wa-cha-kosh pi-moo-way-pa-ham ni-te-hi-niew ki-chi pa-ka-auck: a-wi-chi ha-ya-mi-mac ho-mash-ki-koo ho-tip-pa-chi-moo-siew No-wiee Pi-ne-shish

a star keeps my heartbeat: conversations with Omushkego storyteller Louis Bird

BY
KIMBERLEY K. WILDE

IN COLLABORATION WITH
LOUIS BIRD

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Native Studies
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
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Acknowledgements

Louis: Old training was based on observation of animal cycles, personal experiences. Now it is books, books, read, read, but not based on experience, then you graduate (with book on head- mortarboard), in our way we never graduate, we are always learning.

For my friend and fellow storyteller, Louis Penishish (Bird), and my son Jonah Wilde, with heartfelt thanks for your humor, your wise words, and your humanity.

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Penishish: A Small Songbird

I first met Elder Louis Bird, or Louis Penishish, in 1998, at the University of Winnipeg. As the leader of the Omushkegowack Oral History Project, Louis was in town to oversee the formation of the new committee, do some storytelling, and get to know the people he would be working with for the next few years.

Louis Bird is a scholar and storyteller in the tradition of the Omushkegowack (Swampy Cree) People. He lives in Peawanuck, Ontario, in the western lowlands of Hudson and James Bay. Since 1965, Louis has been collecting the oral history of the Omushkegowack, recording Elders in Cree (old and new) and English, and recording stories and history in his own words as well. The O.O.H.P. is a research project, funded originally by SSHRC, and now by a Government of Canada Heritage Fund grant. The purpose of the project is to transcribe and translate Louis' oral history collection, and find ways to make the material more accessible to researchers and other interested people. This project has resulted in written transcriptions of a portion of Louis' work, and a website that makes accessible these transcriptions.

His collection is unparalleled, exceeding 300 audio tapes (to date). Part of his collection was destroyed in a flood in 1986, in the community of Winisk, Louis' original home. The loss of these original recordings was irreparable, as many of the Elders had passed on. Louis patiently recreated from memory, the words of these Elders, and his collection continues to grow today.

In December, 2001, I spent two weeks with Louis in Moose Factory and Moosonee, helping him with his research. He was there to interview Elders about

the old Cree spirituality. He had been asked by a council of church officials to help them understand the spirituality, to understand what had been lost by the imposition of Christianity. They wanted to know if the old-time spirituality, based as it was on shamanism, or Mitewiwin, was a true religion. Most of the interviews were in Cree, and in the evenings Louis would translate them for me.

My first impression of Moosonee and Moose Factory was of ice and snow, crystal clear in shadings of color- indigo, cerulean, lilac, periwinkle, mauve, dove gray, and white. Stars; an infinity of light in the sky not eclipsed by the artificial neon lights of a city. And every conceivable way possible to travel- planes and buses, which I took to get partway there; the Polar Bear Express train for the rest of the trip, with families at one end of the car and a prisoner in shackles and his RCMP guards at the other; skidoos, with or without toboggans; helicopters (from Moosonee to Moose Factory, $25.00); taxi vans, $5 anywhere; graders and trucks, lots of cars- somehow there seemed to be more than I remember in the city, but that can't be possible, can it? Even the beautifully painted wall mural in the local school featured transportation themes- dogsleds and canoes as well as the graders, helicopters and motorboats. Friendly, friendly people, curious about who I was and why I was here. Visiting with people at the tribal council, the local schools, and northern college; people who supported and appreciated Louis' work, and were in a position to begin to lend some local support to his project. I remember falling asleep on a couch one afternoon, listening to Louis and a woman he was interviewing talk softly in Cree, me not understanding the words, but soothed immeasurably by the rhythm of the tones. You never know where you are going to

find a lullaby. Talking over supper with Louis about how we each imagine life after death to be. Finding billets, renting apartments, cooking soup to have on hand for visitors, borrowing a truck to get around, and stalling out in the first half hour, hoping for a polar bear and sadly, seeing none. Wanting to relocate to this community, to live in northern time, which is to live in relationship to the environment, and whether or not what you need to get done will be held up by a snowstorm, or power outages, or a death in the community, or a late gas truck, rather than the hectic southern time that ticks our lives away in meetings, paperwork, soccer practice, and an infinity of must-dos that seem to multiply faster than rabbit's. Remembering how I wanted to relocate to Mexico, after spending a week there. Missing my son.

During that time, Louis was invited to the local high school, to speak to students and staff about his work. He and I made ten tapes of that visit, as it spanned four days. The transcriptions used in this thesis come from this set of tapes. Louis, in addressing the students, was fulfilling his mandate as he understands it, given to him by the Elders he has interviewed over the years. For me the experience of sharing those times with Louis, watching him live his purpose, was as important as the tapes themselves. On the first day, Louis was happy and excited to be with the students and staff, a few of whom he knew. He stood at the front of the room, a hunter, trapper and storykeeper, and began his story (Louis' words, whether transcribed tapes or conversations, are formatted in italics for this thesis):

Louis: I notice that our Elders are gone, every year, another one is gone, who

knows the stories and we are losing. It is just like we are losing part of our history each time, one Elder is gone. All he or she has experienced in a lifetime, especially when they get old, we lost that experience. We don't have it, it is just simply gone with them. I notice that when my grandmother died, that's when I decided we should collect those stories and keep them.

And to collect them is, we cannot always have it in our mind, we forget. I decided to use this machine, and tell the stories as they tell. Some of them I went to record, very little, they don't like the recording machine and they don't want you to sit and scribble in the front, when they speak to you, they like you to just sit there and show you're attendant. Otherwise they will stop talking, so I just train myself to listen good, to know everything what they say. it's hard at the beginning, but you have to train yourself to do that. And then once you do that, it is just like picturing something that you know, and that's what I am...hearing those legends and stories when I was young, I could train to listen good, and to listen. Even when I was playing, when I was young, I still hear the old man or the old lady who tells me a story. Even if I don't understand a thing they were talking about.

Later on in life I begin to realize that, and it is now I begin to understand how important it is, and our Elders are gone. And that's when I begin to think, maybe I should record them, to see what they say. So I talk to them, she pretend this her kids, so I am telling them some story, and doing that I picture I am talking to the people the way my grandfather used to do to us. The way they speak...the only thing is, my audience, they are not there but, imaginary they are there. So I am passing something my grandmother has told me in this way, so I have recorded

the story, imitating the Elders, saying the words exactly what they say, and it pass on in that way. But it's in there.

The problem is that these recording machines, these tapes do not last long, they begin to deteriorate, the voice begins to be inaudible. We need to renew them, and for that reason I begin to think they should be transcribed, so that we can keep their words. And that is the important thing. And that's what keeps me going. I collect stories, from anyone, anyone, even the young person who imitate their grandmother, grandfather. To know what the Elder has done to the young person, I just record this person. Especially for the young people who are really good imitators, it's really what they hear, and it goes in there. So I do the same thing. I just recall the Elders that I have listened to, a little bit here, then I record. Then after that, on another tape recording, I mention that story and expand it, explain what it means.

In that way I begin to do that, since 1965. I start to make the recording, and I have about twenty recording, a little bit of the Elders in it, some of those who allow me to record them. And I had then, by about 1968, actually twenty of the Elders speaking. And I lost them in the flood in Winisk, they were destroyed. So finally I begin to work on re-recording them in my mind. And then I began to collect some more alive. From there on, '68, I speak to any Elder that wants, that doesn't mind speaking to me and I collect quite a few since then, plus the ones I re-record from the old ones. And I got some recordings from other people who have recorded their grandparents, their friends. And I ask them if I could get the copies. I got them, too. And they have theirs. This way I have a collection of everybody.

It is about three hundred ninety-minute tapes now. Most of them are, the Elder speaks here, and I expand what they say now because I interpret their story to an easy way to understand. And the way they use their story to teach us, I expanded that in the recording. So that's why I get so many recordings. And besides that I begin to make recordings about our culture, it was somewhere around 1975, and I record in the English language. This was the idea for the nurses who come to our community and for other non-Natives who will come, so they will understand the culture quickly. It was helping them. If I recorded something, if I am saying it right, I listen to it, then I gave it to them to listen, teach them how to adjust to the community, how to approach the community, and to function properly for their social work. They wanted that, they asked. So I gave the recording to them. And with some teachers, I used to do that, to make a connection.

And besides that, I did quite a bit of involvement in the chief's meetings, and that also I have to translate many things to the chiefs, the Elders especially. I sit with them and I listen with them, and I explain what this meeting is all about. And I was always in the middle trying to connect.

And that's what keeps me going, it's to make our culture, the original one, alive. So we can keep it alive as it was, the original. And we, because we are changing all the time, we change we lose a little bit, we gain the other, we blend with the other societies. We tend to forget ours. It gets devalued now, you know what I mean? It's valuable thing, as it were, before the European came. And my story collection is like that. The important part is for the Elders to tell me, the

history before the Europeans. To actually hear the stories before the Europeans, how did they live, what education system did they have, what action they do to train their young ones to survive, all these things. Everything. And that's what I got first.

There are three sections to my story collection. The very old one, most of it is the legends in the very first part. The second part is after the contact, after the European came, what changes came to be, what stories did I hear from the Elders. What happened to them in their time, to their grandfathers, that is about six or seven generations now, since the Europeans came into the Bay. And they change that time, they blend with the European, we blend with the European since then. I'm sorry to say there isn't much of a pure Indian in us! Hahaheehee.

It is really, and by that we change, we adapt easily to the European ways, and we tend to forget our ancestors that were there before the Europeans. Their value system that was important for their survival. We don't see it as important. Now as I get old, I begin to see, that was the valuable thing that they have. That's how they survive. They didn't need no other nation to show them how to live. They live by themselves. They have spiritual beliefs and practices. They have their medicine. They know when to get them. They know the land. They know the land very well, they know how to live, they adapt this lifestyle in this area. Very special area in this James Bay Lowland. It doesn't exist any other place in Canada, only here.

And that is why it's important for me to collect stories, I thought, thoroughly, every little thing that is there. And I have done the best I can, and this

is what I am doing. That's why I am here. And I just try to outline what I do. So I like very much sometimes to try to explain the stories before the European came. That is my most interest. And then, right now, for the last twenty years or so, since 1975, our Aboriginal people, our Aboriginal spiritual practices came into...emerged. The young people begin to question, in the south, they begin to imitate the stories. Like dances and drumming. They don't necessarily understand what that is, they just act them out. They sing, they drum. And I approach them, and I say, how did you acquire to have the knowledge to sing, or to drum? And they said, "What knowledge, you say?" And I say, "I thought you have a style or a way to acquire this, to be able to do it." And the young man says, "No, I just imitate, I don't know much about my history." (laughter). I was amazed, and I was impressed to see them do that. "We hear the stories from our grandfathers. We don't actually know what it was," he says. And that's what get me going. And I come back to James Bay, where I know so many people and went to approach the Elders, ask them what it was, did we have something like they do down south? People who dance around and have the big drums, and all that, did we have that in James Bay? Not like that, many Elders say, not the big drum. We did hand drum, we did have that. And I begin to dig for information like that, begin to do my research, quietly, you know. Right across from Moosonee to Winisk to Fort Severn, right up to York Factory. All the people in the Lowland. And I get a lot of information that way. And all of it, Moosonee to York Factory, it's similar, all the same. And about two hundred miles inland, there the Lowland Cree practiced their separate cultural activities. Inland, there is a group of people known as the Oji-

Cree people, they blend with the Ojibway and the Omushkegowack. They are almost the same, they are not different, they do almost the same as our grandfathers did, the same methods of spiritual belief and practice. So this I gather, doing the research. Because I learn from the Elders. And I learn to respect them, and I begin to respect them much more now about their past. I think now, I sympathize now we lost it. It's not that I wish to revive it, no. I am not a revivist. I am not to try and revive, but to teach the young people to make them understand their past, to be proud that we were once the nation who live here. Nobody else. And we live, we survive, we had a system in every way, just like every other nation.

The most important thing that I want is to write them so they won't erase. We put them in the paper so they will stay. And a few years from now, these things will become very important. They are the documentation of our people, and we do it ourselves. And we should do it now. And I was hoping if I get the young people interested to help, to actually then put it in paper, what they have from their past, and that would be the most important thing. We will have written our own history. We will have our own words written down. That is my aim, my hope. And I am just beginning. And I begin to get help. She there, [points at me], she help! Hahaheehee!

You see, I went to Winnipeg, and my friend there [Dr. Fulford] help me to get some money so we could get started at the bottom, to try to get a way to write it down. So we begin to form what can we do, what can we do, what we need. So we know what we need now. What is most missing is the young people who can use a computer, and to write syllabics. That is the most urgent. If we can have the young

people, we will write this thing down in no time. In ten years we should have a written history that is ours. Our own effort, from our own Elders. That is my hope. That is what I am trying to do. Not much help at the moment, but it is beginning.

All over North America, the Native people, some people are actually practicing the old stuff. They revive the old stuff. But they need information, just as I am telling you about. They go to the Elders, some of them are very weak. They have already been christianized so much, they don't want to speak about it. So they can't get all the information, the young people. They go anyway. They practice as much as they know, trying to get it going, trying to revive. They seek the help from other source, because they find today's world, it is fast advancing with everything. And they can't find help in the Christianity so much more, or any other institution or medical assistance.

So they seek other forms of help from the First Nation, what do you call it, the healing system. So they go for it, the sweat lodge, they find some in there, and also the comforting word from the Elders. And that they can do. But to totally understand what it was, they don't have that yet. it's very unfortunate that our Elders are gone, who know exactly how it was, and how it was done. So that's what I am catching, what I am recording. The situation then, and today, and what is now.

What do we need today? The young parents, they are going to experience the same thing, and do we have anything to fall back on if all else fails. So they can believe they can get some comfort from the old stuff. And today, as I travel across the Canada, seeing many communities and Native people, I do travel across, and I

do get involved in many places. I met many of those young people and Elders who make an effort to defend them, to help themselves. I speak to them, and they all say the same thing. They want to see the Elders to get some advice. And as I said, the Elders have a problem. I went to find out why they have problem, why don't they give what they need, to the young people? They say Christianity has forbidden us to mention the past. Because what our forefathers have used as a spiritual practice has been condemned as evil. It has been called as a demon's activity, in many words. And, they stop.

In our area, mostly where I came from, it has been stopped mostly from 18...1824? And finally totally stop in 1930. Nobody practice anymore. The last person to practice shaking tent was in 1930 in that area. And also in Fort Albany. And also the last person who did it in the open. But there are some who did it in the wilderness, where nobody see. So our Omushkegowack people were the ones who specialize in shaking tent. And we will also explain why.

You can find this out here, in Moose Factory, because there are people who know. The Elders. But they don't like- the Christian leaders has condemned it so they don't talk about it. I went to see one last week, an old lady. She is from Rupert's House. She saw this when she was young, and she is ninety-four. And I was so surprised, you know, one living Elder who have seen it, the shaking tent. But she is also the one who is so scared of it... "No, lets don't talk about it!" she says. Hahaheehee. It was unfortunate. She don't want to explain, so I said, "ok, ok, I won't ask!" So there are those people like that. So anyway, that is the history part of it after the European came. That is the effect of it, with their culture. In the

history, when you read the history book about the Hudson Bay...What it does to the fur trade, the impact of it, and also the impact of the Christianity, the impact on our culture. In stages, what happened, for the better it is hoped. If we know the old culture, behind there, we will say you will be the judge, once you know about the past, before the European. You will know why it happens.

There are many things that you may say yes, this life is much easier. The new life is changing and it is much easier for us to live in than it is in the past. But we must be proud of what our ancestors have. I am. I am very proud of our ancestors. When I was young, I used to be ashamed. I used to think, why were they so uncivilized? Now I hate myself saying that. It's the wrong thing to say. So anyway, so far, this is what I do. This is what I am.

Method and methodology: one woman's way in (she doesn't know where she is going, but she is sure of how to get there)

The methodology that I have found most useful in my work with Louis has evolved, for the most part, out of the relationship that I developed with Louis in my capacity as "helper" whenever he was in Winnipeg working on his research project. My responsibilities ranged from transcribing tapes (only the ones in English) to helping him locate apartment furniture, a doctor, the nearest Value Village, whatever was required. On our excursions we would always stop somewhere for lunch. Over a meal, we would visit and share stories. Inevitably, Louis would begin to tell a story or answer a question and I would wish for a tape recorder, as I did my best to remember his words so that I could write them down later. Eventually, I acquired a tape recorder, and would quietly turn it on when Louis began talking. "Cookies and Tea" methodology is the colloquial name I give to a relationship-building process that, over time, can create the foundation for effective community-based, collaborative Native Studies research. This is not a simple process. It is a deeply personal process, in which all participants are subjects. The simple act of sharing a pot of tea and a plate of cookies on a cold winter day became, for me, the invoking ritual for a journey that has no clearly defined beginning, middle and end. Storytelling, as I have been taught by Louis, and in my own experience, is not a chronological experience of time and space. It is, rather, a point of transmission between teller and audience, conditioned by the age of the audience, the experience and memory of the storyteller, the time of year (traditionally some stories are told only in the winter season), the gender of teller

and audience, and the assessment of knowledge needed at that moment, in relation to what has been learned and what will be required for continued well-being. A word that I have come up with to express the movement of storytelling not chronologically through, but *around* time, space, and experience, is **circumlogical**. By this I mean a process of interaction with oral and written history that acknowledges my own subjectivity as a storyteller, and articulates a way of connecting past stories with contemporary experiences that reflects the dynamic and multi-layered social histories contained within the stories. In effect, the most useful method I have found for approaching my work with Louis and with oral tradition, is storytelling itself.

Louis, in his role of storykeeper, has put the five main legends in a kind of chronological order, for his own study, but it is not how he tells them:

As I said before, if you watch them or listen to them or place them in order, it begin to reveal they are part of the creation stories, our own creation stories. If you tell them in a sequence...starting off with the big bones, tells you that there were animals one time, disappeared. And then you begin to say about the Giant Skunk story. Tells you that the animals live first, and then land. And then the waterfowl story, Sinkiipis, you know that, there was no human here. And then finally the Ehep story. Giant Spider who lowered the human beings into the land. That's the beginning for human existence on land. And then Wiisakechaahk come in, and then Chakapesh. And then the other characters came. We still have extra characters- people's characters that are in there. I said yesterday there was Hayas, for example, one particular thing in life, and when you listen to those, and

you actually see the history of our culture in this area, if you use them that way.

So if they could be told that way in schools, you know, a little bit of fact, maybe the story about the giant animals, and have- that's the way they do it when they were young. But they didn't put it in chronological order, no, they did not. They just pick any one and enjoy the story very well. It is up to us to understand it, how do we understand these things. And we listen to them for a purpose like- Giant Skunk? I told you before when you listen to the story, beasts and animals, you listen to them- a good storyteller will take you into the story so deeply, so involved, you forget these were animals, they were just like humans. They think, they plan, everything just like human. They travel inland, why the animals travel such places inland, and that teaches you that behavior of the animals when you listen to that story.

Why does the beaver look for a place at larger creeks, to settle? Why does he do that? Because he wants the deep water. And the beaver there, in the story, he's human, he actually plans, he looks around with his wife, looking for a place to...haha, it's a pleasant story, and it's really- you are in it, it's like as if you travel with them. It makes you understand the land. Which also brings out the nature of our people, to love to attach so much to the land, because they know in detail, emotionally connected to her. So the legends are created like that. So when I say the use and application of legends, that's what I mean.

The process Louis describes here is also the way in which our work together also proceeded. There has been no conventional chronology to the way in which Louis has taught me what he thought I needed to know. He just starts talking,

somewhere in the vastness of his knowledge, and he finishes up somewhere else, like a virtual tour of a library. When I tell students about Louis and his work, I use the metaphor of a university and all the knowledge contained in all the libraries, faculties, departments therein- to describe what Louis carries around in his head. Sometimes I tease him about having too many 'Muskego running around inside him. He likes to be teased- he actually giggles, which is good motivation to hone my own sense of humor.

