The Struggle For Survival Of The Inuit Culture In English Literature

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ABSTRACT

Aboriginal Eskimo life is conceded to have been a persistent struggle for everyday survival in a punishing environment. Nevertheless these hardy people, although exposed to constant catastrophe, did manage to prevail in an ecological balance with nature. However, dating from the first contact with white men, the preservation of the Inuit culture has historically proven to be a battle against extinction.

There were many participants, both human and institutional, which influenced the transformation of this Arctic scenario. These were primarily the explorers who sought the answer to the riddle of the North West Passage; the traders and whalers who strove for self-enrichment and the missionaries who arrived with proselytizing purpose. The vexing problems of sovereignty, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and a variety of Federal Government agencies each helped to alter the original status of Eskimo culture. The Inuit assisted their own upheaval by their zealous appetite for southern technology.

Whether or not these influences have impacted benignly or negatively on Inuit society is a cultural dilemma open to a diversity of interpretations.

The work which follows is an attempt to demonstrate the magnitude of cultural deterioration which has become apparent from an examination of English literature. The corpus of material is regretably sparse but in recent years it has become enriched by the production of writings by native authors.

Abrégé

Il est sans conteste reconnu que la vie des aborigènes esquimaux fut une lutte quotidienne pour survivre au sein d'un milieu hostile. Coto-yant sans cesse l'irréparable, ce peuple vigoureux assure néanmoins son existence par une maîtrise et un équilibre écologiques remarquables. Cependant, dès les premiers contacts avec la civilisation de l'homme blanc, la culture Inuit se révéla à la merci du danger redoutable d'extinction.

De nombreux participants et des cadres institutionnels présidèrent au déroulement et à l'évolution de ce destin. En premier lieu les explorateurs qui voulaient percer l'énigme d'un passage vers le Nord Ouest; les marchands, les baleiniers cherchant fortune et enfin les missionnaires au prosélytisme ardent. Les fâcheux problèmes de souveraineté, la Gendarmerie Royale et toute une variété d'agences fédérales concourèrent à affaiblir les assises statutaires de la culture esquimaude d'origine. De leur propre chef les Inuits aggra-vèrent leur démission culturelle par un appétit sans frein pour la technologie de nos régions.

Quoiqu'il en soit de toutes ces influences et de l'impact bénin ou sévère qu'ils suscitèrent auprès de la société Inuit, la situation ethnologique de ce peuple soulève un dilemme à multiples interpréta-tions.

Le travail qui va suivre s'efforcera de faire la preuve évidente de l'ampleur d'une détérioration culturelle que l'examen des textes en langue anglaise nous rend visible. Bien que peu important le corpus de ces textes c'est heureusement enrichi par l'apport d'oeuvres écrites par des autochtones.

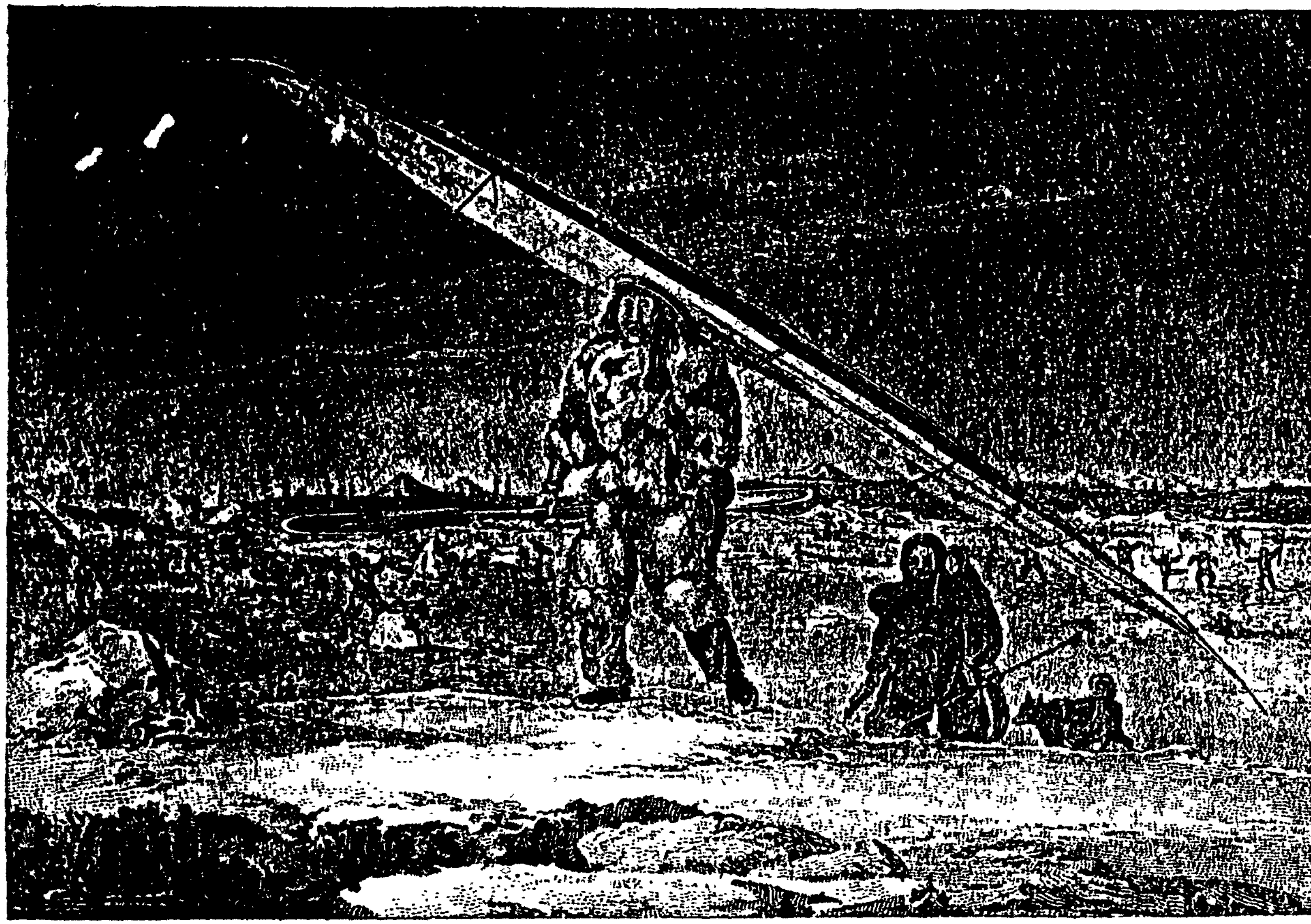
DEDICATION

To my wonderful wife, Ruth and daughter, Jo-Anne, son-in-law, Barry and granddaughter, Bonnie; also in recognition of the manifold achievements of my thesis counsellor, Professor Marianne Stenbaek.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Prints from: The Journal of a Second Voyage for the Discovery of a North-West Passage From the Atlantic to the Pacific Performed in the Years 1821-22-23 in His Majesy's Ships Fury and Hecla Under the Orders of Captain William Edward Parry, R.N., F.R.S..

Publisher: John Murray, Publisher to the Admiralty and Board of Longitude, London, MDCCCXXIV



Drawn by Capt.ⁿ Lyon R.N.

Engraved by Edw.ᵈ Finden.

AN ESKIMAUX OF IGLOOLIK,

In a bird-skin jacket Carrying his canoe down to the water.

Drawn by Capt. Lyon, R.N. — Engraved by Edw'd Finden

[illegible] CREEPING INTO THE PASSAGE OF A SNOW HUT.

Drawn by Capell Lyon, R.N.

Engraved by Edwd Finden.

AN AMERICAN WARRIOR'S FUNERAL-PYRE.

Drawn by Capt. Lyon, R.N. Engraved by Edwd Finden.

Drawn by Captn Lyon R.N. Engraved by Edwd Finden.

ESKIMAUX.

Drawn by Capt. Lyon, R.N.

Engraved by Edwd Finden.

MANNER OF KILLING THE KING, WHEN A WALRUS IS SEIZED.

CHAPTER I

EARLY INUIT SOCIETY AND CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

For the Inuit, the Arctic is 'Nunassiaq', The Beautiful Land. Despite this romantic idealization, the North is a hostile country in which anthropologists tell us the durable Inuit have survived for at least five thousand years. The 'Savages' as many early haughty explorers referred to the Esquimaux, were a stoic and sturdy race indeed. Over the millennia, they had learned to temperamentally accommodate themselves to their pernicious environment by developing an imaginative technology predicated upon their sparse and tenuous natural resources which were essentially animal-derived.

The natural food resources of the Arctic were limited and unfortunately cyclical so that the Eskimo himself unwittingly became a part of the balance of nature, migrating when the wild life resources of an area had been depleted. The Inuit thus survived in fragile harmony with their recalcitrant cosmology practising a cloistered culture which had been consistently shielded from white foreign intruders who "come from where a great pole props up the sky".[1]

Both the Eskimos and Indians have frequently been memorialized as Canada's 'First Peoples'. The Indians generally lived south of the Timber Line whereas the Eskimos struggled

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1. The People of the Twilight, Diamond Jenness, The MacMillan Company, New York, 1928, p. 123

to subsist in the polar vastness north of this natural boundary which segregated the two creeds. However there was vigorous competition between these fractious neighbours for the common hunting and fishing grounds which bordered both ethnic enclaves. Relationships were usually passive "Except when an opportunity presented for one group to surprise and kill each other".[2]

The Indians scornfully described their Arctic neighbours as 'Ayaeskimeau', Raw Meat Eaters, from their custom of consuming uncooked flesh immediately after an animal had been killed. The term rapidly became Anglicized and entrenched in universal usage. However, the Eskimos themselves had always felt demeaned by the pejorative connotations of this appelation so that they now proudly refer to themselves as 'Inuit',[3] their own designation for 'The People'. The Inuit language is known as 'Inutitut', formed from the word 'Inuk' which means 'Man'. The Inuit, in turn refer to a white person as 'Kabloona', a person with heavy eyebrows, a physical feature which the natives seem to lack.

The Eskimos in effect had once been a sequestered society struggling for survival north of Canada's serpentine tree line, an area which has aptly been described as "that damn and bloody

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2. Eskimos Without Igloos; Nelson H. H. Graburn, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1969.

3. Canadian Arctic Prehistory; Robert McGee, Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., Toronto, 1978, p. 124.

space - it just goes on and on until it makes you want to cry or scream - or cut your own throat".[4] To-day the Inuit number only about thirty thousand persons thinly dispersed over about one million square miles of tundra, ice and archipelago. This immense Arctic zone had by the mid-seventeenth century become a mercantile target for crafty adventurers seeking a shortened trade route from Europe to the riches of the Orient. History records that the frenetic search for the fictive North West Passage was actually the primary assault upon the integrity of the Inuit culture by the oppressive tentacles of white civilization. During the era of early cross-cultural contacts, "Everything about the Eskimo astonished the white man and everything about the white man was a subject of bewilderment for the Eskimo".[5]

In response to the merciless exigencies of the Arctic cosmology, the Inuit had forged for themselves an amorphous code of mores and conventions which enabled them to adapt to their stern environment. The three relentless imperatives for survival were food, clothing and shelter - subsistence being the primary requisite in a world where 'Food is Law'. Therefore all energies, cunning and hopes were targeted towards the attainment of these elusive goals. The physical strength,

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4. People of the Deer; Farley Mowat, Michael Joseph, London, 1952, p. 22.

5. Kabloona; Gontran de Poncins, Reynal & Hitchcock Inc., New York, 1941, p. 113.

mental toughness, and steely fatalism of the Inuit were always abundantly demonstrated by their tenacious responses to the terrifying spatial vastness which they overcame with their inbred philosophy of mutual helpfulness. "Here in this hard world men who knew not true socialism practised it".[6]

Perhaps the earliest violation of Eskimo culture was perpetrated by the English explorer, Martin Frobisher, who had successfully penetrated the Eastern Arctic in 1576 reaching what is known to-day as Baffin Island. Frobisher himself had perfidiously seized one of the natives, luring him into captivity by tinkling a small brass bell, an occasion for wonderment in a non-metal civilization. The bewildered Eskimo to whom "a bear was a familiar adversary, a white man a being unknown"[7] was conducted back to England as a human trophy. We are told that the "Strange Man of Cathay bit his tong in twayne within his mouth; not withstanding he died not thereof, but lived until he came in Englande, and then he died of colde which he had taken at sea".[8] To balance off the triumph of the captive Eskimo, five of Frobisher's crew disappeared ashore inside an Eskimo enclave. The fate they met has forever remained a mystery.

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6. Nanook of the North; Julian W. Bilby, F.R.C.S., J. W. Arrowsmith Ltd., London, 1925, p. 18.

7. The People of the Twilight; Diamond Jenness, The MacMillan Company, New York, 1928, p. 21.

8. A History of Polar Exploration; David Mountfield, The Dial Press, New York, 1974, p. 29.

Captain James Cooke, the global adventurer, failed to unlock what would have been a North East Passage from Bering Strait to the Atlantic coast in the year 1778. Somewhat earlier in 1769-1772 an enterprising young Scotsman, Samuel Hearne, in the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company completed a daring and innovative journey assisted by Indian guides up the Coppermine River to Coronation Gulf. At one point along the river, Hearne's party of Indians spied an Eskimo encampment from a distance. Despite Hearne's protestations the "Indians immediately engaged in planning how they might steal up on the poor Eskimos in the night and kill them all while they slept".[9] At one o'clock in the morning the savage Indians "rushed forth from their ambuscade -- and so begar the bloody slaughter".[10]

Traditional Eskimo society had always been characterized by "self-contained and nomadic little bands of people drifting across immense distances, recurrently beset by starvation and disaster".[11] These frequent migrations were constantly imperilled by sudden storms, famine, drownings, a plunge into a concealed crevass, loss of dogs or weapons, an excruciating interlude of snow blindness or a myriad of other unforeseen catastrophies. The Arctic was an environment in which life

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9. Tundra; Farley Mowat, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1973, p. 57.

