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Teaching the Talk That Walks on Paper: Oral Traditions and Textualized Orature in the Canadian Literature Classroom

SUSAN GINGELL

Did the grandmothers know our memory and our talk would walk on paper?

— Sky Dancer Louise Bernice Halfe, “The Tears That Wove Our Songs”

THE CALL TO INCLUDE Aboriginal oral traditions in post-secondary English department curricula was among the urgings of the Canadian Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies' roundtable on Aboriginal Literatures in 2000, and this paper considers ways of beginning to answer that call. Roy Harris has suggested in his book *The Origin of Writing* that the West has “a scriptist bias,” a bias based on the idea that writing is an “idealization which captures those essential features often blurred and distorted in the rough and tumble of everyday utterance” (46). However, even when spoken words are part of formal oral traditions, this scriptist bias entails the subordination of orature to literature in the hierarchy of cultural production. Thus the curriculum expansion proposed at the CACLALS roundtable has considerable potential as one means of decolonizing our teaching programs, but also carries with it a number of attendant difficulties.

I cannot address the difficulties that teachers wanting to include oral traditions in curricula might face in finding Aboriginal storytellers or
oral poets to come into the classroom, mainly because I have limited experience in this area, and the situation and protocol will vary from context to context. However, I learned from Métis community worker, educator, and writer Maria Campbell to observe the Aboriginal protocol of offering tobacco to storytellers, poets, and singers when inviting them to share their words with members of the university community. This paper chiefly intends to suggest approaches to the teaching of textualized orature within a Canadian literature curriculum, both as a worthy activity in its own right and as groundwork for the integration of the teaching of truly oral traditions into the classroom. I use the term textualized orature to distinguish oral work that has been transcribed—whether from a live performance, tape recording, compact disk, film, or video tape—from two related terms: orature itself, which is work composed and recomposed in performance and passed on orally, and what I call textualized orality, which term I use to refer to a writer’s representation of the non-standard speech habits and oral strategies of communication used by speakers of a variety of a language other than that of the dominant socio-cultural group. Textualized orality is usually not based on a text composed, or primarily circulated, orally.

My contention is that teachers need to prepare most post-secondary students, who have been reared principally on literary aesthetics, to hear orature respectfully and appreciatively, not just as quaint myths or colourful children’s stories or songs. Respectful and appreciative reception requires learning about what Anishinaabeg critic Kimberly Blaeser in her contribution to Talking on the Page: Editing Aboriginal Oral Texts identifies as an oral aesthetic. One further desirable part of pedagogical preparation includes making students from predominantly literate cultures aware that oral traditions are not something exotic and static, something that other cultures have but theirs does not.

Chanting to Canadian students a little rhyme like “Trick or treat, trick or treat, give us something good to eat” quickly establishes that oral traditions are alive and well even in our secular culture, and discussing local university rituals may be useful for communicating to students from deeply literate cultures the power that oral traditions can have. The “E-planter” at my own institution, the University of Saskatchewan, is a case in point. This neo-barbaric rite involves the abduction and mock-crucifixion of an Agriculture student on a rise outside the Arts building. Engineers body-painted and attired in the college colour, red, try to defend the large
wooden E to which a kidnapped high-status Agriculture student is tied, while the blue-attired Agros besiege the hill to try to free their E-planted colleague. Professors who have had their noon-hour classes disrupted by the thudding footsteps and chant of the Engineers as they approach the rise and the many students who gather as spectators of this contemporary agon can attest to the compelling effects of the event, which is kicked off by the boisterous repeated chanting in unison of

We are, we are, we are the engineers,  
We can, we can, demolish forty beers;  
Drink rum, drink rum,  
And come and be with us,  
For we don't give a damn  
For any damn man,  
Who don't give a damn for us, heh!

When prompted by questions, my students can easily identify in this ritual such things as the importance of chanting for group cohesion and identity, the mnemonic value of repetition and rhyme, and the contributions of the paralinguistic signals of vigorously pumping arms and breaking into a whooping run that are part of the display of power. The E-plant ritual, with its song, is an exemplary instance of the "high somatic component" that Walter J. Ong reports characterizes the operation of oral memory (67). He cites the following observations of Berkley Peabody as corroborating evidence: "From all over the world and from all periods of time... traditional composition has been associated with hand activity. The aborigines of Australia and other areas often make string figures together with their songs. Other peoples manipulate beads on strings. Most descriptions of bards include stringed instruments or drums" (qtd. in Ong 67).