My western academic training, with it's focus on a chronological rendering of history (our story) that is privileged by such factors as race, gender, class, religion, sexuality, and ethnicity did not, and perhaps could not, prepare me for the experience of 'working with' Elder Bird. The story of how I came to the University of Winnipeg, and then the University of Manitoba, and the story of how Louis came to these places, is part of the larger story that encompasses both of us. The story of the time we have spent working together is the focus of this thesis, and is also the story that Louis and I have created together as we have grown to respect and trust each other. It is a story within our own stories, a thread spun from the web of dreams, aspirations and intentions that brought both of us to this place and time, to work together on the Omushkegowack Oral History Project.

The success of my work with Louis depends primarily on this relationship of mutual respect. Commitment and reciprocity are key aspects of this relationship; the relevance of my efforts to Louis' project determines the outcome, the continuation of this working relationship.

Dr. Peter Kulchyski, Head, Department of Native Studies at the University

of Manitoba (personal communication, October 3, 2000) describes a concept of bushwork as distinct from fieldwork, as a process in which the notion of engaging in a long relationship with an Indigenous community (or in my case, with one individual), returning time and again, is an integral aspect of 'giving back'- the reciprocity upon which mutually beneficial relationships depend. Community based research as an open-ended experience of learning, of 'letting accidents happen', holds very different possibilities for gathering knowledge than the western scientific framework through which anthropological fieldwork is so often interpreted and analyzed. Traveling with people in their daily lives as a way of becoming part of the story is central to an understanding of that story. Oral history represents a way of knowing the world (another kind of framework) in many peoples' traditions. Narrative form then becomes a critical aspect of bushwork. Work that is generated with, accessible to, and directed back to the community within which it is generated is essential rather than discretionary.

The process of bushwork, as I understand it, is about entering an ongoing narrative which is a serious representation of the world, and learning from the inside out, how to hear the narrative. Maybe even what it means, in some way, to live that narrative. And having a place in that narrative that is meaningful to the community who owns the narrative, rather than using the narrative to maintain the dominant paradigms, within which one's place as a researcher is assured.

My work with Louis does not involve me working directly with him in his own community. I have instead assisted him in his own community-based work. Most of the work that Louis and I have done together has been done in my

community, within the framework of a western academic institution, and in my native language- English. Louis has spent far more time explaining his world to me than I have spent explaining mine to him. In her discussion of prophecy narratives in the Yukon, anthropologist Julie Cruikshank talks about the problem of using "...an interpretive framework that predisposes us to interpret unfamiliar narratives in terms of familiar theoretical frameworks-[which] may color our attempts to understand prophecy narratives as serious representations of the world." (Cruikshank, 1998, p.120). I have many times found myself applying my own familiar and western frameworks to the knowledge that Louis is sharing with me. One moment in particular stands out. Louis and I had attended a meeting of a local anthropological society, and the topic up for discussion was research ethics, and balancing the needs of the researcher with the needs of those being researched. The discussion focused on evaluating the current academic research ethics, with a focus on Native Studies guidelines. After listening for about an hour to myself and all the other researchers, Louis interjected with the comment that his community, and every Aboriginal community had their own values and ethical guidelines that should be considered. He then told a story about how he had been asked by the people in his community to research the old governance system that had been practiced in the community. People would then decide if they wanted to return to the old system, or apply the new way being proposed by the federal government.

So he interviewed the Elders and prepared a document that outlined the system of government that had been used in past times. In the end, the people voted to adopt the western approach to governance. This story in itself, and the

impact it had on the community, is a powerful story which is still unfolding in Louis' community. The impact that this story had on our meeting is in itself a teaching about the power of narrative to transform our understanding of the world as we know it. We had all thought that we were speaking from an insightful place, from a place that respected the viewpoint of the people we were talking about doing research with. Louis' narrative widened the aperture for us, revealing not only a part of the ethical story that had been there all along, but our own propensity to recreate the theme of Columbus discovering America just when we thought he had finally fallen off the edge of the earth. I was humbled by this experience, realizing that without the commonly shared language and cultural experience, this will always be an issue that impacts how effectively I am able to understand what Louis is trying to teach me. The lesson of Columbus, for me, is not that I begin the story, or the story begins with me; it is that the aperture of my consciousness widens in the presence of the story, showing me what has been there all along. Whether it is fur trade stories or creation stories, it is the story that is infinite and eternal, not me. There is no beginning, middle, or end.

Louis and I have had discussions, for instance, about gender issues, ethics and values, and fur trade history, in which I have had to recognize and set aside my own assumptions to begin to appreciate that the questions that guide and inform Louis' understanding of the world may be very different from mine. Studying fur trade history with Louis, some of which I write about in another section of this thesis, has helped me to understand the importance of cultural context, and the use of theoretical frameworks that are outside cultural experience. Fur trade history,

from a Euro-Canadian point of view, is primarily a textual territory mapping the intersections of Aboriginal and European lives. The oral traditions of Indigenous peoples have traditionally been the primary means of transmitting their worldviews, including stories of the fur trade. Fur trade history has often been portrayed, by non-Native writers as an opening up of new territory, a chartering of wilderness by intrepid adventurers (Newman, 1985; Wilson, 1970), privileging European experience, interpretation, outcome, and roles. When the oral traditions and worldviews of Aboriginal peoples are included, the 'wilderness' territory mapped is shown to be rich in humanity as well as furs (Bird, 1996; Cruikshank, 1998; Peers, 1994; Brown, 1980; Van Kirk, 1980). Points of intersection become multi-dimensional in context and experience, with the potential for generating new understandings of the impact of culture contact on all participants, past and present. This can best be done if there is an acknowledgement that the points of contact do not represent shared world views; in fact they often represent completely different worldviews colliding with disastrous results for Indigenous peoples. Commitment to the process of decolonising and de-privileging European worldview, experience, and interpretation has not been nearly as well explored as the 'wilderness' discovered by Columbus.

Combining oral history with historical accounts found in libraries, archives, museums, journals, diaries, and letters is one way of bringing in new voices to old stories, and addressing some of these issues. Stories of fur trade history, told by Louis Bird, reveal common themes of abuse of power by fur trade employees, starvation directly related to fur trade enterprise, and conflicting

worldviews leading to a breakdown in social relations (Bird, 1996) which contradict the conventional history. Historical written accounts need to be read carefully, with an eye to the writing, editing and production conventions of the historical period within which the research takes place, the authorship of the text, the origin of the text material, the nature of the text- i.e., is it an exploration journal, a report to a sponsor, a letter; are there several versions of the document; how was it written; who owned it; who was it written for; how widely distributed?

For example, I. S. MacLaren sites the discrepancies between the first and subsequent official accounts of Captain Cook's voyages, which were edited by two different people. The first editor had been "...verbally flayed and sent to an early grave for having transgressed on British public views..." (MacLaren, 1992, p. 44); the second editor "...strove to represent Cook's discoveries in ways that the English public would approve..." (MacLaren, 1992, p. 45). Neither editor stayed completely true to Cook's accounts, and there were other, unofficial accounts written as well, by men who had accompanied Cook on his voyages. The most significant change to Cook's own version of his experiences through the edited versions was the imposition of an imperialist agenda which relies heavily on the depiction of 'savages' as unenlightened, uncivilized, awed by the superior British presence, and in need of salvation (MacLaren, 1992, p. 54-5).

Another example is the archived journal account of the 'Hannah Bay Massacre', found in the Hudson Bay archives, and told to this day, throughout the James Bay Lowland to such an extent that it has become the subject of academic research by a number of people. The archival account, written by HBC employees,

is written without any insight into the possible motives behind the attack on the post at Hannah Bay; it was simply described as a massacre, and the perpetrators punished accordingly. When I showed the story to Louis, he came up with an explanation that took into account the decline in the fur trade that led to increased tension in the region at that time, as well as the negative impact of European ways on the Cree way of life that helped to create situations in which violence was seen as the only available option for survival.

A real problem with much historical and archival material is the lack of information on the lives of women and children, both Native and non-Native. My own reading of archive journals and account books showed few references to women, none by name- always they are listed as someone's wife, or 'old woman', or someone's widow. It is important, then, to question the space between the lines, and not assume that the whole story lies within the lines.

Historian Jennifer Brown articulates another problem that she has encountered in her fur trade research. History books tend to describe the fur trade as a great adventure of exploration and heroism. Archival records show that "...for countless fur traders over countless months and years, not much happened. They stayed largely in one place, or they slogged around on local trips through snow or swamp, mud and mosquitoes. They got sick or drunk, lost or drowned or injured, and often they got bored or bushed." (Brown, 1993, p. 84). Conventional fur trade history is not written about the lives of ordinary men in the fur trade, which makes much fur trade history a history of privilege.

The problem with using such historical material is that, no matter how

carefully one reads, edits, or writes about it, it is still primarily material that has been written by Europeans about the European experience, and/or about Indigenous history. The history of First Nations people, contained within the oral traditions, languages, sign systems, artwork, pictographs, petroforms, sacred objects, songs, dances, and ceremonies, has not been acknowledged as valid history. When tradition and history is encoded in other-than-literary forms, different kinds of methodologies and methods are called for in order to learn what these forms have to teach.

Transcribing and translating these forms into Indigenous languages and/or into English creates a whole new set of challenges for ethno-historical work. Who should do this work? What happens when this work is done by non-Indigenous people? When this work, as is so much research, tied to an academic agenda? Can we move between languages with integrity? What happens to performance, audience, context? Who owns the stories? These are some of the questions I have attempted to answer throughout this thesis, by looking at the ways in which the stories Louis has told me have helped me to better understand my own world, and perhaps a little of Louis' world.

Julie Cruikshank's comment on the problem of frameworks, and her description of the time and energy that the Elders she worked with spent in teaching her their framework, has helped me to clarify what I can and can't accomplish with this thesis. My purpose is to write about the experiences I have had with Louis as a contribution to the life history of this remarkable historian and storykeeper; my own acknowledgement of what he has taught me. His tapes, which contain the oral

history of the Omushkegowack people, speak for themselves, and Louis is more than capable of his own interpretations. Even though I have spent five years in the company of this Elder, I am only beginning to understand the framework that he has been teaching me. Perhaps a deeper truth here is that I am beginning to comprehend the vastness of what I don't know, and the realms of language and worldview that I may never comprehend. I cannot write beyond what I know, and this thesis is a reflection of what I have been able to comprehend so far, and what, of that, I am willing to share.

It is my responsibility as a researcher, writer, and human being to be informed by the stories that have been shared with me, to look with new eyes at the history of my own people. Without other viewpoints, we, as Euro-Canadians with a historical legacy of colonialism, run the risk of being limited to our own heroic imaginings of ourselves. When other viewpoints are considered, we are given the opportunity to learn from past mistakes and to grow beyond those limited imaginings. Stories from the past become the means by which we can determine how it is we want to live out the encounters and interactions of our contemporary lives in a cross-cultural, local and global context.

Privilege is something that I view as a limitation, and an opportunity. Privilege, in the context of this western, hierarchically structured social world, is the framework within which I have learned my own history, and the histories of other peoples. It is the relationship of dominance that I have inherited, the role that I play in many people's lives, the ignorance that intolerably narrows my worldview, and the resource pool of opportunity that I draw upon to do my work. As I see it, it

is my responsibility to use this inheritance wisely, to find ways to share the benefits beyond the hierarchical, power laden distribution of privilege and poverty. More than that, it is my responsibility to challenge those hierarchical divisions, transform the stories that support those divisions, and create new stories that point the way to an inclusive paradigm that honours all ways of knowing the world, and privileges all lifeways. How well I am able to impart this intention in the context of this thesis is not a measure of Louis' ability to teach, it is a measure of how well I am able to learn, and express in writing what I have learned. Jeanette Armstrong, an Okanagan woman and writer, offers a challenge that I have drawn upon time and again when faced with the conundrum of how and what to write:

> Imagine how you as writers from the dominant society might turn over some of the rocks in your own garden for examination. Imagine in your literature courageously questioning and examining the values that allow the dehumanizing of peoples through domination and the dispassionate nature of the racism inherent in perpetuating such practices. Imagine writing in honesty, free of the romantic bias about the courageous 'pioneering spirit' of colonialist practice and imperialist process. Imagine interpreting for us *your own people's* thinking toward us, instead of interpreting for us, our thinking, our lives, and our stories. We wish to know, and you need to understand, why it is that you want to own our stories, our art, our beautiful crafts, our ceremonies, but you do not appreciate or wish to recognize that these things of beauty arise out of the beauty of our people.
>
> Imagine these realities on yourselves in honesty and let me know how you imagine that you might approach empowerment of yourselves in such situations. Better yet, do not dare speak to me of 'Freedom of Voice', 'Equal Rights', 'Democracy', or 'Human Rights' until this totalitarianistic approach has been changed by yourselves as writers and shapers of philosophical direction. Imagine a world where domination is not possible because all cultures are valued. (Moses & Goldie, 1998, p. 240-1)

This is a powerful statement, or teaching. In particular, we who have written so powerfully of ourselves are being challenged to imagine approaching

empowerment of ourselves; that racism and the resultant stereotypes diminish us all; that the power of fear, used to oppress and dominate, is really the fear of power shared.

I experienced this teaching in another form, a few years ago, and have used it as a teaching tool in the classroom, ever since. I had a dream in which a man, who was a Jicarilla Apache, showed me a desert plant. It had green spiked leaves, and a yellow flower with five petals in the center. Beside it he placed a piece of pottery. He told me in the dream that it was not a good idea to use the pottery way (archaeology; linear time; western worldview) to measure the plant way. The plant represented many things- it was a medicine plant, the uses of which were handed down through story. It was also representative of creation stories- the star shape of the plant referred to creation stories in which people came from the stars. As my understanding of the dream has unfolded over time and experience, I have come to realize that one of the things he was teaching me is that we all come from our stories. Some from the stars, some from the below world, some from the earth- the 'out of Africa, Bering Straight' story of western science. Our history, our knowledge is contained in these stories, and they can exist side by side as the pottery and the plant do, but they cannot be used to measure the worth of each other.

Using a dream as a source of insight and research is not common to western academic writing, but it is common to Indigenous epistemology and practice. In using a dream as a teaching tool, I am applying the framework of cultural knowledge and experience that I have learned in part from Louis, in part from

encounters with other Indigenous epistemologies, and in part from my own personal experience. Lee Irwin, in *The Dream Seekers*, articulates insightfully the dreaming traditions of Plains Native Americans. His understanding is consistent with what I have learned over the years, and what he says often reflects aspects of my own process. He draws upon ethnographic material as well as contemporary oral tradition (from which ethnographic material is derived) to speak of dreams and the role of dreaming:

> To appreciate the significance, power, and meaning of the dream, it is necessary to work back into the primordial nature of the religious experience and forward into its dynamic social enactment. The text captures only part of the visionary encounter and requires a religious context to be fully appreciated. This recontextualization of the dream is essential for any in-depth understanding of Native American religions. (Irwin, 1994, p. 168).

In the world of dreams, there is a collapsing of time, of movement within and without, backward and forward. Past, present and future become a dynamic enactment of experience, belief, empowerment, knowledge, and faith. I have encountered this integration of dreamwork into the social fabric of living as an essential aspect of indigenous traditional teachings and experience. Using dreams as research in this thesis, privileged no less than any other source of knowledge available to me is my own personal act of resistance as a member of a culture that has, on the one hand trivialized this process, while at the same time assimilating it under the domain of psychiatry and psychology. It is also an aspect of storytelling as methodology, and reflects what I have earlier termed a circumlogical approach to research, writing, and exploration- a movement around time and space not

chronologically determined.

> Furthermore, continuous visionary encounters serve to deepen the power and understanding of the individual. The dream cannot be interpreted or understood in any "finished" way; it is part of an ongoing process of interaction, dialogue, reflection, and insight unfolding over the years. This is why the Lakota John Fire could say, referring to his great vision, "It took me a lifetime to find out." The entelechy of the dream is it's potential nature, it's capacity to facilitate future growth, interpretations, and development. (Irwin, 1994 p. 70).

Understanding each other's aspirations and dreams has been a central part of the process of working together, for Louis and myself. This is partly the work of sorting through goals, objectives, means, and methods. Fundamentally, it is about listening. Good listening involves making the time and space to listen deeply, without interruption or judgement, so that full voice may be given to the dream that lies at the heart of a project. For Louis, the dream has been to keep alive Omushkegowack oral history, to be the connecting thread between the Elders and the youth of his community, and between his community and the rest of the world. For myself, the dream has been to become a storyteller and teacher. In order to manifest his dream, Louis has begun to write down the oral history that he has learned. In order to manifest my dream, I have been learning to become a teller. We are both, in our own ways, newcomers here, to this particular intersection of our stories.

In my telling of this story, it is important to note two things. One is that I am selecting portions of the material that Louis has given me permission to use, in order to write this thesis; thus, Louis' voice is experienced by the reader through

the framework of my own selective process. The other is that Louis has absolute veto power over anything I write. Much of the research that I have done with Louis remains unrecorded here. I spent two weeks with Louis in Moosonee and Moose Factory, assisting him in his own research, and it is from that experience that I draw most of the transcriptions of Louis' work. The transcription of the ten tapes that he and I generated is my contribution to Louis' mission. Louis tells me that my presence as an outsider, a researcher from a university, was invaluable in lending credibility to his project. In fact, we apparently inspired a number of people to begin researching local oral history, including a couple of men who were interested in finding out how to acquire female researchers of their own.

It isn't possible for me to include all ten tapes here, and so I have chosen instead to write about my experiences rather than simply present a verbatim rendering of the oral history as Louis imparted it in the tapes that he and I made, which would have been an alternative way to say all the things I am saying in this thesis, without actually naming them, but leaving it up to the reader's experience to discern, all in good time. Not having done that, I have endeavoured to make sure that Louis' voice is present throughout, and I have included other voices as well, in order to best reflect some of the other influences on my work to date.

Author Susan Berry Brille de Ramirez develops her theory of Conversive Methodology as a way to approach thinking and writing about contemporary American Indian literature that is integral to the oral tradition inherent in that literature, rather than relying on Western literary critique techniques. While I will not be dealing with contemporary literature, I have encountered several useful ideas

in her work that have helped me to develop an inclusive approach to writing. In her work, the dialogical possibilities of subject-object are rejected in favor of a conversational mode that emphasizes multiple relationships and connections.

> Within a scholarly framework, the interactive relationship between the storyteller and listener is transformed into the interactive and intersubjective relationship between the literary work and the scholar (in the role of a listener-reader). (de Ramirez, 1999, p. 6)

Western criticism, in the context of literature, focuses on identity, authority and purpose, which is fundamentally different than the focus of oral tradition, in which knowledge comes from being in relationship with the story rather than by looking at it from without. The point is to get away from divisions such as subject/object, and create a conversational discourse that equalizes all the voices, and neutralizes the power/over effect of a subject/object approach, which I would tend to call monologue. For me, it is a way of creating a sharing circle within my writing discourse.

For instance, in my own research of fur trade stories with Louis Bird, I used the story of "The Hanging at Kashechewan" (personal communication, Bird, 1999) with several versions of the story of "The Hannah Bay Massacres" (Francis & Morantz, 1983; interview with Ruby McLeod, resident; HBC Archives B.135/a/137.) to create a conversation between Louis, myself, the stories, and archival accounts which explored the dynamics from my viewpoint, Louis' viewpoint, and the perspectives expressed in each of the stories, which included official HBC records from the post manager as well as Governor Simpson. Chronological accuracy was available from some but not all of the material, and was not the primary focus of this research. Rather, the relationships and

connections within the stories to the broader social issues became the focus, as did the differences between European and Native ways of viewing the events (including Louis and myself).

In naming my text as a discourse, I am intentionally framing my work in something other than a conventional research model. I have read and appreciated the approach taken by Dr. Rae Bridgman, who combines 'narrative and commentary' with a sub-text of exploring the ways in which self and meaning are named in personal narrative (2000, p. 322). The notion of thus creating a 'moral framework' within which such stories can be told appeals to me; part of my thesis involves issues of ethics, values, and morality within the context of academic cross-cultural research. The power of storytelling to subvert and transform dominant ideologies (Cruikshank 1998, p.154) is reflected in the fully-dimensional woman named Sarah, whose story of her own experiences as a homeless person shatters the one-dimensional construct of 'homeless' that a statistically-based report inevitably conveys.