10. Tundra; Farley Mowat, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1973, p. 59.

11. The People's Land; Hugh Brody, Penguin Books, Markham, Ontario, 1975, p. 77.

and death were truly neighbours. Despite the hazards, the Eskimos successfully navigated by noting remembered landmarks assisted by the dogs' confident sense of direction. It has often been said that 'every Eskimo carries a compass in his head'.

The nuclear family was the basic kinship unit and the successful hunter within this clan automatically earned the prestigious role of head man. Inuit social organization rarely extended beyond the family level but several families, generally interacting and mutually supportive formed a settlement or community. A population centre was nominally composed of a huddle of igloos with perhaps as many as fifty but rarely exceeding one hundred individuals. The numbers of people in any one, settlement were in direct ratio to the supply of wild life in the area which could feed the inhabitants. There were no hierarchical structures, no governing councils and only a flexible version of ad hoc justice tempered by the needs of the occasion. The concept of politics was entirely unknown.

By and large, the customs and traditions of the Inuit had remained essentially unaltered until the predatory whaling fleets arrived in large numbers about the middle of the nineteenth century. The sailing vessels with their cosmopolitan but disruptive crews converged from the Scandinavian countries, England and the United States hungering for the lucrative profits generated by the whaling industry which "as a theme

for adventure in an industry, whaling had few peers".[12] However about 1910, the whaling industry suffered an abrupt and disastrous demise. "The American whaling fleet dwindled from seven hundred ships in 1846 to a half dozen vessels in 1912".[13] Nevertheless, the lengthy exposure to the 'southern syndrome' had clearly altered the native life style and destabilized their patriarchal traditions.

About this point in time dedicated but frequently over-zealous competing missionaries of both Christian faiths began to arrive in significant numbers to convert the "horde of ignorant aborigines".[14] These men came despite the fact that the Eskimos had successfully survived within their own mystic milieu for thousands of years, spiritually nourished by beliefs and mythologies of their own creation. Unfortunately a cleavage between the host culture and the proselytizers quickly arose because the white transient adventurers were not always models of rectitude since "The traders and whalers often contradicted in their conduct the principles the Ministers laboured to teach".[15]

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12. Scrimshaw at Mystic Seaport; Edouard A. Stackpole, The Marine Historical Association, Mystic, Connecticut, 1966, p. 14.

13. Scrimshaw at Mystic Seaport; Edouard A. Stackpole, The Marine Historical Association, Mystic, Connecticut, 1966, p.X.

14. Thawing Out The Eskimo; Rev. Adrian G. Morice, O.M.I., The Society for the Propagation of the Faith, Boston, 1943, p. 63.

15. Thawing Out The Eskimo; REv. Adrian G. Morice, O.M.I., The Society for the Propagation of the Faith, Boston, 1943, p. 14.

Because the Inuit were a non-literate creed, there is a tragic lack of information about the pre-historical phase of their culture. Fortunately, however, due to the devotions of late nineteenth century missionaries a syllabic system of writing was devised which originally found its application in the production of hymnals and religious tracts. Nonetheless, like many other aboriginal peoples, oral legends and myths provided the essence of their evanescent past. Regretably, though, the body of popular English literature which deals with the Eskimo ethos is shallow and sparse probably because the public imagination did not respond to the remote, vaguely understood and deemed unimportant culture, although the attainment of the North Pole by Peary in 1909 did generate tremendous world wide interest. However, an examination of available literary material will be undertaken to demonstrate how the impact of cross-cultural contacts has affected the survival of the Inuit culture.

CHAPTER II

A PEEP AT THE ESQUIMAUX AND OTHER POEMS

One of the most historical popular editions of Inuit literature, A Peep at the Esquimaux was a poem which appeared in England in the year 1825 during the reign of King George IV. The poem is a series of witty verses which were intended to satisfy the romantic curiosity of a juvenile audience. Ironically, the work stands out to-day as a valuable testament to the primitive state of pre-contact Eskimo culture. In harmony with English social conventions when it was considered indecent for a woman to associate herself with any literary endeavour, the poem was attributed anonymously to "A Lady".

A Peep at the Esquimaux was published just a few years after Edward Parry had completed his first Arctic voyage in 1819-20 and John Franklin had returned from his initial northern adventure in 1822. It would appear therefore with some degree of certainty that the poem was inspired by journals authored by these explorers when they returned to England, defeated in their attempts to open up the fabled North West Passage. Significantly, both expeditions experienced only peripheral contacts with the Eskimos thus reinforcing the thesis that initially at least white adventurers had little concern for the Inuit themselves. As for the Passage itself, it was not to be until the

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1. A Peep at the Esquimaux; By "A Lady", H.R. Thomas, Juvenile Repository, Hanover Square, London, 1825.

early 1900's that the first transit was successfully achieved. Roald Amundsen and his crew reached Nome, Alaska from the East in August 1906. They had begun their journey in 1903.

A Peep at the Esquimaux is a valid portrait of pristine Inuit culture. Objectively perceived, it provides us with a dispassionate word picture free of any suggestions of the magisterial smugness which was often exhibited by Imperial Observers. As an example, we are told that "Franklin and his men strode into the Artic wearing top hats"[2] during his first mission obviously refusing to acknowledge that Eskimo survival - and therefore his own - had always been predicated upon an intelligent adaptation to the lethal environment. It should be noted that Franklin and his whole crew unfortunately perished during their third polar adventure.

The poem begins with a succinct summary of the destitute environment from which the aborigines drew the material to craft the implements and weapons needed for their hunting activities. They pursued the caribou - the 'sine qua non' of native diet - with bow and arrow or waited patiently crouched immobile over a seal hole for endless benumbing hours hoping for a mammal to appear. Fortunately, being endowed with short and stocky bodies, the Eskimos possess a low ratio of skin surface to body mass and therefore suffer less heat loss. At the seal hole the spear

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2. A History of Polar Exploration; David Mountfield, The Dial Press, New York, 1974, p. 14.

was always poised at the ready and the dogs waited silently at a distance.

"With scanty means this harmless race
Form useful weapons for the chace.
Blade composed of flint alone,
Or other nicely sharpened stone.
They shape the Bow and iv'ry Spear
And lighten Dart to strike the Deer."

Drift wood a precious and scarce commodity which floated up from the Tree Line was prized for its usefulness and versatility;

"Drift wood which comes from distant land
Is sometimes found upon the strand.
And this, though scanty the supply,
To many uses they apply;
It forms the Paddle broad and strong,
With which the boat is row'd along
And the neat Shade which Natives wear
To guard their eyes from snowy glare,
Whose workmanship would not disgrace
E'en artists of superior race."

The sledges (Kamutik) and boats used by the Inuit during their wide ranging migrations were completely devoid of any metal fastenings. Instead, the wooden or bone components were lashed together with strands of braided animal sinew. The outer shells of the swift kayak or that of the larger family boat, the oomlak, were made from seal skins, joined with sinew which swelled when wet to render the needle holes impervious to water. Due to their frequent travels, a surfeit of material possessions on the confined sleds hampered mobility and increased the work of the dogs so that by sheer necessity Inuit Society was obliged to be severely utilitarian and based upon resource sharing.

"Wood for their Sledges, too, they use,
But chiefly skins and whale bone choose;
Of these they form the neat Kayak
And Woman's boat, or Oomlak;
Of shape commodious, this appears
By women row'd; an old man steers,
Sometimes in this, they luggage take,
In summer when they cross the lake."

Evidence that the Inuit culture in the early, nineteenth century was still akin to that of the Stone Age is confirmed by;

"No sort of metal here is known,
Their arrow-heads are tipt with bone
And sharpen'd flint of every size
Or iv'ry, which they chiefly prize
The bone of Whale, the hoof of Deer
Amongst their implements appear
With tusk of Walrus, and the horn
of Musk-Ox and Sea Unicorn:
All these materials form a part
In works of industry and art."

The crucial role the women played within the family compact is revealed in the following couplets;

"T is not in outward garb alone
That women's industry is shown.
With equal art they can produce
Utensils neat for household use;
Harness for Dogs and Gear for Bows
And Bowls of leather they compose:
The whale bone Pot and Fishing Line
With curious Toys of iv'ry fine."

And the authoress, 'A Lady', who may very well have been of patrician breeding, was discerning enough that even in primitive societies a woman's work was never done;

"While husbands, no assistance give;
Women as household drudges live,
They make the Coat, the Boot, the Shoe;
And tailors, cooks and butchers, too."

The naturally obdurate temperament and rough manners of the untutored Eskimo are revealed in the following sociological profile;

"His patient Spirit never fails,
In ignorance bred, to Nature true,
His faults, irdulgently we view,
No good example meets his eye
When wallowing in gluttony;
His filthy habits unsubdued,
His manners gross, his gestures rude.
No friendly hand assists to teach;
Instruction comes not in his reach;
And scarcely knowing good from ill,
Being untaught, he's blameless still!

The inbred, fatalistic courage of the Eskimo is confirmed by the following descriptions;

"In his erect and honest mien,
Undaunted bravery is seen.
Not small the courage they can boast
Who fearless tread the icy coast.
Or who, like Esquimaux can dare
To combat with a Polar Bear?"

Religion was an ill-defined and abstract concept of the Eskimo psyche. Inuit beliefs were founded upon a medley of oral legends which were frequently corrupted in transmission as well as upon a system of taboos, shamanistic ritual and faith in a profusion of animal spirits. They did not formally worship any celestial deity nor did they have any notion of a purgatorial hell in after life. Their stoic temperament was reinforced by the credo that "The dead remain at the age they were when they died. Thus there is an evident advantage in dying young, as one remains young forever".[3]

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3. The Netsilik Eskimo; Asen Balikci, The Natural History Press, Garden City, New York, 1970, p. 214.

However, the idyllic spectacle of a pristine culture which is generated by this sympathetic poem has become sadly corrupted by an invasion of western culture. The Eskimos' inherent desire to emulate the white man in combination with their aggressive material expectations have sharply traumatized their vernacular society. The resultant deformations are painfully manifest in the countervailing poem written in 1968 entitled Lament for the Dorsets by the Canadian poet, Al Purdy (1918-). In this poem the Inuit hunters mournfully ask

> "What's wrong? What happened?
> Where are the seals gone?"
> And died." [4]

And again in the same morbid mood, an Eskimo writer bewails the tragic fate which has engulfed his people;

> "They pushed us away from our life
> now they hunt us
> beg and entreat us
> to display our dead life." [5]

A central feature of that dead life of course was the intrepid hunter piloting his kayak off-shore with patriarchal verve, searching for caribou, a term derived from "'tuktu' or simply the deer - - - 'Caribou' comes from the Micmac Indian name which means the shoveller or the animal that paws through the snow for its food." [6]

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4. Canadian Anthology; Edited by Carl F. Klinck & Reginald E. Watters; Lament for the Dorsets, Al Purdy, Gage Publishing Limited, Toronto, 1974, p. 463.

5. When my picture disappears; Author Arqaluk Lynge, Translated by Marianne Stenbaek and Ken Norris, Arctic Policy Review, Nuuk, Greenland 1/83, p. 2.

6. The Unbelievable Land; Editor I. Norman Smith, Specially the Caribou, Dr. A.W.E. Banfield, Queen's Printer, Dept. of Northern Affairs, Ottawa, 1964, p. 25.

"For I see
And recall in memory a man in a kayak.
Slowly he toils along in toward the shores of the lake
With many spear-slain caribou in tow
Happiest am I
In my memories of hunting in kayak." 7

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7. Ulivfak's Song of the Caribou; All Kinds of Everything, Edited by Louis Dudek, Clarke, Irwin & Co. Ltd., Toronto, 1973, p.25.

CHAPTER III

THE EARLY EXPLORERS

In order to fathom the magnitude of cultural deterioration experienced by the 'Permanent People' of the Polar Rim, it is necessary to examine the panorama of influences which shaped this transformation. One must also record that not all Eskimos are of a single homogeneous creed across the vast hinterland, "a land out of which life has died or a land to which life has not yet come".[1] Hence one finds a degree of regional flexibility with regards to social traits and customs. The maritime dwellers were primarily dependent upon the seal for subsistence whereas the caribou were crucial to the survival of the inland natives. However, in all cases where an alien culture is being scrutinized, one should be dispassionately guided by the even-handed dictum proclaimed by Vilhjalmur Stefansson, "It is human nature to undervalue whatever lands are distant and to consider disagreeable whatever is different".[2]

It was Stefansson who demonstrated during his first Arctic venture in 1906-07 that southern man could successfully survive by foraging off the land 'Eskimo-style'. The early explorers who sought to live in that hostile climate according to their own home-grown values generally failed, as has been noted in

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1. Kabloona; Gontran de Poncins, Reynal & Hitchcock Inc., New York, 1941, p. 31

2. The Friendly Arctic; Vilhjalmur Stefansson, The MacMillan Company, Toronto, 1921, p. 687

the third Franklin expedition. Minnie Aodla Freeman, a native authoress confirms the wisdom of the Inuit's inherent adaptive capabilities. She explains, "Inuit society was bound by rules and customs that found their justification in simple survival".[3]

Some contemptible examples of white prejudice appear in An Arctic Rodeo (1929). In this volume the author boorishly exclaims, "The Arctic? Oh yes! The last of the world's aborigines".[4] He then describes a conversation with an Eskimo whose name he could not grasp. "The response was a series of seal barks and pelican cries". Another mean cultural affront appears in Kabloona (1941), that of a hunter departing on his perilous mission, "long hair flying in the wind, his rags blowing about him, inconceivably the picture of a medieval mendicant".[5] The author neglected to add that each time a hunter sets out on his perilous mission he leaves behind a potential widow.