Using an example like that of the E-plant engineers' song of course runs the risk of associating orature with barbarity, so a teacher needs to subvert such overdetermined interpretations by employing such means as pointing out that reciting the Lord's Prayer, singing "Happy Birthday," or performing dub poetry are all part of contemporary Canadian oral traditions. Moreover, a discussion of the Engineers' chant allows for acknowledgement of the often conservative and sometimes exclusive nature of oral traditions.
Performing at least part of Dennis Gruending's poem "chucker chatter" is an additionally effective means that I have found to demonstrate the vitality of oral traditions in many Canadian communities. The poem points back to the oral performances of baseball catchers across the nation encouraging their pitchers to throw the best possible pitch at any given moment of a game:

hudda buddy
     hudda buddy
now you gonow you go
     fireball fireball
       righthaner
shoot to me buddy
       shoot to me buddy buddy
fireball now fireball
       righthaner

    ohhh
now you smoke
now you smoke buddy now you smoke buddy
buddy
now you hot
       now you hot shot ohhh
now you hot
buddy buddy

c’mon babe c’mon babe
     c’mon shooter
c’mon shooter buddy buddy
     you’n me honey
all they is
     honey
all they is honey honey
     buddy buddy
way to mix
     way to mix now righthaner (70–71)
Reference to the un-textualized utterances of the catcher allows the teacher to establish the difference between the always changing phrasing of the chucker chatter at actual soft- and hard-ball games and the fixity of Gruending's written text, so that students are aware of one of the distortions that textualizing orature produces.

Gruending's poem can also help students understand the importance of knowing the original context of a work of orature that has been transcribed. Teachers can ask students to think for a moment how people encountering Dennis Gruending's poem on the page would likely respond to it if baseball were an altogether alien sport to them or even one known only through television broadcasts, so that the imagined readers had never heard a catcher's chatter to the pitcher. When I teach this poem in this way, I give a second deliberately inept performance of the opening 13 lines of "chucker chatter" in which I tentatively read rather than chant the poem, ignore what I know about proper intonation for this text, and deliver the lines

righthaner

shoot to me buddy  
shoot to me buddy buddy

and "now you smoke buddy" in an increasingly puzzled way to indicate both the reader's growing fear that the text may be unreliable and her or his nascent recognition that if the text is accurate, a literal understanding of terms like shoot and smoke does not work to produce a meaningful text. Such a performance strategy is meant to establish that orature is intended to operate inside a closed community, in a context in which the story, poem, or chant is widely known, and that without an insider to provide the kind of detailed cultural information and the intonation and emphasis necessary to a competent performance of the work, distortions in the performance and devaluations in the reception are a very real possibility, if not a virtual certainty.

With this kind of groundwork in place, a teacher can then turn to textualized works of Aboriginal oral tradition. To suggest one way to teach textualized orature I am going to use texts attributed to the Iglulik angâkoq,
texts entitled “Magic Words” in Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie’s widely-used Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English. Though I believe there are problems with the edition of Aua’s words presented in this anthology, Moses and Goldie have done a valuable service in making these texts available in an eminently teachable anthology.

Students who are shown or encouraged to see the stunning Zacharias Kunuk film Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner can gain a strong sense of the central place of oral traditions among the Inuit, but further desirable background for understanding Aua’s words is Ong’s discussion of cultures in a state of primary orality, that is cultures untouched by any form of writing (9). Such cultures are verbomotor cultures (68) because sounded words, being dynamic, are conceived of as having great power. Language, then, is understood as a mode of action, not as an encoding of thought. Words can heal or produce good fortune, just as they can blast health or create misfortune. Thus, many transcriptions of orature record ritual words intended to produce specific effects or bring about a desired condition. Two short texts recording the Erinaliutit, or shamanic words, of Aua, for which the Greenlandic anthropologist Knud Rasmussen bartered, are exemplars of such ritual words. As Robin McGrath comments in Canadian Inuit Literature, “Because of Rasmussen’s superior knowledge of Inuktitut, Danish, and English, and because of his exceptional sensitivity to poetry, Rasmussen’s work is generally considered to be the best source of traditional Inuit poetry in English today” (40).5

The first Erinaliutit, the angdkoq Aua explained to Rasmussen, was designed to lighten heavy loads on a sled or make a person light-footed and untiring on a long journey, and the second was meant to cure or possibly prevent sickness when one’s neighbours had fallen ill. Because these are shamanic words, Rasmussen reports that they were to be jerkily whispered or muttered in order to preserve secrecy (165). The Moses and Goldie anthology presents Aua’s words in the following way:

**Magic Words/Aua**

*To Lighten Heavy Loads*

I speak with the mouth of Qeqertuanaq, and say:

I will walk with leg muscles strong as the sinews on the shin of a little caribou calf.