Storytelling has, amongst many ways, the capacity to be either open-ended or didactic in application. My own preference is for open-ended storytelling in which the listener is an active participant in the learning experience. It is easy enough to create a didactic experience when social issues are involved, and sometimes necessary, when dominant ideologies are deeply, stubbornly rooted in the social psyche. In order to create a more open and exploratory discourse, or conversation, I am including in my text poems, quotations, and personal narratives that provide a diversity of frames within which this conversation can occur:

> ...more than invocations of authority, the quotation and the footnote are the means of transforming a monological performance into a dialogue, of opening one's discourse to that of others. They are also the literate way of interrupting and commenting on one's own text, of acknowledging that reading and writing, like any cultural performance, involve appropriating, absorbing, and transforming the texts of others. (Babcock 1984, p.107)

Babcock's literary attempt at ritual clowning is a creative and insightful response to conventional academic writing, which she claims to have done for many years. In her work she creates text and paratext, drawn from emic and etic writings on ritual clowning. The ethnographers who record the rituals with a hopelessly euro centric viewpoint are playfully shifted off-centre, literally as well as figuratively; the text is divided into two columns. Insightful commentary by predominantly but not exclusively Native voices leads one to the conclusion that the emperor is indeed, naked. In appreciation of Babcock's creative texting, I have used the technique of justifying text left and right in one part of this thesis, to reflect textually the presence of teller and listener.

While my use of quotations, poetry, and stories is applied in a different way, it has nevertheless been inspired in part, by Bridgman and Babcock. I will also introduce moments of comic relief throughout this text/discourse, in the form of poems composed by Cree (Muska koo; not unlike Mushkego) storytellers Jacob Nibenegenesabe and Samuel Makidemewabe, from northern Manitoba, gathered and translated by Howard Norman (1972). The poems don't relate directly to the discourse and narratives herein. What they contribute is a trickster view of life, gently, comically, and gracefully. An older, wiser, more humble trickster inspired these poems, and I expect they will help to keep the didactics if not at bay, at least

balanced.

Researching and then discussing methodologies and methods reminds me of my own experience of operating a daycare in my home for ten years. Every child came with their own unique set of needs, desires, expectations, potentials, and foibles. Each one required a different response from me, and that shifted according to context, age, time of day, previous night's experience, family situation, and any number of real and imagined circumstances, all of them highly significant in the moment. I thought I had left my daycare days far behind me, but here I am, methodically searching through a thousand and one tiny lego-bits of theory, for that one magic piece that will complete the enterprise and quiet the uproar. In my experience, cookies solve almost any problem, with or without the magic of lego. Prior to all this research, all I really wanted to do was drink tea, eat cookies, and visit with people, sharing stories and insights as inspiration flowed. Which is almost exactly what I am doing now, with my computer mediating the dialogue.

There is the conversation initiated by my awareness of an informed and experienced reader at the other end of this process. There is the conversation between the anthropological literature and the Native Studies literature. There is the conversation between these two beings and my own experience with Louis Bird and the *Omushkegowack* Oral History Project. There are conversations that come through snowstorms and boreal forest two, three, or four hundred years ago; conversations with dream beings and poets, trappers, and berry pickers. There is the ongoing conversation with Wiisakechaahk, that trickster who presses the delete button on my computer when I know I pressed save. The stories fly fast and

furious amid the rapidly disappearing cookies. People I haven't even encountered yet have claimed a place at the table, in response to my questions about how and when and where, and why, and why not- and who, too. We speak many different languages, including the language of young and old, male and female, academic and storyteller, south and north, urban and bush, past and present. And when the cookies are eaten and the guests have gone home, all that is left is Louis and I and the stories.

One time
all the noises met.
All the noises in the world
met in one place
and I was there
because they met in my house.
My wife said, "Who sent them?"
I said, "Fox or Rabbit,
yes one of those two.
They're both out for tricking me back today.
Both of them
are mad at me.
Rabbit is mad because I pulled
his brother's ear
and held him up that way.
Then I ate him.
And Fox is mad because he wanted
to do those things first."

"Yes, then it had to be one of them,"
my wife said.

J. Nibenegenesabe (Norman, 1982, p. 38-9).

"We don't kill him because he is our relative."

Besides the five main legends that Louis has identified as the foundation of Cree oral history, there are several other story genres and a diversity of characters to explain or entertain any circumstance that life in the James Bay Lowlands may engender. The boundaries of time and space, in this thesis, do not allow for a full exploration. To be able to tell, or even refer to all the stories and all the characters, one would have to be very old and very wise. There are also age appropriate, and gender appropriate stories to consider, layers of stories that unfold between the teller and the listener. So it is that I will here share with you just one of the many stories that I have learned along the way. One of the conversations I had with Louis occurred during a telephone call one summer (2001). Bigfoot, or Kamakicited (in the old Cree), sightings are common across the north in the spring, and this particular spring was no exception. In fact, the news from Peawanuck was that Bigfoot had indeed been sighted that June.

Bigfoot stories tend to be represented by the media (western) as spooky but entertaining, guaranteed to make the rounds at summer camp bonfires. In Anishinaabe (Ojibway) traditions, Bigfoot is a spirit found in the forest who carries a particular responsibility that was given originally by Creator.[1] The Omushkegowack do not have the same teaching as the Anishinaabe regarding Bigfoot, at least as far as Louis knows. From Louis' Omushkegowack perspective, Bigfoot is a mostly non-human character talked about in the mystery stories, a

[1] The Anishinaabe teaching regarding Bigfoot will not be discussed here; if you are curious, take your tobacco and ask an Anishinaabe Elder or Storyteller for this one.

genre of story found in the Omushkegowack oral tradition referring to stories for which there are unanswered questions, something not fully understood. Bigfoot is a character who lives in the forest, usually avoiding human contact but at the same time intensely curious about humans, without the explicitly spiritual purpose or responsibility that the Anishinaabe understand.

Louis: Bigfoot never does harm, but brings fear with him; he exudes fear, communicates fear, but this happens only when he is afraid and doesn't want you to get close. Also, he stinks- he is smelly.

There are two things I want to say here about oral history research that I have learned from Elder Bird. Louis has always stressed that all he can talk about is what he has come to know. My saying 'as far as Louis knows' is not an expression of scepticism on my part; it is a simple truth. Louis' work is a life-long journey of discovery, recovery, reclamation, and exploration. What he knows today will inevitably expand through the conversations and questions of tomorrow. And there will inevitably be a couple more tapes to transcribe. The point is, that there may well be other teachings or stories besides the one I am about to share with you, so if you know something different about Bigfoot, just add it on to the knowledge you already carry, rather than discarding one or the other. Like this one, for instance. Doug Cuthand, a plains Cree writer, tells a Bigfoot story that he relates to our responsibility as human beings to care for the earth:

> At one time the Indian people of North America lived together with a race of giants. The giants thought that because of their size they could always do what they wanted. These large beings abused the Earth, killed more animals than they needed and attacked the people for no reason. They thought they didn't have to answer to anybody.
>
> My stories come from my heritage, which is Cree. Other

nations have similar stories. In my culture, Wiisakechaahk is a messenger for the Creator. He is the Creator's representative on Earth. In Blackfoot the same being is Napi, and in Ojibwa it is Nanabush. This same being is present in other cultures as well.

In any event, one day Wiisakechaahk visited the giants. He told them that they would have to leave and live by themselves because they had broken the rule of living in harmony with nature and humanity. They had not respected the gifts that the Creator had given them and they were to move to the deepest part of the mountains.

At first the giants didn't want to leave because they still thought that they were invincible. But Wiisakechaahk had special powers and they soon left and travelled to the mountains.

Today, some of the descendants of the giants still exist and they are known as "Big Foot" or Sasquatch". They live alone in the mountains and hide from people they continue to pay for the sins of their forefathers.

This story is told to teach our people to respect the Earth and the gifts from the Creator. We don't have "dominion" over the Earth like Western thought proclaims. We are one with nature because we are no better or worse than the animals, trees and rocks. It's a philosophy that needs to be practised more as we move into a period of climate change and eco-crises." (Winnipeg Free Press, 130:46).

The second point I want to make is that we of the dominant society tend to homogenize Aboriginal peoples and their teachings without recognizing the diversity not only between nations, but within communities and tribes of people. The Omushkegowack are a very different people than the Anishinaabe, and their stories are often very different. At the same time, there is also much common ground shared between nations, tribes, and communities, and this can also be reflected in stories. This is evident even with the stories presented here- the plains Cree story has similarities to the following Omushkegowack Bigfoot story, as well as to the Anishinaabe story. Each story teaches something different, yet each has a common theme of respect, and of relationships. Louis has commented several times that many of his stories are unique to his region; the Omushkegowack were somewhat isolated in their territory, and developed their own unique cosmology.

From this territory, then, comes the following Bigfoot story.

One of the Elders that Louis told his Bigfoot-sighting news to was an old man from Cochrane, Ontario, and his wife is the smartest woman that Louis knows. When Louis asked the old man if he believed in Bigfoot, this is what he was told: *Louis recounts the words of an Elder from Cochrane, Ontario: We don't kill him because he is our relative.*

One time, before the European came, the other tribes didn't like the Omushkegowack because they had so much land. So the Ojibway, Mohawk, Iroquois, Blackfoot, Saultaux, all plan to wipe out the Cree speaking tribes. The east coast (James Bay) *Cree were pushed all the way to Labrador. The bush Cree were pushed into the North West Territories, and the James Bay* (West) *Cree were pushed all the way to the Rocky Mountains.*

They had to live in caves, and they lost their hunting skills because they were in a strange territory. They managed to survive by mostly eating plants and whatever they could find.

They couldn't get fur for clothing, so their bodies got hairy. They gradually began to move back East, and now they get homesick and come to visit their relatives in James Bay.., and that is when people see Bigfoot, or see their tracks. They are bigger than ordinary Mushkego now.

The first thing that this story brought to mind for me was a comment in *Grateful Prey: Rock Cree Human-Animal Relationships* by Robert Brightman:

> Crees eat meat with relish, enthusiasm, and no visible indexes of guilt or conflict. I know no Cree vegetarians. The theme of witiko cannibalism nonetheless plays along the margins of Cree dietary practice (1993, p. 203).

Brightman's book is a complex study of the social and spiritual relations between the Rock Cree of northern Manitoba, and their animal relations. Brightman combines oral history with linguistics, semiotics, history, and anthropology in his study of this Cree religion. There is a tension in Brightman's work between the sacred and the secular. In his study of the oral history and the contemporary stories that people share with him, he finds what for him seem to be irreconcilable contradictions; a disorderly rather than systematic set of beliefs and practices. The reconciliation of this tension, for Brightman, is an analytical approach that is derived from and oriented within Indigenous, in this case Cree, knowledge and practices, a viewpoint that is shared by Cruikshank and de Ramirez. Like Cruikshank, my focus here is to explore the social life of this Bigfoot story. The conversive approach suggested by de Ramirez was useful in this process, as conversations with people, either in person or through their writings, became the primary mode of exploration for this story.

Brightman's adamantly rendered statement regarding the lack of Cree vegetarians seemed like overkill to me, when I first read the book. It came to mind (again) this way: I had to make a presentation at a colloquium, and decided to talk about the Bigfoot story. Louis and I like to make jokes, and after he told me the Bigfoot story, I teased him about the dispersed western Cree being the first Cree vegetarians. It was a small and not very significant joke, but I used it as a title for the presentation. Then I had to figure out what to say, and that's how I have come to understand that just when we think we are telling a story, we find out that the story is telling us. Because my title caught the attention of a prominent Cree

vegetarian. Possibly the only one, prominent or otherwise. After explaining the Bigfoot story, this person shared a story with me about a black bear that had been killed (hit by a car) in the Peguis community that summer. The bear was much bigger than normal, and it was suggested that it likely got that way from eating at the garbage dump- changing his diet because of the encroachment of humans on his territory. There were also Bigfoot (footprint) sightings around this community at this time. I thought about how the bears and the old-time Omushkegowack were pushed out of their territory, and had to change their diets, and how their bodies changed because of this.

So I called Louis and asked him to tell me more about the Bigfoot story. This time, he went on to talk about Windigo, and Maymagweyshew, and the deeper meaning of the story. According to Louis, Windigo is a general term for sub-human, someone who is not a proper human.

Louis: In western culture, this might be something like a vampire or werewolf, that dangerous and not quite human. A human being who has become a beast of the worst sort. Windigo represents a reality of life in this territory, though. Some Windigo are cannibals- ***ojisquatcho****, which means 'left-over freezing people survivor'. They are one of a group of people who were starving and freezing, and this one survived because he ate the others. He is a leftover thing, an* ***iskopano.***

> "Winter and spring, the north and east, ice, cold, starvation, famine, cannibalism, and the witiko together comprise a metonymic series. More fundamentally, the witiko complex is a complex metaphor likening the most obscene expression of human violence to the climatic conditions most inimical to human survival. With negligible exceptions, summer appears to have been a season of reliable foraging throughout the Algonquian sub-arctic. Winter provided the hazards of isolation, freezing, famine, and correlatively, emergency cannibalism.

Famine cannibalism and the spirits of the cold create the witiko." (Brightman, 1993, p.156).

I read Brightman's description to Louis, and he thought that it captured the essence of the relationship between Windigo and winter. At the same time, the intention here is not to define all winter experience as destructive or life threatening; people lived well and joyfully for thousands of winters in this land. It is in the extremity of experience that the Windigo is found, not the day-to-day. There are many Windigo stories, and there are stories of hunger and starvation during particularly harsh winters. Starvation, according to Louis, is only one way to become a Windigo, and cannibalism is only one form that this character takes. *Louis: Other Windigo begin to be Windigo because they are driven crazy, but they may not eat people. Some have been cursed by a Mitew (shaman), and become Windigo. In western culture they have something like a witch, but this is not Windigo. Windigo is a person who experiences hardship, like starvation, and develops a mental imbalance, sees people literally as food, and goes crazy.*

Bigfoot is one type of Windigo, not a cannibal. he never does harm, but when he is afraid, and doesn't want to be encountered, he exudes fear. The people also say that Bigfoot is a cousin to Maymaygwayshew, who are beings that are a smaller version of Bigfoot, about 4 feet, and hairy, a small person a bit like a monkey. They are like butterflies, they appear and disappear quickly and quietly, blending into a place, usually rocks.

The deeper explanation to this story, for Louis and the Elder from Cochrane, is that Bigfoot, and Maymagweyshew are part of the Cree people, are Cree ancestors. And therefore not to be killed. In fact, although Bigfoot is

reclusive, s/he is known to come close to people in the springtime, never to kill or attack humans. Sometimes females like to be around male humans, and males like to be around female humans. Some Elders have suggested that maybe there is an animal sexual instinct being expressed, towards humans, and only in spring. Bigfoot is more like a shadow in the forest, disappearing into the wilderness, sometimes killing animals and leaving footprints.

I shared with Louis the story about the black bear from Peguis, and asked him what he thought of that.

Louis: Listen. I am going to tell you something. Before Europeans, there were very few big Native people. We were shorter, and stouter (like Maymaygwayshew). Now we have changed shape, we are bigger, more like 6 feet. Before 1950-55, in Omushkegowack communities, we were more isolated, still kept to our traditional diets.

Then the radar station came, and white men came to live at the station. Our men began to work at the radar station, and people began to eat more and more of the European food. Vegetables, flour, sugar, greasy food, all that stuff, oranges, bananas, not too much of the cucumber and lettuce.

Since then, kids have gotten bigger, grow faster, with big bodies, but their bodies have less power. Women before 1950's were very powerful, but now they are weak. And people get sick more, as their diet and lifestyle changes. Also now people's hair goes grey very quickly. It used to be black all the time, now even by 40, 45, gets grey.

Louis of course, answered my question with a story, and left me to draw my

own conclusions. I am left with a powerful sense of relationships. A sense of the way that story and memory reveal the illusion of time as a linear process- past and present spiral through my consciousness with each telling of this story, and I know absolutely that I will hear this story again, in the future.

> The *telling* is for them & him & us an act of "going backward/looking forward," in which past & future intersect; in which traditional ways (as process) do not imprison but free the mind to new beginnings & speculations. This is the basis of the "oral" as a liberating possibility: an interplay that preserves the mind's capacity for transformation-as important in an ecological sense as that other preservation (of earth & living forms, etc.) that we now recognize not as nostalgia but a necessary tool for human survival. (Norman, 1982, p. ix)

I think of the Omushkegowack who were dispersed from their territory, losing their hunting skills in the unfamiliarity of a new territory. They must have been hungry, these newcomers, and yet in this story they survived and retained enough of their humanity to be considered relatives. So they became Windigo, but not cannibals.

I think of that bear, newcomers encroaching on his territory, eating refuse from the garbage dump, and I am reminded of an old man I once saw, eating cold spaghetti from a dumpster.

> Fear is a teaching of my culture.
> It is a powerful story, we tell it to our children.
> We tell it for shame, we tell it for blame.
> It is the cannibal we call abuse.
> It is the soul blaster we call racism.
> It is the helping hand that does not share.
> It is the drug that allows us to step blissfully over the homeless.
> (Wilde, unpublished).

I think of the newcomers from the radar base, introducing new foods to the Omushkegowack. White sugar, white flour, white hair. I think of a fur-trade story

that Louis told me one time, of people dispersed from their home territory because of a conservation initiative spearheaded by Grey Owl and the government of the day. Of these people starving to death one winter because they did not have the hunting knowledge for the area they were forced to relocate to, and were refused food by the local fur trade outpost manager, a newcomer to that place. Here, for me, the story within the story becomes one of contested spaces, a cultural chasm across the landscape of a history yet to be truly shared. The history of the fur trade, written from a Western perspective, tends as Julie Cruikshank points out, to be written as

> ...a distinct chapter in Canadian history, as an event or a series of events with a clear beginning and ending. Aboriginal trappers, on the other hand, regard trapping as an enterprise that began long before Europeans arrived and that continues to have social and economic importance in many communities, most recently as a consequence of the activities of animal rights movements that have crippled trapping economies across the North. (1998, p. 5).

Another part of the teaching that Louis shared with me tells that when Bigfoot is nearby, and does not want to be found, he emanates fear such that a person in the vicinity would be overcome with fear. Fur trade accounts are filled with stories of fear of attack, and fear of the forests, fear of starvation. Sometimes these fears would manifest, but other times they seemed to be a generalized response. So I began to wonder if Bigfoot was around in these stories. I asked Louis that question. He didn't answer directly, but he said that the Native people always knew when Bigfoot was around, and noticed that Bigfoot was scared of white people because they were so loud and noisy when they went anywhere. So the Native people would act like white people when Bigfoot was around, to scare

him away. Somehow, that seems like a small piece of healing and redemption to me.

That far north beast
there, with icicle shag hair
hanging down.
That beast winter sits on.

You'll see him
ghost the clearing.
Snow falls on him, then
snow stops falling
and he's a pile of snow!
Eyes showing through,
ears shivering snow off,
whole body shaking snow, snow flying around him.
So it snows off him.
So it does.
S. Makidemewabe (Norman, 1982, p. 95).

"Once upon a time there where giant animals in the world, one time..."

I have included this story here as an example of a quotation story, which is of the same genre, but a very different style, as "The Hanging at Kashechewan" in my essay entitled *Patterns of Terror in Colonized Spaces.* This story gives an interesting perspective on how far back into oral history one would have to travel to find the borderland of 'time immemorial', if memory and story can tell of dinosaurs. It is also indicative of one of the ways that Louis has of establishing chronology. And, it teaches a bit about how to work with an Elder.

Louis: And then we have, we have, here in this area, we have other stories that start off with quotation? I call them quotation stories. Some of them are very old. Yesterday, I was quoting one of them, when I said there were giant animals in the world one time, before others, and ah, they have a very dramatic saying...you know...Once upon a time there were the giant animals on the land, who roam the world, and that's when they went into hibernation until the end of time. That's the farthest it goes. And then it goes on to pick up a story that Elders say, why they say that.

I asked an Elder, in Winisk, when he quoted the story, that was in 1956, I remember that day, hahaheehee...I know that, because that's how it impacted on me. Because I used to hear it. And he say the word in the morning at five o'clock, just to wake me up, he knows to do that eh, instead of hitting me, he just say the word, and I hear him, it sounds so great! And I wake up right away, and I want him to continue, and he just laugh. And he says, "I know you gonna get up" ...chuckle...and he turn and start, so he hand me a tea pot, says "here, it's nice and

warm" ...chuckle...That was an old guy, his name Xavier Chokomonaw. He was the last Elder that lives at Holly Lake, the father of John Chokomonaw.