However, the responsibility for this alleged state of decadence must inevitably be shared by the western civilized nations which have adopted a posture of cultural legislators towards 'a lesser breed' of people. Jean Lesage, former Federal Minister of Northern Affairs who later became premier of Québec wrote a pertinent article in the Beaver Magazine in

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3. Life Among the Qallunaat; Minnie Aodla Freeman, Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, 1978, Quote Inside Dust Jacket.

4. An Arctic Rodeo; Daniel W. Streeter, Garden City Publishing Inc., Garden City, New York, 1929, p. 7.

5. Kabloona; Gontran de Poncins, Reynal & Hitchcock Inc., New York, 1941, p. 26.

1955, "As soon as any white man made contact with or lived with the Eskimos, he began to disturb the well established pattern of their society. He was beginning to create the problems of adjustment which exist to-day".[6] One of the severest cultural dislocations resulted from the evolution of a money economy which displaced the socially equitable custom of barter and mutual helpfulness. Stefansson confesses that during one of his earlier ventures, "I had put $1300.00 of paper money in my hip pocket and a hundred pounds in weight of silver and gold which we carried for trade with the Alaska and Herschel Island natives".[7]

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6. The Beaver, Spring 1955; Enter the European Among the Eskimos, The Honorable Jean Lesage.

7. The Friendly Arctic; Vilhjalmur Stefansson, The MacMillan Co. of Canada Ltd., Toronto, 1921, p. 56.

CHAPTER IV

THE WHALERS, TRADERS AND MISSIONARIES

The explorers seeking the elusive answers to the frozen secrets of the North West Passage were of course the first 'outsiders' to leave their 'foot prints' on the Eskimo culture. Then followed the hard living traders and whalers. In their trail came the ardent but not always tempermentally qualified missionaries. Then in the early 1870's, the Royal North West Mounted Police was founded 'To uphold the Law' in the burgeoning north west and the sub-Arctic. This federal agency later evolved into the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, a politicized body which was mandated to superimpose a code of legal values upon an unsophisticated society whose ethical precepts were governed only by the struggle to remain alive in a land "about which everything was a link in the chain of death".[1]

Central to all these intrusive influences were the foreign, economically powerful trading companies which flourished primarily by exchanging southern wares for furs, especially the Arctic white fox. Notable among these corporate giants were Revillon Frères based in Paris and the imperialistically oriented Hudson's Bay Company operating out of London under a charter granted by King Charles II in 1670. At times these mercantile antagonists performed humanely - on other occasions as raw buccaneers. However,

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1. Kabloona; Gontran de Poncins, Reynal & Hitchcock, Inc., New York, 1941, p. 19.

the corrosive psychology of the 'Colonial Syndrome' was present in all trading companies. "The Hudson's Bay Company man to whom had been entrusted the management of the new district was Mr. Christy Harding, an Englishman born in India."[2] During the terrible depression years of the 1930's when the price of furs plunged, the Hudson's Bay Company absorbed the faltering Revillon Frères.

Although the whalemen chased down their magnificent prey in all oceans of the world, the history of this daring commerce in the polar regions began only in the decade following the initial Parry and Franklin voyages. We are told that "The Arctic had never been penetrated by a whaler until 1835".[3] The exotic prizes the whalers sought were sperm oil, ivory and blubber. (Blubber was the vital ingredient in the Eskimo diet.) Whale bone was used extensively in the manufacture of stays for ladies' corsets, a Victorian obsession in feminine fashions. Even buggy whips were crafted from this same pliant material. Whale oil for illumination enjoyed world wide application before the development of kerosene. However, by about the year 1910 an altered industrial strategy had by-passed the need for whale-oriented resources and commercial whaling had become obsolete. Unfortunately, however, major damage to the Inuit subsistence chain had already been

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2. The Friendly Arctic; Vilhjalmur Stefansson, The MacMillan Company, New York, 1921, p. 390.

3. Scrimshaw and Scrimshander; E. Norman Flayderman, N. Flayderman Inc., New Millford, Connecticut, 1973, p. 7.

inflicted. Indiscriminate harvesting of whales with newly developed weapons charged with gunpowder had gravely depleted the herds to the serious detriment of the natives.

To emphasize the enormous influence the whalers had upon native culture, Farley Mowat wrote that "By the early 1900's American whalers and traders had taken de facto control of the whole western Canadian Arctic coast from the Alaskan border to Victoria Island - - - and much of the east Baffin coast as well."[4] The seamen in addition to guns, knives and axes introduced such highly useful articles as matches, tea, tobacco, metal needles and a variety of fancy canned foods. Even the magic of the primus stove was soon to be eagerly embraced which provided the Inuit with a more secure source of light and heat than the archaic blubber-fed stone lamps (Kudlu). However in conformance with our western money-dominated society, "The traders came, stayed briefly when their profits warranted then left the land and thought no more of the destruction they had wrought".[5]

It should be noted that the whalers were as ignorant and unheeding of their grim environment as they were avaricious. In the first known autobiography ever written by an Inuit entitled I, Nuligak, the author who was born in the Mackenzie Delta in 1895, witnessed foolhardy sailors deserting their ships at Herschel

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4. Canada North Now: The Great Betrayal; Farley Mowat, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1976, p. 33.

5. People of the Deer; Farley Mowat, Michael Joseph Ltd., London, 1952, p. 51.

Island to set out on foot for Dawson City many hundreds of miles away, lured by the specious romance of the Gold Rush. The silent north has never recorded their successes but the book tells us that "In Nuligak's life is compressed the transition from a Neolithic culture to our modern society. Nuligak began his life using tools of bone and stone virtually identical to those used by our own ancestors ten thousand years ago".[6] When Nuligak was a youth, axe heads were made out of stone and ice picks were wrought from ivory, bone or antler. Nuligak had also hunted polar bears, the Eskimo's most formidable adversary using spears at a distance and then daggers at close range. Nuligak, the cultural patriarch, died in a modern hospital in Edmonton in 1966.

A dramatic increase in cultural alteration was precipitated by the arrival of large numbers of zealous missionaries - often estimated to have been as many as one per hundred native population. These men came as spiritual paradigms to redeem the pagans from "the unspeakable moral depths to which this people had sunk before the coming of Christianity"[7] but too often "Conversion was encouraged by trade, medical benefits, threats and tireless exhortation".[8] Some missionaries pre-dated the Parry and Franklin

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6. I, Nuligak; Edited and translated by M. Metayer, O.M.I., Peter Martin Associates Ltd., Toronto, 1966, Inside Jacket Cover.

7. Thawing Out the Eskimo; Rev. Adrian G. Morice, O.M.I., The Society for the Propagation of the Faith, Boston, 1943, p. 55.

8. The People's Land; Hugh Brody, Markham, Ontario, p. 23.

expeditions by several decades. "In 1752 the schooner, Hope, chartered by three Christian merchants of London set out with four missionaries to Christianize the Labrador Eskimos. They brought muskets, powder and salted pork."[9]

Although essentially men of good will, not all clerics had been educated to understand the strange traditions and systems of mores which had historically evolved in response to the environment. Fortunately, many 'long robes' had received medical training to relieve the distress of accident or sickness, especially the virulence of tuberculosis. Nevertheless, there were stubborn individuals amongst them who were willing to sacrifice the well-being of their parishoners by inflicting a literal and inflexible interpretation of Christian dogma. Some missionaries in effect, even vaingloriously attempted to establish their own personal theocracies. Community tensions were further exacerbated by competition between the two faiths to win over the same meagre clientele. To highlight the rampant rivalry a Catholic missionary boasted "With the dogs I've got now, I'll set up my mission in the north of Victoria Island where no missionary has ever penetrated. I'll call it the mission of Christ the King. It'll turn the Protestants green with envy".[10]

Some missionaries stubbornly refused to comprehend that the rudimentary imperative for survival transcended the need for piety.

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9. An Eskimo Village; Samuel King Hutton, M.D., F.R.G.S., Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. The MacMillan Co., New York, 1929, p. 24.

10. The Ghost Voyage; Gontran de Poncins, Translated by Bernard Frechtman, Doubleday & Co., Inc., New York, 1954.

It sometimes happened that when the long-awaited herds of caribou appeared on a Sunday, the starving Inuit were forbidden to hunt the animals. They were condemned as 'Sabbath-Breakers' and threatened with an after life in hell, a concept which paradoxially appealed to the Eskimos for its eternal warmth. Even fishing in near-by streams on the Sabbath was denied the natives to satisfy their craving for food. Even struggling natives whose instinctive impulses to remain alive superseded the niceties of polite behaviour by southern norms were denounced as that of a "Savage in his abhorrent state of nature".[11]

One excessively devout Oblate priest canonically stated, "We figure the missionary goes before the doctor, first things first. It's more important for the Eskimo to get into heaven than to be cured of tuberculosis".[12] A saddened hunter who had reverentially buried his father's possessions with the body in accordance with local custom, was castigated by a fanatical priest who accused him of theft. "Your people are liars and thieves. They are pagans and cannot be believed."[13]

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11. People of the Deer; Farley Mowat, Michael Joseph Ltd., London, 1952, p. 85.

12. The Desperate People; Farley Mowat, Little, Brown & Company Ltd., Toronto, p. 114.

13. The Snow Walker; Farley Mowat, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1975, p. 173.

CHAPTER V

INUIT TRADITIONS AND MORES

Inside the family igloo the focus of warmth, light and hope was the stone lamp "which produced a wavering pennant of black smoke from its wild cotton wick but the faint warmth and murky illumination were welcome sensations".[1] So critical was the lamp to the cheerful mood of the dwellers that "without a lamp, the igloo was a grave".[2] In primeval times the fire was laboriously started with a hand-held friction bow or by rubbing stone flakes together over a bed of moss or twigs. Providentially, when blubber was in sufficient supply, enough heat could be generated to warm the soup of undiluted seal blood, melt ice for drinking water or to thaw the rock-hard caribou meat or fish which had been cached in times of plenty. A favorite treat was 'Nirukky', 'Eskimo Salad', - the semi-digested innards of caribou intestines - actually moss and lichens devoured by the animals when foraging. The marrow of caribou bones was another dietary prize. Family members enveloped in caribou fur robes - caribou hair is hollow which renders the skins both warm and light weight - slept on platforms constructed from ice blocks. A semblance of light penetrated through a window made either of a layer of translucent ice or dried seal intestinal membranes sewn together.

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1. The Snow Walker; Farley Mowat, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1975, p. 167.

2. Kabloona; Gontran de Poncins, Reynal & Hitchcock, Inc., New York, 1941, p. 214.

Caching food during times of plenty was a vital precaution against future famine. However, the comestibles had to be meticulously concealed against the wily wolverine or the powerful polar bear, predators which could invade virtually any structure in which food had been vaulted. Meat had to be stored whenever a surplus became available because "an inland Eskimo had to kill two hundred caribou annually to keep himself, his family and his dogs alive".[3] Inuit on the trail frequently had to endure punishing famine. During one such migration, a despairing family stumbled across "a deer cache - - - a foul mess of hair, bones and long-rotted meat, but it gave us the strength to continue on our journey".[4] Often, a frantically hungry Eskimo chewed his seal skin clothing, an organic material, for traces of nourishment to remain alive. It is believed that it was this custom which inspired the famous episode in Charlie Chaplin's movie The Gold Rush, (1925), in which the comic daintily ate a boiled leather shoe to ease his hunger. There are also varied accounts of a hunter who "fell on his knees when he reached the scattered black droppings of an Arctic hare. He gobbled up every one of them.

3, Seasons of the Eskimo; Fred Bruemmer, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1978, p. 10.

4. The Snow Walker; Farley Mowat, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1975, p. 113.

5. Wolf Run; James Houston, Longman Canada Ltd., Toronto, 1972, p. 27.

Within society, age was the criterion for authority and hunting skills the badge for prestige. A youth ascended to manhood just as soon as he had killed his first animal. The bow used in the hunt was usually made "from deer horn, split and bound together with plaited deer sinew and arrows with sharp ivory heads capable of piercing and killing".[6] It is interesting to note that the Arctic ecology does not generate any toxic material (the polar bear liver aside) so that poisons were not available for hunting use as in other primitive cultures.

Native weapons were generally ineffective instruments, a bow and arrow having a useful range of less than one hundred yards. Hunting was generally conducted as a joint family or group effort assisted by the dogs to reinforce the attack and to help haul the slain animals back to the igloo. However, with the introduction of fire arms, the hunter tended to become a solo predator thus fragmenting the collaborative bonds which had always been characteristic of Inuit society. The one very grave problem attendant with the introduction of guns was the tenuous supply of ammunition. Having lost their ancestral prowess with bow and arrow or harpoon, whenever the supply of ammunition was exhausted, the ability to secure wild life was dangerously impaired and the whole settlement suffered terribly.