I will walk with leg muscles strong as the sinews on the shin of a little hare.
I will take care not to walk toward the dark.
I will walk toward the day.

_To Cure Sickness among Neighbours_
I arise from my couch with the grey gull's morning song.
I will take care not to look toward the dark,
I will turn my glance toward the day. (3)

Two of the potential problems with the editorial practice in presenting the texts of what Moses and Goldie call Inuit "Traditional Songs" are, first, a question about whether all of them are truly songs—Aua's whispered words provoke such a question, though McGrath argues "there is no getting around the fact that traditional Inuit poetry is oral song" (40)—and, second, there is a possibility that many readers could mistake the names following the titles for namings of particular groups of people. The Inuit names, like Aua's, provided after a solidus following the titles in the first section of the anthology are treated quite differently from the names of authors that head the sample of their work anthologized in later parts of Moses and Goldie. A sample of Alexander Wolfe's work, for example, is presented as follows:

**Alexander Wolfe b. 1927**

**SAULTEAUX**

The Last Grass Dance

_Told by Standing Through the Earth_

The printing of Aua's name following the solidus reproduces the consistent practice in John Robert Colombo's _Poems of the Inuit_, which Moses and Goldie list as their source text, and that practice appears to have been followed without thought of the potential confusions thus produced. Moreover, in the case of works from the written tradition, the Oxford anthology gives an author's First Nation or Métis identification under the author's name. In the case of the Inuit "Songs," no further ethnic designa-
tion is given, though Rasmussen clearly differentiates between six dialect and cultural groups in the "General Plan and Methods" section that prefaces *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos* and devotes separate volumes to the intellectual cultures of Iglulik and Caribou Eskimos. Penny Petrone's *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English* distinguishes eight cultural groups. However, to find out that Aua was an Iglulik person, Moses and Goldie's enquiring readers would have to go to Colombo's *Poems of the Inuit* or to Rasmussen's *Across Arctic America*, which was Colombo's source.

A further issue with Aua's texts in Moses and Goldie relates to the titling and paucity of contextualizing. In this anthology, both the title "Magic Words" and italicized headings "To Lighten Heavy Loads" and "To Cure Sickness among Neighbours" are the additions of a literate culture. In *The Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, Rasmussen presents the second text under the heading "Words to be used in the morning on getting up" and explains that they are to be uttered "If there is sickness in a village, but not in one's own household" (166). He thus provides grounds for speculating whether the words were preventative in addition to curative medicine, but in his later popularized summary of his findings, *Across Arctic America*, Rasmussen prefaces the untitled and unheaded words with statements that deny a preventative dimension to the medicine:

> A charm for curing sickness among neighbors may be uttered by one who is well. The speaker gets up early in the morning before anyone else is astir, takes the inner garment of a child, and drawing his own hood over his head, thrusts his arms into the sleeves of the child's garment as if to put it on. Then these words are uttered. (137-38)

Colombo and his followers Moses and Goldie subsequently use Rasmussen's first prefatory statement as the source of a title. An enriched understanding of Aua's *Erinalititit* proceeds from the fuller contextualizing material that Rasmussen provides for Aua's words, and those interested in more information about shamanism among the Inuit can be directed to chapter five of *The Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, "The Angakut or Shamans."