In 1956, in January 1956, I took him from his home to Winisk, and we camped twice along the way. And each night I have pleasure of listening to the old man, telling all the short stories and everything. And I ask him in that, during the lunch hour, about this quotation. So he says, "once upon a time" he says, "travellers from this area go into the west, into Lake Winnipeg and that area, people who meet the prairie tribes have mentioned they found the bones that are big. Big bones that have been washed away someplace. And nobody have any explanation why these things, why these things are there. And it's just by guessing, they say they must have live here a long time ago, these animals. They may have come again, just guessing. So that's why they start the story with quotation. And there are other people who have a different experience, who actually pinpoint the whereabouts of this thing they found. They see it, long time ago. So the thing is, I didn't believe it that time, just because of the quotation story that is so dramatic- the effect of it. And still didn't believe when I had a little bit of an explanation.

But in 1970, when I travelled to Edmonton, I went to the museum where they have those, the, dinosaurs. There is a tape recording that tells you that these giants lived there, thousands of years ago, and then they were destroyed somehow. And you can see the bones, and it even tells you where they found those bones, being washed off somewhere...the water, the river run off, I think it was the Saskatchewan River, in southern Saskatchewan. And that's exactly what our quotation says, being found and washed off somewhere...it was there, that I see it

again.

So you see, our stories were very useful, and they were very old. They were not created after the European came. I say that because I want to bring back the pride of our people, you know. I say, they were there, they were useful. So that's the quotation. I am explaining about the quotation story. There are many others, many, that teaches us the lesson or the history about long time ago.

Patterns of terror in colonized spaces: A reading of Taussig through Omushkegowack fur trade narratives

Michael Taussig, in *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing,* suggests an alternative way of reading oral narratives which have been fragmented by colonialist representation. To engage, as a historian might, in a process of authorizing truth from fiction is to re-enforce the imperialist power stance of truth wielder:

> ...what "truth" is it that is assumed and raised by history, in this case the history of terror and atrocity in the Putumayo rubber boom wherein the intimate codependence of truth on illusion and myth on reality was what the metabolism of power, let alone "truth" was all about. (Taussig 1987, p. 75).

Taussig's alternative is to "listen to these stories neither as fiction nor as disguised signs of truth, but as real." (1987:75). In so doing, Taussig is able to explore the complex interconnections between colonial terror and shamanic healing, chaos mediated by torture, order mediated by wildness, wildness mediated by Christianity, white redemption mediated by Native 'magic'. Julie Cruikshank's work with Yukon Elders reveals a similar understanding and process:

> Stories, like good scholarly monographs, explore connections underlying surface diversity. If anthropology's project has centered on detecting subsurface relationships, this book [*The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory*] shows how narratives are used to establish such connections- between past and future, between people and place, among people whose opinions diverge...Yukon storytellers of First Nations ancestry frequently demonstrate ability to build connections where rifts might otherwise appear. They use narratives to dismantle boundaries rather than erect them. In so doing, they raise significant epistemological issues both about past Western classificatory practice and about contemporary theoretical constructions. If post modern analyses attribute fragmentation of meaning to late twentieth-century uncertainties, Yukon storytellers have long experienced such fragmentation as springing from the structure of colonial practices that took root more

than a century ago. (Cruikshank 1998, p. 2-3).

If, as Taussig suggests, colonial truth was bound up in a codependent relationship with illusion, perhaps late twentieth century uncertainties are attributable, at least in part, to the narrative power of Indigenous storytellers to expose subsurface relationships by dismantling colonial boundaries.

This paper will explore some of the themes raised by Louis Bird, Taussig and Cruikshank, through a reading of fur trade oral history narratives. The oral history of the Omushkegowack of western James Bay as imparted by Louis Bird contain narratives that reveal the role of fear in fur-trade encounters, and in the not-quite human beings that inhabit the boreal forest ecology. To this end, the story of "The Hanging at Kashechewan" and "The Hannah Bay Massacres" will be discussed.

The kaleidoscopic nature of Taussig's narrative journey through the Putumayo experience lends itself to an equally diverse (and possibly chaotic) exploration on my part. One of the strengths of Taussig's writing is that he inspires as many insights and questions as he poses; he creates a poetic mandala through which many journeys are possible, as boundaries between time and space are diffused by narrative process. Unsettling as Taussig's work can be, I have chosen to juxtapose his work with these stories in the belief that stories map the firm path through such unsettling territory.

Crossing Narrative Borders in Omushkegowack Territory

> The creation of colonial reality that occurred in the New World will remain a subject of immense curiosity and study- the New World where the Indian and African *irracionales* became compliant to the reason of a small number of white Christians. Whatever the conclusions we draw

> about how that hegemony was so speedily affected, we would be unwise to overlook the role of terror. And by this I meant us to think-through-terror, which as well as being a physiological state is also a social one whose special features allow it to serve as the mediator *par excellence* of colonial hegemony: the space of death where the Indian, African, and white gave birth to a New World. (Taussig 1987, p.5).

Taussig is writing about the jungle territory of South America. Louis Bird's stories of "The Hanging at Kashechewan", Bigfoot, and Windigo take place in the boreal forest of North America, over there by James Bay. The jungle, as described by the Europeans in Taussig's book, is overwhelmed by too much life- fecund, decomposing, and dark. Forces of terror in this jungle center on the administration of violence at the rubber plantations, and on tigre mojano, the shaman-possessed jaguar, who will "attack humans, without provocation, against all odds". (Taussig 1987, p.77).

The boreal forest, tempered by bonebitter arctic winds, gave birth to Omushkegowack, a "*hardy people seasoned to the harshness of the land*" (Bird 1995, p.8). From these people come stories that sometimes speak of not **enough** life- starvation, scarcity, loss. The administration of violence at the hands of fur traders are stories contained in the rich oral history of these people, but much less frequently in the archival records of the colonizers. In this forested land, non-human forces of terror often manifest in stories of Mitewiwin, shaking tents, Windigo and Bigfoot.

Conflicting concepts of power, governance, and social relations have informed the unfolding of events described in the story of "The Hanging at Kashechewan". Louis knows many stories of violent treatment of Native people at the hands of fur traders. Few are as yet written. If these and other fur-trade stories

from across the continent were collected, fur trade history would need to be re-written. It is likely that narratives of such violence are to be found in every territory in which the fur traders worked- I have so far encountered stories from the Yukon, the Pacific Coast, Manitoba and Ontario. My focus is to examine the social relationships that are revealed when Indigenous narratives are considered real.

> Accounts of the past, including oral storytelling, are not just abstract objects of study, texts for analysis; their telling is bound up in social-historical and power relationships. What consequences follow when different narrative models intersect on a "frontier" where they are accorded unequal weight? (Cruikshank 1998, p.73).

The word 'frontier' is applied in two ways here. According to the Canadian Oxford Dictionary (1998, p. 560) it can refer to a "border between two countries" or "the limits of attainment or knowledge in a subject". When knowledge of an event is limited to the discourse relevant to only one side of the border, the social map contains large tracts of uncharted territory. When oral history is used to explore this territory, notions of empty wilderness give way to the reality of a social map that springs forward from the page like a child's pop-up book.

The Hanging at Kashechewan

The following story is described by Louis Bird as a nasspitoetamowin, or quotation story. Quotation stories are told frequently in a community, and are passed down to new generations. A legend could be a quotation story, but often they are 'historical', in this case meaning having occurred in recent (500 years) memory. Whether legend or historical, the stories are told for the lesson contained within, and the power of the social dynamic expressed. Quotation stories always begin with a short quote that lies at the heart of the story, meant to entice the

listener into asking for that particular teller's version. In this story, the grief of the old man who as a child of four had witnessed his father's hanging, is vividly remembered. The moment when his father's bowels emptied, has been quoted from generation to generation, and across the territory of James Bay.

Louis: This story that I want to tell you is called "The Hanging in Kashechewan." Kash is one of the old settlement of the HBC. Hudson Bay, all the Europeans were going to James Bay. They opened a fur trading business there. That was the second factor, what do they call them, they call them factors...actually it is a settlement, the second from York Factory. The second from York Factory, the oldest one, this is York Factory, and then Kash and then Moose Factory, and then the east coast.

That's one of them, one of the oldest ones, and in this story, it deals with the managers, that's what we call them today. But they would have a different name then, I think. Factors, I think they call them. So some of those people were very mean. I don't know exactly what is it, they excessively exercise their power, I guess, because they are everything in there- that settlement, it's the power, the leader. They are everything, the police, and judges and everything, they carry that all. And to show the Native people about who they are, they want to give the example about the rules, the law.

Laws are not quite understood by the Native people. The people, the Omushkegowack people had their own laws, but they didn't have to carry out the execution; if somebody breaks the rules, the laws that come from nature.[2] *So when*

[2] Louis is here referring to what he calls natural law; meaning that the rules for living were so bound up in what was needed to survive in this harsh land, that to go against the rules was to incur a

they saw this European style, that they can punish the person who was breaking the law, they couldn't understand it- it sort of terrify them. They look at these, the Hudson Bay manager, who has total power, as if he is the most powerful shaman. So they are afraid. Even the shaman are afraid of them. They can't do anything to them.

It was one of those kind of managers who take advantage of them. He knows he is feared, and when he had just a little excuse for him to show that, you know. And it so happened, I'm not sure exactly when it happened, I think it was in the trap line, and the person who is very royal to the HBC, the fur trading company, when he was out there somewhere on his cache, he left this little bit of shortening and flour, that is there in the middle of his trap line. Somebody came in who was totally out of everything. He was kind of hungry, and he help himself of this little bit of stuff, and they were the flour that was most important food item. Flour, tea, and lard. These are the basic things that can be made into a lunch, into a food, temporary. And when this man didn't have any food and was traveling there, he help himself at this cache and take seven pounds of flour. That's what he took. Seven pounds of flour, and he went on and he was alright.

I don't know what season was that, but it was in the winter time. And in the springtime when everyone went into the community to trade furs to the company, the man whose stuff was taken, reported to the HBC, "That man stole my cache,

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consequence equally bound up in the land- greed or stinginess could lead to hunger for the community, for instance. So in many cases, consequences imposed by humans were considered unnecessary. When human intervention was necessary, usually the consequence was considered and dispensed by three Elders, and it could be as harsh as banishment or death, if it was felt that the community was threatened.

took the seven pounds of flour." And that's all the HBC manager wanted to have. So he says, "Ok, he shall be punished." So a very short, something like a court session or something was put on. In front of people, he talks- he says, "Anybody that steals anything in out law is supposed to pay. For this reason, for the example, this man who have stole the item of the person which could have caused death, deserves to be hanged,."

And people had never seen any hanging. So he proceed to hang the man. But not like the way we see, in the respect that there is a scaffold, and someone is just dropped there and blindfolded, tied foot and everything, foot ties and arms. It wasn't like that at all. There was a staff there, a flagstaff. They are usually big, about thirty-five feet high and usually very strong, and that's where they hang this man. Just put the noose on his neck. And this is the time when they were still dressed with the breechcloth, you know, that's all he wears. Protesting of course, and everything, and people watching. And he was a married man, and he had a little boy, say about four or thereabouts. He remembers.

So they hang him, they put the noose on this man, right in front of everybody. And the manager stands there and says, "Heave!" And then they start pulling the string up. And the man, just the noose tied in his neck, and he starts to struggle for breath and everything, and he kicks and he kicks and his arms are tied up here in the back. Only his feet were loose. And then as he goes up there, twitching and everything. And he, you know the way people, when they get in an accident, they let go everything, so that's what happened to him. And the boy that was standing beside there, with the mother, saw his father kicking and twisting and

everything and finally the dropping came down. And the pee and everything, all at the last twitch as he is pulled up into the high mast. And then he finally stopped, and died.

And then the manager speaks: "This is the punishment for the people who steal. Let it be an example, that none of you ever steal." And everybody got so scared. This is the white man law. Because people used to take something from somebody, but they replace it. That's not stealing. But there were some who did steal, I guess he knows that, and that's where he make the example. So the boy remembers an awful lot. And he live to see the old man that I saw, James Wesley. James Wesley listened to this man when he was grown up, and he says "I saw my father hanged." Saw his dropping coming down, and all that disgusting thing. So he still vividly remembers, I don't know how long ago that is.

The thing is, that's what they [fur traders] do. Those things. They were very rough, they were very- once they know the Omushkegowack people are some kind of leery, sort of scared, they just usually used that, the way they do in the British army, whatever it is, that discipline action, they use. That's what they show to the people. And that's what makes those people, you know, scared. One of the reasons, even shaman couldn't do anything to such persons. And besides that, the manager didn't know anything about the shaman power, and of course he was not afraid. And that's the reason, you know, when there is two people, opposite belief, it doesn't work. If the manager, the factor, if he had known the power of the shaman, he would never do that because he would, to him, it was a total blaspheme act, what he did in front of the people. But he didn't know that. He totally ignore

the First Nations Laws, the morality, so he was committing sin. They call it blaspheme.

Anyway, there is a little story that I forgot, I'm not going to say that, for that reason, I think, the manager did have a very bad accident- whatever it is. Because people didn't like him after that.

Reflections

I have not been able so far to locate this story in the Hudson Bay Archives. Louis thinks that it dates to the early 1800's. He has heard the story most often in the Hannah Bay area, and thinks it may be connected to the story of the Hannah Bay massacre. These stories involve issues of starvation and conflict, which seem to polarize around the complex and often contradictory ways in which power is defined and used when very different worldviews are involved.

One of the questions that I have been thinking about as I read Taussig, and re-visit Louis' fur trade narratives, is whether or not the raw, violent brutality of the Putumayo rubber plantations was replicated in the forests, plains, desserts, swamps, and mountains of North America. I am not so much concerned with a quantitative measure, as whether or not I am encountering the same beast. To measure quantitatively would be to say that the holocaust that exterminated 6 million Jewish people in five years was worse than the more gradual genocide of Indigenous peoples in North America for five hundred years. Five hundred years allows for a more subtle, legislated, and institutionalized approach, but is the end result that much different? Does the end lend itself to defining the means? That imperialist and colonizer agendas were served through the fur trade, missionaries, settlers,

treaties, residential school, and the Indian Act are not new ideas. Yet my experience with listening to Louis' fur trade stories, and reading fur trade literature, is that we have only just begun to dismantle the boundaries between official doctrine and Indigenous narratives. I wonder if the sheer brutality of the Putumayo rubber plantations is the underbelly of the boreal forest colonial beast?

I recently visited two communities near James Bay, in Ontario. Moosonee and Moose Factory are communities of people whose ancestors *were* the fur trade (and much more, besides). One of the people I talked with is a Cree linguist, who is interested in developing oral tradition curriculum for educators and social workers. We talked for some time about healing from residential school experiences, and the difficulty that healers face in helping people to articulate their experiences enough to begin healing. One of the problems we talked about has to do with language. Many residential school students were forbidden to speak their language, and this was enforced with tactics that ranged from strict to torturous. Loss of language is part of the problem, but *permission* to use the language is a deeper problem in the healing process:

> The very first time I stepped into a classroom, my dream was always to master the English language. Here I am in my mid-forties and I am still trying to learn the language. I can get by and I can sometimes describe how I feel with the language, but when it comes to articulating *exactly* how I feel, it fails me. It fails me because it is a language, which does not connect with my heart, my family, my history, my dreams, but it is a language I can manipulate when it suit's me. What this means is; I give up part of what I want to say, therefore, I give up part of me,. It makes me realize what I have given up to get an education. An expense, I did not visualize, nor did I imagine. One of the things I gave up was being proud to be Anishinaabe. I did exactly what Maracle (1996;8) suggest is "the result of being colonized is the internalization of the need to remain invisible. The colonizers erase you, not easily, but with shame and brutality. Eventually you want to stay that way".

(Young, 1997, p.18).

These are the words of Mary Young, Aboriginal Student Councillor at the University of Winnipeg, describing her residential school experiences. The language she learned to use for survival and to succeed in the colonizer's- in my world- is a language that fails her utterly for matters of the heart, mind, soul, and body of her experiences *in* that world. I hear through her words, the words of a priest in Taussig's book, who claimed that the Indians liked and wanted to be whipped, it was their custom. His explanation for this statement was that it was obligatory, after the whipping, for the person to say "God be praised", and if it is not said, more whipping follows until obedience is obtained (Taussig 1987, p.44). Taussig also cites reports which describe the Indians throwing themselves on the ground voluntarily to receive the punishment that is forthcoming when it is clear that they have not gathered enough rubber, the punishment being either a severe beating or death by machete (Taussig 1987, p.35). In both cases the Indians were forced to submit to a brutally imposed reality, that of the colonizer. "The colonizers erase you, not easily, but with shame and brutality. Eventually you want to stay that way". It is this enforced invisibility that allows us to entertain the notion of a wilderness empty of people, a fur trade empty of brutality, the well-meaningness[3] of residential school. Given all we know so far, what would the experience of residential school have been like if it were *not* well-meant?

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[3] Without exploring this idea further at this time, I am here referring to an oft-used rationalization that the motivations for residential schools were well-meant. This is official doctrine, and contains one kind of truth. But I wonder, what would the picture be if it had not been well-meant? Putumayo machetes? Blind good-will may not begin with brutal intentions, but it can have brutal results.

Julie Cruikshank addresses the question of silence and cultural erasure in her examination of oral and recorded accounts of a trial that took place during the Klondike gold rush (Cruikshank 1998, p. 71-97). This was frontier territory, large tracts of which were named and mapped during the fur trade, and later during the gold rush. Except that, as Cruikshank points out, this was not an empty land, it was home to people who had named and mapped this land with their stories. In this account, four Tagish men were accused of murdering a white prospector. In the Tagish tradition, the men had acted within custom, as the murder was committed in order to compensate for some previous deaths. It was Western law- imperial ideology, however that was applied to this case. Two of the men died in prison while waiting for final sentencing, and two were executed. The trial was conducted with an interpreter who spoke Tlingit, not Tagish language.

> Compared with codified law...customary law may appear unregulated, poorly rationalized, and haphazard. But the consequence is that Natives are still, as they were a century ago, invariably compelled to defend their practices in a manner consistent with Western logic. In an 1898 courtroom in Dawson City, one institution was endowed with the resources and authority to carry out an act of adjudication. Ultimately the law derived it's legitimacy from the silences- from the prisoners' silences in court, from the absence of witnesses for the defence, from the administrators' silences from Ottawa, from the apparent dismissal of a legal opinion on file stating that "the proceedings are a hopeless nullity," and from the deaths of men who died in prison while their case was still under appeal (Cruikshank 1998, p. 97).

Hannah Bay 'Massacre'

It is these same issues of silence and cultural erasure that the story of the "Hanging at Kashechewan" evokes. In order to broaden this discussion, the Hannah Bay story will also be considered. The following version was recorded by John Long, a teacher in the James Bay region. The narrator is the late Ruby

Mcleod, who heard the story from a family she was living with as a young girl. The murders occurred on January 22, 1832, at the Hannah Bay Post. Nine people were killed, including William Corrigal, Postmaster, his wife, three other adults, three children, and one infant (HBC Archives, B. 135/a/137) William Corrigal was the only non-Native; the rest of the victims were Natives and 'half breeds'. The killers were a band of Natives, which included four men with families, and two young men aged 19 and 15. I am also including a report by Governor Simpson regarding the events surrounding the killings. I have not included Ruby McLeod's account in full, as it is quite lengthy. I have picked up her narrative at the point where a foreman named Tom Morrison had been sent from Moose Factory to Hannah Bay, to round up the people who had committed the murders.

Ruby McLeod: He got an order to go out to Hannah Bay, and they told him not to spare any of them Indians what was there, you know.

And there was an old fellow what was their head murderer. He was called Shantokish. And this old fellow Tom Morrison, he says he went in there, and all the books was in a mess there.

"I turned over a page," he said, "and asked him, 'What's that?' Hmm. Couldn't tell, him. So I gave him a slap on the face," he said. "I turned to another page and asked him, "What's this?" "No." "He gets another slap." Hahaheehee. So then he says, "That's all right."

They had him anyway, old Shantokish.

"Oh," he said, "they had everything piled up that they were taking."

And they killed this boss what was there, you know, Watt they called him

Watt was the name of the boss [Corrigal]. But his wife, they didn't kill her yet. They had a rope around her neck, was going to hang her out on a tree. That's what they were going to do, hang her. But they killed her husband now.