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6. Nanook of the North; Julian W. Bilby, F.R.G.S., J. W. Arrowsmith Ltd., London, 1925, p. 182.

Each time a stoic hunter set out he was aware that he was exposing himself to risk from the unpredictable environment while the women back at the igloo accepted his plight with a silent anguish. Yet "There was no show of emotion, no farewell, though the men knew they might not return".[7] As a matter of fact there were no native words for 'good-bye' or 'thanks' in the Eskimo language. Whatever disaster might occur the response was a reflexive "'Ayorama'. It can't be helped: life is like that".[8] The word 'thanks' was not known because in a society distinguished by its fraternal interaction, whatever one gave or received was reciprocated by his neighbour as the need arose.

In the beginning, parent - offspring relationships were psychologically close within the family compact, stimulated by the human propinquity inside the confined space of the igloo. Children were taught respect and pride for their heritage by the conspicuous deportment of their elders. During the seamless blackness of the winter night they loved to tease good naturedly (sometimes scatologically), they sang and played at cat's cradle while the men challenged each other with arm-wrestling. "The women scraped and sewed skins, rolled and

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7. Nanook of the North; Julian W. Bilby, F.R.G.S., J. W. Arrowsmith Ltd., London, 1925.

8. Ayorama; Raymond DeCoccola, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1955. Text inside Jacket Cover.

smoked cigarettes, continuing such badinage and gossip until the nightly dance. The men talked about their dogs, their hunting and what they would bargain for at the trading post when they reached it."[9] However, inside the igloos, the etiquette-less and infrequently bathed Eskimos were oblivious to the smelly accumulations of disgusting trash, putrid filth and an assortment of discarded paraphernalia. When food happened to be plentiful, community dances were held in over-sized igloos to the beat of drums, the only indigenous musical instrument. Prodigal feasting and merry-making continued uninterruptedly for days.

Oral legends were recited inside the igloo, a learning process for the young folk which extolled by-gone heroics, lamenting erstwhile tragedies or didactically expounding patriarchal traditions. The animated, oft-times toothless raconteurs enthralled the children with their dramatic gestures and vocal shadings which they used to enhance the excitement of their stories, emphases which are lost to-day from casual readings. A popular legend of the Copper Eskimos recalled the first people to inhabit the earth. "In the first times there were no men and only a single woman. She mated with a dog and bore therefrom a litter of dogs and human beings - some of whom became white men, others Indians while still others

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9. Ayorama; Raymond De Coccola, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1955, p. 150.

became Eskimos. Thus the different countries were populated".[10] When the warming spring daylight began to displace the monolithic winter night, the congealed spirits of the people responded with "exploding passions and madness",[11] a giddy release of spirits probably comparable to the May Day festivities in medieval England.

Children learned by imitating their parents who in turn tended to mimic and emulate the 'civilized' whites. The boys struggled to become proficient in hunting strategies and the maidens in household chores, especially sewing. Inuit philosophy precluded disciplining children; the parents were aware that the implacable environment would do it for them. "Rules are things we Inuit children were never brought up with".[12] There was also the ingrained tradition of the second generation providing for parents in old age so every precaution was taken to promote cordial relationships between age groups. Perhaps the weapons of the hunt were the most precious patrimony a young man might inherit. A father proudly told his son, "The spear and the whip will be yours in time".[13]

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10. Report of the Canadian Arctic Expedition; Volume XIII, Diamond Jenness, King's Printer, Ottawa, 1924, p. 81-A.

11. Ayorama; Raymond De Coccola, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1955, p. 85.

12. Life Among the Qallunaat; Minnie Aodla Freeman, Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, 1978, p. 17.

13. Nanook of the North; Julian W. Bilby, F.R.G.S., J. W. Arrowsmith Ltd., London, 1925, p. 23.

Mothers customarily transported their infants naked except for a head covering, snugly inserted in pouches slung from the shoulders - a convention in apparent contradiction with our own sense of thermodyanmics, but which was psychologically a healthy phenomenon which helped to fuse a firm relationship between mother and child - a similar custom whereby Indian children were carried on decorated 'cradle boards'. Excretions were removed from the pouches with caribou peltry or absorbent ptarmigan skins which also served as family towels. Socks made out of ptarmigan were also esteemed as fashion items in a bride's trousseau for which "Needles were also provided and both kinds of thread, deer and seal sinew - - - and a woman's knife and lamp",[14] but the most indispensable implement which could be owned by any Eskimo family was the snow-knife used "for eating, for building the igloo, for attacking the polar bear".[15]

Religion was merely a nebulous accretion of acquired conventions, taboos, superstitions and legends bound up with the magic and spirituality of Shamanism, a tribal phenomenon which has withered as the Inuit have become assimilated. Spirits were deemed to dwell everywhere, even under the sea

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14. Nanook of the North; Julian W. Bilby, F.R.G.S., J. W. Arrowsmith Ltd., London, 1925, p. 180.

15. Kabloona; Gontran de Poncins, Reynal & Hitchcock Inc., New York, 1941, p. 54.

and in the inanimate world, all of which had to be propitiated. Stefansson observed at the turn of the century "I noted that Naqasah's milk teeth were pulled out by her mother with a piece of sinew and that they were not thrown away but were carefully put inside pieces of meat and fed to dogs - - - for were some evilly disposed man to get hold of one of your teeth, he could practice magic on you by practicing it on the tooth - - - you freeze a man's tooth or a paring of his finger nails and you give him chills, - - - you let them drop and he is likely to have a fall in the mountains and to break some of his bones if not to kill himself".[16] According to tradition because seals and whales dwelt in sea water, the Inuit were obliged to pour a dipperful of fresh water into an animal's mouth when brought ashore because "If a hunter neglects to do this, all the other seals know about it and no other seal will ever allow himself to be killed by that hunter".[17]

Amulets and charms were favorite devices worn in order to deflect evil spirits, especially those associated with the hunt. Simultaneously, they were intended to confer upon the wearer the remarkable physical attributes of the animals they represented. A grandmother had sewn a pair of amulets into the parka of her grandson, "one was a wolf's claw and another

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16. My Life with the Eskimo; Vilhjalmur Stefansson, The MacMillan Co. of Canada Ltd., Toronto, 1913, p. 56.

17. My Life with the Eskimo; Vilhjalmur Stefansson, The MacMillan Co. of Canada Ltd., Toronto, 1913, p. 57.

a hawk's bill to make him a swift hunter like his father and grandfather".[18] There were also many stern interdictions an Eskimo was obliged to observe during his life time. Amongst the Ihalmiut creed "are the laws which prohibit the making of skin clothing when there is no snow on the ground - - - and numerous taboos covering the activities of a pregnant woman and governing the conduct in the camps when a death has occurred. A surprising number of those apparently senseless restrictions have a sensible basis in reality and are not simply the rituals of the super natural".[19] In effect, "The taboo system was the first automatic defense mechanism against uncontrollable and unpredictable dangers".[20] Hence the Inuit dictum naturally evolved that "a wise man means a man who knows a large number of taboos".[21]

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18. Wolf Run; James Houston, Longman Canada Ltd., Don Mills, Ontario, 1972, p. 21.

19. People of the Deer; Farley Mowat, Michael Joseph Ltd., London, 1952, p. 259.

20. The Netsilik Eskimo; Asen Balicki, The Natural History Press, Garden City, New York, 1970, p. 223.

21. My Life with the Eskimo; Vilhjalmur Stefansson, The MacMillan Co. of Canada Ltd., Toronto, 1913, p. 412.

CHAPTER VI

SOCIAL STRUCTURES

"There is absolutely no internal organization to hold authority over the People. No one man or body of men holds power in any other sense than the magical"[1] - and that man was the Shaman. This master of the occult was thought to be imbued with supernatural powers but in reality he often exploited the credulity of the Settlement with raw quackery. His presence was feared and his pronouncements were tantamount to folk-law. He was fed, pampered and given sexual license with any female he desired. This usually bedaubed and frenetic mystic could theoretically cause the caribou herds to appear or cure the sick but he could also maliciously accuse any individual of a misdeed in order to protect his own priestly status. There was so much fanciful belief associated with Shamanism that "when an 'aunqutquhk' (Shaman) wanted to find out how other villagers were doing he would push out the bottom of a wooden pail or dish and would then fill it with water. The 'aunqutquhk' would look into the bucket. He could see through the bottom and look at all the villages along the coast. This was Eskimo television".[2]

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1. People of the Deer; Farley Mowat, Michael Joseph Ltd., London, 1952, p. 183.

2. People of Kauwerak; William A. Aquilluk & Laurel L. Bland, Alaska Methodist University, Anchorage, Alaska, 1973, p. 118.

Inuit sexual mores were never codified and like many other aspects of their society were adapted to both time and place. Children were not shielded from witnessing such performances, especially in the confined space of the igloo. "The exchange of wives was common among the Eskimos - - - a relief from the monotony of existence".[3] As a matter of fact the Eskimo was surprised that white men did not 'trade' their wives. "Why not?" asked the astonished Eskimo. "There's no harm in it. A wife doesn't wear out. When I get mine back she is always as good as she was before". Instances of multiple wives, although not common did occur . His two wives gave Siksik the sort of prestige a two-car garage brings a businessman. Bigamy for him represented virility and in the eyes of his fellow hunters added to his stature as a man".[4] Actually it conferred prestige upon a husband to loan his wife or daughter to a white man for a jar of jam or a packet of needles. And within Eskimo society itself, ardent males courted their lady friends with exotic packets of caribou tongues or "with an immense bouquet of marrow bones".[5]

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3. Kabloona; Gontran de Poncins, Reynal & Hitchcock Inc., New York, 1941, p. 119.

4. Ayorama; Raymond De Coccola, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1955, p. 37.

5. The Desperate People; Farley Mowat, Little, Brown & Co., Toronto, 1959, p. 81.

A hunter might be away from his wife for several weeks at a time stalled by weather, accident, white-out, or frustration to find any wild life. As a trapper primarily in search of white foxes, he might be away for extended periods checking his snares, radiating out a hundred miles or more from the family igloo. Under these conditions it was not unknown for either mate to take an interim partner for carnal comfort. Significantly however, any child born of such a temporary union was never considered to be unwanted. A male infant especially was always cherished as a potential hunter but "a child from any source whatever was welcome as any other child in the camps. Paternity is unimportant".[6]

Sadly, whether a female child at birth was allowed to survive was linked directly to the food supply and not for want of affection. Female infanticide was a positive technique to conserve food for more productive family members. "What good is a girl? A useless mouth to feed for months and years until she is taken away by another man, possibly never to be seen again".[7] Normally children had to be suckled for as much as three years because of the vagaries of available nourishment but

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6. People of the Deer; Farley Mowat, Michael Joseph Ltd., London, 1952, p. 181.

7. Ayorama; Raymond De Coccola, Oxford University Press, 1955, p. 3.

child mortality nonetheless was shockingly high. During that barren term the mother would be biologically incapable of producing a future hunter to ensure the security of the family. In any event the new born infant was cleaned "with the silky fur of an Arctic hare and more particularly with her mother's tongue".[8] However, according to tradition unless the child had been named, the destruction of an infant was not considered to have been an immoral act.

The practice of female infanticide had a long term effect on Inuit society because it reduced the numbers of marriageable women. This imbalance of partners in turn generated jealousies and hostilities amongst the male majority creating social tensions in the camps. Also at the other end of life's spectrum the elderly and infirm fatalistically sacrificed themselves rather than become burdens on frail food resources. "The old became a dead load on the sled, a dangerous hindrance on the trail. The lives of the young and the strong had to be preserved at all costs and the weak and crippled had to be sacrificed. It was the unwritten law of the land".[9] In conformance with this philosophy, a disabled father in a starving camp commanded his son to hang him. "It is the way of our people".[10]

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8. Ayorama; Raymond De Coccola, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1955, p. 8.

9. Ayorama; Raymond De Coccola, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1955, p. 67.

10. Paper Stays Put; Editor Robin Gedalof, The Custom, Charlie Patsauq, Hurtig Publishers, 1980, p. 60.

The Inuit, once 'born-free' as Eskimos, had never envisioned a formal code of laws. Their society had always been bound by rules and customs predicated upon simple survival. The Eskimos consistently respected a neighbour's privacy but resented the social disruptions inflicted by drones and laggards in a mutually reinforcing community. Social peace therefore was resolved by exercising a system of ridicule, mockery and/or ostracism against malefactors. Psychologically, this was a very effective technique (also employed by the Indians) because the approval and esteem of one's peers elevated an individual's prestige.

The concept of law was always personal unless the welfare of the larger community was prejudiced. The land and its resources belonged to all the people. Nonetheless "Should a man continuously disregard the Law of Life, then little by little he finds himself isolated and shut off from the community".[11] Crime and punishment were in reality only nominal phenomena. "All of the delicately balanced minor and major restrictions which go to make up the law are flexible - - - their openness to individual interpretation, and their capacity to adjust to individual cases, that accounts for the remarkable absence of what we know as 'crime'."[12] Nevertheless, a baser

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11. People of the Deer; Farley Mowat, Joseph Michaels Ltd., London, 1952, p. 184.

