sung by Avva, and the hymns of Umik the Prophet – the former shaman who brought a version of Christianity to the Igloodik region in the winter of 1921-22 (Tungilik

and Uyarasuk 2-3; Brody 47; Blaisel, Laugrand and Oosten 379). At the end of the film, the members of Avva's group give in one by one to their hunger: they walk over to Umik's camp, where a group of Inuit are singing hymns before engaging in the *siqqitirniq* ritual – a kind of communion, in which the eating of the forbidden cuts of meat signifies the abandonment of shamanism (Tungilik and Uyarasuk 3). As the late writer Alootook Ipellie put it: “The psalm book now replaced / The sacred songs of shamans / ... It was not / ‘Jajai-ja-jijiaaa’ anymore / But – / ‘Amen’” (58).

This encounter between Avva the shaman and Umik the prophet, though based on historical events, is fictionalized. Avva did accompany Peter Freuchen and Therkel Mathiassen on the trip north from his camp at Port Elizabeth along the eastern coast of the Melville Peninsula, and Mathiassen does report a shortage of food, very cold temperatures (between -40 and -50°C), and difficult terrain (Mathiassen 43-44).²⁹² But when they reached the camp at Ignertoq on March 18, 1922 – just over halfway through the trip – they met and were fed by the hunter Ilupâlik (44). They continued on to Pingerqalik – the last camp before Igloolik – where again they were given walrus meat, and at this point, Mathiassen reports, Avva left them and headed back south. He had wanted to turn back earlier, fearing for the lives of his dogs, but, as Mathiassen says, “he was persuaded to go on” (44). In any case, Avva never actually arrived at Igloolik with the Fifth Thule Expedition, and his conversion happened later on – at some point before Rasmussen returned from his inland trip to the Pâdlermiut (Caribou Eskimos), in January of 1923. Then, before Rasmussen headed out on his great journey westward to the Mackenzie Delta and Alaska, he stopped one more time at Avva's camp, where he reports that “above each hut waved a little white flag—a sign that the inmates had

²⁹² See Map 5.

relinquished their old heathen faith and become Christians” (*Across Arctic America* 118). It was only at this point, *after* Avva had converted, that he spoke freely to Rasmussen about shamanism; in the film, the chronology is altered, and Rasmussen’s two visits to Avva’s household are collapsed into one.²⁹³

My interest here is not the historical accuracy or inaccuracy of the film – although one could say that it is a sort of narrative *ikiaqtagaq* – but rather the way in which the conversion to Christianity is imagined by Isuma through a kind of song-duel, as the *ajajas* sung by Avva and his family compete with the droning hymns of Umik’s converts. Indeed, just as in the old *unikkaaqtuat* (stories), songs are a crucial feature of the storytelling in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*. As Sophie McCall suggests, hearing the songs in the context of a film prevents us from understanding them as pure poetry, and problematizes any attempt at formalist reading (McCall 19-28). While they are beautifully crafted art-pieces, the songs are also *tools*, with particular tasks to perform, and with value as objects of exchange. While I would agree with McCall that the songs must be understood in context, and that films such as *Atanarjuat* constitute a powerful response to the work of ethnographers and anthologists, I think that it is also important to remember that within Inuit storytelling traditions, songs are often borrowed, bought, excerpted, and re-used in a way rather similar to the work of southern editors. The difference, however, is that in *Atanarjuat* and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* these adaptations happen within – and arguably for the benefit of – the community. In this way,

²⁹³ Thanks to Christopher Trott for pointing this out (personal communication). In the screenplay for the film, there is a final scene in which Avva explains his conversion to Rasmussen (who did not go on the trip to Iglulik). However, this was cut from the final version of the film.

I will argue, the use of songs in the work of Igloolik Isuma Productions provides both an alternative *and* a parallel to the southern anthologies of adapted Inuit poetry.²⁹⁴

The Journals of Knud Rasmussen opens with a scene that takes place on board Captain George Comer's whaling ship, which is wintering in the ice of Repulse Bay. In the film, Comer himself is never seen, but the influence of the whalers is apparent: a young woman is experimenting with an accordion, and an older man is learning to write syllabics. As he spells his name out, sound by sound, we realize that this is none other than Evaluarjuk (Ivaluardjuk), singers of songs.²⁹⁵ Indeed, it was one of his *ajaja* songs – recorded onto a gramophone – which accompanied the opening shot, in which the actors arrange themselves to pose in a black and white photograph. The film begins, then, with the theme of documentation;²⁹⁶ it is clear that we are no longer in the same world as *Atanarjuat*. Interestingly, the scratchy *ajaja* song of the opening sequence – which is recorded a few shots later by Evaluarjuk and Angutimarik – is actually a song that was used in Isuma's previous film: it is the love song performed by Atanarjuat and Puja. Here, that *qimik* (tune) is heard again, although the words have been changed. Now, it seems to have become an *ikiaqtagaq*, and like other aspects of Inuit culture, it is being recorded, for reasons that are presently unknown.

²⁹⁴ This discussion would benefit from an analysis of the third feature film to come out of Igloolik: the recently-released *Before Tomorrow* by Arnait Video Productions (a sister company of Isuma). This film also makes use of a highly significant theme-song, or anthem; initially sung by the character Ningiuq ('old woman' or 'grandmother') to put her grandson to sleep, it gradually acquires a more serious connotation. Unfortunately, the film is not yet widely available, but should hopefully be in (some) theatres soon.

²⁹⁵ I will use Rasmussen's spelling (Ivaluardjuk) to refer to the historical figure, and Isuma's spelling (Evaluarjuk) to refer to the character in the film.

²⁹⁶ A deleted scene showed Captain Comer making a plaster mask of Ivaluardjuk's face, the original of which is in the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

This scene turns out to be a kind of prelude, and ten years passes before the main action of the film.²⁹⁷ The events aboard Comer's ship are quickly echoed, however, in a scene that takes place at George Cleveland's HBC trading post at Repulse Bay, in December of 1921. It is here, you may recall, that Ivaluardjuk meets Knud Rasmussen and the other members of the Fifth Thule Expedition. While Peter Freuchen drinks with Cleveland and his friends, Rasmussen talks quietly with Evaluarjuk, and tries to "draw him out a little" (*Iglulik* 17). The elder man obliges, and invites Rasmussen to visit the camp of his brother, the shaman Avva. When Rasmussen asks him why they are all living so far from Igloodik, Evaluarjuk doesn't answer, but two of the women, laughing, begin singing a hymn, and shake each other's hands. Their song anticipates the conflict that will later be revealed: it is in Igloodik that Umik the Prophet has begun his proselytization – characterized by hymn-singing and shaking hands – and Avva and his family are pointedly staying clear.

As if in counterpoint to this mock-hymn, Evaluarjuk then begins singing a song of his own. In the film, we only hear three of its verses, but the longer version included in the published screenplay contains the following line: "*Aija, niglasuk qitturiatlu uimanartut takua*" – "cold and mosquitoes – they make you hurry, those ones" (Kunuk and Cohn 365).²⁹⁸ This is a version of the famous song that Rasmussen included in his Report; now translated from Danish and English back into Inuktitut for the film, it is an *ikiaqtagaq* that has passed through a few more than the usual layers. The film's

²⁹⁷ Or twelve years, according to the screenplay.

²⁹⁸ My translation (and transcription). The English-language screenplay gives a version of the song based very closely on Calvert and Worster's English translation in *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*; these are included in Appendix B (V, VI). As the original was not printed in Rasmussen's Report, the song seems to have been translated back into Inuktitut for the film. According to the film's credits, the *ajajas* were composed by Louis Uttak, Paulossie Qulitalik, Atuat Akkitirq, Nathan Qamaniq, Abraham Ulayuruluk (who plays Ivaluardjuk), Clara Quassa, Enuki Kunuk, Julia Amagoalik, Herve Paniaq, Madeline Ivalu, Eugene Ipakarnak, and Elizabeth Nutarariaq.

reenactment of the song, furthermore, differs quite substantially from the description in the *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition*. In *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, Rasmussen gradually leads the readers into the performance; he describes the journey from Danish Island to Repulse Bay, the appearance and character of Ivaluardjuk, the words that were spoken prior to the singing, and the effect of the song on the people assembled. In the film, however, the shots of Evaluarjuk's performance are interspersed with images of a traveling dog-sled: the high-speed journey of Avva's large sled in the night, moving towards the first meeting with Rasmussen and his team (which occurs almost three months later). Evaluarjuk's song, in other words, transports the viewers out to Avva's territory – the symbolic stronghold of tradition. Much as it did for Rasmussen (and for Ivaluardjuk) in 1921, this song takes the audience far from the trading post, and far from the hymns.²⁹⁹

Evaluarjuk's song, I would argue, is used almost as a kind of leitmotif to signify 'tradition'; and the film is quite notably less concerned with recreating the original performance of the song. Like the magic words that Rasmussen recorded, the songs in Isuma films are performative; they have a task to carry out, and they get it done. Often, that task is symbolic, whether it be evoking a particular setting, a person, or an ideology.