And he'd [Shantokish] tell them, you know, "Not me sir. Not me sir." That's what he'd say. So we know he was the head murderer, that old fellow.

So, he says, we were walking along and we seen a woman and children. They were walking along the bank. They were looking for these frozen cranberries, you know. That's what they were picking. So he says he called out to her.

"We told her, don't run, don't run. We're not going to do anything to you. We just only want to talk to you," he told her.

He says, "Where are these people living what come and took the store here, where are they living?"

[The woman told Tom Morrison and his men where the people were. She was told that if she showed them the place, she would be given some stuff from the store, and she and her children would be safe. But her husband would be caught. She complied].

They were sitting in a wigwam, that's what they were doing. And that's all this old fellow would say to him, "Not me sir. Not me, sir." But he was the head one, you know.

Well, they got rid of all of them, anyway. That was them ten men, that was there. Oh, they were well off. They had everything.

So then this woman went back with her children. So they didn't do anything to this old fellow they called Shantokish. They didn't do anything to him.

He says, "We tried to go on up to the place here, you know. Oh, we had an awful job with him," he says. "He wouldn't walk. He wouldn't walk. We had to come dragging him. So," he says, "we got him as far as Middleborough [Island] down here. And that was as far as we could get him. We couldn't get him to move," he says. "They cut a hole in the ice," he says, "and we shoved him under the ice. And that's what finished him here."

They wanted to get him up here to question him, you know. To ask him. Oh, they asked him quite a bit. He asked him what he was going to do. He said he was going to take Hannah Bay. They were going to take Hannah Bay and they were going to come up and take this place, Moose Factory. And then they were going to go when the ship come out. They were going to go out and they were going to take the ship. Hahaheehee. That's what they were telling him. Oh, they were going to have charge of the shop, go where they want. They were going to take places wherever they went. Hahaheehee. So they didn't get far.

John Long: I interrupted again to ask where the murderers were from.

Ruby answered, "Rupert's House Indians," and continued the story. Well, they thought he was somebody wonderful, this old Shantokish, you know. He made them believe he could do anything. He thought he was a big shot. So he says they listened to him, everything what he told them to do. Hahaheehee.

John Long: I interjected a statement, hoping to get her to talk about shamanism. "They thought he was a boss."

Ruby replied "Yeah," and continued with her story.

[John Long continued to question Ruby on this last point, and finally asked her if

Shantokish was a conjurer, by which he meant shaking tent operator. The shaking tent is a means of communication employed by the Mitew, or shaman, to communicate with the spirit world. It was used to locate animals for hunting, or lost persons, or weather conditions, or any other information necessary for survival.]

Ruby answered in the affirmative. "Yes, that's what he was. You know, conjuring, they thought that he could do anything. That's what they thought. He could do anything." And she laughed again.

[The interview continues for another half page, but I have chosen to end here, as the information relevant to the killings is covered.]

Governor Simpson's Report

Governor Simpson's report of this account describes William Corrigal, Postmaster, as a 'respectable old servant...who had long been a Postmaster.'(HBC Archives, D. 4/99, f. 29d-30). In it, Simpson describes the visit in January of a family of Rupert's River Indians, seventeen in all:

> ...They were received with the usual hospitality by Corrigal, and remained there for some days, watching, as it appears, a favorable opportunity of carrying their murderous plan into effect. The inmates of the Establishment at the time were Corrigal, his Wife, and twelve men, women, and children, Indians and half breeds; Corrigal himself being the only European of the party. A fitting opportunity for their bloody work at length presented itself, while two young men belonging to Corrigal's party were out of Doors, and they forthwith availed themselves of it by attacking the inmates with their Guns, Hatchets, and Knives, destroying 10 Individuals...

The men who were dispatched to investigate found the bodies stuffed into a privy, and a quantity of property stolen. With the help of one of the murderers [in this report, the woman picking cranberries is not mentioned as helping, nor the

threat made to her and her children] they tracked and killed six men:

> ...and forthwith inflicted the punishment of death upon them, the only punishment which could serve the ends of justice, and deter others from the like crimes. A great part of the stolen property was recovered, and the women and children were set at liberty, being furnished with necessary supplies to enable them to provide for themselves....

Reflection

The story of the hanging, and the story of the murders both engender more questions than they answer. Louis' narrative raises the issue of European law imposed upon a group of people with their own laws of governance and relationship, which Louis calls 'natural law'. European and Native definitions of power and authority clash in this story, with tragic results. In Louis' experience, abuse of power by the HBC employees was not an unusual event, although the hanging is an extreme example for which there is no mandate in the directives of the Charter of the London Committee.

Why was the borrowing of food from the cache reported as a theft? It would not have been considered a theft, within Omushkegowack tradition. It would have been considered a matter of survival, with the proviso that the food be replaced when possible. What is the significance of 'theft' in fur trade discourse?

Both stories raise the issue of spiritual power, Christian and Mitew, and how such power is used and abused. Louis raises the issue of spiritual power juxtaposed with the absolute authority attributed to post managers. In both cases, the stories reflect a shift in values and authority from traditional-local to imperial-distant. What are the consequences of losing the practise of the shaking tent? The Mitew knowledge?

Both stories also raise issues about the role of terror in much the same way that Taussig identifies in the Putumayo jungle. Although the HBC Charter provided guidance for dealing with 'criminal' issues, Chief Factors were in fact able to exercise discretionary, and sometimes questionable power. What model of authority did Europeans bring to Rupert's Land, and what role did terror play in the execution of that authority?

European Models of Authority and Power in Rupert's Land

What I am presenting here is a sketch of the model of authority that was applied during the fur trade in Rupert's Land. It is a very general sketch, and does not cover in great detail the changes over time as the commercial venture of the fur trade gave way to the colonization of the Red River Settlement on the prairies, the impact of the gold Rush in the Yukon, and the growth of Upper Canada, for instance. The Omushkegowack experience is not meant to be a model for all Indigenous experience. Yet without documenting it here, my own experience of listening to oral narratives from across the country, and reading 'between the lines' or oral narratives recorded in historical and anthropological texts, has convinced me that there are many important stories still waiting to be told that would compel the retelling and rewriting of fur trade history. Such a retelling would, I think, challenge the ways in which we talk about racism, imperialism, and colonialism, past and present.

Rupert's Land, as defined by the Charter granted the HBC in 1670, included Hudson and James Bay, all the waterways that drained into the Bay, and all the territory in between (Brown1980, p.xi). Germaine Warkentin describes Rupert's

Land as a 'state of mind':

> For English Canadians it is the first great unimagined space in our national consciousness...Within the vague, immense boundaries of Rupert's Land, as Richard Davis has rightly pointed out, the problems that as Canadians we still attempt to solve today were first posed: the relation between Eurocentric traders and the Aboriginal 'other'; between the English clinging to their Bayside posts and the French at their backs in the interior, between the desire to exploit the land and the fact of it's quick exhaustion, between the settler's dream of peaceful plenty and the farmer's nightmare of drought and betrayal. Rupert's Land thus provides a metaphor for the whole of Canadian life, for it's history since the beginning..." (Warkentin 1993, p. xii).

It is important to remember, as Warkentin points out, that this metaphor is most relevant to English Canadians. She is naming our creation story as a nation. Yet, our 'first great unimagined space' has been imagined for countless centuries by the peoples she calls, 'Aboriginal Other'. The wilderness of that unimagined space is to be found, not in the first experiences of the first Europeans on this continent, but in the quick exhaustion of an exploited land; the treaties and reservations that cleared the land of it's people for settler dreams of peace and plenty, and farmer nightmares of drought and betrayal; Tom Thomson's portrait of a jack pine (The Jack Pine, 1916-17) in Algonquin Park, devoid of human presence. In this dialectic of imagination, we, the Europeans, become the 'Other', the prophesied presence within a continuing Indigenous oral history.[4] The frontiers we encounter in this unimagined space are the limits of our imagination, where Indigenous people and stories are rendered silent and invisible, not so much through the absence of tellers as through the presence of listeners intent on

[4] There are many Indigenous prophecy stories that foretell the coming of the white man. Louis Bird relates one such story in "Timeless History".

enforcing their own stories. This is Trickster territory, this wilderness frontier, and Trickster, not us, is the first great imaginer:

> The dream world of North American Indian mythology is inhabited by the most fantastic creatures, beings and events. Foremost among these beings is the "Trickster", as pivotal and important a figure in our world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology. "Weesageechak" in Cree, "Nanabush" in Ojibway, "Raven in others, "Coyote" in still others, this Trickster goes by many names and many guises. In fact, he can assume any guise he chooses. Essentially a comic, clownish sort of character, his role is to teach us about the nature and the meaning of existence on the planet Earth; he straddles the consciousness of man and that of God, the Great Spirit.
>
> The most explicit distinguishing feature between the North American Indian languages and the European languages is that in Indian (e.g. Cree, Ojibway), there is no gender. In Cree, Ojibway, etc., unlike English, French, German, etc., the male-female-neuter hierarchy is entirely absent. So that by this system of thought, the central hero figure from our mythology- theology, if you will- is theoretically neither exclusively male nor exclusively female, or is both simultaneously.
>
> Some say that Weesaceechak left this continent when the white man came. We believe she/he is still here among us- albeit a little the worse for wear and tear- having assumed other guises. Without the continued presence of this extraordinary figure, the core of Indian culture would be gone forever. (Highway, 1998).

What would it mean for the non-Native world to acknowledge the presence of Trickster as someone other than a character in coffee-table storybooks? We would have to recognize the authority of Trickster, and the unmediated wildness of this being. And within that recognition is the knowledge of our privileged selves.

The dialectical power of oral narratives to subvert official doctrine reflects the presence of Trickster. The official doctrine of the HBC Charter authorizes imperial power, which has indeed created much wear and tear for Trickster, but the story is not over yet. The legal power vested in the HBC was derived from the Charter, which was rooted in British common law. The Charter created a hierarchy

of power in Rupert's Land. It embodied the authority of the Crown, the British Parliament, and the London Committee of the HBC, as administered by the Governor, Council, Chief Factors, and Officers of the HBC. Chartered companies held a monopoly of political as well as economic power (Baker 1996, p. 20). At the same time, while the Charter did not grant governance over Native people, it did claim jurisdiction over their territory as if the two were separate and distinct entities. Thus the imaginative power to create wilderness from Indigenous homeland was given ideological and pragmatic justification.

Authority within the posts was maintained by the Chief Factors, who were expected to draw upon British common law as it applied to masters and servants, and the primary means of discipline was flogging (Baker 1996, p. 48; Smandych & Linden 1996, p. 78). Military or martial law was utilized periodically, particularly during the years of war between England and France. The Hannah Bay murders, defined as a 'massacre', suggest a means for applying military law to a situation that may have been perceived as an act of war. The Henley House 'massacres' in 1755, had been viewed this way, setting a precedent of jurisdiction over Native people(at least those who 'massacred'), which may have influenced proceedings at Hannah Bay (Baker 1996, p. 64).

Governance of Rupert's Land, for all practical purposes, was left to the discretion of individual Chief Factors, who reported, in writing, once a year to the London Committee. While guidelines for governance were provided through the Charter, the application of long-distance justice lacked the legal apparatus necessary for enforcement. For serious problems, the Governor could call a

council, as could a Factor, and a trial could be held. This was preferable to using martial law, which was hard to administer, and considered too severe for most situations:

> The Company, despite exacting discipline through the usual forms of floggings and beatings, showed a real reluctance to take it's servants' lives or limbs under it's authority and jurisdiction: not one recorded case can be found of a resident governor or chief factor exacting such penalties in the eighteenth century (Baker 1996, p. 20).

At the time of the Hannah Bay story (1832), which Louis believes is the same approximate time of the Kashechewan story, there was still no dominant legal structure in place in Rupert's Land. Ambivalent jurisdiction still continued to provide plenty of room for individual application of law.

An Omushkegowack View: Reflections by Louis Bird

That all of the stories I am using in this paper are written in English obscures the fact that when they took place, both English and Cree were spoken, and understood with varying degrees of fluency, a factor which undoubtedly affected the way in which these events were understood by the people involved. Power and authority was understood and expressed by the Omushkegowack in ways very different than the Europeans they encountered. Cruikshank's analysis of the trial of the Tagish men reflects a similar conflict between worldviews:

> Accounts of the deaths at Marsh Lake are equally embedded in contrasting ideas about individuals and society. For the newcomers, an attack on two prospectors was disconcerting and incomprehensible because it challenged their view of their enterprise. Hence it could only have been perpetrated by "bad Indians."...But from the Native perspective, their classification of the newcomers as members of a cohesive group- like a clan- and their attempts to impress on them the rules of the country met with an incomprehensible reaction. The stories passed on orally make the same point as those told about Skookum Jim. They provide coherent narrative translations of events that have no familiar prototype (Cruikshank 1998, p. 94).

I asked Louis to comment on the different versions of the Hannah Bay story, and to think about the events of the two stories from his own understanding of the history at the time, including his own worldview as an Omushkegowack. Louis responded that three things came into his mind as he was reading the stories. Interestingly, after reading the Hannah Bay stories, he was even more convinced that the story of the hanging was related to this event.

The first issue for Louis had to do with the kinds of changes that were occurring in the James Bay area at this time, due to the fierce competition between fur trading companies. Even though the HBC and the NWC had merged in 1821, in Louis' corner of James Bay competition continued in the early 1900's with the Revillon Freres company. Louis saw many parallels between this period and the early 1800's.

Louis: Beaver were depleted due to the demands of the competition. People were becoming more dependent on the HBC for supplies, and starvation was increasingly a factor in people's lives. The early 1900's saw a ban on beaver hunting, until 1937, and the 1930's especially was a period of starvation right across the Bay area. There is a story about four people who starved in his community at this time, because they had been refused supplies by the HBC manager, and had been unsuccessful at hunting. These people had been inland people who moved to the coast because of the ban[5], and did not know how to

[5] Here Louis is referring to conservation laws that were brought into effect as animal resources had become depleted. These bans were partly the result of the work of Grey Owl. Taussig's discussion of colonial healing through shaman healers has some applicability here; Grey Owl was a white man who 'became' an Indian, and worked to establish conservation areas which, as can be seen by this story, may have protected animals, but not necessarily the people who also lived there.

survive as well in that environment.

At the time of the massacre, the starvation that people were experiencing resulted in several incidences of cannibalism in the Winisk area, in which three families were destroyed. This occurred on the east side of the Winisk river, where a radar station would be built in the 1960's. There is also a story of a woman who 'went nuts', simply overwhelmed by hunger, and disappeared into the bush. This occurred at Kaskatamagan, the site of a small HBC post which had been closed down due to the decline in furs, and the restructuring of the Company in 1821.

The Native people lost their conservation practices because of the competing demands for furs. Threats were often made to the Native people, that they would not be given food unless they brought in more furs. In both periods, people tell stories about the HBC managers not giving them the help they needed during the periods of starvation. At the same time people don't want to publicize these stories because they are in awe of the HBC managers.

This in itself was contrary to the values that guided the lives of the Omushkegowack, who had developed their own system of governance based on keen observation of the natural world. It is also contrary to the words of Governor Simpson, in his report to the London Committee, that the starving band of Rupert's River people were "received with the usual hospitality by Corrigal". Another factor that likely contributed to the way that the events were perceived and reported by the Europeans involved, particularly Governor Simpson, was the increasingly racist and discriminatory attitudes towards Native and 'Half Breed' peoples (Brown1980, p. 204). Louis certainly identifies this as a factor; the lives of Native people were

simply valued less.

Louis: The French never got along with the HBC, and the East Main people were influenced by the French. It may have been that Shantoquaish and the others were influenced by the East Main people, since they couldn't get anything from the HBC.

Maybe they were influence by stories from the south about Native people's battles with whites, people fighting against the white man. They could have heard of these things from the shaking tent. The shaking tent acts like a kind of short-wave radio. There is a problem with the word 'conjurer'. It really describes something different, the closest example is the Old Testament story of Saul. He went to see a lady- called an unfamiliar spirit, like an evil spirit- to ask if he was going to win a war. That's not like a shaking tent operator, really. When a shaking tent operator begins to speak, people worship, respect him. He has a power almost greater than a priest. People could have just believed him [Shantoquaish]. But it doesn't work if you don't believe- that shaman power, if white people don't believe, it won't hurt them. So, he lost.

Shaman power is an issue that Louis comes back to time and again, and he is often asked why the shamans didn't fight the Europeans and defeat them. In *Timeless History,* Louis describes shamanism:

> *This spirit idea became to be known as Mitewiwin- what in English is called 'shamanism'. The Elder is a leader in our traditional belief system. Some Elders did live long. Living many winters on the land made them wise. They obtained wisdom by observing nature. Thus, the Elders were looked up to by younger people.*
>
> *This kind of person was known as Mitew. In English, you say "shaman". These shamans then were respected. They did have mystic powers. Some good. Some bad. This shamanism is the, the only spiritual connection between human and spirit...there was not organized body of ideology. Nobody studied what is truth. Each individual has their own*

> *spiritual development which they learned to believe and practice. Such beliefs came from being alone. The family was the main social unit. But not even within a family was there a single idea of spiritual belief. Each person has his/her own spiritual thing... Their values and customs, their moral rules, all this stems from natural law.*(Bird 1996, p. 24).

Commentary by Louis: There are three levels to natural law. First of all, though, about natural law- nature is God, God's creation. Great spirit or God, is the closest thing we can say. So natural laws come from God, from observing nature. Natural refers to the cultural beliefs, the moral principles derived from observing nature. The word 'natural law' was not used at that time. The closes word in the Omushkegowack language is ittaskanaysiwe tappwayanitamowin, meaning cultural beliefs, moral principles.

1) Three Elders, or it could be three ordinary men, form a tribunal to judge a person who has broken tribal custom. The punishment could be to be killed, or banished for one year from the community, handed over to Great Spirit. If he is alive after one year, then he can live.

2) A shaman could use his power to make a decision to sentence someone who has killed for a reason other than self-defence. He would get another shaman to punish this man for one year, and if he survives, then he can live.

3) If someone goes against the values, like killing without a purpose, or stealing, or sexual molestation, abuse of animals, or abuse of women and children, then three Elders would curse him and leave him to the Great Spirit. God creates starvation, illness, weather, so God might punish him in this way, he would maybe get sick, or have bad fortune.

People see how the wilderness acts, they see what happens- when over-

population occurs, animals get disease and die off- so they understand the force, law, Creator power. Someone who takes it on themselves to punish in that way, people would say he is considering himself to be as powerful as God. Only God has the right to punish. In the hanging story, God would not have punished in that way, with total humiliation. People think he should have applied their custom.

Reflection

A shifting array of images moves through these stories. A man hanging from a flagpole, to Louis like Christ on a cross, to me like a colonized flag marking ownership of something more than land. A little boy watching; the contents of the man's bowel punctuating the story across generations. A man shoved through an ice-hole, ten people murdered; a shaking tent, a question asked, a brutal answer. Hunger and cold, *Windigo* walking through the frontiers of this story, the kind of *Windigo* that is cannibal; a woman and children picking cranberries in January. A pile of furs, many piles of furs, but no live beavers. The hand that pulls the flagpole rope; the hand that shoves a shaman below the ice; the hand picking cranberries in January. The hand measuring the pile of furs, the hand pulling the trap. The hungry hand, the stingy hand. Ten murdered people, ten unfinished stories. Whispers of resistance, a solitary man listening in a tent, the voice of a goose. Six more murdered people, no questions asked there, no whispers, no voice. Only a story told over and over again, I heard it myself, there, in Moose Factory only last month.

The Factors were considered, by the Omushkegowack, to be all-powerful. Their authority came from God and the King; they were referred to as Kitchi

Ogimaw by the Cree, which literally means Spiritual King or God King. The word King used in this context is derived from the Old Testament; the British concept of King as ruler of a country was not understood. European power and authority is structured hierarchically, and derived from the authority invested in the Crown and Parliament. This structure is also present in Christian teachings, lending weight to secular authority. The hand that pulled the rope on the flagpole was vested with symbolic and real power, and contrary to the words of the Charter, exercised governance over land and people. According to Louis, fear was the mediator for that power. Colonial power seemed more powerful than *Mitew* power, that time.