12. People of the Deer; Farley Mowat, Joseph Michaels Ltd., London, 1952, p. 175.

human instinct did manifest itself amongst these patient but obtuse Inuit. Blood feuds, usually to vindicate the murder of kin were known to occur but fortunately "The custom of foregoing vengeance and renouncing a feud in favor of a 'tax' or blood price was quite common with the Eskimo, particularly the Copper Eskimos".[13] Ironically in earlier years an R.C.M.P. constable may have arrested a native 'in the name of the king' for what may have been an infraction of southern mores but what was habitual practice in the North. The officer would then be burdened by a prisoner without a jail house - an offender who knew how to survive in open country where the constable himself might perish.

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13. I, Nuligak; Nuligak, Edited and translated by Father M. Metayer, O.M.I., Peter Martin Associates, Toronto, 1966, p. 142.

CHAPTER VII

PERCEPTIONS OF TIME AND COMMUNICATIONS

The People's perception of time was an ongoing linear phenomenon rather than a recurring cyclical experience, a non-systematized structure which was measured by events and the vagaries of memory. During pre-contact times neither the calendar nor the clock existed. Disastrous famines which virtually annihilated whole communities were used as temporal reference points. A bench-mark accident was the sinking of the Hudson's Bay Company supply ship, Nascopie, near Cape Dorset on July 21st, 1947. "Each new month is told by something to remember".[1] January is known as 'Onaitovick' the short days. The coming of April is 'Nuwaitoivick' meaning caribou fawns are born. "The Inuit don't celebrate birthdays. We don't reckon maturity in terms of years".[2]

During migrations, 'days' were measured in 'sleeps', random intervals when a weary group halted to construct an igloo (a combined effort requiring about two to three hours) to rest up and eat. The changing seasons were described by the specialized activities which dominated the Eskimo will to stay alive. 'Akunakhee', for example, was the designation for the

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1. People of Kauwerak; William A. Aquilluk & Laurel L. Bland, Alaska Methodist University, Anchorage, Alaska, 1973, p.19.

2. Life Among the Qallunaat; Minnie Aodla Freeman, Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, 1978, p. 37.

dreaded time of starvation - just prior to the return of the caribou in the spring from feeding in the South. Fred Bruemmer, an active and respected polar ethnologist has observed that according to the Inuit "Time is a vague and unimportant concept and the white man's preoccupation with exact time and exact distance mystifies and annoys the Eskimo mind. - ... - Mood, weather and need were the determinants of life".[3] To-day cuckoo clocks are status symbols and "The spectacle of an Eskimo setting an alarm clock strikingly points up the cultural revolution that has swept Canada's Eskimos in a single life time".[4]

To record the age of an individual - Eskimos were always an approximate number of winters old - or any other process which required the most elementary arithmetical calculations, always presented vexing puzzles to the natives. Anthropoligist Diamond Jenness (1886-1969) notes in People of the Twilight, that some tribes were unable to count beyond the number six. Quantities were loosely designated by the simplistic expression "more than two men have fingers and toes",[5] a crude technique common to many aborigines. Being illiterate and untutored, the Inuit were obliged to rely on their inbred instincts for survival.

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3. Seasons of the Eskimo; Fred Bruemmer, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1978, p. 93.

4. Nunaga; Duncan Pryde, Walker & Company, New York, 1971, p. 277.

5. The Spirit Wrestler; James Houston, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1980, p. 45.

"Each year the Great North takes its tithe in frozen lungs, in hands that have to be cut off before gangrene sets in, in eyes that slowly vitrify with blindness".[6] Tragically, the long isolated Inuit were vulnerable to 'imported' catastrophe, the white man's 'civilized' diseases to which they had never acquired a natural immunity in the North. Their resistance to contagion was nil and as a result virulent epidemics savaged the camps "when the white man and his germs arrive once a year by ship each summer".[7] However, equally disastrous was the endemic scourge of tuberculosis, a pan Arctic killer, induced by inferior sanitation and erratic diet. Whenever a serious contagion wiped out a camp, which happened with alarming speed, the starving dogs, unattended were left to die. Sometimes during sieges of dire distress, the Hudson's Bay post managers were permitted to dispense relief under the provisions of 'epidemic account' or 'destitute rations'.

Communications in the Arctic were historically tenuous and uncertain, the 'letter-box' invariably being many hundreds of miles away by dog-sled. Stefansson during his first visit to the Arctic in 1908-1912 mentions that "We left a letter in a

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6, The Ghost Voyage; Gontran de Poncins, Doubleday & Co. Inc., Garden City, New York, 1954, p. 61.

7. Eskimos Without Igloos; Nelson H. H. Graburn, University of California, Berkley, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1969, p. 142.

tin can suspended from a pole in a conspicuous place at the mouth of the (Coppermine) river hoping that some wandering Indians might pick it up and eventually carry it to the Hudson's Bay post at Fort Norman three hundred miles away".[8] (Ink was known to freeze solid in the cold). A few years later news of the Great War only reached Diamond Jenness at Coronation Gulf in November 1915 - more than a year after hostilities had erupted. Jenness dismally records the disgust of the uncivilized pagans after he had explained the mortal implications of warfare to them. "The Eskimos were troubled. Ikpuck could not believe our western natives when they told him that white men were killing each other like caribou. He pondered the subject for some days wondering whether after all the ancient traditions of his people might not be true; certainly white men who deliberately used their extraordinary knowledge and powers for the wholesale massacre of each other was strangely unnatural and inhuman".[9]

It is interesting to note the frail and daring plans conceived for an aerial rescue of Stefansson believed lost with his ship, Karluk, during his third polar expedition in 1913-18.

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8. My Life With the Eskimo; Vilhjalmur Stefansson, The MacMillan Co. of Canada Ltd., Toronto, 1913, p. 216.

9. People of the Twilight; Diamond Jenness, The MacMillan Company, New York, 1928, p. 194.

"Airplanes were to be employed. A ship would take the airplanes to the north coast of Alaska and they would make reconnoitering flights of 75 or 100 miles from shore - - - Each trip would be a non-stop flight. All this was to be done in July to September 1915. - - - Orville Wright emphasized the impracticability of the airplane part".[10] Perhaps the aphorism, 'There are no old pilots, just bold pilots in the North' derived from just such primitive plans. Stefansson ultimately returned to his base at Herschel Island without any external assistance. Some twenty-five years later Lord Tweedsmuir, Governor General of Canada (1935-40) writing as the author, John Buchan, observed the cultural paradox that "The Eskimo had never seen a horse or an automobile but he knows all about aeroplanes".[11]

A great leap forward in communications with the outside world occured when "In 1925 an Oblate in Eastern Canada, Father Rudolphe Desmarais, constructed two small radio sets for Chesterfield and Eskimo Point and thanks to station KDKA of Pittsburgh which transmitted the message free, the Fathers thereafter received words from their relatives every Saturday evening".[12] Hence contemporary news was received in the North

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10. The Friendly Arctic; Vilhjalmur Stefansson, The MacMillan Co. of Canada, Toronto, 1925, p. 383.

11. Sick Heart River; John Buchan, The Musson Book Co. Ltd., Toronto, 1944, p. 123.

12. Thawing Out the Eskimo; Rev. Adrian G. Morice, O.M.I., The Society for the Propagation of the Faith, Boston, 1943, p. 207.

despite the cranky and erratic reception. Perhaps the Inuit guardian spirits were trying to repel the deforming assault of Southern culture!

Throughout the recorded history of the Arctic, the husky was the indispensable ally of the Eskimo. He shared the tribulations of his master equally with the elations of the hunt. The animals, endowed with a sharp olfactory sense, performed as reliable sentinels outside the igloos sniffing out danger from afar. During the summer months when the sun dissolved the compact surface of the tundra rendering sledge travel impossible, the rugged creatures were employed as pack animals; in winter the dogs unerringly smelled out the breathing holes which betrayed the presence of seals - and helped to haul the carcass back to the igloo. The fearless dogs also helped to strike down the polar bear, often at the cost of their own lives. When Admiral Peary reached the Pole in 1909, the first white person to achieve this triumph, his original party had included "twenty-two men, seventeen women and two hundred forty-six dogs".[13] To-day the husky has been relegated to the status of a household pet but is eternally memorialized by his image on the coat-of-arms of the Yukon Territory.

For the next couple of decades, the stone age conventions of the Inuit were being relentlessly eroded by the proliferation of new industrial technology filtering through the frozen but

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13. The Exploration of Northern Canada: 500-1920; Alan Cooke and Clive Holland, The Arctic History Press, Toronto, 1978, p. 317.

porous Arctic borders. The ardently receptive natives, stoic by nature but equally materially oriented were more and more beginning to abandon the hunt in favour of urbanized life in settlements anchored around the expanded trading posts. Family bonds were coming loose; age-old beliefs were crumbling. The white fox, an international commodity which was equated with the meretricious magic of money, had supplanted the caribou as the premier wild life crop. Soon the impact of World War II was to demolish Canada's ultimate frontier and bring the Arctic and its people into the immediate world. On the ground "A man in the coming darkness is whipping his dogs. - - - Meanwhile in the sky an aviator protected from the cold by his electrically heated flying suit soars over those same regions and wonders whether this is where the Russian attack will come from".[14] Inuit culture, whatever remained of it, was doomed.

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14. The Ghost Village; Gontran de Poncins, Trans. from French by Bernard Frechtman, Doubleday and Co., Inc., Garden City, New York, 1954, p. 68.

CHAPTER VIII

THE IMPACT OF WORLD WAR II

When war erupted in 1939 the circumpolar area was thrust into the maelstrom of universal conflict. The Canadian Arctic became a vital adjunct to North American military strategy. "During World War II the eastern Arctic lay directly in the path of the Great Circle, flying routes between North America and Europe. A number of air bases and radio stations were built. The Cold War has in effect transformed the whole Arctic into a front line between Russia and North America - - -. The Eskimo is under the gaze of 'civilized' man whose reasons for coming to his land have nothing to do with native populations."[1] In Washington it was feared that the Canadian Arctic could become the Polar Gateway to the Pentagon. "Defense measures are bringing a considerable number of people from the south into the country. Industry is beginning to spread into the Arctic and the isolation which has protected the Eskimo for so long is being rapidly shattered."[2] The Inuit hunters were being absorbed into the work force and the face of the tundra was being indented by airfields and radar stations.

After major defense installations such as the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line had been set in place, the native wage-labourers

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1. Eskimos Without Igloos; Nelson H.H. Graburn, University of California, Berkeley, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1969, p. 8.

2. Peoples of the Northwest Territories; Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, Ottawa, 1957, p. 20.

were discharged into a job vacuum. They were economically destitute and emotionally confused. Their hunting and trapping skills had become dulled from disuse, while the caribou herds had become severely shrunken from years of profligate slaughter with high powered weapons. The Inuit had become cultural hybrids in their own land neither able to function as their forebears nor able to integrate into a disdainful white society. "The Inuit often lacked the will and resilience to go back to the land. They settled in tents and shacks near the sites around the slowly developing settlements - bereft of their old culture yet not belonging to a new one either."[3]

Bureaucratic attempts to redress the social malaise were attempted by Prime Minister Diefenbaker's government (1957-1963) linked with the struggle to break open Diefenbaker's vision of Canada's 'Northern Treasure Chest' to grasp the entombed hordes of natural resources. These industrial stabs only served to further separate the natives from their patriarchal conventions. The 'eye to eye' fraternization inside the igloo was now exchanged for the detached relationships around the tawdry commercial centres which had sprung up around the trading posts and which had now become elevated to the status of minor department stores. Assorted missionaries and jumbles of government administrators followed to complement the populations of less than a few thousand persons. Air strips around the hamlets were 'de rigeur' to make them viable with the outside world.

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3. Seasons of the Eskimo; Fred Bruemmer, McClelland and Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1978, p. 14.

CHAPTER IX

PROBLEMS OF SOVEREIGNTY

All of these cogent developments had quickened the Federal Government's determination to re-assert its claims to sovereignty over its polar wasteland which it had initiated in the early 1930's, although Queen Victoria had formally ceded the Arctic archipelago to Canada in 1880. Canada's political involvement in the Arctic had been shallow and inconsistent so the government felt genuinely threatened by the proprietary assertions of other nations. For example it was "in 1909 that the American explorer, Robert Peary, laid claim to the North Pole and 'all adjacent lands' on behalf of the U.S.A. - a claim which embraced most of the north eastern portion of the Canadian Arctic archipelago - - - was still maintaining this claim as late as 1924".[1]

"During 1931 and 1932 nearly three-quarters of the children born at Cape Dorset died of malnutrition and its attendant diseases."[2] With the double-edged motive to ease this terrible human distress and to reinforce its own sovereign claims, the Government entered into a political agreement with the Hudson's Bay Company to relocate bands of starving Inuit to selected geographical locations to manifest a Canadian presence. "The

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1. Canada North Now; Farley Mowat, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1976, p. 32.

2. The Snow Walker; Farley Mowat, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1975, p. 189.

Hudson's Bay Company with an eye to the future after the Depression, made a proposal to the government. Canadian ownership of the immense, high Arctic archipelago, now known as the Queen Elizabeth Islands had been disputed by the United States, Denmark and other powers. The Company suggested that Canadian sovereignty over these vast, uninhabited lands be strengthened by settling them with Eskimos who had been made indigent by the current economic problems."[3] One of the first re-settlements of twelve families occurred at a long abandoned R.C.M.P. station at Dundas Harbour on Devon Island. The choice was a disaster. The country, which is mountainous with towering fjords was ill-adapted to sled travel and was almost totally devoid of wild life.