²⁹⁹ I should note that in the film version, the encounters between Rasmussen and Avva's family are presented through the *local* point of view. The meeting at the HBC trading post is in fact a flashback, as Evaluarjuk tells his family the story of his encounter with the Greenlanders. The meeting of the sleds in the night, furthermore, is shot from the perspective of Avva's sled; as we approach, we see the exotic bear-skin pants of the Greenlanders glowing in the dark. This might be compared to Rasmussen's description of the encounter:

We had had a long day's journey in the cold, and were now, in the fine starry night, just ready to set about building a snow hut, when suddenly, out of the darkness ahead, there appeared a long sledge with one of the wildest teams I have ever seen. Fifteen white dogs were racing along at full gallop with one of the big Hudson Bay sledges, at least 7 metres long, and six men on it. They sighted us, and came sweeping down right on top of us, and a little man with a big beard, his face covered with ice, leapt down and came running towards me. . . . His keen eyes rested on me, full of life and spirits, and he greeted me with a ringing: qujärnamik 'Thanks, thanks to the guests who have come.' This was Aua the shaman. (*Iglulik* 45)

The beauty and strangeness of their language may be very much a part of their effectiveness, but they can also be understood via the action that they perform. Sophie McCall discusses this phenomenon in *Atanarjuat*, noting the way that the central song – the *pisiq* of the dead leader Kumaglak – functions as a kind of anthem for the community, and is used in different ways each time it is performed (McCall 26-28). For McCall, this usage signifies an alternative to the decontextualized song-fragments that appear in collections like Edward Field’s. The film, she suggests, enacts a dramatic *re-*contextualization of the Inuit song.³⁰⁰ “[T]he song’s power,” as she puts it, “lies in its performance, and the relations of address cannot be separated from the song itself” (19).

In this framework, songs gain value almost as a kind of trade-good, or material possession. In one of the pivotal scenes in *Atanarjuat*, the corrupt leader Saurriq sings his father’s anthem in a show of power; it corresponds with his possession of the walrus-tooth necklace that the evil visiting shaman Tuurngarjuaq lifted from Kumaglak’s body (McCall 27).³⁰¹ Lowenstein notes the material aspect of the songs as well; the idea that they are *crafted*, he says, “is implicit in [their] language. Words (like snow, or bones, or reindeer skin) are part of the material environment, and they have the sort of concrete property which can be woven, wrapped up, carved and put together, for either functional

³⁰⁰ So keen is McCall for context, however, that she ends up inventing a good deal of it. Her article is entitled “I Can Only Sing This Song to Someone Who Understands It”; this line – the first in the film – is taken as a statement about the importance of keeping songs within the context of the community (McCall 19). It is a compelling argument. However, she very strangely attributes this line to the leader Kumaglak, and claims that he is “refus[ing] to sing” his anthem for the visiting shaman Tuurngarjuaq (who later kills him) (McCall 26). In fact, the line is quite clearly spoken by Tuurngarjuaq, *not* Kumaglak, and it refers to a *different song* (which is sung almost immediately after the line is spoken). Admittedly, this line does not appear in the published screenplay, and when it is spoken in the film we do not see the speaker – instead, there is a shot of the landscape, and a man with some dogs. But immediately after we hear it, we move to the interior of the snow-house, where Panikpak (Kumaglak’s wife) says “*Atii*” (‘Go ahead’ or ‘Let’s hear it’), and Tuurngarjuaq sings.

³⁰¹ In the film’s opening sequence, the stranger Tuurngarjuaq (‘great spirit,’ now ‘devil’) enters into a competition with the leader, Kumaglak. Kumaglak is killed, and Tuurngarjuaq appoints Kumaglak’s son Saurriq leader. This is when things begin to go wrong. The main action of *Atanarjuat* occurs about twenty years later, when the community is still feeling the effects that that fateful night.

or aesthetic purposes” (xxii).³⁰² As is evident in magic songs, and the stories used to describe them, words can have a very real, often transformative impact on the physical world.

Rasmussen understood well the trade-value of songs, and bargained for them throughout his journey. The idea of Rasmussen as a trader in intellectual culture is apparent in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* as well. When he and his team have arrived at Avva’s camp, and are sitting inside with their mugs of tea, the following exchange takes place:

RASMUSSEN: I came to hear songs and legends, if you will share them, and to learn about your beliefs.

AVVA: We believe happy people should not worry about hidden things. Our spirits are offended if we think too much.

RASMUSSEN: [thinks about this] Yes, I understand. Soon I am traveling west to meet the inland Inuit near Baker Lake. But my friends want to go to Igloolik, if you don’t mind taking them.

[Avva does not respond]

NATAR: Father, I don’t mind taking them. Maybe my brother-in-law [Taparte] will come too?

[Apak, Taparte’s wife, gets up and leaves]

FREUCHEN: People...working...soon...trade...

AVVA: You want to trade.

FREUCHEN: Yes...trade.

AVVA: My family doesn’t work for Whites. But everyone sees my son wants to help people but my son is eager to help people who speak our language. [To Rasmussen] Sing us something in your language.³⁰³

Again, songs are here bound up in the barter economy. Rasmussen would like Avva to share his songs and to escort his friends up to Igloolik; Freuchen suggests that they have much to trade in return. Avva surprises them by asking for a deposit in kind: “sing us something in your language.” Rasmussen (who had once hoped to have a career in opera)

³⁰² Lowenstein gives a number of examples, such as the following piece by the East Greenland singer Kilimé: “Let me cleave words / sharp little words. / like the fire-wood / that I split with my axe” (xxii).

³⁰³ This is taken, with minor variations, from the film’s subtitles (not from the screenplay, which is slightly different).

obliges by singing the opening lines of the famous aria “*M'appari tutt'amor*” from Friedrich von Flotow’s *Martha* (Kunuk and Cohn 301).³⁰⁴ Avva’s reaction is difficult to read, but the performance seems sufficient, and an agreement made. Freuchen and Mathiassen get an escort to Igloodik, and Rasmussen gets his songs and legends. In the *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition*, we learn that he later reinvests them back into the song-market; as he writes of his encounter with the Netsilingmiut shaman Orpingalik: “he gave me the words of several magic songs, I paying for them with some of those I had got from the Iglulingmiut. It was considered that these transactions were quite legitimate, for as they were made through the agency of a white man they could not, it was thought, offend the spirits” (*Netsilik* 13). There is some suggestion here that Rasmussen’s status as an outsider may have increased the extent to which songs – magic songs, at least – were commodified. But on the whole, it appears that the decontextualization of songs is not wholly a *qallunaat* practice. Although “every magic word has its particular mission,” and songs their particular task, part of their value is in the possibility of re-use, or adaptation (*Netsilik* 13).

In *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, Rasmussen describes a conversation that he had with Ivaluardjuk about the nature of poetry: “I shall never forget Ivaluardjuk’s astonishment and confusion when I tried to explain to him that in our country, there were people who devoted themselves exclusively to the production of poems and melodies” (233). In other words, the idea of poetry as a pure art form, unconnected to any practical

³⁰⁴ Much more could be said about the use of this song in the film. “*M'appari tutt'amor*” is itself in translation from the German “Ach, so fromm,” but neither Italian nor German, of course, is Rasmussen’s own language. Furthermore, this aria is a kind of *ikiaqtagaq* – it originally was part of Flotow’s opera *L’âme en peine*, but was later transposed into *Martha* (Kobbé 546). In the film, Rasmussen’s rendition leads into a recording by Caruso, which accompanies the scene in which Mathiassen is flirting with Avva’s daughter Apak; this recording is also the final song used in the film – it is played over a shot, placed in the middle of the credits, of a dog team arriving at a camp, far in the distance. The intertextual possibilities here could no doubt generate a chapter of their own.

task, was – if we believe Rasmussen – “inconceivable” (233). I do not quite follow Rasmussen’s conclusion that Inuit singers do not “make a conscious attempt to create beauty and power”; the ubiquitous refrain about ‘trying to find a song’ – “a song that is strong,” as Orpingalik puts it – would seem to indicate otherwise (*Iglulik* 234; *Netsilik* 321). Rather, I believe that this discussion illustrates the distinction between Inuit songs and *qallunaat* poetry: while poetry – at times – may quite legitimately have no other task than to be beautiful, songs are never useless. The poetry of songs, however – the way in which they succinctly capture a memory or desire, or the way in which they create mystery or magic, with their strange or coded vocabulary – is closely tied to their power, or performativity. While the work of editors and translators like Rasmussen, Jenness, Lowenstein and Field may have rendered the songs into fragments of their former selves, it has at least alerted audiences to the literary qualities of Inuit song – something that the singers, no doubt, have been aware of all along. As this canon now shifts back into context, and back to the community, that sense of ‘poetry’ might be a useful souvenir.