In Cree culture, it is not uncommon for a person, if they are temporarily without resources, and in dire need, to borrow from another's cache of supplies. The supplies would then be replaced at a later date. Such an act was not considered theft, and would not be punishable, particularly not in such a brutal manner. It is this brutality, and the total humiliation of the man in front of his family that makes this story a quotation story. Threatening the profits of the HBC was serious business, but flogging and being sent back to Europe were the usual punishment for non-Native employees.

There are layers of theft here, as there are layers of brutality. The most blatant and easily identifiable is the 'theft' of the flour, and the disproportionate punishment. A more subtle theft is the theft of a father from the four-year-old boy. Even more subtle is the theft of Indigenous custom- for to steal flour, a life, or a custom, is to first of all recognize its existence. It is not clear in this story that the fur trader knew that there was a custom other than his own.

Another kind of terror that moved through this story is the ever-present reality of starvation juxtaposed with the Mitew power of the shaking tent. This too contains layers of meaning and implication. The shaking tent is a tool, to be used to benefit the community, at least in the hands of a Mitew motivated by good intentions. Another kind of Mitew might use the shaking tent to further his or her self-interests, without regard for life. This was/is a power akin to the *tigre mojano* that Taussig writes about- the power of a shaman to act outside the predictable behavior for living well with the community. The priests who wrote prayerbooks years later certainly feared and hated this power. In 1887, the Sermons de Monseigneur Baraga were published in Ojibway syllabics, and widely distributed in Omushkegowack territory:

> First, God's Word
> I do not like the native people's cultural traditions such as shamanism, at the present time (1887) God has never created this creation (shamanism), ancient (First Nations) people created it. I hate it
> the Lord said
> do not ever hold anything used by (First Nations) people who are not Christians, such as those who do shamanism, the sweat lodge, and divination...do not possess even a little Indian medicine throw it all into the fire. If you are sick do not ever think to be attended by natives who are not Christians or by medicine men...(122-124, excerpts).

It is interesting to note that in the early 1800's, Traders were not supposed to teach the Native people to read, thus maintaining hegemony over the trade records.

In my recent travels to Moosonee and Moose Factory, in conversations with Louis regarding the shaking tent, Mitewiwin, and the shift to Christianity, Louis suggested that many people have told them that their parents converted, or they themselves converted, because the Mitew power could be used for evil means, and

Christianity seemed to be a safer kind of religion. That Christianity contains it's own forms of fear is another layer to this story.

Yet the harsh and brutal reality of starvation continues to move through this story. The shaking tent could be used to help hunters be successful, but the practices of the fur trade had depleted resources. The conservation practices of the Native people had been subverted by fur trade practices, and then replaced by European ways of conservation, which created for some people, more starvation. Louis tells many stories in which traders refuse to help people when they were hungry, saying they had not brought in enough furs. The HBC version of the Hannah Bay story suggests that William Corrigal treated the Native people involved with hospitality and kindness. There are oral stories in the community that contradict this view. Where these murders a brutal massacre of innocent people, or can they be viewed as a response of anger and frustration to increasingly difficult living conditions, and long-standing abusive treatment? Was this an act of cold-hearted self-interest, or an act of desperation, faith, and resistance meant to regain an autonomy that had been radically altered by the encroachment of Europeans? There are no clear answers here, but there are patterns that move through these stories that also move through Taussig's rendering of the Putumayo rubber plantation experience, which at the very least suggests that there is much more to this story than has yet been listened for.

Conclusion

Listening to oral stories of the fur trade through Taussig's work on good and evil reveals, as I have stated earlier, patterns that I think could and should be

explored more thoroughly than I have been able to do here. The details of the stories I have related could be dissected for authenticity, but I have found it more useful, as Taussig does, to simply consider them real. I have not challenged the veracity of any of them, including the archival accounts. I have juxtaposed the stories and the emerging patterns, to suggest patterns of continuity and discontinuity. Taussig's work is complex, and I utilized only a few of his ideas, thus leaving much more for another time. I leave this project convinced that terror had and continues to have a powerful role to play in the colonizing process. The Putumaya story, I think, is not so different after all; terror has it's own unique smell, whether or not we try to call it a rose.

This journey writes me
flows through my heart,
inkblood footprints across the landscape;
a bedtime story for the stars.
Wilde, unpublished.

A star keeps my heartbeat

Louis sometimes tells this story that an Elder shared with him:

The old man was asked what makes hearts beat.
He went looking for the answer.
He said that each heart was connected to a star,
it was the star that kept a heart beating.

Louis thought this might be related to quasars, black holes, the universe expanding and contracting.

Shaking the hill is not a sermon on the mount

Notes from Interview; B. Tooket; Nov. 29, 2001; nursing home.

Mitewewin
Louis asks her if Mitewiwin was a church. She answered that there was a shaman, performer who was so strange and powerful, he used to shake the hill.

Adjikishiininow (Atchi); he was the Mitew who made the hill shake. This hill was about 800 ft. above sea level. This was before her time, maybe her great, great grandfather's time. He was powerful, feared, but he died alone, nobody found him, no ceremony. So he may have been powerful but he died like an ordinary person.

Louis' explanation
This hill is somewhere between Peawanuck and Attawapiskat, it is a ridge that cannot be seen from the west, but from the other direction it is 800 ft. above sea level. The old man (Mitew) could shake the hill by his power. He would stand on the ground and move back and forth.

Christianized people are judging the Mitew when they are telling you about it. She was answering from what she knows- Christian conversion was powerful, especially around 1884-1936, people totally brain washed. Louis, in his work, explored the church from the outside- the historical view- put aside saving his soul to look for another view. At one time he wanted to be a priest, but was discouraged by the local priest in his community who told him he would never be able to make it.

She changed the subject quickly, this means she doesn't want to talk about it.
She said she was intimidated by Louis, thinks he knows more than her. Having an interpreter is a protection for her, she can be comfortable in her own language. My presence also lends support to Louis' work.

Back to Mitew
In response to Louis' question:

When he wanted to die, he became so nothing, he was hardly even noticed. So what he had was not important in the end, he died less than even an ordinary man. Shamans are nothing in the end.

So she was saying, no, not a church, because in church, death is recognized- graveyard, markers, ceremonies, burial service. So Mitew does not recognize death like the church.
Louis asked if they know where he was before he died?

Yes, he was close to that hill, but they couldn't even find his body. Powerful, but unlucky.

Wiissakechaahk learns that not all webs come from spiders (Louis goes digital)

One of the problems with writing oral history is that the voice of the storyteller- tone, resonance, chuckle, pause, crescendo, rhapsody, diminuendo- is not there to guide the reader. Gone as well is the body language through which story is told- the sweep of a hand creating a landscape, the lift of an eyebrow to reveal the twinkling eye that lets the listener know some mischief is on the way, the wash of grief across a face. The intimacy of the physical presence of story teller and story listener is exchanged for the more solitary pursuit of reading, in which the reader supplies voice, gesture, and imagined intimacy with the company of characters residing between the pages of a book. The tree that a storyteller might sit under to tell a story is transformed, for the purposes of the written word, into a book that preserves the life of the story through time and space, and brings to a close the story of that tree for all time. One of the ironies of life is that the lives of storytellers are sometimes less well preserved than the words they speak, written down for future generations.

I invite you, if you have access to the internet, to look up the following website:

www.ourvoices.ca

"*My name is Louis Bird, and this is my story.*"

You will hear Louis begin to talk about his project, his dreams, and the rich oral history of the Omushkegowack. Modern technology is used in creative ways to bring back some of the dimensions of storytelling that are not available through the written word. This website is a remarkable contribution to the "First Voice"

history of Indigenous peoples. Louis' project, with the help of Dr. Jennifer Brown, Dr. George Fulford, Dr. Mark Ruml, and many other committed and talented individuals (check the website for a more complete list) has begun a new journey into the digital global community. So bake yourself some cookies (or buy them from Tall Grass Prairie bakery, I highly recommend them), pour yourself a cup of tea, and visit with this remarkable website. Louis will take you there, onto the ice, into the forest, from time before time to the fur trade and beyond. You will learn everything from how to hunt caribou to how the First People came to this place; how to communicate over long distances without electricity, and how to survive colonial encounter. You will learn medicine, history, biology, geography, theology, fantasy, and the connection between your heartbeat and the stars. You will meet Giant Skunk, Wilderness Woman, Wiissakechaahk, and Chakapesh. You will learn about quotation stories, the woman who was a cannibal killer, and the true history of the Omushkegowack people, as learned and told by one man.

As you listen, just as when you read this thesis, you will notice that most of the words are in English. The plans for **www.ourvoices.ca** include accessing a final phase of funding in order to present Louis' work in Cree as well as English. The importance of preserving Louis' stories in the Omushkegowack language cannot be underestimated. This is how the stories were originally lived and experienced, and continuing in this tradition is important to Louis' integrity, to the promise he made to the Elders, and to the integrity of the stories themselves. Louis has tapes that are in old Cree, and new Cree, and some that are in English. Transcribing the English tapes is a simple process. With the Cree tapes, finding

people who speak Louis' dialect and can work with both old and new Cree, is more of a challenge. Transcribing in roman orthography or using syllabics for the Cree is also part of the consideration. Translating the Cree tapes into English, and the English into Cree so that both are completely accessible in either language, has not yet happened, partly due to funding problems; research funds are more readily accessible for projects done in English. Privileging language, and access to funding that supports the preservation and continued use of language is simply a continuation of the assimilationist colonial project that Louis and many others have identified as being the source of the problem in the first place. That the tapes used on Louis' website will be transcribed in Cree is testimony to Louis' tenacity and perseverance, and to the recognition by the people who work with him that this is of utmost importance. That it was not able to be done in time for the opening of the website is, in part, a reflection of how deeply entrenched the ideology of colonization, and the resultant cultural genocide, still exists within our governing institutions. When you visit this website, you will see a picture of Louis' face, and hear his voice. Louis, and others like him, are all that stands between the younger generations and that cultural genocide. I am reminded of the photograph flashed worldwide of the student in Tienamen Square, blocking the passage of a military tank. It is the storykeepers like Louis who are the guardians of the language, preservers of culture; so often they and their projects are left vulnerably unprotected in a world phalanxed by western ideology and language.

It is estimated that in Canada, only three of the remaining Indigenous languages- Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut, will survive, and then only if immediate

action is taken (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 82). Battiste and Henderson's discussion of language protection raises important points that I have heard Louis speak of many times. As a translator, one of the struggles Louis faces is to find words in both languages that express, as clearly as possible, the worldviews found in each. It simply isn't, in many cases, possible. The structure, nature, and usage of his language, and most Indigenous languages, is very different than English. Louis' language is based on verbs; mine is based on nouns. My language is used to name things, to categorize and classify; the thinking is abstract, the process is to theorize. Louis' language is best used to describe the continuous transforming movement of relationships between interconnected spaces. The story of Ehep, the giant spider that lowers the first humans to earth in a basket attached to her/his string, can be interpreted as representing this movement between worlds; the interaction between animals, humans, and spirit; and the relationship of interdependence that links them all in the great web spun to connect all these realms. Battiste and Henderson chose to look at Algonquian languages, Mi'kmaq in particular. What they have to say is consistent with what I have heard Louis say, and with my own experience:

> The Mi'kmaw relationships to the forces of the Earth Lodge realm (maqmikewo'ko'm) are direct and visceral. This is often simply called "nature" in English, but it is a difficult concept to express in Mi'kmaq. Perhaps it can best be expressed as kisu'lk mlkikno'tim (creation place). The Mi'kkmaq understand how limited their knowledge is about this realm of the transforming flux. It makes little sense to create any fixed worldview in this realm; the known truth is about unending change that requires both cognitive and physical flexibility. Mi'kmaw knowledge does not describe reality; it describes ever-changing insights about patterns or styles of the flux. Concepts about "what is" define human awareness of the changes, but add little to the actual processes. To see things as permanent is to be confused

> about everything: the alternative to understanding is the need to create temporary harmonies through alliances and relationships with all forms and forces. This process is a never-ending source of wonder to the Indigenous mind and to other forces that contribute to the harmony (2000, p. 77).

The historically fixed chronology of time that Louis tries to develop for his western audiences contrasts sharply with the Mitew whose relationship with the spirit realm helps her to traverse the web of realms that encompass all movement of time, including infinity. How then, is it possible to make translations from one language to another? From one worldview to another? Battiste and Henderson argue that the European concept of 'benign translatability'- the belief, or rather illusion that it is possible to translate Indigenous languages into English or French, that there is a shared worldview within which such translations are possible, is simply another tool of assimilation.

> The illusion of translatability between Indigenous languages and English or French devalues the uniqueness of Indigenous languages and worldviews. It prevents Indigenous speakers from understanding how to correct the interactions of Eurocentric languages with Indigenous languages, so that the former will not contradict or overpower Indigenous languages or worldviews. The illusion also hides Eurocentric fragmentation from the wholeness of Indigenous languages until it is too late to correct the problems associated with this fragmentation. Additionally, the illusion is often used to excuse inaction on the problems affecting Indigenous people (p. 82)

I have walked through museums with Louis, listening while he looks at the displays of artifacts, sacred objects, and dioramas which are meant to portray life lived in the past. Objects in the museum have a language of their own, one that is often overwhelmed by Eurocentric interpretations. When Louis, or other Elders see, and sometimes hold, these objects, often a story is sounded; the object acts as a mneumonic device, and the holder becomes the voice that reveals the story encoded

in the object. That many of these objects are deeply rooted in spiritual practice and community life, is revealed by the stories told when these objects are reconnected to that community. A bundle of sage in a local museum is described as a smudge for mosquitoes, which is partially true. That it is also one of four sacred medicines, associated with women's teachings, and used as a healing herb, is not part of the display. Lee Irwin identifies the complex connection between vision, object, ritual, nature, and human life lived to its fullest capacity:

> Grounded in personal experience and explicitly manifested in ceremonial and ritual behavior, the concept of the sacred in texts has many diverse meanings, all of which express an attitude of heartfelt reverence. The texts record a deep respect and profound appreciation by informed members of the community for the vision experience and for acts and objects associated with the vision. If the concept of the holy is not stratified into hierarchical schemes by Plains visionaries, it is expressive of a deep regard for the importance and generative processes of nature that reflect an underlying unity and vitality impinging directly upon and acting through human life. This underlying unity requires long and thorough reflection to be fully appreciated.(Irwin, 1994, p. 71)

Anthropologist James Clifford tells a story about the Rasmussen Collection of Northwest Coast art, located at the Portland Museum of Art in Portland, Oregon. In 1989, Tlingit Elders were invited to participate in planning discussions for the re-instalment of these items, which had, since the 1920's been displayed (when not stored) in conventional ethnographic manner. The staff and Clifford expected the Elders to talk directly about the items; who made them, how, and why, roles and traditions. Instead, the Elders used them as memory aids for several days worth of ceremonial singing, storytelling, and reclaiming that involved a complex process of integrating the past memories with present-day concerns:

> A headdress representing an octopus is brought out. So she [Amy Marvin] tells an octopus story about an enormous monster that blocks

> the whole bay with it's tentacles and keeps the salmon from coming in. (All the stories are told in Tlingit with translation and explanation by the younger participants- elaborate performances, sometimes interrupted by dialogue.) The Tlingit hero has to fight and kill the octopus to let the salmon come into the bay, salmon which are the livelihood of the group. The hero opens the bay so the group can live. And by the end of the story the octopus has metamorphosed into state and federal agencies currently restricting the rights of Tlingit to take salmon according to tradition.(Cruikshank, 1998, p. 189)

Julie Cruikshank, an anthropologist who has worked in the Yukon for many years, tells a similar story. Carvings made by Kitty Smith, a woman of Tagish and Tlingit descent, ended up in the MacBride Museum in Whitehorse, identified as the work of Mackenzie River Indians 100-101). When reunited with her work, she talked of learning to carve as a young married woman, inspired by her father and curious about the stories that the wood might have to tell. She carved figures from traditional stories, which were particularly relevant to her own life, and was amused to find them in the museum after so many years. She used them again, to tell the stories of her life from the perspective of an old woman looking back at herself, for the benefit of her family.

Both of these stories have an important lesson to teach:

> ....Kitty Smith's ways of making connections may have implications for other marginalized works in museums. They document her creative use of cultural materials at hand to construct an understanding of the human condition. They allow us to look at how culture is *made* rather than merely at its representations. The stories Mrs. Smith told to describe her work refer to the act of creation rather than to the finished object: keeping the carvings would have been highly impractical for anyone with a lifestyle as mobile as hers. Besides, they were not so much discrete "things" as one part of a tradition she used to engage with the world around her.(1998, p. 113)

What Julie Cruikshank describes as the social life of stories, and what Louis talks of as the use and application of stories, is also, I think, at the heart of the

difference that Battiste and Henderson articulate between Algonquian and English languages. The language structured around verbs is used for experiential holistic living; the focus is on process and relationship, which is what Kitty Smith talks about in her story. A noun based language can describe and name, abstract and theorize, and articulates a compact package of beginning, middle and end, which is more reflective of the categorization that museum objects often seem to fall prey to.

The impact of colonization on indigenous languages cannot be underestimated. There is much that could be said about the way in which knowledge is lost forever when language is forbidden, as it was in residential schools. Or how survival knowledge is lost when old ways are no longer practiced, and the words to describe those old ways are forgotten. Or the Elders who remember those words are not asked for them because younger generations are facing new challenges and having to learn new words to describe new ways. Or, the Elders who know the words have been told that what they represent is evil, the work of the devil, and so they fear to use those words. On the second day of our visit to the school in Moose Factory, Louis began his address to the students with a discussion of language. On the first day, he had been upbeat, and full of laughter as he introduced himself, his project, and some of the stories. On this day, he was quieter, and what does not come through in this transcription is that quietness, the sadness that toned his voice as he described some of the challenges he faces when it comes to language, and why he continues to do his work, even thought he has at times felt like giving up:

Louis: In our community they speak part Cree, and part English, and the meaning

of the Cree language is beginning to fall off. It is not the original sound any more, the original word. it's beginning to lose sound. So that's the observation I notice. There are many things that are not used. The original Cree language is not used because we don't live like that anymore. You know, sixty years ago, families used to go into the bush with their kids, small children. To me, what they speak is the real Native language. Because they live in the wilderness, they act out their culture. And when they speak amongst each other, they use that language, of the people in the wilderness. That was the pure language. There is no other cultural expression in there. One good example is, I want to use the way the Elders speak in their language, which words are not used anymore. If they go someplace without the outboard motor, which they used to do a long time ago, they say, themasgoshewun, it means you are paddling. So, maskosheen is a glass, it's a word meaning waterglass. And you wonder, why is he talking about glass in there? But it's not the glass you are talking about, it's the way your are travelling by water...or masgastosqueow, that word is not used any more, because we use outboard motors. Most of the time you don't get out in a canoe. So that word is missing, it's not used anymore. Words like these, that we stopped doing in the wilderness, those words are gone. Slowly we are losing our language.

Where does this leave Louis, in his role as storykeeper and translator? Right where he always is, adapting, learning, explaining, applying, storytelling. I mean this literally; there is no easy solution the complexity of issues that surround the discussion of language and translation. The reality that Louis faces is a community in which both English and Cree are spoken. The Cree of the Elders

represents one way; the English of the young people represents another, and somehow Louis and all the other Louis's of the world have to come to terms with the task of moving within and between both worlds, connecting both, spiderlike. The website that features so many of Louis words has already moved beyond Louis, in terms of the technology; he is dependant on a new generation of people for the ongoing maintenance of that project. Publishing his work in Cree and in English addresses in a pragmatic way the problem of preserving the knowledge and replacing strictly western histories of the James Bay Lowland people with one that is rooted in the lives of the people. Permanently fixing the stories in time and space moves beyond the cultural context that the stories were created in, but not doing so runs the risk of losing forever the knowledge so painstakingly collected and preserved.

Later in the day, as Louis talked to the students, his sense of humour was restored, perhaps in part due to the good lunch the students fed us, moosemeat stew and bannock, tea and cookies. He continued with his discussion of language issues:

Student: So if someone married in the west coast, they would be able to understand their speech?

Louis: They would understand very well, yes, all the time. it's only recently as the European came that sort of develop the many different dialect. Like in Moosonee, it's different than Attawapiskat, eh? There is a different way of saying things. it's blend to the English language, the sounds. You go to Moosonee, hear people speaking English, they have a...Irish accent. Chuckle. You understand that? it's there! When you are here in Moose Factory you can hear that, Scottish and Irish,

you can hear it when they speak. All these blending, that's why it changes the dialects.