The problems of logistics associated with ensuring sovereignty were staggering beyond imagination. The Inuit population, unorganized and numbering at various times perhaps 25,000 to 35,000 individuals dispersed over a defiant snowscape of about one million square miles linked only by elementary communications, was a Herculean challenge. We are told that "Twenty-five men, women and children made up the entire population of King William Land, a territory ten thousand miles in extent".[4] A further

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3. The Snow Walker; Farley Mowat, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1975, p. 189.

4. Kabloona; Gontran de Poncins, Reynal & Hitchcock Inc., New York, 1941, p. 101.

example of how tenuously uncharted land masses were claimed was demonstrated by Vilhjalmur Stefansson on "June 15, A.M., 1916 at Meridian Distance about 4° 15' East of Cape Isachson, N. Lat., about 79° 53' - - -. We have this day taken possession of this land by power vested in us for that purpose, in the name of His Majesty King George V on behalf of the Dominion of Canada".[5] The document was deposited in a papier maché tube at the site. No mention was made of the Eskimos.

The wilfull process to consolidate northern sovereignty was an on-going national commitment. During the early 1950's "That prideful organization the Royal Canadian Mounted Police had been sent to the Arctic to show the flag and thereby to establish Canada's political suzerainty over the vast northern wastes - - -. Although their apparent role was that of law enforcement, there was remarkably little demand for their services in this capacity so they became a corps of colonial administrators".[6]

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5. The Friendly Arctic; Vilhjalmur Stefansson, The MacMillan Company, New York, 1925, p. 525.

6. The Desperate People; Farley Mowat, Little, Brown and Company, Toronto, 1959, p. 115.

CHAPTER X

SCHOOLS AND MISSIONARIES

Dedicated missionaries intent upon fulfilling their spiritual roles established church schools for the untutored native children. However the curriculum was a dismal failure because it ignored the practicalities of a temporal education in favour of sacred instruction. "In most of the church schools the Eskimos are taught the singing of hymns, and the saying of prayers but they learn little else and what they do learn is useless to them for it is not applicable to the physical realities of their present lives - - -. It is a fight which is made more dangerous to the Eskimos by the violent competition between opposing religious groups, which often engage in most un-Christian strife, using the souls - and bodies - of the natives as pawns in their strange battles."[1] However, the naive curiosity of the children had been aroused by this first-time contact with books. To satisfy this response, they were fed "abridged classics such as The Odyssey and Pilgrim's Progress which were published in Inuktitut, the Inuit language".[2]

Education was further complicated by the inbred illiteracy of the Eskimo culture save for the introduction of the syllabic

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1. People of the Deer; Farley Mowat, Michael Joseph, London, 1952, p. 309.

2. The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature; Editor William Toye, Contributor Robin Gedalof, McGrath, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1983, p. 390.

system (by the missionaries), about 1885, an inexact process which itself generated many ambiguities. One was obliged "to rely entirely on the context of a sentence for the precise meaning of a word".[3] The Eskimo language is regulated by the additions of prefixes, infixes and suffixes to express nuances of meaning and tone. Such subtle gradations were vital to describe weather and snow conditions which shaped the day to day existence of the natives. Characteristically, when infrequent letters were written, they were done in disordered characters over a single sheet of paper, then folded and tied with caribou sinew. "They were carried in pockets and became very dirty from tobacco"[4] to which the natives had become heavily addicted.

Beginning with the post war period, the federal bureaucracy, "which speaks with two voices and no one knows what the other is saying"[5] thrust Inuit children into new educational programs predicated upon a barrage of white culture. Instruction was radicalized - given exclusively in English - which resulted in a wrenching severance from ancestral traditions and a transformation in behavioral norms and family cohesion. The boys had become lacklustre as hunters and the girls indifferent about family

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3, Eskimo - English Dictionary; Arthur Thibert, O.M.I., St. Paul University, Ottawa, 1970, p. VIII.

4. People From Our Side; Peter Pitseolak and Dorothy Eber, Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, 1975, p. 87.

5. Land of the Long Day; Doug Wilkmson, Clarke, Irwin & Co. Ltd., Toronto, 1955, p. 84.

chores. The education the students had received was aptly described as 'learning helplessness'. Even Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent (1948-57) characterized his own government's administration in the North as "an absence of mind".[6]

"Southern teachers come to northern schools with little or no knowledge of the Native cultures, little or no training in cross-cultural education, little or no understanding of instuction in a second language."[7] Eskimo children themselves have become so intensely southern-acculturated while the primitive stereotype remains so firmly implanted in the white man's mind that a concept of role reversal has actually developed. "When a Canadian Eskimo boy recently visited a Southern School, the teacher asked the children to draw a typical Eskimo scene. All the white children made pictures of igloos and sled dogs. The Eskimo boy's drawing showed a house and a skidoo."[8]

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6. The New York Times, August 22, 1983; Hopes for an Eskimo Territory Rise in Canada, p. A-12.

7. Learning: Tradition and Change; Northwest Legislative Assembly Report, March, 1982, p. 20.

8. Seasons of the Eskimo; Fred Bruemmer, McClelland and Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1978, p. 19.

CHAPTER XI

CHANGING BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS

Traditionally within the central family, the husband had earned his prestige as headman by virtue of his food gathering skills, a challenge now made acutely difficult because the caribou population had withered to ten percent of an originally estimated herd of three million. A disturbed ecology compounded by profligate wild life slaughter with high-powered weaponry were the essential culprits. The white fox "with its cyclic populations and wildly fluctuating price"[1] had become a very desirable international commodity and was now firmly installed as the Eskimo's primary entry into the monied economy. Nevertheless problems of subsistence and social equanimity continued to cloud the whole Northland. The natives were emotionally destabilized and culturally defenseless. Their once collective security had disintegrated into paroxysms of individual despair. The Polar People were confronted with a "Dead past and an uncertain future".[2]

In the dollar-dominated postwar Arctic, the headman suddenly found himself emasculated in the new wage - labour environment. Under economic stress, family cohesion had become fragmented. Off-spring were lured by imported neon-light distractions; the strict code of family discipline and reverence for elders, had

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1. The Beaver; Enter the European, The Honorable Jean Lesage, Spring 1955, p. 6.

2. Seasons of the Eskimo; Fred Bruemmer, McClelland and Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1978, p. 131.

yielded to a debilitating regime of permissive parenting. "The basic problem is that aboriginal customs are no longer functional".[3] Psychologically, the once proud Inuit had suffered a spiral descent into helplessness. "Drunkness became rife. Home brew was easy to make and not expensive. Card games grew more serious and fights broke out. There was more and more extra marital sexual activity".[4]

Although excessive drinking was not necessarily a post war phenomenon, the whalers and independent traders had introduced this injurious habit. The British born 'factors', sent out to supervise the trading posts were privileged imbibers. Ample allotments of spirits arrived each summer for them by boat, whereas the thirsting Inuit felt themselves denied. Nevertheless, "Some evil genius had taught the Eskimos to brew a vile concoction of treacle and mouldy biscuits and the effect of this appalling stuff was that drunkeness began to be seen in our village. - - - It was a dreadful pity to see strong drink taking hold of this simple people from time immemorial a teetotal race".[5]

The Inuit had always enjoyed an innocuous propensity for gambling - more in the nature of a teasing camaraderie to

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3. Eskimos Without Igloos; Nelson H. H. Graburn, University of California, Berkeley, Little, Brown & Company, Boston, 1969, p. 190.

4. Eskimos Without Igloos; Nelson H. H. Graburn, University of California, Berkeley, Little, Brown & Company, Boston, 1969, p. 186.

5. An Eskimo Village; Samuel King Hutton, M.D., F.R.G.S., The MacMillan Company, Toronto, 1929, p. 111.

relieve the ennui of the endless night. Such, too, was the devastating boredom which induced 'Arctic hysteria' amongst whites who felt suffocated by the imprisoning tundra - a syndrome during which demented men actually took their own lives, primarily white men who were not habituated.

Native gamblers were motivated by the possibility of acquiring bits and pieces of the wizardry and woes of industrialized technology which were now to be seen everywhere around them. Faddish clothing, ski-doos and frigidaires were avidly sought. In some instances gambling became so compulsive that families were literally destroyed. "Gambling abounded and anything would be staked except children and harpoons. One man won two extra wives in a night but soon returned them in exchange for small gifts".[6]

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6. Eskimos Without Igloos; Nelson H. H. Graburn, University of California, Berkeley, Little, Brown & Company, Boston, 1969, p. 63.

CHAPTER XII

THE NEW ECONOMY

Wage-labour was conceived as a remedy to alleviate some of the insidious economic distress. However because of the glutenous interaction between white authority and the sub-ordinated Inuit, the important jobs were reserved for the élite coterie of bureaucratic administrators of that "burgeoning colonial empire, the Federal Department of Northern Affairs". The natives were assigned demeaning tasks such as removing 'honey-buckets' from white men's houses or other degrading manual labours. Such blatant discrimination provoked a reaction of lethargy and spiritual despair. Realistically, however, there is a minimal distinction between white and native. "When it comes down to it, some Eskimos prefer to live like some of their white brothers - on welfare. It beats trapping as a way of life and generally pays more. I don't know any white men who have given up welfare to go trapping".[2]

Industrial co-operatives utilizing indigenous resources were organized with federal assistance to foster an independent entrepreneurial spirit amongst the natives. The products of such enterprises were intended for profitable 'export' to southern markets. Such schemes, however, despite the earnest

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1. The Snow Walker; Farley Mowat, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1975, p. 187.

2. Nunaga; Duncan Pryde, Walker & Company, New York, 1972, p. 228.

cooperation of the Inuit were not without hazard. The vagaries of the market place, costly transportation and lack of business acumen were just some of the economic deterrents. Unfortunately there were also latent cultural obstructions. A successful fish cannery had been established at Whale Cove which displeased the regional Shaman because he felt his authority threatened. This pernicious malefactor summarily imposed a taboo on the cans which his tribesmen then feared to touch. "These are primitive people. Breaching a taboo might not only result in individual misfortune, it could precipitate a total communal tragedy".[3] The cannery was shut down.

There was even a cultural dichotomy in the matter of diet between the North and South. Each Society is characterized by its own preferences and values. What is demeaned in one milieu may be highly prized in the other. "I got a kick out of knowing that the same beautiful Arctic char we were catching to feed our dogs were selling as a gourmet dish in the top restaurants of Canada and the United States. We figured we had to stock up five thousand pounds of fish in the fall to run the dogs through the winter".[4]

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3. Inuit Journey; Edith Iglauer, Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., Vancouver, 1979, p. 141.

4. Nunaga; Duncan Pryde, Walker & Company, New York, 1972, p. 219.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INUIT ART

Historically, sculpting had been a native skill which was, astonishingly by our own conventions - completely devoid of any aesthetic intent by the carvers themselves. Nevertheless, one should be consistently alert to recognize the latent animation and magical potential with which the ancient carvings were infused. Each and every article was designed to be functional or purposeful. Among the latter type were amulets or charms worn by intrepid hunters to ward off sickness or accident. The array of utilitarian articles included tools, lamps, toys and toggles. (Buttons as fasteners were totally unknown in the Inuit ethos). Objects traditionally were no larger than 'palm' size to ease the burden of travel in the crabbed space of the sleds.

"I never thought I would be living off the very carvings I used to make only to keep my children happy."[1] Such an expression of cultural chagrin is symptomatic of the radical transformation which has overtaken Eskimo Art in the present era. By 1972, "In Canada's North, the production of art and craft objects has become the largest and most widely spread industrial activity. In some areas it is almost the only means by which the former hunters and their families can survive in a society that depends on the availability of money for survival".[2] Paradoxically, in the pre-contact

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1. Paper Stays Put; Nipikti, the Old Man Carver, Alootek Ipellie Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, 1980, p. 97.
2. Artscanada; Eskimo Art Reconsidered, George S. Swinton, December 1971/January 1972, p. 85.

era there was not even a word for art in the Eskimo lexicon.

The most 'marketable' sculptural motifs are Nanook, the polar bear, and the image of a frozen hunter, harpoon in hand, hunched over a seal hole. Carvings are shaped from bone, stone, antler or ivory - or more recently from old, weathered whalebone repossessed from abandoned maritime sites. Abstract forms are intended to invoke mythological reminiscences or time-worn spiritual beliefs. During one of his journies to the Arctic, Knud Rasmussen queried a native about the intellectual life of his fellow-natives. The answer he received qualifies to explain the mystique surrounding the current production of art works "All our customs come from life and turn towards life; we explain nothing, we believe nothing, but in what I have just shown you lies our answer to all you ask".[3]

The development of the Inuit print which has earned a wide international appreciation was entirely fortuitous. It happened that "In 1959, Oshaweetuk had walked into the office of James Houston the government administrator of Dorset and himself an artist, and noticing a package of Player's cigarettes on the table, had remarked of the familiar picture of the bearded sailor on the wrapper, 'It must be terrible to have to paint this little sailor on every package every time'".[4] Houston was stunned by

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3. The Inuit Print; National Museum of Man, Ottawa, 1977, p. 26.
4. Inuit Journey; Edith Iglauer, Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., Vancouver, 1979, p. 116.

the impact of the remark and immediately grasped the potential for educating the natives to give formal expression to their latent artistic sensibilities through the creative process of print making. The idea has been so successful that print making is presently flourishing in many Inuit communities.