In the final scene of the *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, Avva’s son and daughter have both ‘crossed over’ to Umik, and he walks out on the land, far from the houses and the sound of the hymns. In the old days, this is where he might have gone to sing magic words, which “may be uttered under the open sky, but only in places where there are no tracks in the snow” (Rasmussen, *Copper* 113). Now, he summons his spirit helpers, but only to banish them. “I am grateful for all the help you have given me in my life,” he cries: “[b]ut now I have to send my spirit helpers away. Now I will follow the road of Jesus and you have to leave me.” Weeping desperately, the spirits walk away, out

into the distance.³⁰⁵ This scene is another *ikiaqtagaq* – an adaptation. The version that Rasmussen heard was less final: Avva is reported to have told him, “[b]ut now . . . I am a Christian, and so I have sent away all my helping spirits; sent them up to my sister in Baffin Land” (*Across Arctic America* 127). In the film version, that sense of continuance is not included – unless of course we count the existence of the film itself, and the appearance, after eighty-six years, of Avva’s helping spirits on camera. I would argue that both versions of this event are accounts of adaptation; both are stories of survival. In an age where Inuit songs appear in subway cars or are accompanied by symphony orchestras, the films of Igloodik Isuma Productions provide an alternative form for the modern *pisiit*. Like those spirit helpers, the old songs are increasingly being put to new purposes, whether they are performed in the context of a college classroom, or as part of the soundtrack to a film, or whether they inspire contemporary Inuit poets and musicians.³⁰⁶ And although many of these songs are now *ikiaqtagait*, Isuma demonstrates that it is this kind of adaptation that keeps the songs in the service of the community – especially now that it has digital cameras and audio recorders. The songs have a signification that goes beyond pure poetry, as they rally a people, or warn of danger, as they negotiate with the spirits, or evoke tradition in the presence of cultural change. But we should never forget their origins in that special language of the *angakkuut* – in the time, as Edward Field imagined it, “when words were like magic” (8).

³⁰⁵ One of the helping spirits is played by Rachel Uyarasuk, who was over 90 years old at the time of filming, and was a child in the Igloodik area when Umik the Prophet and the members of the Fifth Thule Expedition arrived there (*Tungilik and Uyarasuk* 5).

³⁰⁶ Such as Laina Tullaugak, Tanya Tagaq, and Sylvia Cloutier, or of the up-and-coming spoken-word artist Taqralik Partridge.

CONCLUSION

Literate Landscapes

Flying into Baffin Island, leaning over strangers, craning your neck to acquire some first-hand, authentic information about what the *nuna* in Nunavut means: that's when all of those ideas about Northern barrenness, harshness, epic landscapes and hardy people – those memories of the Group of Seven and of Heritage Minutes – start vying for attention. Somehow the shock of treelessness reverberates in your field of vision, and what is in reality neither bare, nor lifeless, seems from the plane window to become a desert of rock and ice. First-time visitors may not admit it, but on some level of consciousness they are secretly comparing themselves to those intrepid Arctic explorers, making their way in the wild, and as such they are doing battle with every minute piece of received information about The Arctic that has ever been ingested via a television screen, or across a dinner table – and all this as the real thing looms below.

This, luckily, is mostly an airborne affliction, for as soon as you get up close and personal with the tundra – as soon as your feet are sinking into the moss and tripping over the branches of horizontal trees – you quickly understand that all those months of reading are not going to help (or hinder) you in processing this experience. You may have to proceed slowly in your acquaintance with the Land, starting with the triangle of ground in the vestibule of your tent, that patch of sky visible through the window. You may find yourself taking many, many pictures, often of the same feature, especially as it changes. Tides in flux, clouds rising, the retreat of the sun staining the sky – all of these marvels can be slowed down, captured, or enclosed within the four walls of a camera shutter, and this will manage their vastness for you, at least for a moment. You might similarly find

yourself compartmentalizing your world through words, or names. Names are powerful, as all peoples know, and so you find yourself repeating ‘mountain,’ ‘river,’ ‘tundra,’ ‘midnight sun,’ or better yet, ‘*salix arctica*’ and ‘*corvus corax*.’ All this to exercise some degree of control over the idea – or the fact – of Land.

It’s not that there wasn’t land at home. Traces of it somehow made their way to your plate each day, and your nine-story apartment building clearly was standing on something. But here it seems that something slightly different might be meant by that word – Land. Soon after your arrival, people begin using a strange but compelling phrase: “we’re going out on the land,” they say. You might have already been labouring under the misconception that you had already gotten ‘closer to nature’ by passing time in a settlement where nature is a little harder to ignore. But now it seems that your acquaintance with this abstract notion is going to be somewhat accelerated. ‘On the land.’ When you first hear it, you are struck by the oddness, and thus the importance, of the preposition. Back home, we say we are ‘in’ or going ‘to’ a particular land. But ‘on,’ as in ‘to be going out on,’ seems to be describing a different relationship to a place – an awareness of physical proximity, perhaps. To be ‘in’ a land is abstract, but to be ‘on’ the land is wonderfully literal, and honest. Just by listening to those words, one gets a sense of contact—of groundedness; there is an implicit acknowledgement of the source of sustenance, and of human impact. For those accustomed to cities, where points of contact with the land are often made conveniently invisible, this is nothing short of radical.

When I heard people in Pangnirtung talk about going ‘out on the land,’ I assumed a point of cultural similarity – a binary shared by both North and South: the notion of the city versus the country, or civilization versus wilderness. Going out, then, I imagined that

we were leaving civilization. I made much of the fact that for one week I would be without phone, email, or plumbing. From all of those large, weblike structures built by humanity to keep us safe and comfortable, I would be momentarily cutting my ties. So at Sanigut – an island about an hour’s boat-ride down the fjord and into Cumberland Sound – when I went out on a long group hike up the mountain and stood at the top, turning, scanning the horizon until it met itself again, I expected to see wilderness – a place free from civilization, or the reaches of humanity. When I set out that day, I was climbing over a kind of generalized land, where rock, lake, moss, scat, and mosquito circulated evenly in a meaningless diorama.

But for Levi Ishulutak, who was leading the group, this was no undifferentiated mass of nature. For him, this hike seemed to have little difference from a walk in the city, where signs and markers indicate path and place. Later, when I recalled that day in a picture, Levi stood behind me, correcting my abstract depiction of lake, hill, sunset, loon. “There was a rock here,” he said, pointing, “and the hill was shaped like this.” Watching him navigate, I began to see something different when I looked around me: an inhabited wilderness, covered with the markers of long-term human presence. As Sim Akpaliak later explained, a good hunter will know the name of every place in Cumberland Sound, even when it is shrouded in mist. Everywhere around me, then, there were signs of human history – of human knowledge of this land. The problem was that I was illiterate, like the many visitors before me, who, unable to recognize ancient narratives in the shape of a rock or inlet, no doubt felt compelled to write upon the landscape in a much heavier hand, leaving permanent traces, borders, and signs of conquest.

For southerners, reading Inuit literature – like reading Inuit lands – requires a certain kind of re-visioning, or re-training. For the many scholars and readers who may not have had the chance to experience the Nunavut landscape, the texts discussed in these pages can provide an imaginative route to the North – but one which is markedly different from that taken by Franklin, by Robert Flaherty, or by Edward Field. These stories and songs have taught me much about the ways in which universities still have a great deal to learn about reading. Texts like *Life Among the Qallunaat*, *Interviewing Inuit Elders*, and *Eight Inuit Myths* demonstrate that Inuit authors and elders are scholars in an intellectual tradition whose expertise the South must begin to recognize. There are many other kinds of literacy located outside of the institution, if only we can learn to look, listen, and read in a different way.

One of the most prevalent *unikkaaqtuat* is the one about Aningaak, the blind boy whose mother is cruel to him.³⁰⁷ One day, he hears footsteps approaching his home, and a pair of strangers gently lead him down to the water and encourage him to dive under. Each time he goes down, they hold him a little longer, until he is desperate for air. But each time he surfaces, he begins to see a little more clearly, until finally his vision is as sharp as that of the loons (who, it turns out, have been escorting him). In navigating Inuit intellectual geographies, I find this story itself to be a useful guide. Learning to see, it says, can be a painful process, and might require you to put your trust in something unfamiliar, or unknown. This suspension of disbelief, or of judgment, or of assumptions, I think, constitutes the poetic faith which – in a way that is not entirely unfamiliar – is necessary in approaching an ancient literary landscape.

³⁰⁷ See, for instance, Thomas Kusugaq's telling (Spalding, *Eight Inuit Myths* 33-50).

Appendix A: "Angusugjuk and the Polar Bears"

Angu / sugjuk Naru / il / lu
Man / Superlative Bear / s / and

Angusugju / guuq angusuaq / tu / mmari / aluk
Angusugjuk / they say good hunter / was he / really / very

avillaq / sima / til / lugu / guuq angiqqar / ami
away / in a state / while / he / arriving home / he
 of being they say

paa / mi / ni qingmi / arju / kulung / m / ik
doorway / his own / in dog / small / very / /

taku / gami tigub / luni / uk
seeing / because he grabbing / he / it

itiq / &uni. Sunauva
going in / he. Much to his surprise

angati / mi / ni arnaq aquvia / nga / juq.
place / his own / in a woman crouching / in a she.
(on snow bench) state of/

Takub / luni / uk uqaq / &uni / guuq
Seeing / she / him speaking / she / they say

taanna arnaq "qiturngar / a qai / jjuk!".
that woman "child / my bring / it!".

"Nuliaq / taa / ri / niar / up / kit
"Wife / taken / have for / will / if I / you

qai / najaq / ta / ralua / ra".
bringing / would / thing / indeed / mine".