But if you go to the most isolated places, like Attawapiskat, and go to Winisk, no, the white people never live there, they just pass through. And you will still hear the original stuff. You go deeper into the land Ojibways, they don't even have one... haha... Yah, they're pure! Only between Ojibways and Cree. They're the ones who have blank. So that's why we have those Oji-Cree.... That's what they say...hahaheeheehahahaheehee, I understand it, I can speak like them...hahaheeheeha. OK, Roy, Roland, don't say that...hahaheeheeha.

Student's father: I was going to ask you to say something, please!

Louis: hahahhah...don't make fun of me, speaking Ojibway hahah...

Louis explains much less when he tells his stories in Cree; shared assumptions make listening and telling an entirely different experience than it is in English, where explanation becomes a much larger part of the process. Learning from the stories, when presented in English, is no longer an experience integral to the traditional role of story:

> Only in the last century of contact with modern consciousness have these stories become explanations. As represented by the structure of the language, in a connected world, the whole is no longer the whole when it is a part of an explanation. A holistic process cannot be explained by shattering it into it's component parts and assigning local explanations to the segments. If such a process occurs in Indigenous thought, new forces are unleashed. These forces have always existed, and are said to be held in check, contained, by the structure of language (Batiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 77).

I agree with Batiste and Henderson that new forces are unleashed by the fragmenting of the whole; whether or not the structure of the newly emerging

language system described by Louis as the blending of Cree and English, can support the changes remains to be seen. It seems to me that the best way to move through this transformation, is also the oldest way- by adapting, observing, experiencing, learning, and laughing wherever possible. This does mean, though, as Battiste and Henderson assert, that we can no longer afford the illusions of a shared worldview that hides the process of assimilation.

In the meantime, Louis continues to move fluently through the worlds he encounters, as a translator, and teacher, telling his stories to whoever is ready to learn. Today, his tellings are often in English, especially when Louis encounters a Western audience, or a younger audience in his own community that is no longer fluent in the language. I have watched and listened to Louis for several years as he tells his stories, and have come to see him as more than a translator of words from one cultural reality to another. Louis mediates within Western and Indigenous cultures as completely as most of us do within our own traditions:

> Contemporary Native American writers are in an innovative position full of potential. As participants in two cultural traditions, their art is patterned by discursive acts of mediation at many levels. By mediation, I mean an artistic and conceptual standpoint, constantly flexible, which uses the epistemological frameworks of Native American and Western cultural traditions to illuminate and enrich each other. In working toward an understanding of their texts, it is more useful to see these writers, not as between two cultures (a romantic and victimist perspective) but as participants in two rich cultural traditions. While some may say these writers are apologists for one side or the other, or that their texts inhabit a no-man's land, a mediational approach explores how their texts create a dynamic that brings differing cultural codes into confluence to reinforce and recreate the structures of human life- the self, community, spirit, and the world we perceive. (Ruppert, 1994, p.7).

Louis tells a story about his own life that helped me to understand a little bit

about how we come into our story through experience. When Louis was about to enter residential school, he questioned this decision, and how to survive there. The Elder that he spoke to as a young boy told him to immerse himself in the Western world, to learn it from the inside out. To understand it in this way was to survive it. When Louis came back to his community from residential school, he had to immerse himself again in the Omushkegowack world. I have never heard Louis say that he feels caught between two worlds, although I know the movement within both has not always been easy, or effortless. What I have seen is also expressed by anthropologist Julie Cruikshank, through her work with Yukon Elders (some of whom Louis has met):

> Language, land, and family are central to contemporary public discussions of culture and expressions of belonging in Yukon communities. All three concepts refer to institutions profoundly affected by more than a century of involvement in international economic, political, and social networks. Within any social community, members differ in their experiences of what such fundamental concepts mean- older and younger people, land-based trappers and urban residents, women and men. But when externally authorized categories begin to create cleavages based on conflicting claims to language, to land, or to family knowledge, skilful storytellers frequently contribute by demonstrating- in effect performing- how stories can reconnect people temporarily divided...now, as in the past, people use narrative knowledge to establish connections among people potentially at odds (1998, p. 13).

For the Elders attending a three-day Elders festival in the Yukon in 1994, a discussion of language dominated the proceedings. The Elders were most concerned with ways in which "...print enhances possibilities for communication." (Cruikshank 1998, p.15), and less concerned with issues of context, or 'crystallization' of narrative into text. Connection and communication were of top priority, and in this multilingual territory of the Yukon, English was viewed as

"...just one more Native language, in fact the dominant Native language at the end of the century." (p.16).

The Yukon experience reflects one aspect of a complex set of issues surrounding language, orality, and text; Battiste and Henderson have presented another; neither are mutually exclusive. I have seen Louis move through my culture and his with an authority and mastery that is humbling. Along with it comes the knowledge that the journey toward the common ground that Louis and I share as we work together, has been longer and more arduous for Louis than it has for me. He has travelled much further into the Western world, for the sake of survival, than I have had to travel into his. And yet his story is more than a survival story; it is a story of life lived in all directions, full of grace, and grief, and much more that is ordinary and extraordinary. *Keeper 'n' Me,* a novel by Richard Wagamese, tells the story of a young man who was adopted out (some would say kidnapped) of his community at the age of three, and returned as a young man who sought the help of an Elder in order to find out how to be Anishinaabe. Keeper, the Elder, gives much the same advice as Louis does, and was himself given:

> The truth is that most of us are movin' between Indyuns. Movin' between our jobs and the sweatlodge. Movin' between school and powwow. Movin' between English and Anishanabe. Movin' between both worlds. Movin' between 1990 and 1490. Most of us are that kinda Indyun.
>
> It's not a bad thing even though some figure you're not so much of an Indyun when you're trying to find that balance. Them that think that way are ignorin' them two truths I was talking about. See, the old man told me one time he said, us we only think of our culture as bein' the old way. Old-style Indyun way. But it's not true, he said. Culture's what you find yourself doin' day in and day out, he said. Culture's the way of livin' and us we gotta admit that these days our culture's made up of sweatlodge, TV, radio, huntin', school, fishin', sweetgrass, cedar, work and all sortsa things. Whatever we find

> ourselves doin' day in and day out. That's our culture now and that's why most of us are the movin'-between kinda Indyuns. Movin' between the pickup truck and the sweat lodge, movin' between the office and the wigwam, movin' between school and the traditional teachin's.
>
> But we can always get more and more traditional by learnin' them teaching's and puttin' them into our lives. Or we can get less and less traditional by ignorin' them teachin's. That's why balance is such a big thing. We need a balance between worlds today. Guess in a way the boy got more traditional than most right away on accounta he kept on askin' about things and learnin' them and puttin' them into his livin' day in and day out. That's what's important. Do what the world asks you to do but do it with the spirit of the teachin's. You'll never get lost that way. Never. You can go and be whatever. DJ, hockey player, businessman, lawyer, anything as long as you carry them traditional teachin's with you wherever you go. That's balance. (Wagamese 1994, p. 137-8).

In the writing down of his stories, Louis is fulfilling a promise he made to the Elders that the stories they shared with him would be preserved for the young people of his community, so that they would know their own history, and learn to have pride in who they are as Omushkegowack. Stories that are told orally are flexible in their application and telling- although core themes and details remain fixed, the teller adapts the stories to the moment, and to the audience. Written stories become fixed in time and place, and at the same time, are preserved beyond time and place for future generations. Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, in an article aptly titled, "The paradox of talking on the page", agree that

> The ideal vehicle for survival is stewardship and natural transmission within the community, but this is no longer possible in many places in the Indigenous language, although it may be possible in English (Kwachka 1992). It's the difference between the salmon run and smoked fish; the berry patch and jars of jam. (1999, p. 27).

I think for me, at least, there is some kind of a resolution in these words; no

current choice is as perfect as a just-picked berry on a hot summer day. But a pot of jam for your bread on a cold winter's day contains both memory and promise. And in the end it comes down to Louis, the Elders and the stories to preserve the memory and keep the promise.

The analogy to jam and smoked salmon is useful in thinking about the question of 'why write oral history'. The point here s not to replace oral with written forms, but to use the written as one tool to recover, reclaim, and relocate the oral. The jam and smoked salmon are not much use without the stories of how to locate and process these good foods. And the storyteller, like the one who prepares the food, is the key ingredient here. One of Louis' goals is to share, in written form, the story of the Omushkegowack people, in their own words. To be told alongside all the other histories that have been, and continue to be lived; so that the stories as told by Europeans are not the only voices to sound in these places we all call home. We, as Europeans, have written ourselves a heroic journey into this land, with little regard for other voices and other stories, other heroes. Our tellings will remain flat and one-dimensional unless we are willing to hear Indigenous tellings of the world, with a humble heart. We might not be the heroes in these stories; the plot may not always move around us. Yet I think it may be that we, who have imagined ourselves so powerful, may find that we have imagined ourselves and others too small. And that the larger truth is to be found in the sharing of many stories, the willingness to be silent and listen.

Another of Louis' goals is to have his works used to teach/reclaim the language, to inspire others to begin to ask the questions that have guided his work,

and to have an apprentice take over his work. Each of these goals involves a return to, and a continuation of, orality, and to the storytellers, teachers, and learners who can carry that forward into the future. This, to me, is the life force that ripens the berry, wills the salmon upstream, and keeps the storytellers telling, even as the bushes are cut down to make way for a road, chemicals are dumped in the ocean, and storytellers search for listeners. It is the telling of the stories, person to person, through these deep changes that bring heart and life to this living, that articulates and illuminates the connection between language, knowledge, experience. The written word, in this context, is only one of many tools that people can use to make sense of the world as they find it, and to mindfully change what no longer makes sense, or never did. The gatherings of Elders and youth, the teaching of language and tradition by traditional teachers, the storytelling sessions, the apprenticeship learning (ascaabes in the Anishinaabe language), the well-being of the storytellers, these are the resources and processes that sustain the lifeways of a people, and should be privileged accordingly. That they are often considered secondary to western academic processes is worthy of more exploration that I am able to give here. The point, for me, and I think, for Louis, is to find ways to use written language to sustain the oral process.

If you listen to Louis, whether in person or on his website, or by reading one of his stories, you will hear about Wiissakechaahk, the Trickster, the ageless mediator between humans and all other beings. Tomson Highway, a friend of Louis' and another great Cree storyteller, always dedicates his books and plays to this character:

> The dream world of North American Indian mythology is inhabited by the most fantastic creatures, beings and events. Foremost among these beings is the "Trickster," as pivotal and important a figure in our world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology. "Weesageechak" in Cree, "Nanabush in Ojibway, "Raven" in others, "Coyote" in still others, this Trickster goes by many names and many guises. In fact, he can assume any guise he chooses. Essentially a comic, clownish sort of character, his role is to teach us about the nature and the meaning of existence on the planet Earth; he straddles the consciousness of man and that of God, the Great Spirit.
>
> The most explicit distinguishing feature between the North American Indian languages and the European languages is that in Indian (e.g. Cree, Ojibway), there is no gender. In Cree, Ojibway, etc., unlike English, French, German, etc,., the male-female-neuter hierarchy is entirely absent. So that by this system of thought, the central hero figure from our mythology- theology, if you will- is theoretically neither exclusively male nor exclusively female, or is both simultaneously.
>
> Some say that Weesageechak left this continent when the white man came. We believe she/he is still here among us- albeit a little the worse for wear and tear- having assumed other guises. Without the continued presence of this extraordinary figure, the core of Indian culture would be gone forever. (1999, notes).

The following story (italics, flush right) is a transcription of a story which can also be found on Louis' website. I have introduced two characters to the story (standard text, flush left), as every storyteller needs a story listener or two. I have formatted this story to reflect the idea of listeners/me (flush left) and teller/Louis (flush right). As you move through this story you will see how a good storyteller and an involved listener interconnect in sometimes unexpected ways. This is how I have experienced a good telling, and how I have learned to listen to 'talking on the page'.

Before I open up this story, though, I want to comment on the role of the listener. Being a listener is not as easy or as seamless as the following story might lead a reader to believe. Being a listener in a cross-cultural storytelling situation is

as full of absence as it is of presence. There have been, and will continue to be, many times when I simply don't understand what Louis is talking about. For instance, in a story that I was researching, I once confused a person's name with the job that he was doing, and spent many fruitless hours in the archives looking for something that just wasn't there. The experience was discouraging, and illuminating at the same time. Being confronted with one's limitations is humbling, but it did underscore the need for Louis to find an apprentice, which could not be me. And now, I ask more questions and assume less, knowing that inevitably I will misunderstand again. Language is not always translatable, nor is experience. It is often the questions I ask that determines the deepening of the story experience for me- the inquiry reflects what I have come to understand so far, and points the way to the next experience of learning. However, the widening of the aperture of my consciousness is conditioned by the reality that the equipment I am using has an instruction manual printed in a foreign language. I can either walk away from the experience, or I can, as the following story tells, jump in with both feet, knowing that my lifelong experience with the teaching of humility is not yet over.

One time I fell into a story
and couldn't get out.

It happened this way.

A storyteller came travelling down our way.
"Lets go hear him," says my friend.
"OK," says I, all innocent and unsuspecting.
So we went.

He was some storyteller, let me tell you.
We sat down in front of him,

all comfy with our tea and cookies.
He tilted his head to one side, like a bird, like pennishish,
and said,

"Hello, my name is Louis Bird, and this is my story."

The hair on the back of my neck stood up
like a mouse that smells a piece of cheese,
never minding the trap.

"Now I am going to pick this story, this legend about a Trickster.
Some people call it a Trickster. Some people call him Nanabush
and we Omushkegowack people call him Wiissakechaahk.
We don't know for sure how to translate this thing,
what we can say is he is a pain in the neck or any other parts.
But the thing is that's the kind of person he is.
He always trick people and to get his ways.
Not only people, tricks also animals.
Most of the time he get his way,
but sometimes he is beaten by his own making.
So we are going to talk about this guy."

Right about then I began to notice that my big toe hurt.
I tried not to let it distract me from the story,
so I kept my eyes on the teller.
It worked, pretty soon I couldn't feel my big toe at all.

"...the story will bring tricks because of the character that plays the story...
he's supposed to be a trickster and also a mystic person.
Mysticism involved in the story, shamanism involved in the story,
but mostly the shamanism.
So shaman or medicine man, whatever you want to call him,
that I must explain first that shamanism is a general term
for people who have the power to move things,
to disintegrate things, to disappear things,
to make illusions, to make you see things, to make you hear things,
even for you to die.
Anything...anything is possible for these shaman...shaman person.
Shaman is a mind over matter sort of thing.
But it's all connected to the spiritual thing...
now we are going to listen to this guy."

About this time, I notice the storyteller is tossing something
back and forth, in his hands.
I nudge my friend and wiggle my lips.
He sees it too.
it's about the size of an acorn, oblong and tan.

Back and forth, faster and faster,
until it looks like he is juggling lots of those little things.
He slows it down, and now there's ten of them passing through his hands.
Where did they come from?

"...When he wants something he will play a trick on people or animals
in order to get his way.
I guess this is why people call him trickster. He fits the description anyways.
When the story starts, he's the shaman.
He can do anything.

Now, once upon a time Wiissakechaahk was traveling...
And this time was a time when he was thinking about having a different diet.
Again he was traveling on always the creeks.
People use to always look for creeks and rivers to hunt.
Because that is where all the animals and birds are always traveling.
then one day he was walking...he was walking this river, following the river.

Boy, my legs were getting sore and tired,
hearing about all that walking.
I reached down to give them a rub,
but I couldn't feel a thing.

Meanwhile the storyteller's hands were still moving,
only now it looked like he was juggling sticks along with the little oblong things.
Funny thing, with all that juggling I don't notice my legs at all now...
How can he do that, I wonder??? Must be a healer...

And then all of a sudden he saw a deer on the riverbank.
And it's late in the fall. Not late, just late in September or thereabouts.
Just when the berries are plentiful.
And he saw this bear eating berries, berries like we...the bears like to eat berries,
especially in the fall they eat cranberries, when they're fully ripe.
So he saw this bear and again he thought about the bears
by this time are near going into their den and would be very fat.
And especially when they eat berries they would be very tasty
and he thought about how nice it would be to have a bear,
bear steak or things like that.
Again he decided, he didn't go right up to the bear.
And he decide that...to trick him, another trick to do.
So instead of trying to kill him right away, he walks up...he walks up to the bear.
And the bear looks up a bit scared.
And then he says, "Hi brother." And the bear says, "Help yourself."
So he says, "Sure. Ya, sure. Ya, I will join you.
Let's have a...let's gather the berries."
By the end of the day he was getting hungry for a different kind of food.

"Me too!!!" growls my stomach.
The storyteller looked at me and smiled, big white teeth.
My stomach stopped growling.
The storyteller picked up the story again, juggling away.
Only this time it looked like he had added a giant beach ball.
He was using the sticks to bat it back and forth.
I had to stop watching because I was beginning to feel seasick.
I closed my eyes and listened to the story...

He looks at the bear, "It would be nice steak to have."
So he was forming his opinion, how he was going to kill him.
"Can't just tackle him. Can't just kill him because he's more like a friend.
Trusting friend." So finally he decided it's time.
Soon he's going to leave. Soon he's going to go into his den. It's now or never.
So he begin to form his opinion how he is going to trick him.
So he talks to him just like anybody else and the bear would answer him.
Whatever he talks about the bear would just go along.

And then one day he says, "Do you know one time I was..."
He began to play tricks on him.
He says, "Do you see that thing there in the distance?"
...And the bear says, "No, no I don't see anything."
And he pointed farther and he say, "Do you see that crow out there sitting there?"
And the bear says, "No, I can't see that far, I don't see that far."
But Wiissakechaahk know he doesn't see that but it's just part of his trick.
He kept on doing that to him...
So the bear says, "I don't see that far. I don't see.
My eyes are not that good. Not like you."

"Me either!" I yell. Or at least I try to yell.
My voice seems to be coming from over there, by the storyteller.
This guy is one good juggler.
He spins objects just like he spins that story.
Pretty soon he's got my head spinning too...

...so Wiissakechaahk says, "I was like that a long time.
...I had a very poor vision, especially at long distance. I can see close that time.
Then one day somebody told me what to do. How to cure my eye-sight."
And the bear says, "Yeh? How did that go? How did you cure your eyes?"
He says, "Ya, I did get a cure and now I got a very good sight.
I can see far distance, most anyone."
"Yes," says the bear, "I would sure like to see far.
I would like to have a good sight, like you."
"Well, it's no problem," he says, "It's no problem to do that.
The cure is right there, you are eating it. The berries!

"Ya, ya these," says the bear, and he's looking at the berries. Says, "Yup!
And what do you...how do you cure these things?"
So he says, "You have to put them in your eyes.
You have to squeeze them into your eyes and after that they will be sore, alright.
After that you gonna sleep. And when you wake up you will see clearly."
And the bear says, "That sounds easy enough. But these things,
are they hurt in your eyes when you squeeze them?"
So Wiissakechaahk says, "Yes. They are very, very painful the first time,
but you just have to close your eyes and go to sleep.
After you sleep many hours you are cured.
And then you have a better sight than me, maybe."
So the bear says, "Well, let me try these, let me try so I can see."
...and so the bear walk down with him
and they pick a nice grassy place and they lay
...and they lay him down. Wiissakechaahk put him there
and he got the berries in him.
Give lots of berries in his hand.
And he says, "Ok, you lay down here." So he put him on a pillow as a stone.
And the bear said, "This stone is hard."
But Wiisakechaahk say, "Well, that's the best way.
Because that stone will reflect the heat in your head
and comfort you and all that stuff."

"Don't do it, don't do it!!!" I think to myself.
By now my friend and I are on the edge of our seats.
At least my friend is.
I am so caught up in this story that I feel as if I am almost
right there- even my eyes are beginning to hurt,
just like brother bear.