Petrone also titles Aua's words in *Northern Voices*, but she uses Rasmussen's *Intellectual Culture* as her source for the first of Moses and Goldie's "songs" by Aua, taking the exact wording of Rasmussen's heading "Words which make heavy things light" for her title. She follows the title
by a parenthetical, truncated statement of context "(to be uttered beside a heavily laden sledge)" (7), a practice which produces an improvement over the totally uncontextualized version in the Moses and Goldie text, but she does not provide all the contextualizing details Rasmussen offers in *Intellectual Culture*. Rasmussen indicates not only that "The speaker stands at the fore end of the sledge, speaking in the direction of the traces," but also that the words could be employed in more than one context: "Also used when setting out on a long journey, and wishing to be light-footed and untinged" (165). Knowledge of this alternate context of usage is particularly important for the argument I will make later about a politicized reading of this text. It is also worth noting that in his scholarly text Rasmussen does not make the reference to Qeqertuanaq part of his text of Aua’s *Erinaliutit*, instead explaining in a prefatory statement that "Aua’s method of referring to Qeqertuanaq when using her magic words was . . . as follows: . . . ‘because I wish to utter an Erinaliutit . . . using as my mouth the mouth of Qeqertuanaq’" (165). Petrone’s anthology does, however, have the added interest of publishing a picture of a man in shamanic apparel that she identifies as Aua, thus making apparent that the uttering of such a text is an embodied performance, one in which the shaman’s clothing can contribute to the power of the performance.

The accuracy of Petrone’s identification is, however, questionable. The anthropologist Bernard Saladin d’Anglure in "Ijiqqat: Voyage au pays de l’invisible Inuit" captions the same photograph in a way that links the image to Aua’s father: “très vraisemblablement du chamane Qinqualisaq revêtu de son manteau à la mode Ijiqqat” (80). The photo, D’Anglure explains, was taken on board the whaling vessel *I’Era* in 1902 and is now in the Comer collection of the Mystic Seaport Museum, but it is Rasmussen who explains both the symbolism of the coat and its fate:

> My father, who was a great shaman, went home [after a triumphant encounter with mountain spirits known as *‘Erqät*] and had a dress made like that of the *‘ErAq* [singular of *‘Erqät*], but with the picture of the hands in front on the chest to show how the *‘ErAq* had attacked him. . . . There were a number of white patterns in the dress, and it became a famous dress, which was bought by him who was called: ahak’oq (the well known whaler and collector for the American Museum of Natural History, Capt. George Comer), and my father was paid a high price for the garment. (Intellectual 206)
A picture of Aua whose authenticity is more sure is a pencil sketch Rasmussen reprints in *The Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos* of Aua and his wife Orulo inside a snow hut (49).

Moses and Goldie's source for Aua's *Erinaliutit*, Colombo, chose as copy text *Across Arctic America* (Danish original, *Fra Grønland til Stillehavet*, published 1933–34), Rasmussen's popularizing of his scholarly work *The Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos* (Danish original published 1929). In the scholarly book, Rasmussen provides both the Inuktitut original and English translation of Aua's *Erinaliutit*. The English translation differs from the text in *Across Arctic America* in lineation and phrasing, and the words in the *Intellectual Culture* text also suggest the speaker will look towards the dark: “I arise from my couch / With the morning song to look towards the dark” (166). The *Across Arctic America* text says he will do the opposite: “I will take care not to look toward the dark” (138, emphasis added).

The ground for questioning the choice of copy text here relates to the greater concern for accuracy that one might expect Rasmussen to have in preparing a scholarly edition of a work, and the five years that elapsed between the scholarly report of the Fifth Thule Expedition of 1921–24 and the publication of the Danish book that was translated as *Across Arctic America*. However, lest this uncertainty confirm a sense that the wisest thing is to avoid teaching these texts because of the translation problem, teachers might want to consider the observation Craig Womack makes in the context of arguing that Native literatures (his term certainly includes, if it is not here synonymous with, oratures) have “sufficient literary excellence that they retain something of their power in translation” (64). He notes, “What happens when Native literatures are rendered to the realm of problem (like the Indian problem, we have the translation problem) is that Native cultural production is then examined as ethnography rather than tribal national literatures” (64). Responsible teaching of Aua’s texts at the moment, however, means calling students’ attention to both the discrepant translations and the contextualizing that Rasmussen provides.

Having discussed the problems regarding the available texts of Aua’s shamanic words, teachers can direct students to consider the multiple markers of the oral in these texts. The first text ascribed to Aua begins by acknowledging how the words came to him: no claim to originality is made in the way that writers warrant their originality by subscribing their names as authors of their work. Aua speaks with the mouth of Qeqertuanaq,
the old woman from whom he had learnt the words, because only by uttering her name and repeating the words in the right order would they have any power (Intellectual 165). Parallelism patterns the syntactical structures, making them easier to remember, and the mnemonic anaphora “I will walk,” which opens most statements in this work, is in the penultimate statement varied to “I will take care not to walk” before the return to the original formula in the final line.