Anna uqa / kkanni / rib / luni
And speaking / again / also / she

"qiturngar / a / ilaak qai / jjuk!".
"child / my / I know bring / it!".

"Nuliaq / taa / ri / niar / up / kit
"Wife / taken / have for / will / if I / you

qai / najaq / ta / ralua / ra".
bringing / would / thing / indeed / mine".

Taanna / guuq arnaq angiq / &uni
That one / they say woman agreeing / she

Angu / sugju / up nuliaq / taa / rib / luni / uk.
Angusugjuk / 's wife / taken / have for / he / she.

ila / qar / ama *taku / jartu / qa / lawr / niar / ap / kit.*
relatives / have / seeing / to go off / for now / will / I /
because I them.

Angusugju / guuq *ilau / juma / ju / alu / ung / mat*
Angusugjuk / they say accompanying / want / he who / very / was /
because he

35 *nulia / nga* *angiq / &uni.* *Imaa / nua / guuq*
wife / his agreeing / she. Water / into the / they say

misi / giar / mat *qaa / nga /nut* *palluq / &uni*
jumping /now/because top / her / on lying belly down / he
she

nalujjigi / liq / &uni /uk. *Tuwaqta / alung / mut / guuq*
swimming away/now/she/with him. Solid sea/ very / at / they say
piggy-back ice old the

tikin / namik *pisu / liq / &utik*
arriving / when these two walking / now / these two

Angusugju / um / nguug *nulia / nga* *uqaq / &uni*
Angusugjuk / 's / they say wife / his speaking / she

40 *taima / guuq* *tauna / ni* *nuna / taqar / mat*
so / she said away / in land / has / it
down there

taima *ila / kk / a* *tauna / ni/i/liq/put.*
so relative / s / my away / in / are / now/
down there they.

Taima *iglu / mit* *tugliq / paa / mit*
So house / from next / very / from

ani / ju / qar / niar / mat *nanu / alung / n / ik*
going /ones/have/will/because polar / fierce / s /
out who it bear

kagli / lir / umuk *ajauppia / m / nik* *tuni / niaq / pa / git.*
approaching /are/when walking stick /my/ give to / will/I / you.
we two

5 *Asu / ilaa / guuq* *misi / giar / ming / mat*
That decided / definitely/ jumping / now / again / because she
they say

qaa / nga / nut *pallu / rib / luni* *nalujjigi / li / rib /luni/uk*
top / her / on lying/ again / he swimming away/now/ again / she/
belly-down piggy-back with him

asu / ilaak *nuna / mut* *tikin / namik.*
that decided/ land / at the arriving / because these
definitely two.

qaib / luti / guuq *pangalik / tu / alu / u / liq / &utik.*
coming / they / they say galloping / those who / wildly / are / now /
they.

Taamma / guuq *sivulliq / paaq*
That one / they say front one / most

65 *aitta / nga / aluk / &uni* *kagli / lir / mat*
open- / in a / hideous / he approaching / now / because he
mouth state of

ajauppiar / mi / nu / nguug *qani / a / gut*
walking stick / his own / with / mouth / his / through
they say

ajaa / ta / alu / ging / magu *iksiva / llaq / &uni / lu.*
shoving / thing / sharply / have for/ sitting / heavily / he / and.
he him down

Niaqu / innar / mi / guuq *uti / mut*
Head / nothing but / / they say home / ward

pangalik / si / ju / alu / ub / luri / lu.
galloping / now / one / fearfully / was / he / and.
who

70 *Kingulli / ngita / guuq* *uti / lir / mat*
Behind one / s' / they say returning / now / he

malik / saq / &uni / jjuk / &u *tagv / unga / guuq*
following / working at/they/ him/ here/towards/ they say
and

anib / vi / gi / qqau / jar / ming / nut
going / place / have for / just now / thing / their own / to
out

iti / a / ju / alu / ub / lutik.
entering / many at once / ones / mysteriously / were / they.
who

Taamma / guuq *Angusugju / up* *nulia / nga*
That one / they say Angusugjuk / 's wife / his

5 *uqaq / &uni* *anaana / kku / kk / a* *taima*
speaking / she mother / association / s / so
of my

tagv / ani *isumata / u / jut.* *Asu / ilaa / guuq*
here / in boss / are / they. That decided / definitely /
they say

urnik / &uni / jjuk *iglu / nga / nut* *itij / &utik*
approaching / they / it house / his / to entering / they

kiinar / mut *matu / ja / u / qattaq / &uni*
face / to the cover / -ed / is/ regularly / it

nwvak'iq / siu / qati / gi / qqu / nngi / laaq.
blobs of/hunt / partner/ have for/ order/not/ she him.
phlegm for

Taima / guuq *aib / luni*
So / they say going home / she

amma / guuq *kangi / kkut* *turlula / gib / luni*
again / they say snow-house / through shouting / again / she
vent

kibvakata / qati / gi / juma / vaa / guuq.
lifting match/partner/have for/want/he him/they said.

Angusugju / um / nnguq *saki / a* *uqaq / &uni*
Angusugjuk/ 's / they say mother-in-law/his speaking /she

kibvakata / qati / gi / niaq / paa *Angusugju / guuq*
lifting match/partner/have for/will/he him Angusugjuk / they say

saki / a / ta *ajuqigtu utib / luni / uk*
mother- / his / 's teaching / she / him.
in-law

Taima / guuq *kibvakata / aluk*
So / she said lifting stone / big

angmaluq / tu / alu / ung / mat *qairat/tu/mmari/alu/ub/luni*
round/that /very/ was/because smooth/that/really/very/was/it
which it which

nau / guuq *tigub / vik / sa / qa / nngi / ttiar / mat.*
none at all / she said take hold/place/potential/has/not/a trace/
because it.

Taima / guuq *itiqsa / kulu / it* *sitamat*
So / she said indent / little / s four

kuki / up *marru / up* *naama / gi / ja / ngi / t*
finger-nail/'s two / 's enough/have for/ thing/ their / s

itiqsa / tua / ring / ma / git. *Taamma / guuq*
indent / unique / have for / it / them. That one / she said

kibvakatak *kivi / giar / nia / lir / uni / uk*
lifting stone lifting / start / will / now / when he / it

pataju / nnguaq / sirtuq / &uni / u / guuq *taapkua / guuq*
patting / make- / pretend / he / it / she said those / she said
believe

Arja / liq / &uni / uk taqa / ju / alu / u / galuaq / &uni / guuq
Carrying / now / he / it tired / one who/very/ was/indeed/he/ they say

ili / kasa / laur / aluaq / &uni / u / guuq.
putting down / almost / was / indeed / he / it / they say.

Amma / guuq uti / mut arja / li / rib / luni / uk
And / they say back / on carrying / now / again / he / it
the way

ini / nga / nun / nguuaq ili / giaq / &uni / uk / &u
place / its / to / they say putting / start / he / it / and
down

itir / iaq / &uni ulla / si / ju / alu / u / gami.
entering / start / he running / now / one who / swiftly / was /
because he.

Itiq / &uni / lu / guuq kinguni / nga / ni / guuq
Entering / he / and / they say rear / his / in / they say

kii / giaq / palatsi / ju / alung / m / ik tusaq / &uni
biting / and snapping / noise of / that which hearing / he
/very / /

ari / nngil / luni / guuq.
going out / not / he / they say.

Amma / guuq nulia / nga kangi / kkut
Again / they say wife / his snow-house / through
vent

turlulak / &uni uqa / rib / luni ui / m / a / guuq
shouting / she speaking / also / she husband / 's /my/ she said

Angusugjuk nassiq / suksauti / qati / gi / juma / vaa.
Angusugjuk seal/mutual contest/partner/have for/want/he him.

Angusugju / wn / nguuaq saki / a uqa / rib / luni
Angusugjuk / 's / they say mother-in- / his speaking / also / she
law

nassiq / suksauti / qati / gi / niaq / paa / guuq
seal/mutual contest/partner/have for/will/he him / she said

amma / guuq Angusugjuk saki / a /ta
and / she said Angusugjuk mother-in- / his / 's
law

afuqitu uti / gib / luni / uk. Taima / guuq
teaching / again / she / him. So / they say

aglu / t pingasu / ung / mata nanu / alu / wn / nguuaq
breathing-hole /s three/are/because they bear/fierce big/'s/they say