The bear was do what he says.
So he begin to squeeze the berries into his eyes,
and then the bear is just agonized with these painful things in his eyes
and that friend squeezing another berry.
Soon the bear had all of these running down his face and everything.
And finally he says, "That's enough, go to sleep. And I'll sing for you."
...so finally he sing and the bear begin to drift into a sleep,
forget all about the pain.
Usually the bear sleeps in the afternoon when he eats the berries.
And that's why Wiissakechaahk say that.
Cause he knows the bear's going to sleep anyways.
So the bear went to sleep. So he went to sleep
and Wiissakechaahk sits by, and by this time he wasn't singing.
So Wiissakechaahk thought the bear was fully sleep now.
So he look around and look for the big stone, big rock which he can lift.
He walks up to the bear, lift the big stone

and just before he drops it, he slip on the rock.
And he drop the stone just beside his head. Which bring the bear awake.
And he says, "Ha, ha, ha, ha... what's a matter...what happen?"
And Wiissakechaahk says, "Oh, my brother I was just exercising my muscles
with this stone and I slipped and nearly kill you.
And the bear says, "I'm alright. God helps. I was alright"
He still couldn't open his eyes.
Wiisakechaahk ask him, "How are your eyes? How do they feel?"
"Still feel...I couldn't open them. They're very sore still."
"Well go back to sleep and I will exercise a little distance away from you."
S o he put him to sleep and the bear went back to sleep.
So this time he make sure that he was sleeping.
The bear was actually snoring this time.
He had shifted his head to the side way.
So anyway, as soon as he was certain that the bear was fully sleeping,
pick up the rock again.
Pick up the rock and right there well balanced, right in front of him,
and he dropped that stone right into his head and he killed the bear instantly.
Once again he had his way.
And then he congratulated himself that he has tricked the bear.

By this time I was all ears, as you can imagine.
"Only ears!" laughed my friend,
and I tried to give him a piece of my mind,
except that storyteller picked up the story again,
and I was gone....completely...

Now he begin to plan this time.
Remember the last time he lost his food.
This time he says, "He's not going to lose it."
So he took the bear up into the bank and cut it open into strips
and the best way possible.
He started to make a fire and he roast all the meat
and all the tenders and everything
and the fat and everything.
And he was so, so eager to have a feast by himself...this time he didn't go to sleep.
He just begin to eat the best part of it..
best delicious cooking and soon he was full.
The bear was still hanging there and the bear meat and everything.
And he was full. He couldn't eat any more, simply couldn't eat.
He just laid down there, sits there beside.
But the bear meat still looks delicious...couldn't stop himself.
So he decided, "You know, I shouldn't really sleep at all." Because he was sleepy.

Because he was greedy and wants to have his way all the time.
So he decide, "I should squeeze myself with the trees so I can digest fast."
So he got up and looked around and not far away from his cooking,
he found the trees, tamaracks, standing close by.
Just the right size for his body. And tamaracks standing there.
So he went sit between them. Right into the guts there.
Then he talks to them and says, "Now squeeze, so I can digest my stomach."
So the trees started squeeze, slowly. They squeeze and they squeeze.
And he says, "No, no, not too much, just a little bit. Just gradually."
So they did. And later on they begin to squeeze again.
And he says, "No, no, no, it's too hard, it's too hard, it hurts!"
And then it stops and then he begin to relax.
And again the trees begin to... to twist each other on top of his stomach
and hold him there.
By this time he says, "Not too much, too much, just stop."
And by this time, the trees say, "Ok, you birds and animals, come and eat.
There is some food here."
And all of a sudden, there's animals, foxes and mink and all kind...wolverine and...
Canada jay and all those flesh eating birds... ravens, crows, and all that.
They all came.
And then they begin to eat this food and... and Wiissakechaahk was held there
by these two giant tamaracks and he said, "Let me go, let me go,
they eat all my food!"
And the trees didn't say a thing, they just hold him there.

And that's just about where I was too,
stuck between that storyteller's hands like Wiissakechaahk.
I wiggled and twisted as best I could,
but he just held me there.
I would have fallen apart right then and there,
If I wasn't already fallen apart, if you know what I mean.
I thought for sure I was gonna live in this story forever...

Finally, there is so many animals and birds eating his food and...
soon his food was barely left there and he was getting mad.
And he fight the trees and wouldn't let go. And then finally he got so mad.
By this time there was hardly anything left in his... in his kitchen.
And all the food was eaten.
And finally he got so mad, he... get off of the trees and started to beat the trees...
no, he didn't beat the trees yet, he just went to run to his kitchen
and all his food was gone.
There was barely any... just a little bit left. And he was so mad for the trees and
he went over them and worked them over.
Twist them and all that stuff and way...
And they say now that's why we see the tamaracks are twisted into...
and are out of shape.

Because Wiissakechaahk was mad at them. So once again he lost out.

So the moral of the story is that him, Wiissakechaahk as powerful as he is,
trickster, ticks as he is... what gets him most of the time is his greediness.
He is too greedy. And he lost out.
He lost so much things and for that reason sometime he lost very stupidly.
Which he didn't think could possibly be happening.
So he teaches a story that we shouldn't be so greedy.
We should live moderately.
We should never want something materialistic so bad, so much,
that we would rush nature things, not the way it should be.
Like killing the food and cooking lots of food and trying to rush
your digestive system by using the power of something.
And that's what it teach us.
We should... that's how the Native people use to teach...
that you should not kill any animal that you can not put away or preserve for use.
For every legends that's been used is to teach the people...
the people- amongst our people not to take things that's not necessary.
Most of all not to be too greedy
because you always lose out at the end if you are greedy.

That storyteller had it right,
I am here today to tell you that.
Because it was what was lost out at the end,
due to too much greedy eating,
that blew me right out of the story and back into my life!

I was pretty much ok, a bit twisted up like those tamaracks,
except for one thing.
Somehow, in that kaleidoscopic trip through the story,
my ears got attached to my heart instead of my head.
So now when I listen, sometimes I can hear the inside story.

So the moral of my story is, if you are going to get lost in a story,
you better hope it has a fart in it.
(In my experience, Wiissakechaahk stories usually do).

And that's the end of that story! Do you believe me?

Sometimes there are no words...

Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer write extensively of their experiences working with Tlingit and Haida Elders, recording, transcribing and translating oral history. They have outlined many of the practical considerations of cataloguing, editing, transcribing and formatting, as well as some of the more complex issues around translation, ownership, appropriation, and language. In reading their commentary on working with Elders, one of their concerns stood out for me, as I had been encountering this too, and had not so far found others who were talking about it:

> ...there is an emotional side of the work that we also need to keep in mind. The most difficult aspect for us is always working with death and dying, with seemingly endless grief. We are almost always working with the voices of the departed, or with Elders probably in the last decade of life. Our message here is "Be kind to your transcriber.' The job requires technical skills in Native language literacy, linguistics, and folklore, and also requires emotional skills to deal with stress and grief...."(1996, p. 25).

In the time that I have known Louis, he has had major heart surgery, including a pace maker implant, which thankfully has slowed him down only a little bit. My grief at the thought of losing Louis and others like him is perhaps eclipsed by the grief that I know he feels at the loss of so many Elders in his community over so many years, yet he carries all of them inside him. He has begun to call himself a storykeeper, and I think this is partly what he means. He carries the stories, yes, but he carries the tellers too. He keeps them alive in his memory and imagination.

When Louis and I were interviewing Elders in Moose Factory and Moosonee, we found that although the Elders were willing to answer his questions

about Christianity and the old Mitewewin, they also had concerns that they wanted us to hear. Many of the Elders spoke of residential school experiences. Several expressed great concern for the well-being of the youth in their community, and the high rate of suicide. In fact, they were more interested in the issues they were facing right now, than they were in determining the religious status of the Mitewewin. It may be that they wanted us to let the religious leaders who had commissioned Louis to do this work, know what the real concerns were, and the real consequences. It may be that they were in fact redefining the question to fit their criteria. I know that for me, grief was part of the experience.

In a conversation with a member of the tribal council in that area, I described what I had been hearing and observing, and we embarked on a discussion of residential school. I did not record what he said, but of all that I heard in that place, I have returned most often to what he said about language and residential school, because I think it helps me understand why Louis is so passionate about language, a passion I have the luxury of choosing.

When a child is taking from the very center of her existence, and told that she can no longer articulate her experience in her own language, and then endures experiences of deep pain, abuse, and violation, that pain remains inside her, a silent pool without the clean tide of language to release that pain. When that child is taught instead to articulate her experience in a language other than her own, that does not contain the words or concepts of her worldview, and then told that she must never speak of the deepest pain inside her in any language, regardless of worldview, what then? Story.

There is always a dream dreaming us

Louis' chronology of the stories is his way of stepping back to take a look at the big picture, and think about how everything works together. It's not the way the stories were told, and it's not the way he tells them to me. Usually he just tells me a story, and then another, layers of stories, which have only just begun to resemble a framework that I can use as a reference point. As my questions show a greater understanding of what he is teaching, the stories get more complex, more detailed. it's a bit like being born, slowly.

Louie (Day 1, school, Moose Factory): The use and application of stories. Write that down. There are legends, now we are talking about before the European, ok? In time, before the European, there are stories that are just like textbooks that you have to read in the classroom. If you want to read the history you have one text book, and if you want to deal with the biology, one textbook, and if you want to deal with something else, you have many books to read. So you walk around with book like this (on his head) hahaheeheeha to learn something, ok?

But in the past before the European, our young person who is five years old already hear those things. Many things that involve his history, his or hers. They hear, every evening, five stories. And then the stories are made in such a way for the children to enjoy. Like the children's story books that you see. The stories were made that way. Stories are made for the young kids to hear and understand, and as they grow and begin to be eight, and between there, that story grow, and begin to be more added, more understanding, more their life experience are geared for that. The same stuff.

And as they begin to be teenagers they begin to be more complicated, as they begin to experience their growing, in their mind. The same story is just like five or ten volumes for the young people, until they get to the full adult, and the version is there for the adult, the same story, but it's much more content.

And finally at the end when they begin to be old like me, there is a certain way of storytelling that comforts the Elders together. They comfort each other with these stories. That's how these stories are used. And that's the way they were built. They were used that way, a long time ago. There were many kind of stories. They call them legends. The way I understand about the legends in our terminology, the First Nation terminology. It means the stories that are very old. You cannot know who is involved in the stories because they are very old. So the name has been assigned to the story.

And there are five of them. One is called Giant Skunk, one is called Sinkiipis, it's a duck story, or waterfowl. All animals, all the first ones, or birds, any birds that flies. It also involves the fish, and then after that the story comes in the middle that is very short, which shows us when the human begin to emerge on the land. We do not actually have a creation story that says there was water, and then there was the land up here. We don't have that. We don't have any genesis like the old testament, but we do have stories that explain the beginning, and after that we begin to have the human involvement in the life, in the history of our understanding. Then we begin to have a character like Wiisakejaahk, and we begin to have a character like Chakapesh.

And then we begin to have a character like Wemishoosh, and the extra one,

Hayas, and all the others, five more that are very important. And they are stories that have names, there is no person involved but you only have a starting point of a story, where someone said something, and you begin with that. And sometimes those stories are very important. They are educational, they show you something that is, teach you not to do, teach you why you should not do.

So these stories are very important. And they all have interpretation, to teach you life, and you hear them as you are young, when you are young you hear them when you are five years old until you get old, and they still teach you each time. This is the way we use before the European came.

What Louis describes here is not a creation that is finite, with a clearly defined beginning, middle and end. There is no day of rest when the work is all done. Creation is instead, a process, ongoing, and still not finished. More than that, I think, it is a co-creation, a collaborative effort between humans, animals, and spirit. The point at which humans emerge is right in the middle, neither above or below any other being. Louis' rendition of the creation process reminds me of a story that I read years ago, in a book written by anthropologist Laurens Van der Post, in his travels throughout Africa. The colonial influence can be read in his words, but so too can an emerging understanding of his own cultural limitations:

> In the beginning, St. John says, was the Word. I believe that is a way of saying that in the beginning there was meaning. This word, this meaning, according to the Bible was with God and indeed was God. The ancient Chinese said something similar when they defined meaning as that which has always existed through itself. Somehow this meaning demanded also to be lived. As St. John puts it again, the word was made flesh. A similar intimation of its beginnings seems to me present in the first spirit of Africa. It is true the Bushmen I had just met in the Kalahari were not very communicative in this respect. I think it needed more time, more trust and patience than I commanded to elicit from

> them the full image in which this intimation moves over the mystery of the beginning in their spirit in search of some conscious thought to contain it, like the first bird let out of the ark winging over the dark waters of the Old Testament flood for some tangible fact of earth or rock to light upon. When I pressed them to talk to me about the beginning they seemed to lose their power of speech, and the only significant answer was given to me one night by my favourite hunter. Distressed by my persistence and his inability to satisfy my curiosity, he said: "But you see, it is very difficult, for always there is a dream dreaming us." (1961, p. 139).

I think that Van der Post would have been more successful if he had not tried to use the Christian framework to understand what he was being told, or in the case of the continued silence he faced, what he was not being told. His favorite hunter must have had a name that gave more meaning to his life than a function he performed; this is not unlike reading the Hudson Bay archives and searching in vain for the name of someone's wife. In spite of that, Van der Post came away with an incredibly profound insight into creation- 'there is always a dream dreaming us'. There is no beginning, no end. I know little about African epistemologies, but I think this may be one of those truths that resonate beyond cultural borders.

The story of how humans came to the 'Mushkego world is one that interests me, because I think that the creation process it describes is one that is re-enacted in different times and places, whenever a new beginning is needed; and creation, I think, begins with a dream.

This is the story of First Humans, as told to me by Louis Bird. I have no recording of this story, only permission to tell it. As you read it, remember that Louis reads it too, and has corrected any mistake I may have made. Also remember that this is how Louis recorded many of his tapes- he would rush home from an interview with an Elder, and speak from his imagination memory (I am thinking of

inventing the word imanginemory to reflect this relationship), the words of that Elder. Some of the interpretation is mine, some is his. I will make this clear at the appropriate time. My interpretation does not reflect how the Omushkegowack people would hear and understand this story; it reflects how I have experienced this story, although in far more gentle a fashion than the Christian creation story was imparted in James Bay:

Ehep

There were two people, a man and a woman, and they lived somewhere. We don't know where it is, it was above us somewhere. And these two people were so in love with each other, they just wanted to be together all the time. One time, they looked down from where they were, and they saw another land, and it was so beautiful, so green and blue and full of light. They wanted to go there, to have a place all their own, where they could be together in their love for each other. In their longing, they heard a voice, but they didn't know where that voice came from. It said to them, "I can help you." They looked around, but couldn't see anyone. The voice instructed them to travel to another part of their world, where there lived someone who would help them fulfill their desire. So they followed these instructions, and they travelled to this place, and they did find the one who would help them. This one was Ehep, Giant Spider. Ehep told them that he would help them, but they would have to follow his instructions. He wove them a basket with his web, and told them to climb in. He would lower them down, but they had to promise not to look down; they should be patient. If they were to look, they would have hardships in that land, even though it was so beautiful. They agreed,

eagerly, and climbed into the basket. The journey down was long and far, and being human they were impatient and curious. And like all humans in these stories, they just had to have one little look-see, which they didn't think would really count. At that moment the string broke from the basket, and they fell through the air to land in the top of a broken tree. They weren't hurt, but they were sure stuck. The animals who already lived in this land knew that the humans were coming, and knew that they were going to need help. So, first the caribou came to see if he could help them out of the tree, but he couldn't. So then, they saw a lynx, and called her him over, but he didn't want to help, and left. Finally, a bear came out of the forest. They called to her for help. She was kind of sleepy, and thought, why should I? but finally she agreed. She could not do it alone, though, and so when wolf came out of the forest, they called her over to help. She was reluctant too, but finally agreed, and bear climbed up and lowered the humans down to wolf, who placed them on the ground, and it has been like that ever since.

The explanation that Louis gives for this story is his remembrance of what he heard from Elders, who heard it from one particular Elder, and I have repeated it here, after talking with him about it over the phone:

The humans lived in one realm, and wanted to travel to live in another realm. It looked so beautiful in that other place, but they needed help getting there. The world they were in is not the material world, it was another kind of dimension or realm. The basket is a container for creation, and the string is like the cord that attaches a baby to its mother, its life. The teaching about not looking, is about not being born with eyes open or the eyes might get sore, so the midwife cleans the eyes

of the newborn baby first. Then the nose and mouth, to prevent infection. The midwife should always have assistance, like the animals in the new land that help the humans.

It is also a way of talking about what was here before, and how temporary is our stay. It's also a way of explaining that we have to earn this good life, that beauty and struggle go hand in hand. The voice that gives instructions is the voice of creator, she is all over, not seen in one place, and that original land is creator's land. There is a mystery to how the spider lowers the string, sometimes it cannot be seen and it is as if the spider hangs in the air. So there is something mysterious and inexplicable, it is a spiritual thing. Women and Creator make life, the mother in this story is the creator, the descendant of Creator. And the child becomes separate from the mother, for awhile. We have to live in the material world, but we come from the spirit world, and like the spider, we will go back up there sometime.

So this is also why we have the concept of clans- the first animals to help the humans had a council where they were advised of the coming of humans, and given instructions to help them.

I have thought about this story for a long time. It had such a profound impact on my imaginemory that when a spider moved into a corner of my basement window, I did not disturb it, thinking that perhaps Ehep had come for a visit. That spider lived in my window for several years. I noticed one spring that she was no longer there. That same spring my mother came to visit and cleaned all over my house, including Ehep's web.

I have also thought about it in relation to Louis, and some of the stories that

I have shared in this thesis. My experience of learning from Louis has shown me that creation is indeed an ongoing process, and we are all newcomers at some time or another.

Coyote Welcomes a New Immigrant

"My roots grow in jackpine roots!" (Kitty Smith, Yukon Elder)
she says, that old lady, over there in Crow's land.
She has died there a hundred generations,
and lived longer still.

When windwoosh and washaway rain visit,
she stand, greeting; rooted beyond story.
I am a newcomer here, I tell her, I have three-generation roots!
My back is straight, I am so proud.

When windwoosh visits, I tumble, root to sky,
leaves-a-two-step dance the prairie!
Not too proud to sweep the dust
from that old medicine wheel rock, there.

Washaway rain visits, and
skinnybone branches shivering,
I seek shelter under Coyote's umbrella,
that Jackpine tree.
(Wilde, unpublished.)

Bigfoot, in the story told by the old man to Louis, became a newcomer in a new land after an arduous journey and much suffering. Their return home, to live hidden in the forests, and the consideration that they are given by a people who recognize them as relatives, may stem from an understanding that we all need helpers sometime. The Europeans in the fur trade stories were newcomers in a new land who needed help; they suffered, sometimes, and also created much suffering partly because they did not respect their helpers and the animals who had been here first; they didn't understand their place in creation. I was a newcomer to Moose

Factory and Moosonee, and travelled a far distance to get there. Louis was a good helper for me in that place, I would not have managed well on my own. The children who were taken away to residential school were cut off from their families and communities with much hardship and suffering. And out of that cutting off, a need was created that inspired a new birth. Louis has begun to call himself a ***storykeeper***, one who not only tells the stories, but keeps them alive inside him until they can be delivered into the world again. This is a new role in his tradition, for one person to carry so much. That it was inspired by a woman, his grandmother, I think is appropriate and true to the teaching of the Ehep story. Louis will laugh to think of himself as pregnant, and like the elephants, he has carried his 'children' around for a long time. The chord that binds him to the Elders and to the youth is long, and the journey arduous, but the land, as always, is beautiful, and there have been helpers along the way. Like Angela Sidney in the Yukon, Louis knows that a good story lives on for a long time:

> She has shown that she organizes, stores, and transmits her insights and knowledge of the world through narratives and songs describing the human condition. Her narrative is as much about social transformation of the society she lives in as it is about individual creativity. Her point is that oral tradition may tell us about the past, but it's meanings are not exhausted with reference to the past. Good stories from the past continue to provide legitimate insights about contemporary events. What appears to be the "same story, even in the repertoire of one individual, has multiple meanings depending on location, circumstance, audience, and stage of life of narrator and listener (Cruikshank 1998, p. 43).

That Wiisakechaahk enters the world after humans is no accident. How else, once the cord is broken that binds us to our Creator, are we to remember where we come from? "...his role is to teach us about the nature and the meaning

of existence on the planet Earth; he straddles the consciousness of man and that of God, the Great Spirit." We need someone around to keep us laughing, to keep us humble, to keep us looking at our foolishness, because we sure haven't done too well so far.

Conclusion

When listening, it is important to consider that silence may be the most appropriate answer.

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