At the inception of the program, native print makers were culturally unsure of themselves and were therefore vulnerable to suggestions by starchy missionaries to incorporate religious and Greek classical motifs in their works. Such an incongruous cultural travesty resulted in works "depicting the Last Supper and the fourteen Stations of the Cross; the figures were Grecian-style robes and grapes and tropical leaves".[5] With good common sense however, Houston intervened re-asserting the credo "that the Eskimo should reject anything imposed on him because his thinking is so different from ours".[6] Inuit drawings and prints have characteristically evolved in which all images are confined to the frontal plane; there is a total lack of background or perspective.

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5. Inuit Journey; Edith Iglauer, Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., Vancouver, 1979, p. 117.

6. Inuit Journey; Edith Iglauer, Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., Vancouver, 1979, p. 117.

CHAPTER XIV

NATIVE LITERATURE : HARPOON OF THE HUNTER

It was only as recently as 1970 that a prideful native Eskimo became the first of his people to produce a fictional narrative incorporating the faded civilization of his brethern. Significantly, it is also the first indigenous work to be published in English which describes life in the Canadian Arctic before the coming of the white man. The story, entitled Harpoon of the Hunter, has also become enshrined as a major contribution to the body of our national ethnic literature.

The author's name was 'Markoosie', husband to a wife who was Christened with a Biblical name, Zipporah. All Inuit were customarily known by a single tribal name until the 1970's and frequently the same name was applied to both male and female without distinction. Markoosie's home was deep inside the Arctic Circle at Resolute on Cornwallis Island not far from the magnetic pole. Markoosie was also distinguished as the first Canadian Eskimo to earn a pilot's license.

Inspired by the heroic legends Markoosie had heard from his elders, he felt compelled to record his people's pre-contact culture and daring adventures. He originally wrote Harpoon of the Hunter in syllabics but the excellence of his achievement so impressed the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs that he was invited to translate his work into English. The book was so

enthusiastically received that this "First Eskimo novel has been published in a dozen languages around the world".[1]

The tension in Harpoon of the Hunter radiates out of the co-operative adventure of an encampment of nine hunters and sixty dogs. A rabid polar bear had attacked the dogs outside the igloos during the night and brutally destroyed five of the animals, their stomachs sundered, limbs torn away and throats ripped open. From experience the Eskimos knew that a rabid bear is capable of spreading its venomous contagion throughout an entire wild life area, thereby extinguishing their only source of food. Whatever the dangers, whatever the cost, the hunters knew they must track down the bear and destroy it.

The intrepid hunters were beset by interminable disasters. Relentless storms, accidents and starvation plagued the pursuers. The older men all perished, victims of the heartless Arctic. Only Kamik, a boy of sixteen winters had survived, tortured by famine and crazed by the loss of all the hunters and the dogs. Kamik desperately exerting the last remnants of his energies, tracked down the cursed bear and killed it at close quarters with his spear. But even in frozen triumph, Kamik had lost his world. He remembered '"Before my father died, he said only dead people find everlasting peace. He said he was going where there was peace. And he said he would wait for me'" "Kamik looked at the harpoon

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1. The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature; Editer, William Toye, Contributor Robin Gedalof, McGrath, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1983, p. 391.

in his hands. Now the time had come. Now was the time to find peace, and to find the family and the people he loved. He kneeled and put the tip of the harpoon to his throat. Suddenly, he pushed it in. And, for the last time, the harpoon of the hunter made its kill."[2]

Perhaps as a postlude inspired by Markoosie's reputation as a polar pilot, Québec's Gabrielle Roy who authored The Tin Flute in 1947, conceived her own story incorporating a similar background to his. She published Wildflower, a translation from the French La Rivière Sans Repos which thrusts the persona of the Inuit into the vortex of world affairs. The story begins at Fort Chimo at the bottom of horse-shoe shaped Ungava Bay. It is the saga of Elsa, an unwed Eskimo girl whose son, sired by a U.S. airman, grows up to experience service in the Viet Nam War as a bomber pilot. Hence the once remote Inuit culture is directly linked with the machinations of the whole world now shrunken to the dimensions of a 'Global Village'.

Air travel had made Canada's Arctic accessible. Instant communications have compressed its immensity to the dimensions of a living room. The whole Northland has become linked by voice or instantaneous print. The 'mail box' is no longer hundreds of glacial miles away by sled. Canada launched its first satellite Alouette 1 in September 1962. The initial satellite in the Anik

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2. Harpoon of the Hunter; Markoosie, McGill, Queen's Press, Montreal, 1970, p. 81.

program (Anik means Brotherhood in the Inuit tongue) breached the ionosphere ten years later in November 1972. What may very well be the first recording of a satellite in Inuit literature appears in Nunaga issued in 1971. It was four years earlier that the author, Duncan Pryde, was leading a dog team across the cheerless tundra when he was suddenly startled by a 'star' slicing across the sky. "I stopped the sled to watch through the binoculars. How ironic it seemed that in the time that one of these satellites took to make a revolution around the world, we had travelled only a few miles."[3]

3. Nunaga; Duncan Pryde, Walker & Company, New York 1971, p. 207.

CHAPTER XV

MILESTONES IN INUIT LITERATURE

Only a decade ago there was a genuine paucity of literature pertaining to Canada's native peoples, and more especially with regard to Inuit society. This deplorable condition has been well documented by a number of authorities. It was in 1974 that Guy Sylvestre, National Librarian, wrote in the introduction to a bibliography entitled Indian-Inuit Authors, "There have been few if any efforts to produce a definitive record of the written and published works of the aboriginal peoples of Canada".[1] The substance of this remarkable statement is re-inforced by an embarrassingly sketchy entry for Inuit literature which appears in The Literary History of Canada. "A considerable number of books have appeared on the Indians of Canada, and a few on the Metis and Eskimo."[2] By and large in Canada as in many other young countries, "The Staple products of the earliest Canadian presses, as of colonial presses everywhere, were newspapers, almanacs, laws and legislative publications - - -. There were almost no creative works of imagination, thought or research - - -. The small demand for such material was met by importing, mainly from Great Britian."[3]

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1. Indian-Inuit Authors; Information Canada, Ottawa, 1974, Introduction not paged.

2. The Literary History of Canada; General Editor, Carl F. Klink, Henry B. Mayo, Social Sciences, Second Edition, Volume Three, University of Toronto Press, 1976, p. 155.

3. A Bibliography of Canadian Imprints 1751-1800; Marie Tremaine, University of Toronto Press, 1952, p. XIX.

Inuit legends and folkloric material which form a basic resource for the development of Arctic literature were until their recent popularity available only in scientific and academic journals, such as Report of the Canadian Arctic Expedition Volume XIII, 1913-18 by Diamond Jeuness or Knud Radmussen's creditable ten-volume report The Fifth Thule Expedition (1921-24). Much of this primary material has been extracted and modified and subsequently incorporated into commercial publications intended to appeal to the fantasies of young children. Recurrent themes in these works are the polar bear, Nanook, and the ubiquitous hunter with harpoon.

Prominent among the children's stories which have found their place in the Inuit literary canon is Nuki, written by Alma Houston in 1955. Nuki is a romantic fiction about an eleven year old Baffin Island Boy who became responsible for the welfare of his family after his father had been accidentally killed, victim of a crushing ice floe. Sons of the Arctic, a novel by the film maker, Doug Wilkinson (1965) is an exciting epic of three youthful hunters who are confronted by a huge polar bear. This work especially demonstrates the tempermental accommodation by the Inuit psyche to their punishing environment. The same author's Land of the Long Day (1955) revolves around twelve year old Paneeluk, "with a ragged face that spoke of an admixture of blood in the distant past of his forefathers. Perhaps his great grandfather had been

a sailor. - - - No one knew and no one cared. Paneeluk was an Eskimo".[4]

Julian W. Bilby, F.R.G.S., may be considered to be one of the 'Fathers' of Eskimo literature. His Nanook of the North (1925) published in London is a valuable recitation of his polar experiences. He diligently recorded "the tribal customs and beliefs which are gradually dying out; for the great fur trading companies have pushed forward, the North-West Mounted Police have established posts in several parts of the country and the land has been made subject to Canadian Law".

Subsequent 'pathfinders' of Inuit literature begin to appear in more significant numbers in the 1940's and 1950's. Gontran de Poncins, both an oblate missionary and an ethnologist, departed from Paris in 1938 "to evangelize the most distant and disinherited peoples of the earth".[5] Kabloona (1941), the saga of his experiences in the western Arctic amongst the Netsilikmiut, is a first hand revelation of the culture of these primitive people. Another meritorious publication is Ayorama (1955) authored by Raymond De Coccola, a Corsican missionary, who personally survived twelve years in the central Arctic sharing the terrible hardships and fleeting joys of the stoic natives. During this prolonged exposure to the exhausting environment he learned to adapt to the

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4. Land of the Long Day; Doug Wilkinson, Clarke, Irwin & Company Ltd., Toronto, 1955, p. 143.

5. Nanook of the North; Julian W. Bilby, F.R.G.S., J.W. Arrowsmith, London, 1925, p. 7.

Inuit philosophy - 'Ayorama' - it can't be helped."[6]

A recent important addition to Inuit literature is entitled Paper Stays Put: A Collection of Inuit Writing (1980). The book is a valuable anthology of stories, poems, essays, plays, memoirs and songs dealing with the social history of the Eskimo ethos in the North and the culture shock suffered by Inuit who have emigrated to the metropolitan centres of the South. The selective writings have been chosen from major Inuit publications of the 1960's. The cogent title was aphoristically inspired by a folkloric-loving Inuk who declared, "By ear we forget, but paper stays put".[7] It is in this text that the life of the Eskimo has been so memorably and so poignantly summed up, "The old life was a long walk on an empty stomach".[8]

The Story of John Ayaruaq was the first book published in syllabics. The work originally appeared in Intercom and later was reproduced in the periodical, North, dated March 1969. An abridged version of the narrative which mirrors ancient traditions has been included in Paper Stays Put. "My father's name was Uvinik and my mother's was Iquaq. My own father had two wives, Iquaq and Haakuluk. The essence of the plot is one of familiar

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6. Kabloona; Gontran de Poncins, Reynal & Hitchcock Inc., New York, 1941, p. 4.

7. Paper Stays Put; Editor, Robin Gedalof, Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, 1980, p. 7.

8. Paper Stays Put; Editor, Robin Gedalof, A Story of Starvation, Marion Tuu'luq, Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, 1980, p. 121.

Eskimo tragedy; a hunting party suddenly finds itself in open waters, trapped on an ice floe. All the hapless persons perish."[9]

A number of diaries dealing with the integrative life styles in the North have presently appeared. A pertinent example is Georgia: An Arctic Diary published in 1982. Throughout its pages one may learn about the paths of social pestilence and political unease which are festering in the Arctic. A description of the interior of a modern 'matchbox' house follows: "Discoloured sheets of plastic, newspapers and scraps of fabric hung from the walls. - - - The floors were as uninviting as any other abandoned Inuit camp or garbage dump".[10] Neither is the largesse of government welfare achieving its objectives. "The seeming lack of relationship between work performed and wages received galls him (a government administrator) - - - Like the prizes in Cracker Jack boxes, money is shovelled out with seemingly no correlation between effort and recompense. Indeed, the material trappings of mercantile society are considered to be something due to the Inuit rather than the fruits of toil."[11]

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9. Paper Stays Put; Editor, Robin Gedalof, The Story of John Ayaruaq, John Ayaruaq, Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, 1980, p. 53.

10. Georgia: An Arctic Diary; Georgia, Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, 1982, p. 122.

11. Georgia: An Arctic Diary; Georgia, Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, 1982, pp. 160, 161.

Life Among the Qallunaat, (the white men) by the native writer, Minnie Aodla Freeman, is an enlightening record of the cultural shock and ethnic snubs experienced by unsophisticated Inuit who move South in search of 'the better life'. The authoress, educated in the north around James Bay, was awarded a post in Ottawa to work as an Inuit-English translator. Traffic lights and escalators were baffling but tolerable experiences, but not the villainous welcome she received from her superior the first morning she reported for work. "I can't remember your name, but are you the Eskimo?"[12]

There have been embarrassingly few Canadian novelists who have had either the imagination or temerity to locate their works inside our national Arctic, an area fertile with a dense silence, a treacherous landscape and a spatial tyrrany. Nevertheless, Farley Mowat has produced an important collection of literature predicated upon his own experiences in the North, books which are heavily laden with sociological and ethnological observations. Most critics believe that Mowat's personal sentiments are excessively tilted in favour of the Inuit, Canada's 'disinherited people'. Mowat is also strongly critical of the swelling despoliation of Arctic ecology through careless resource exploitation.

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12. Life Among the Qallunaat; Minnie Aodla Freeman, Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, 1978, p. 19.

The author's propensity to heighten his stories for dramatic appeal is compatible with his belief "that one should never spoil a good story for lack of exaggeration".[13]

Mowat, a good story teller with a lucid prose style, was born in 1921 at Belleville, Ontario. Mowat could not find a Canadian publisher for his first effort, People of the Deer, an account of the Ihalmiut, the Inland People of the Barrens. Doubtlessly our own feelings of national cultural insecurity and the book's generous criticism of the federal bureaucracy were the built-in deterrents to Canadian publication. By good fortune, however, the book was published abroad, in London by Michael Joseph in 1952. People of the Deer is now renowned within the corpus of postwar Inuit literature. Mowat's follow-up publication, The Desperate People, 1959, a more moderate and equitably objective treatment of the Inuit dilemma, was published by Little, Brown and Company, Toronto.