The formulaic quality of the final two statements of the first work becomes clear when we hear or see a variant of them at the end of the second work, where the walking is now replaced by references to looking.

What Ong identifies as the copiousness, or rhetorical fullness (39–41), of orature is evidenced in the iteration and immediate reiteration of the opening statement of the second work, “I arise from my couch with the grey gull’s morning song,” though the extent of the repetition varies depending on the edition of the text used. Robert Bringhurst observes in “Reading What Cannot Be Written,” the prologue to his A Story Sharp as a Knife, that “Once it is transcribed, oral literature looks like writing” (15). His point is, of course, that looks are deceiving, and if one judges textualized orature on the basis of literary aesthetics, the reiterated phrases or lines are likely to seem dully repetitive when read, or, more likely, quickly read over. However, if the teacher has models like “trick or treat, trick or treat,” “we are, we are, we are the engineers,” and “hudda buddy hudda buddy” to refer back to, such depreciations may be at least somewhat subverted. Such attempted subversion is important because the general agreement that Robin McGrath affirms, namely that “repetitions in oral literature are the concern of native speakers and ethnographers” (13), arises from a form of ethnocentrism related to literary as opposed to oral aesthetics.

Because students need to be directed to consider how repetition in orature is functional, they might also be encouraged to think about the ramifications of Alfred B. Lord’s classic statement in The Singer of Tales that “an oral poem is not composed for but in performance” (13). Whoever among Qeqertuanaq’s ancestors faced the original demands of spontaneous composition would in part have met those demands through the use of formulaic structures, but that person may also have relied on repetition to give her or himself the time to decide where the poem would go next. John Hollander in his verses from Rhyme’s Reason that exemplify blues improvisation makes this point more memorably:

Susan Gingell 295
Now a blues has stanzas, stanzas of a funny kind—
Yes a blues has stanzas of a very funny kind;
(Do that again, singer, while you make up your mind) . . .

Make up your mind, while the next line gives you time,
Make up your mind, yes, while this line's giving you time,
Then your train of thought comes running after your rhyme.
(45, ellipsis in original)

If repetition is seen to be functional in the oral context, students are less likely to see it as a weakness or an aesthetic flaw, and reference to almost any contemporary popular song will show students that repetition of the sort found in Aua's *Erinalisutit* is a characteristic of the songs most of them find appealing.

In Aua's shamanic words, the oral culture's belief in the power of language to produce desired effects is evident not only in the assertions of what the speaker will do or is doing in order to lighten a heavy load or cure sickness, but also in the refraining from articulating obstacles to the desired state. No mention is made of weight or sickness, lest the articulation summon that which the angakoq is seeking to overcome or banish. Teachers seeking to combat the idea that these texts provide traces of at best quaint and at worst primitive practices can remind students that some contemporary psychotherapists claim an efficacy in having clients repeat affirmations in order to overcome doubts, insecurities, and negative convictions. Moreover, the still common practice of responding to negative news—like an announcement of snowfall in April—by saying something like "Don't even tell me about it" evidences an even more widespread persistence of the idea that putting something into words makes it real.

Creek author and critic Craig Womack offers a powerful suggestion that would validate interpreting Aua's words as vital for this moment when he expresses concern with the de-politicized readings critics have given to Native oral traditions and writing in an era when land settlements and other treaty entitlements are critical issues in Native communities. In *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, Womack discusses the question of whether it is "appropriate to look for political meaning when dealing with the sacred" (53). Having asserted that "Politics without spirituality is not only out of balance but potentially oppressive," he goes
on to argue that “spirituality without politics appropriates belief systems without taking responsibility for human liberation.” Womack thus opens the possibility of unfixing Aua’s words from the specific context in which they were originally performed so that we may think about how they might act contemporaneously. In an era of snowmobiles and other forms of northern transport, the need to utter powerful words beside a heavily laden sledge has arguably been much diminished and the preventative or curative medicine needed to cure or ward off sickness afflicting Inuit neighbours is as likely to have to address despair at social and economic conditions as physical ailment. However, if the heavily laden sledge, the need for strong and determined walking, the rising with the grey gull’s morning song, and the looking not toward the dark but to the day be understood as referring to the burdens contemporary Inuit must carry in securing land title and eagerly journeying towards a brighter, healthier future, then these texts might have new and powerful circulation as liberatory words in contemporary struggles. When the texts are read in this way, the reason for Aua’s avoiding a focus on the obstacles to the desired state becomes even clearer, and the gift of the ancestors in articulating an empowering vision of capability for the Inuit even more obvious. The study of oral traditions and textualized orature could then be seen as the study of living wisdom rather than as anthropological artifact or outmoded form of cultural production. And if we as professors of Canadian literature would use such postcolonial Indigenous thought as Womack’s in teaching such texts, we could be putting our power in the service of people of Aboriginal ancestry even as we enrich all our students’ appreciation for the range of verbal cultural production in this country.