- ungalliq / paa / kkut* *aqqaq / ti / niar / ma / gu*
far one / most / through go down / make / will / he / him
out of sight
- akulliq / paa / mi / guuq* *nanu / aluk* *nikpaar / niar / rat.*
middle one /most/at/she bear/big wait to / will / he.
said fierce spear
- Akulliq / paa / guuq* *qaangir / umnar / uni / uk*
Middle one/most/she said going past / able / if he / it
- qaangiq / &uni / uk* *tugliq / paa / kkut*
going past / he / it next / very / through
- nui / guni* *pita / up* *ilu / a / ni*
come up / when he seal nest / 's interior / its / in
into view
- qirmiq / tu / kulung / m / ik* *taku / guni*
black / thing / little / / seeing / when he
- ari / giaz / &uni / lu / guuq* *angiqqa / mut*
going / start / he / and / she home / on the way
out said
- ulla / si / alu / u / niaq / puq* *kingu / mun / nguug*
running/start/swiftly/be/will/he rear / to the / she said
- 150 *qiviaq / tailib / luni.* *Asu / ilaa / guuq*
looking back / refrain / he. That decided / definitely / they say
- aglu / nu / nngau / lir / amik* *aglu/it* *pingasu / ung/ mata.*
breathing-/towards/going/now/ breathing-/s three/are/
hole because these two hole because they.
- Ungalliq / paa / kkun / nguug* *Angusugjuk*
Far one / most / through / they say Angusugjuk
- aqqaq / ti& /&uni / uk* *taamma* *nanu / aluk*
going down/make/he/him that one bear/big fierce
- akulliq / paa / mi* *nikpaa / liq / &uni.*
middle one / most / at waiting to spear / now / he.
- 155 *Akulliq / paa / guuq* *Angusugju / up*
Middle one / most / they say Angusugjuk / 's
- tikin / nami / uk* *ibjangu / ju / alu / u / lir / ami / guuq*
arriving at / he / it out of / one who / badly/was/now/because he/
breath they say
- nui / jumab / luni* *isuma / laur / aluaq / &uni*
coming up / want / he thinking/at first/indeed/ he

qani / laa / guuq *aglu / mut* *tikit/tunnar/asugib/luni/uk*
clos-/est/they say breathing-/to arriving/able/thinks/he/it
hole at

isuma / lir / ami *taik / unga*
thinking / now / because he over there / to

ungu / nasu / liq / &uni. *Tikin / nami / u / guuq*
propelling/try / now/ he. Arriving at / he / it/ they say
himself

pita / up *ilu / a / ni* *qirmiq / tu / kulung / m / ik*
seal nest / 's interior / its / in black / thing / little / /

taku / gami *kiib / luni / uk* *nui / giaq / &uni / lu.*
seeing/because he holding/he/it coming/starts/ he/ and.
in jaws up

Angiqqa / mut *ulla / si / ju / alu / u / gami*
Home / on the way running/now/one who/swiftly/was/because he

kingu / mun / nguug *qiviaq / tailib / luni.*
rear /towards the/they say looking back/refrain from/he.

Itir / iaq / &uni / guuq *kii / giaq / palatsi / ju / alung / m / ik*
Entering/start/he/they say biting and /snapping/ noise of/that
which / very / / /

tusar / alua / rib / luni. *Katang / mut* *taamna*
hearing/indeed/also/he. Doorway/in the that one

kingmiaq / ta / ni *naluk / &uni / uk*
held in jaws/thing/his throwing down/ he / it

itiq / &uni / lu. *Sunawva / guuq* *taamna*
entering / he / and. Much to his surprise / that one
they say

qirmiq / tu / kuluk *nassi / u / nir / mat*
black / thing / little seal / was / apparently / because it

nulia / nga / ta *Angusugju / up*
wife / his / 's Angusugjuk / 's

aki / mut *ilib / luni / uk / &u.*
meat bench / on the putting down / she / it / and.

Angusugjuk and the Polar Bears

They say that Angusugjuk was a very great hunter and that, on returning home from a hunting trip, he found a little puppy dog in his doorway which he picked up and took in. To his surprise, there was a woman crouching in his place on the snow-bench. When the woman saw him, she said: "Bring my child to me!" "If I was going to take you for a wife," he replied, "I would certainly bring it." But she, in turn, begged him again: "I said bring my child to me!" Once more, he answered: "If I was going to take you for a wife I would certainly bring it." After that, the woman assented and Angusugjuk took her for his wife. Because she was regularly eating nothing but a great deal of fat, her mother-in-law would scold her, telling her to eat meat as well. But the wife began to feel ashamed at this scolding and left for the floe edge while Angusugjuk was away on another hunting trip. When Angusugjuk came home and found his wife missing, he took off towards the floe following her tracks, one of which was that of a polar bear, the other of a human. Just as he arrived at the floe edge, he was surprised to catch up with her, lying on her back and rolling in the snow. He told her that he wanted to accompany her. But his wife said that, down there far out to sea in the landless ocean, she had relatives, and that for the time being she intended to go off and visit them.

Because Angusugjuk wanted to go along so badly, the wife agreed to it. She then jumped down into the water, they say, Angusugjuk lying belly-down on top of her, and she began swimming away with him piggy-back. Having reached some very old solid sea ice, they began to walk on it, and Angusugjuk's wife said that there was land down there and that was where her relatives lived. She told him also that there would be some fierce bears coming out of the closest house and that, when they approached them, she would give him her walking stick for protection. So, it is said, she jumped into the water again and Angusugjuk got on top of her back once more, and she swam with him piggy-back again until they finally reached land.

Because they were just then arriving at the big houses, the wife gave Angusugjuk her walking stick and told him that the first one to come out would be huge and terrible with many polar bears following furiously after him. The very first one, she said, is going to charge wildly at you with hideously gaping jaws but you will shove it in the mouth with this walking stick and make it fall backward heavily on its ass. So at last they were approaching when a polar bear came out from the closest house and many fierce polar bears came racing out wildly after him, galloping madly towards them. The first one now approached with hideously gaping jaws but, with his walking stick, Angusugjuk gave him a hell of a push in the mouth, making him sit down heavily on his ass. The polar bear then turned and galloped fearfully homeward, nothing but a skull. As he was returning, those bears behind all followed him and all at once mysteriously vanished into the place through which they had just come out.

Angusugjuk's wife then said that her parents were chiefs of the bear village there. So they approached the parents' house and entered it, where shortly these fierce menacing bears kept coming to visit them in droves for the purpose of seeing Angusugjuk. The very largest one of these polar bears was continually eyeing Angusugjuk fiercely whenever he was turned away, but

whenever Angusugjuk started to look around at him he would also turn away with a glare of malice in his eyes.

So after the biggest bear had gone out and was now at home, his wife came and shouted through the snow-house vent that her husband wanted to challenge Angusugjuk to a contest of diving for jelly-fish. Angusugjuk's mother-in-law said, however, that she forbade him accepting the challenge to dive for jelly-fish because one's face keeps getting covered and because they are extremely ticklish. So the challenger-bear's wife went home and returned again, shouting through the vent once more that her husband wanted a lifting match with Angusugjuk. Angusugjuk's mother-in-law answered that he would accept this lifting match and she began to teach him how he should go about winning it.

She told him that the big slippery lifting-stone was very round and wickedly smooth, and that there were absolutely no places on it to hold on by. She said, however, that there were four tiny indents on it, enough for two fingernail grips, and that these were the only dents. She said that, when he was about to pick it up, he must pretend to pat the surface of the stone lightly in order to find the little indents and that, when he found them, he was to draw the stone towards himself and carry it forward to the mark. If he was able to bring it back, she said, he was, first of all, to carry it back and place it in its spot and then run very swiftly to enter the house and to refrain from looking back.

So Angusugjuk went out and approached the stone. The big fierce bear said to him: "Go ahead! Start to pick it up!" But Angusugjuk answered him: "Go ahead! Just pick it up yourself!" The big fierce bear was actually lifting it up a little bit but was unable to carry it. At his turn, Angusugjuk pretended to pat the surface of the stone but actually groped for and found the little indents. He was indeed very tired as he was carrying it now, for a moment almost actually putting it down, they say. But he managed to carry it back again as well and place it in its spot, after which he began running swiftly in order to enter his house. On entering, behind him, he heard terrible biting and snapping noises, but he didn't go out again.

For the third time, the challenger-bear's wife shouted down the vent that her husband wanted to challenge Angusugjuk at the game of hunting seal. Once again, his mother-in-law said that he would accept the challenge of the seal-hunting game and she again started to teach him what he must do. There would be, she said, three breathing-holes and that the challenger-bear would make him go down through the farthest one while he himself would stand waiting with a harpoon to spear him over the middle one. If Angusugjuk was able, she said, to pass the middle breathing-hole and, having passed it, was able to come up through the closest one, he was to take a little black thing from the inside of the seal's nest, come out from the hole, and run like hell towards home without turning to look back.

So Angusugjuk and the fierce bear went to the breathing-holes which were three in number. The big bear made Angusugjuk go down through the farthest one while he himself waited with his spear poised over the middle one. Angusugjuk reached the middle breathing-hole very badly out of breath, it is said, and indeed temporarily considered coming up, but since he thought that he could reach the closest one, with this in mind, he began trying to propel himself towards it. On reaching the hole, he saw a little black thing inside

the seal's nest, clenched it in his teeth, and started to emerge. He ran swiftly home without turning to look back. As he was entering his in-laws' house, he again actually heard terrible snapping and biting noises behind him. He threw down the thing that he was carrying in his mouth in the doorway and entered. It was a pleasant surprise when he discovered that the little black thing was a seal which his wife placed up on the meat bench.

Appendix B: Six Versions of Ivaluardjuk's Song

I. Rasmussen's Danish:

Myg og kulde, disse plager følges aldrig ad.
Her jeg lægger mig på isen, lægger mig på sne og iss, så min kæbe klapper.
Det er mig, aja - aja - ja.