Obviously the sanctity of Inuit culture has been under attack dating back to the earliest intrusions by alien civilizations, a phenomenon which is clearly reflected in the available literature. The novelist and critic Margaret Atwood has perceptively commented that "The Indians and Eskimos have rarely been considered in and for themselves; they are usually made into projections of some-

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13. The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature; General Editor, William Toye, Contributor Robin Gedalof, McGrath, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1983, p. 536.

thing in the white Canadian psyche, a fear or a wish".[14] The author has also postulated that Canadian literature is usually bound up by a victor-victim syndrome - and within that frame of reference the Inuit are surely victims. Another eminent national literary personality, Al Purdy, in his poem North of Summer also scathingly denounces the arrogant contempt by which the Eskimos "are viewed neither as 'good' nor as 'bad' but as simply 'other' - - - a primitive civilization which is being trivialized by the gimmicks of white culture".[15]

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14. Survival; Margaret Atwood, Anansi, Toronto, 1972, p. 91.

15. Survival; Margaret Atwood, Anansi, Toronto, 1972, p. 95.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ANATOMY OF INUIT LITERATURE

The critic, Northrop Frye, developed the 'Garrison Mentality' theory o explain the withdrawal syndrome exhibited by the French populace of Lower Canada to defend themselves from physical abuse by the Indians and cultural violation by the English. However, Frye stops short of expanding his thesis to include the Inuit-White cultural imbroglio. One must then wonder if the Inuit were able to invoke an 'Arctic Curtain' if their culture might have remained wholesome and intact. The untutored instincts of the Eskimo were always strongly appetitive so that the natives were eagerly receptive to the amenities and cosmopolitan inducements of western civilization. Hence the chasm of cultural disparity has consistently remained unbridgeable. The whites themselves have been accused of blatant intrusion, "respecting nothing that is not theirs, cherishing and preserving no one who has not been turned into a pathetic replica of themselves".[1]

Hugh MacLennan, a Rhodes Scholar and eminent novelist, has been acclaimed for his didactic works pertaining to Canada's national destiny. He has also postulated that our country is composed of three defeated nations, the French Canadians, the United Empire Loyalists and the Scottish crofters who escaped

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1. Artscanada; Doctor Fuast and the Woman in the Sea, Alex Spalding, December 1971, January 1972.

from the heavy-handed indentureship imposed by the wealthy landlords. To this aggrieved list may be added a fourth Peoples, the Inuit who have become metamorphosed into differentiated Canadians within their own land. Ironically, the Eskimos and Indians have often been proclaimed as Canada's 'First Peoples'. At the present time the Eskimos are the target of so much speculation and curiosity that "like a vanishing species, the Eskimos are avidly studied by scientists to the extent that it has been said that the typical present day camp family consists of a man, a wife, three children and an anthropologist."[2]

In the 'open-ended' realm of literature, every culture around the world is noted for its own traditional variety of novelistic death which in reality is a reflection of the national psyche. In the United States, death is a turbulent phenomenon usually synonymous with violence or a bizarre accident. In England, the conventional norm is a hero's demise gloriously suffered with patriotic fervor or a noble pose brought on by romantic failure. In our native land, however, "a reader must face the fact that Canadian literature is undeniably sombre and negative and that this to a large extent is both a reflection and a chosen definition of the national sensibility".[3] Within

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2. Seasons of the Eskimo; Fred Bruemmer, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1978, p. 14.

3. Survival; Margaret Atwood, Anansi, Toronto, 1972, p. 245.

this melancholy framework, Canadian novelistic death is generally attributed to misadventure or catastrophe in the untamed wilderness or brooding environment - and within these bleak national perceptions, the Inuit surely qualify as victims.

Significantly, Inuit literature is absolutely devoid of any native 'national' heroes, probably due to the migratory characteristics of the people and, of course the prevailing condition of endemic illiteracy. However, there were innumerable heroic acts performed by individuals on behalf of the total community which were worthy of enshrinement in any tragic novel. Indeed, it was the whole Inuit social complex fighting to stay alive in the hostile environment which is deserving of a 'collective hero' status. Significantly there are no Eskimo-built monuments. If there are memorials to be found, they are cairns erected by white men to commemorate their own deeds.

Nevertheless, the 'mighty hunter' has always been the symbol of the traditional protagonist in Inuit literature; the villains were the perils of the environment and that majestic predator, Nanook the polar bear. These were the constituent 'tension-generators' in legends and the savage themes which still persist in modern Eskimo literature.

Character development has always been consistently shallow, the central figures being ornamented by a few qualifying phrases. Mystery - apart from the mythological - appears to have been

absent in the naive but sturdy Inuit mind. The element of romance, sparingly introduced, tends towards the carnal rather than the sophisticated presumptions of western courtship. In essence, Inuit literature is 'quest' literature, predicated on a relentless search for food and survival.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PAST, THE PRESENT AND THE UNKNOWN

"Daily life in any northern settlement presents myriad faces of conflict between old and new, young and old, alien and native"[1] and the schism between generations is perhaps the most crucial of all these festering social problems. The restive mood of to-day's youth is confirmed by the following strident outburst from a scornful adolescent, "Makes me think. It's like when the old people sit around the table and drink tea and cough and spit and talk about the way things used to be. - - - Most young folks tend to get impatient and turn away, go watch television, take a walk down to the beer hall, make endless nothing - talk on the telephone. - - - I always used to get real frustrated because the old people used words I don't know. - - - Some old folk say that young people are just brown white men. Like a dog turd that has been out in the weather. - - - The trouble is, of course, me and many like me have not forgotten the so-called true language. You can't forget something you never knew".[2] As a pronouncement issued in anger, it is nonetheless a genuine cultural testament to the mood, resentment and confusion imbedded in the Eskimo psyche to-day.

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1. Georgia: An Arctic Diary; Georgia, Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, 1982, p. 11.

2. The White Shaman; C. W. Nicol, McClelland and Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1979, p. XI.

A culture coheres around its language. It is the catalyst which generates the vigour and motivation to shelter the ethos of a people. Acknowledging this universal truism, the Inuit Tapirisat - The Eskimo Brotherhood of Canada - has rallied all its intellectual resources to promote a renaissance of its withered mother tongue. The Tapirisat has declared that "In order for an Inuk to be elected to the board of directors of the I.T.C., he must be able to speak Inuktitut, so Inuit who speak only English cannot run for office".[3]

Ever since the polar vastness was breached by 'outsiders' nothing has remained static. Society has been transformed, the caribou have been ravaged, the political purposes of the Arctic have been subverted and the polar wasteland is being lusted as a bountiful quarry of natural resources. These are the 'Northern Blights' which continue to wrack the Inuit's homeland. "Man in the Arctic had always defended himself from the forces of nature, from the environment. At times he has had to protect himself from wild animals. Now Nature in the Arctic must be preserved from man himself. The animals of the world, the cleanest lakes and rivers and even the crystal air of the Arctic are threatened."[4]

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3. Inuit To-day; January 1977, Vol. 6., No. 1, p. 8.

4. National Geographic; Hunters of the Lost Spirit; Priit J. Vesilind; Vol. 163, No. 2, February 1983, p. 220.

The psychic autonomy, the discipline of the hunting ethic and the patient judgment of the Inuit have been shattered, but there is now a concerted will for common purpose to refortify a once feckless spirit. Cultural torpidity is being supplanted with new hope and determination "to listen again to the story that is in the wind."[5] Indeed, a rallying cry to "Grasp Tight the Old Ways"[6] a beacon out of the past discovered on an ancient ivory and antler artifact, is presently swirling around The Beautiful Land, Nunassiaq.

John Amagoalik, a vice president of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada and a former director of Inuit land claims for the North West Territories eloquently sums up the social plight and the struggle for cultural survival of his people, "Will the Inuit disappear from the face of this earth? Will we become extinct? Will our culture, our language and our attachment to nature be remembered only in history books? To realize that we Inuit are in the same category as the great whales, the bold eagle, the husky and the polar bear brings me great fear. To realize that our people can be classified as an endangered species is very disturbing. Is our culture like a wounded polar bear that has gone out to sea to die alone? What can be done?"[7]

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5. Paper Stays Put; Edited by Robin Gedalof, Where are the Stories of My People? Mary Panegoosho, Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, 1980, p. 13.
6. The New York Times; Arts of the Far North, July 31, 1983, p. 51.
7. Paper Stays Put; Editor, Robin Gedalof, We Must Have Dreams, John Amagoalik, Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, 1980, p. 163.

CHAPTER XVIII

SUMMARY

In 1576 when Martin Frobisher beguilingly sounded a brass bell to lure some wary Eskimos towards his ship, the metallic vibrations, strange and fascinating to aboriginal ears, symbolically signalled the beginning of the decline of native cultural integrity. Indeed, the hostility generated at the moment when an Eskimo was forcibly detained and subsequently carted off to England as a prize, and when five of Frobisher's crew were secreted inland by the Eskimos, may have been the incidents which presaged a future of resentment, suspicion and irritation between a haughty white civilization and a hitherto static, inward looking society. Thus, dating from Frobisher's premier foray into the Arctic, the dynamics of Inuit life styles have been thrust into a disordered flux, the terrible results of which are apparent in the cultural decay which exists everywhere in the North today. The testimony to this terrible tragedy is of course evident from the literature already reviewed.

A Peep at the Esquimaux, a romantically idealized but incredibly accurate piece of poesy for its time (1825) has provided us with a useful portrait of unsullied Inuit culture, a datum point from which one may measure the disintegration of a civilization which struggled to live in a workable equilibrium within an intractable environment. Other than the journals pro-

duced by the first waves of adventurers seeking a transpolar maritime passage across the top of America, there was very little literature published which was concerned with the well-being of the Inuit until well into the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

From the turn of our century to the outbreak of World War II, the bulk of Arctic literature was produced by social scientists and missionaries who personally experienced the hardships of Arctic life along side the Eskimos. Among the former were Vilhjalmur Stefansson and Diamond Jenness who wrote intelligently and objectively about their observations. Most missionaries who served in the North were equally assiduous and diligent and chronicled their experiences with inspired vigour. Renowned amongst these men were Gontran de Poncins who produced Kabloona and Raymond De Coccola who authored Ayorama, a personal record of twelve years amongst the Eskimos. It is interesting to note that not one of these four gentlemen just mentioned was a Canadian by birth but were nevertheless selflessly dedicated to the well-being of the Canadian Eskimo.

Foremost amongst post World War II Arctic chroniclers is Farley Mowat, a proud, patriotic and strong-willed Canadian author who is a thoroughly seasoned Polar dweller and one who consistently exhibits a strong affection for the Inuit. Mowat's People of the Deer (1952) was released in England because timorous Canadian publishers did not wish to confront 'the

establishment' or to offend a rambling political bureaucracy. This volume has now become a cornerstone of our national Arctic literature. In the meantime Mowat continues to be a prolific author writing about our wilderness problems and in particular about the cultural plight of the Inuit.

James Houston, a distinguished civil administrator and author of Inuit themes is generally credited with the initial development of Eskimo art in Canada. He is best known as an illustrator and writer of juvenile fiction relating to the struggles of native children confronted by perils of the Arctic environment. Houston persistently attempts to show that the physical courage of Inuit adolescents equates with the moral development of his young characters. Houston has created this sturdy vignette of Eskimo youth by pitting them against the antagonistic predator, Nanook the polar bear, or exposing the children to perilous environmental obstacles.

Undoubtedly the most exciting and useful development in the relatively short history of Inuit literature which highlights the cultural struggles of these tenacious people, is the evolution away from oral legends to written records. Paper Stays Put which is a collection of Inuit folklore and traditions, many translated from the original syllabics, mirrors this recent literary phenomenon. The philosophy behind this valuable compendium is that 'By ear we forget, but paper stays put.' The editor of this fine collection, Robin Gedalof, has instinctively brought together a rich

anthology of legends and social history. Another recent publication which is illustrative of the cultural embarassment and pain which are suffered by natives who move to southern metropolitan areas to secure their livelihoods is Minnie Aodla Freeman's Life Among the Qallunaat. The social shocks and abuse to which these courageous persons are exposed in the South are humiliating experiences for the proud natives who have ventured into 'white' territory far removed from their traditional residence patterns.

Native authors have emerged in recent memory who have written with the authority and conviction forged from personal experience. Two ranking original works by individuals from the Inuit community are the autobiography written by a patriarch, entitled I, Nuligak. The other is a fictional historical account of a bitter struggle to survive against a dire famine by the inhabitants of a destitute encampment. The latter adventure, Harpoon of the Hunter, from the pen of Markoosie the pilot, is the first novel to have been written by an Inuit. The book has been elevated to international prominence, having been translated into a dozen foreign languages.

Within the last decade the Inuit Brotherhood known as The Tapirisat has energetically pursued its leadership in cultural affairs. It is encouraging the present generation which is infected by Euro-American technology and morality to re-educate themselves to speak their own tongue and to once again embrace their lost ancestral beliefs and traditions. It is in these latter areas where a cultural vacuum exists today.

The ongoing urbanizing processes and political penetrations have now resulted in the failure of a once indigenous hunting economy and a shared sustenance system. The loss of these values - frantically accelerated since the end of World War II - have rendered Inuit society spiritually void and emotionally fractured. As concerned witnesses to this débâcle we have observed that the central theme of Eskimo literature, whether from the hands of English writers or the hearts of Inuit authors, continues to dwell upon the multiple challenges confronting the cultural survival of these resilient natives. The struggle is open ended. Much literature remains yet to be recorded. The survival of the Inuit culture in 'Nunassiaq', The Beautiful Land, is still in the balance.

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