NOTES

1. I checked my memory of this song and details of the ritual with a third-year civil engineering student at the University of Saskatchewan, Riley Jestin. He also told me that on other occasions the Engineers’ chant is not chanted but sung to a tune I identified as that of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” His testimony thus suggests the way in which orature is adapted to different occasions, originality in the context of orature being understood as the ability to fit a received text to specific occasions. Julie Cruickshank’s account of the tellings of the Tlingit story
of Kaax'achgook by Angela Sidney, an account given in her article "The Social Life of Texts," provides another instance of this oral originality.

2. Aua's name is explained in Rasmussen's *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos* in a passage that reports Aua as saying that his "first helping spirit was [his] namesake, a little aua. . . . An aua is a little shore spirit, a woman, that [sic] lives down by the sea shore. . . . They are bright and cheerful when one calls them, and resemble most of all sweet little live dolls" (119). Despite being marked to be an angakoq before his birth, and despite evidence of his practising his people's form of shamanism up to and presumably beyond the time of his first meeting with Rasmussen, Aua reportedly told the explorer on their second meeting, "I am a Christian, and so I have sent away all my helping spirits" (Across 127). Rasmussen learnt that "the business of an angakoq [was] to heal the sick, to protect the souls of his fellows against the machinations of hostile wizards, to intercede with the Mother of the Sea when seal are scarce, and to see that traditional customs are properly observed."

3. Rasmussen uses the term magic words, but because of the negative connotation of magic as illusory, I prefer the term shamanic words.

4. Rasmussen notes, obviously it is almost impossible to elicit any Erinaliutit from people who themselves believe in the miraculous power of the words. Those who possess the words will not part with them, or if they do, it is at a price which would soon ruin an expedition. A gun with an ample supply of ammunition was regarded, for instance, as a very natural price for a few meaningless words. One can, however, instead of buying, sometimes obtain Erinaliutit by barter, and I availed myself of this, giving magic words from Angmagssalik, in East Greenland, in exchange for others from Iglulik. In this manner I obtained the following magic words from Aua. (Intellectual 165)

5. Peter Freuchen, a member of Rasmussen's Fifth Thule Expedition of 1921-24, during which Rasmussen bartered for Aua's healing words, explains that Rasmussen was born in Greenland in June of 1879 to a Danish missionary father and a half-Eskimo mother (16). Freuchen reports Knud's father was a gifted linguist who became a recognized scholar of Greenlandic. In *Across Arctic America*, Rasmussen himself reports, "It was my privilege, as one born in Greenland, and speaking the Eskimo language as my native tongue, to know these people in an intimate way. . . . My playmates were native Greenlanders; from the earliest boyhood I played and worked with the hunters" (vi).

6. Though I have questions about the accuracy of some translations in *Across Arctic America*, that book's versions of Aua's words accord more closely with a
European literary aesthetic, and therefore might be expected to have a wider appeal.

7. Rasmussen reports of Qeqertuanaq, “She was very old, and her family had handed down the words from generation to generation, right from the time of the first human beings” (Intellectual 165).

8. I borrow this term from Marie Battiste’s introduction to *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, where she explains:

Postcolonial Indigenous thought should not be confused with postcolonial theory in literature. Although they are related endeavours, postcolonial Indigenous thought also emerges from the inability of Eurocentric theory to deal with the complexities of colonialism and its assumptions. Postcolonial Indigenous thought is based on our pain and our experiences, and it refuses to allow others to appropriate this pain and these experiences. It rejects the use of any Eurocentric theory or its categories. (xix)

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