Er det minder fra de tider,
fra de tider, myggen sværmer,
fra de tider, kulden lammer, der får tanken til at svimle,
mens jeg strækker mine Lemmer ud på isen -
Det er mig, aja - aja - ja.

Aj! men sange
bruger Styrke,
og jeg søger
efter ord.

Aj! Jeg spejder og ser, hvad jeg nu vil synge om: Renen med de brede takker!

Og jeg slyngede med styrke spydet med mit kastetræ.
Og mit våben tøjred' tyren midt i bækkenbenets hulning,
og den skælvede for vunden, til den segned' og blev stille.

Aj! Men sange bruger styrke og jeg søger efter ord.
Her er sangen, her er mindet.
Og det er kun mig, der synger. (Rasmussen, *Den store Slæderejse* 17)

II. Trans. W. E. Calvert and W. Worster (1929) III. Trans. Tom Lowenstein (1973) "A Hunting Memory"

Cold and mosquitoes,
These two pests
Come never together.
I lay me down on the ice,
Lay me down on the snow and ice,
Till my teeth fall chattering.
It is I,
Aja – aja – ja.

Cold and mosquitoes
are torments
that never come together.
I lie down on the ice,
I lie down on the ice and snow
so my jaws chatter.
This is I!
Aja-aja-ja.

Memories are they,
From those days,
From those days,
Mosquitoes swarming
From those days,
The cold is bitter,
The mind grows dizzy
As I stretch my limbs
Out on the ice.
It is I,
Aja – aja – ja.

Ai! but songs
Call for strength
And I seek after words,
I, aja – aja – ja.

Ai! I seek and spy
Something to sing of
The caribou with the spreading antlers!

And strongly I threw
The spear with my throwing stick (sic!).
And my weapon fixed the bull
In the hollow of the groin
And it quivered with the wound
Till it dropped
And was still.

Ai! but songs
Call for strength,
And I seek after words.
It is I,
Aja, aja – haja – haja. (Rasmussen, *Iglulik* 18-19)

Is it memories
of the seasons,
of the seasons,
(mosquitoes swarming)
of the seasons
(ice paralysing)
make the mind swoon,
as I stretch my limbs out
on the ice?
This is I!
Aja-aja-ja.

Aj! But songs
require strength,
and I search
for words. Yes, I!
Aja-aja-ja.

Aj! I raise my head and see
the subject of my song :
the broad-antlered reindeer!

Powerfully I hurled
the spear and throwing-pole,
my weapon tethering the bull
right in the middle of the loin
He trembled, and he fell.
And then lay still.

Aj! But songs
require strength,
and I search
for words.
Here is the song.
Here is the memory.
It's only I who sings.
Aja-aja-haja-haja! (Lowenstein 25-
26)

© Tom Lowenstein (1973).

IV. Trans. Aenne Schmücker (1947)
“Jagderinnerung”

Mücke und Kälte
diese Plagen,
kommen nie zugleich.
Hier lege ich aufs Eis mich,
lege mich auf Schnee und Eis,
bis die Zähne klappern.
Das bin ich.

Aja – aja – ja.

Kommt Erinnerung
an die Zeiten,
an die Zeiten,
da die Mücke schwärmit,
an die Zeiten,
da die Kälte lähmt,
die Gedanken traurig macht,
wenn ich meine Glieder strecke
auf das Eis hin?
Das bin ich.

Aja – aja – ja.

Ach! Mein Sang
bedarf der Stärke,
und ich suche
nach dem Wort,
ich . . . aja – aja – ja.

Ach, ich erspähe und ich sehe,
wovon ich nun singen will:
Rentier mit den breiten Schaufeln!
Und ich schleuderte in Stärke
mit dem Wurfholz meinen Speer.
Und die Waffe traf den Bock
mitten in des Beckens Höhle.
Und er bebte ob der Wunde,
bi ser hinsank
und ward still.

Ach! Mein Sang
bedarf der Stärke,
und ich suche nach dem Wort.

Ja, ein Lied's ist's,
ein Gedenken,
und der singt,
das bin nur ich.

Aja – aja – haja – haja! (Rasmussen, *Schneehüttenlieder* 39-40)

V. Ivaluardjuk's song in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* (Inuktitut)

Ivaluarjuk (ingisivuuq)

aija, kialikianguna taimaituta atuaqatapik
halalalalalalaja halalalalalalaja

aija, inuataliuna ilisarinniarpagu
irsinal&arajarpuq
halalalalalalaja halalalalalalaja

aija, angutiqatimalu kunigumajima; pinasuarusingit
ipjuajanginakit salausukpaktunga
halalalalalalaja halalalalalalaja

aija, salausukpatunga akuliaqatami
halalalalalalalaja, halalalalalalaja, halalalalalalaja

aija, salausukpakpin sutuinamut ima
halalalalalalalaja, halalalalalalaja, halalalalalalaja,

aijia, niglasuk qikturiatlu uimanartut takua
halalalalalalalaja, halalalalalalaja,

aija, isurillalunga sikumi aputlirmi aglirulalirninu
halalalalalalalaja, halalalalalalaja,

aija, tainiksarsivunga nagjuligalungmi
halalalalalalaja, halalalalalalaja, halalalalalalaja,

aija, ak&igarmullima tartuna&apara nagjulijuarmanna
halalalalalalaja, halalalalalalaja, halalalalalalaja,

aija, isumaksasiurpunga tainiksaningima qinajujarpunga
halalalalalalaja, halalalalalalaja, halalalalalalaja (Robinson 364-365; my transcription)

VI. Ivaluardjuk's song in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* (English)

This version closely resembles (but is not an exact copy of) Calvert and Worster's English translation of Rasmussen's *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*.

EVALUARJUK *Cold and mosquitoes, These two pests never come together. I lay down on the ice, Lay down on the snow and ice, Until my teeth fall chattering. It is I, Aja – aja – ja. Memories from those days, From those days, Mosquitoes swarming, The cold is bitter, The mind grows dizzy, As I stretch my limbs, Out on the ice. It is I, Aja – aja – ja. Ai! But songs call for strength, And I seek after words, I, aja – aja – ja. Ai! I seek and spy, Something to sing of, The caribou with spreading antlers!*

EVALUARJUK *And strongly I threw, The spear with my throwing stick. And my weapon fixed the bull, In the hollow of the groin, And it quivered with the wound, Until it dropped and was still. Ai! But songs call for strength, And I seek after words. It is I. Aja, aja – aja – ajaja. (Robinson 297)*

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Appendix C: Songs by Imaruittuq

I. Lyrics to “Inngirajaalirlanga” (“Let Me Sing Slowly”). Performed by Immaroitok (Imaruittuq) and Qamaniq (singers) and Saturqsi (drum).

This song, recorded on Isuma’s CD *Unikkaat Sivunittinnit: Messages From the Past*, bears a strong resemblance to the song by Maniq that Imaruittuq performed at Nunavut Arctic College (203-204). There are some changes to the lyrics, however, and some of the lines appear in Imaruittuq’s own song (211-212). Parts of stanzas 4, 5, and 9 are different from the Nunavut Arctic College versions, and I have attempted to translate them.

1. aijaa ijajaajaajaa inngirajaalirlanga

Aijaa ijajaajaajaa, let me sing slowly

inngirajaalirlanga pisiksaksiurlungalu ijajaajaajaa

Let me sing slowly and search for a song ijajaajaajaa

2 aijaa ijajaajaajaa pisiksaninngiliqpunga

Aijaa ijajaajaajaa, I have not acquired a song

nunguusimangvatigut sivullitta pisiksamik ijajaajaajaa

They have finished them on us, our ancestors of any song ijajaajaajaa

3 aijaa ijajaajaajaa nunguusimavatigut

Aijaa ijajaajaajaa, they have finished them on us

nunguusimavatigut sivullitta pisiksamik ijajaajaajaa

They have finished them on us, our ancestors of any song ijajaajaajaa

4. aijaa ijajaajaajaa tainiksaqajjaanngila

Aijaa ijajaajaajaa it does not have a title

tainiksaqajjaanngila pisiq una ikiaqtaq ijajaajaajaa

It does not have a title this song which has had words put to it

5. aijaa ijajaajaajaa tainiksaqajjaanngila

Aijaa ijajaajaajaa it does not have a title

tainiksaqajjaanngila nirjutillu naliannit ijajaajaajaa

It does not have a title even of any animal

6. aijaa ijajaajaajaa maliktarigaluaqpit

Aijaa ijajaajaajaa removing incoming snow

maliktarigaluaqpit apivalliajuq manna ijajaajaajaa

Are you removing incoming snow from this that is becoming snow covered ijajaajaajaa

7. aijaa ijajaajaajaa iqqaqtulirivara

Aijaa ijajaajaajaa, I remember

iqqaqtulirivarali ijjannguqturnira inna ijajaajaajaa

I remember my difficulty in breathing ijajaajaajaa

8. aijaa ijajaajaajaa nunguusimavatigut

Aijaa ijajaajaajaa, they have finished them on us

nunguusimavatigut sivullitta pisiksamik ijajaajaajaa

They have finished them on us, our ancestors of any song ijajaajaajaa

9. aijaa ijajaajaajaa nungugiaqsinnarivuuq

Aijaa ijajaajaajaa, it is about to come to an end

nungugiaqsinnarivuuq tainiksaqajjaanngimang ijajaajaajaa

it is about to come to an end because it has no title. (Unikkaat; my transcription)

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II. Imaruittuq's Own Song

Do you have a pisiq of your own?

Imaruittuq: I have an *ikiaqtagaq*. I can certainly sing part of it. It's quite long. I'm probably not going to remember how it all goes.

aajaa samaajaajaajaajaa inngiqtalauranga

Aajaa samaajaajaajaajaa let me sing

inngiqtalauranga pisiksaqsiurlungalu

Let me sing and search for a song to be mine

samaajaajaajaajaa aajaa

aajaa samaajaajaajaajaa nagvaa&&arniarnanga

Aajaa samaajaajaajaajaa, searching but not finding

nagvaa&&arniarnanga qimiksamik nakiqtumik

Searching but not finding a tune which has accurate speed

samaajaajaajaajaa aajaa

aajaa samaajaajaajaajaa nagvaaraluqpunga

Aajaa samaajaajaajaajaa I have found one though

nagvaaraluqpunga ikiaqtaksanniglu imma

I have found one though to probably put my words to

samaajaajaajaajaa aajaa

aajaa samaajaajaajaajaa tainiksanigunnangilaq

Aajaa samaajaajaajaajaa it is unable to acquire a title

tainiksanigunnangilaq pisiq una ikiaqtaq

It is unable to acquire a title, this song which has had words put to it

samaajaajaajaa aajaa

aajaa samaajaajaajaa tainiksanigunnjjangilaq
Aajaa samaajaajaajaa it is quite unable to acquire a title

tainiksanigunnjjangilaq nirjutillu naliinnit
It is quite unable to acquire a title even of any animal
samaajaajaajaa aajaa

aajaa samaajaajaajaa iksivauja&&aqtunga
Aajaa samaajaajaajaa I sit doing nothing

iksivauja&&aqtunga iglukallangniglu imma
I sit doing nothing in probably numerous houses
samaajaajaajaa aajaa

aajaa samaajaajaajaa pijatuariliriga
Aajaa samaajaajaajaa the only thing that I now do

pijatuariliriga niriuttaujarniq una
The only thing that I do now is wait for the arrival of someone
samaajaajaajaa aajaa

aajaa samaajaajaajaa inngiqtaurlanga
Aajaa samaajaajaajaa let me sing

inngiqtaurlanga pisiksaqsiurlungalu
Let me sing and search for a song to be mine
samaajaajaajaa aajaa

aajaa samaajaajaajaa nirrittauja&&aqtunga
Aajaa samaajaajaajaa I await the arrival of someone

nirrittauja&&aqtunga tikitau&&arniarnianga
I await the arrival of someone despite no one coming home to me
samaajaajaajaa aajaa

aajaa samaajaajaajaa qinuisaaraluaqpiit
Aajaa samaajaajaajaa I am being patient

qinuisaaraluaqpiit ajurnaqsivakkillunilu
I am being patient though at times it becomes hard to do
samaajaajaajaa aajaa

aajaa samaajaajaajaa siaqqalau&&aqtunga
Aajaa samaajaajaajaa the times that I have been without

siaqqalau&&aqtunga kiinaujaqanngimut
The times that I have been without for the lack of money
samaajaajaajaa aajaa

aajaa samaajaajaajaa unangmijjavanngilakka
Aajaa samaajaajaajaa I have no desire to emulate

unangmijjavanngilakka angutilli parnajuktut
I have no desire to emulate men who are getting ready
samaajaajaajaa aajaa

aajaa samaajaajaajaa parna&&arniarnanga
Aajaa samaajaajaajaa I'm not bothering to get ready

parna&&arniarnanga parnagaksaqannginnama umiamik
I'm not bothering to get ready because I have no boat to get ready
samaajaajaajaa aajaa

aajaa samaajaajaajaa sujuruluuvillikiaq
Aajaa samaajaajaajaa what is the matter with me

sujuruluuvillikiaq ajulua&&aqtungali
What is the matter with me that I am so incapable
samaajaajaajaa aajaa

aajaa samaajaajaajaa nunguiaqsinnarivuuq
Aajaa samaajaajaajaa it is about to end

nunguiaqsinnarivuuq tainiksaqanngimulli
It is about to end for lack of a title
samaajaajaajaa aajaa (Imaruittuq 211-214)

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Appendix D: Magic Words for Hunting Caribou

I. “Magic Words for Hunting Caribou” by Edward Field

This ‘translation’ appears in Field’s 1973 *Eskimo Songs and Stories*, and is based on Calvert and Worster’s own translation of Rasmussen’s work in Vol. VIII of *The Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921—24 (The Netsilik Eskimos: Social Life and Spiritual Culture)*.

You, you, caribou
yes you
 long legs
yes you
 long ears
you with the long neck hair—
From far off you're little as a louse:
Be my swan, fly to me, long horns waving
big bull

 cari-bou-bou-bou.

Put your footprints on this land—
this land I'm standing on
is rich with the lichens you love.
See, I'm holding in my hand
the reindeer moss you're dreaming of—
so delicious, yum, yum, yum—
Come, caribou, come.

Come on, move them bones,
move your leg bones back and forth
and give yourself to me.

I'm here

I'm waiting

 just for YOU

you, you, caribou

Appear!

COME HERE! (Field 59-60)

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II “Magic words to bring luck on a caribou hunt” by Orpingalik

kumARUAQ niutō·q
You, louse-like, you, long legs
siuktō·q tiŋajo·k
You, long ears, you with the long neck hair,
ataunaŋa·t
Run not past below me
atuŋäg·fautit, iperäg·fautit
Skin for soles, moss for wicks
quiäklugit
You shall look forward to.
ma·uŋa qai, ma·uŋa qai!
Come hither! Come hither! (Rasmussen, *Netsilik* 279-280)

Rasmussen gives an alternate translation of Orpingalik’s song earlier in the Report:

Wild caribou, land louse, long-legs,
With the great ears,
And the rough hairs on your neck,
Flee not from me.
Here I bring skins for soles,
Here I bring moss for wicks,
Just come gladly
Hither to me, hither to me (Rasmussen, *Netsilik* 15)

III. “Magic words to bring luck when hunting caribou” by Inūtuk

qugjuq·fUAQ, qugjuq·fUAQ,
Great swan, great swan,
paŋNER·fUAQ, paŋNER·fUAQ,
Great caribou bull, great caribou bull,
siwUNERA man·a
The land that lies before me here,
kisimilo neqigikpōq
Let it alone yield abundant meat
nunagikpōq
Be rich in vegetation,
näkfō·fa·g·fatit
Your moss-food
quiagalugit ma·uŋa qai!
You shall look forward to and come hither
atuŋau·fa·g·fatit quiagalugit
And the sole-like plants you eat, you shall look forward to
ma·uŋa qai, ma·uŋa qai!

Come here, come here!
aːVERʃUARTIT ERPARTAːTLUGIT
Your bones you must move out and in,
manːiviunːaː
To me you must give yourself! (Rasmussen, *Netsilik* 280-281)

IV: “Magic words to help when out hunting caribou” by Nakasuk

acai, acai
siːwunERA manːa kisime
The land before me here, it alone
neqigikpɔq
Abounds with food,
quATAːrikpɔq
Abounds with reindeer moss –
siːwunivnut manːa
On the land before me here
tukLAːrasuktutit
You will want to set your footprints
quakːa tikitlugit
My reindeer moss you must come to! (Rasmussen, *Netsilik* 286)

Appendix E: 'Songs of the Copper Eskimos'

Songs of the Copper Eskimos

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No. 29. RECORD IV. C. 92B

Dance Song (pisik), sung by *Kān-wa*, a Coppermine river boy

- Verse 1. pt. 1. *i ye ye ye yi ya ālienaḡlukpa*
ātaḡcaḡyua tainiḡcait'ḡḡ
i yai ya hi ya
- Refrain. *i ye i ya ai yi ya ha*
hi ye yi ya hi
- Connective. *i ya hai ya*
- Verse 1. pt. 2. *tainiḡcand-u avaciḡal-uḡin*
no — uḡculiḡyuit'i tcikumi camani yai ya
 (Connective)
- Verse 1. pt. 3. *ai ya*
ilaḡneḡlucm-aḡapkin taicunaḡpāka
aḡlumiyun unuwaḡmata
i yai ya hi ya
 (Refrain and Connective)
- Verse 2. pt. 1. *i ye i ye a ya yi ya ālienaḡlukpa*
ātaḡcaḡyua tainiḡcait'ḡḡ
 (Refrain and Connective)
- Verse 2. pt. 2. *yai ya*
tainiḡcand-u avaciḡal-uḡin
nāḡyuliyuit'i ninami camani
i yai ya hi ya hai ya
 (Refrain and Connective)
- Verse 2. pt. 3. *ilaḡneḡlucm-aḡapken taicunaḡpāka*
ḡaiḡneḡin diwyḡḡḡmaḡin
i yai ya hi ya
 (Refrain and Connective)
- Verse 3. pt. 1. *ye ye yi ya ālienaḡlukpa*
ātaḡcaḡyua tainiḡcait'ḡḡ
 (Refrain and Connective)
- Verse 3. pt. 2. *tainiḡcand-u avaciḡal-uḡin*
uḡyuliyuit'i tcikumi camani yai ya
 (Connective)
- Verse 3. pt. 3. *ai ya*
ilaḡneḡlucm-aḡapkin taicunaḡpāka
aḡlumiyun unuwaḡmata
i yai ya hi ya hai
 (Refrain)

Translation

- Verse 1. pt. 1. It is pleasant,
 The game, there is no song about it.
- Verse 1. pt. 2. Words [for a song] being far away [hard to find]—
 Seals on the ice down here—
- Verse 1. pt. 3. When I obtained a few [words] I attached them [to the
 music]—
 To their breathing holes they departed.
- Verse 2. pt. 1. It is pleasant,
 The game, there is no song about it.

- Verse 2. pt. 2. Words being far away—
Antlered caribou on the land down here—
- Verse 2. pt. 3. When I obtained a few [words] I attached them [to the music]—
The plains when it crossed over them.
- Verse 3. pt. 1. It is pleasant,
The game there is no song about it.
- Verse 3. pt. 2. Words being far away—
Bearded seals on the ice down here—
- Verse 3. pt. 3. When I obtained a few [words] I attached them [to the music]—
To their breathing holes when they departed.

No. 30. RECORD IV. C. 59A

Dance Song (pisik), sung by *Ivya-yotailaq*, a *Puvliq* man. Cf. No. 31.

- Verse 1. *i yai yai yai yai dqa-yaca-ylaym*
nuna-yyuit-i tikapaktatka
ayoticat-i qatqacicunayya
- Refrain. *i yai yai yai ya i yai yai yai yai yai yai yai*
- Connective. *i yai ya*
- Verse 2. *ku-yua-ylu pinul-u ma*
ukpik-ytu qa kic-yaylu umiuy (?)
ucunnaqci-yvik isoqt-ytu isoqtul-ua
maqqsarvik mangaqtor-ytu
(Refrain)

Translation

- Verse 1. Let me recall them to mind,
The lands that I have reached,
Game as I do not even wish to find.
- Verse 2. *Kuyyuaq* [river] and *Pingog* [hill]
And *Ukpik* [river] and *Kissigag*,
Usungnaqstovik and *Isogtoq*'s¹ muddy water,
Maqqsarvik and *Mangaqtorvik*.

No. 31. RECORD IV. C. 70B

Dance Song (pisik), sung by *Kukilukaq*, a Bathurst inlet woman. Cf. No. 30.

- Verse 1. *i ye ye ye ye dqa-yaca-ylayd*
nuna-yyuit-u tikapaktatka
ayoticamnik qatqacicunayya
- Refrain. *i ye ye i ye ye i ye ye i ye i ye*
ye i ye i ye i ye e ye
- Connective. *i ye i ye*
(Spoken: *alienaqci-yami ila ilicaijiyog*)
- Connective. *i ye i ye*

¹ *Isogtoq* means "the muddy one."

No 29

Record IVC. 92b

♩=120

Dance Song (pisik).

by Kān.uva, a Coppermine River boy.

A **B**

i ye ye ye yi ya ä - li - ε - nay - luk - pa ä - faq - cay - yu - a tai - n - iq - ca - it - oq i

Verse 1. pt. 1.

C **Conn.**

ya - i ya hi ya i ye i ya ai yi ya ha hi ye yi ya hi i ya ha

Refrain

D **B**

i ya tai - n - iq - ca - mi - u a - va - ci - yat - uy - in (no) uq - cu - hy - yu - it - i tci - ku

Verse 1. Pt. 2.

Conn. **C¹**

mi ca - ma - ni i ya - i ya hi ya - a ha i ya ai ya i laq - ney - u cin - a - yop - kim

Verse 1. pt. 3.

(ext) **B¹** **C¹**

ta - i - cu - naq - pat - ka ay - lu - mig - num u - nu - van - ma - ta i ya i ya hi ya i ye i ya

Refrain

(ext) **Conn.** **D¹**

ai yi ya ha hi ye yi ya hi ya - a ha - ai ha - ai i ya i ye e i ye i ye a ya yi ya

Verse 2. Pt. 1.

B

ä - li - en - ay - luk - pa ä - faq - cay - yu - a tai - n - iq - ca - it - oq i ya - i ya hi ya - a ha - i

C¹ **(ext)**

i ye i ya - ai yi ya ha hi ye yi ya hi ya - a ha - ai ha - ai i ya (he he)

Refrain

Conn. **D²** **B**

i ya - i ya ta - in - iq - ca - mi - u a - va - ci - yat - u - yin näy - yu - hy - yu - it - i nu - na

Verse 2. Pt. 2.

mi ca-ma-ni i ya-i ya hi ya-a ha-i ya i ye i-ya-ai yi ya ha hi ye yi
Refrain

ya hi i ya a ha-i ya i-lag-neyl-u-cin-a-yap-kin tai-cu-naq-pat qa-iy-m-ney-in
Verse 2, pt. 3.

i-iv-yeq-por-ma-yin i ya i ya hi ya
Refrain as in V. 1, pt. 3.
Verse 3, pt. 1 and its refrain are the same as for V. 2 pt. 1 but the "he" is omitted at the end of the Refrain

i ya-a ha i ya tam-ig-ca-nil-u a-va-ci-yat-uy-in uy-yu-luy-yu-it-i tci-ku-
Verse 3, pt. 2.

mi ca-ma-ni i ya-i ya hi ya-a-ha i ya ai ya i-lag-neyl-u-cin-a-yap-kin
Verse 3, pt. 3.

ta-i-cu-naq-pat-ta-ay-lu u-nu-vay-ma-ta i ya i ya hi ya-a ha i i ye i ya
(muy-nun)
Refrain

ai yi ya ha hi ye yi ya hi ya. (1) This measure is probably not part of the song.

No. 29. RECORD IV. C. 92B

Phrases	Minor tonality ¹						Measures	Beats
	a	b	c	d	e	b ²		
V. 1. pt. 1.	A-	1/2	3	3			2	6 1/2
		B	2	2	2 1/2	2	2 1/2	5
Refrain	C		b ³	f	b ³	b ²	4	8
			2	2	2	2		
	Conn.		b ⁴	g-			2-	3
			2	1				

¹ Owing to the singer's shift in pitch it is arbitrary to say which minor

GLOSSARY

<i>ajaja</i>	a sung refrain used in many songs
<i>angakkuq</i> (pl. <i>angakkuit</i>)	shaman
<i>ikiaqtagaq</i> (pl. <i>ikiaqtagait</i>)	a 'split' song; a song which has had new words put to it
<i>Inuit Nunaat</i>	the Inuit homeland, or traditional territory
<i>Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ)</i>	Inuit 'traditional knowledge'
<i>inuk</i> (pl. <i>inuit</i>)	person
<i>inuktitut</i>	'like Inuit'; a term for Inuit language
<i>inummarik</i> (pl. <i>inummariiit</i>)	a <i>real</i> Inuk
<i>inuusirminik unikkaat</i>	life stories
<i>Inuvialuit</i>	the 'real people'; Inuit of Western Canadian Arctic
<i>Iqqiliit</i>	term for Dene, or Indians (lit. 'louse eggs')
<i>iviutiq</i> (pl. <i>iviutiit</i>)	a song used to embarrass someone, as in a song-duel
<i>-miut</i>	an ending meaning 'people of' (a place)
<i>natsiq</i>	ringed seal
<i>nuna</i>	land
<i>pisiksaq</i>	material for a song
<i>pisiq</i> (pl. <i>pisiit</i>)	song
<i>qaggiq</i> (pl. <i>qaggiit</i>)	song-house, or feasting house
<i>qallunaaq</i> (pl. <i>qallunaaat</i>)	white person, Southerner
<i>qilaut</i>	drum
<i>qimik</i>	tune; melody
<i>qimmirjuaq</i>	horse ('big dog')
<i>sakausiq</i> (pl. <i>sakausiit</i>)	song used by shamans; magic song
<i>siqqitirniq</i>	conversion to Christianity (in Igloodik)
<i>taavani</i>	over there
<i>tainiq</i>	the subject of a song
<i>taunani</i>	down there; toward the sea
<i>Thule</i>	a term for the ancestors of modern Inuit; also a former trading station (and now a village, Uummannaq) in Greenland), from which Rasmussen's expeditions take their name
<i>tuktu</i>	caribou
<i>Tuniit</i> (sing. <i>tuniq</i>)	the people who preceded the Thule Inuit; Dorset
<i>unikkaa</i> (pl. <i>unikkaat</i>)	story; something which is narrated
<i>unikkaaqtuaq</i> (<i>unikkaaqtuat</i>)	'traditional' or classic story; myth.
<i>unikkausiq</i> (pl. <i>unikkausiiit</i>)	a story told in a particular way; sometimes also understood as a myth, or classic (canonical) tale.
<i>unikkausinguaq</i>	'an imitation of an unikkausiq'; possibly a fictional story
<i>-vut</i>	singular ending meaning 'our'

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