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Arctic Solitude: Mitiarjuk's *Sanaaq* and the Politics of Translation in Inuit Literature

Keavy Martin

Perhaps it is the influence of the grant writing that scholars are obliged to do in order to earn our bread and butter, but it seems that much of our energy in literary studies goes into advocating for the reading that *we* have most recently been doing. We thrive on identifying gaps in the critical literature, and then on zealously drawing other people's attention to these oversights. "Too often," we say, or "for too long, the work of (insert author here) has gone unrecognized!" This kind of tactic, however — what might be called *remedial* or *salvage* literary criticism — is arguably quite valid when informed by the appropriate political framework: for instance, when the oversight that we are protesting has happened as the result of shortsightedness or prejudice or Eurocentrism in the academy. What we read, after all, and what we choose to canonize (and finance) by inclusion on university reading lists says much about our values — and those of our institutions.

The process of opening up the canon to include, first, works by Canadian writers (itself, at one time, a radical move) and, later, works by Canadian writers belonging to demographics other than the two "founding" French and English nations has been an important agent in the rise of both multiculturalism and the Aboriginal[1] rights movement. Today, almost any Canadian literature course will include at least one text by an Aboriginal writer: generally by Thomas King, Eden Robinson, or Tomson Highway. In 2008, furthermore, Aboriginal literature as a field found itself to be momentarily mainstream when Joseph Boyden won the Giller Prize for his novel *Through Black Spruce*. Although there are now many more publication venues for Aboriginal writers, and although Canadian audiences are now, for the most part, tolerant of — or even enthusiastic about — the inclusion of Indigenous voices, there are still a great many books that languish out of print,

and a great many Aboriginal writers and storytellers whose words go unheard for the sake of the already canonical.

What does it take to be a success as an Aboriginal writer? Is a secure spot on the shelves of Chapters outlets or on second-year English syllabi a true marker of quality? In 1993, the Cree-Métis poet Marilyn Dumont commented on the expectations faced by Native authors:

> If you are old, you are supposed to write legends, that is, stories that were passed down to you from your elders. If you are young, you are expected to relate stories about foster homes, street life and loss of culture and if you are in the middle, you are supposed to write about alcoholism or residential school. And somehow throughout this, you are to infuse everything you write with symbols of the native world view, that is: the circle, mother earth, the number four or the trickster figure. In other words, positive images of nativeness. (47)

It is true that the Aboriginal texts that succeed commercially do contain many of these elements — they defer, to some extent, to the expectations and desires of their audiences. The pursuit of under-studied or under-read texts, then, may be more than merely an avenue to SSHRC funding; it may also require scholars to step outside of their interpretive comfort zones by engaging with texts that, for various reasons, have not thrived in the process of literary selection.

The study of Aboriginal literature often seems to be the most virtuous of these decolonizing projects, as it promotes and honours some of the most marginalized voices. I would like to take advantage of this righteous critical stance by identifying an oversight or blind spot in the field: an Inuit novel called *Sanaaq*, which is almost entirely unknown outside of Quebec. My task here, however, goes beyond simple advocacy for greater inclusiveness. Rather, I would like to interrogate the ways in which both the call for greater recognition for *Sanaaq* and the process whereby it has been excluded demonstrate the ongoing semi-colonial biases and expectations of literary studies in Canada. Does the canonization of Indigenous novels truly constitute the honouring of Indigenous intellectual traditions? Or does it merely perpetuate the assimilative history of the Canadian education system in its demands that Indigenous literature appear in only the most familiar — or European — of forms?

The Many Tasks of *Sanaaq*

In the early 1950s, an Inuk woman named Salome Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk was asked by a priest working in Kangiqsujuaq — a community in the Nunavik territory of Northern Quebec — to write down some Inuttitut[2] phrases to assist him in the study of the language. At the age of twenty-two, Mitiarjuk began writing, but she did not stop at mere phrases and vocabulary lists; rather, she invented a group of characters and events, and over the next twenty years, she wrote a manuscript of more than a thousand pages. As Bernard Saladin d'Anglure, who edited and translated the manuscript, explains, "À l'age de vingt-deux ans, Mitiarjuk avait ainsi réinventé l'art du roman, alors qu'elle en ignorait jusqu'à l'existence" (7).[3] Mitiarjuk's writings eventually became the novel *Sanaaq*, which was published in 1984 by the Association Inuksiutiit Katimajiit of the Department of Anthropology at Université Laval. In 2002, the French translation by Bernard Saladin d'Anglure was published in France. In 1999, Mitiarjuk was awarded a National Aboriginal Achievement Award; in 2000, she received an honorary doctorate from McGill University, and in 2004, she was made a member of the Order of Canada. She passed away in April of 2007. Despite being a figure of great literary and cultural importance, Mitiarjuk and her work are almost entirely unknown in English-speaking Canada.

Sanaaq is the name of Mitiarjuk's female protagonist; the novel tells the story of her family and of the changes that come to their community as the first *qallunaat*, or white people, arrive. It is full of hilarious and dark stories, and it provides richly evocative depictions of the characters' daily lives and struggles. Many of the early chapters seem quite ordinary; they tell of a fishing trip, of a chore that needs to be done, or of the little stories that make up peoples' days and lives. Here, the narrative seems to be gathering its strength and laying the foundations of setting and character relationships for the more dramatic events that are to come: the killing of a polar bear, the injury and death of some of the characters, the arrival of the white missionaries and the power plays between Anglicans and Catholics, the incidents of domestic violence, the necessity of traveling to the South for medical treatment, or the time when one lovesick character marries an invisible woman who begins to sap his strength and sanity.

This kind of detail is of interest to anthropologists and to non-Inuit readers in Quebec and France for whom the novel may function primar-

ily as a document about Inuit culture, something to supplement their reading of Yves Thériault.[4] Again, the text began its life as a language lesson, and readers have continued to express interest in its documentary or testimonial qualities. As one reviewer said, "On ne lit pas *Sanaaq* pour la beauté de l'écriture. L'auteure raconte tout simplement leur vie, qui se traduit par une lutte acharnée pour se nourrir" (Proulx).[5] I would argue that this assessment does not give Mitiarjuk her due as a storyteller; it is likely that the novelty of the subject matter, along with the reviewer's somewhat stereotypical impressions of Inuit culture and the Arctic environment, obscured his appreciation for *Sanaaq* as a literary text. *Sanaaq* may well be read as an ethnographic or historical document, but to do so exclusively would be to miss the skill and complexity of the storytelling.

At the time Mitiarjuk began writing, Bernard Saladin d'Anglure was conducting research in Nunavik for his doctorate. In a model that was probably unorthodox for an anthropologist, he decided to base his research on the fictional text that Mitiarjuk was creating, rather than on observation, evidence gathering, and the recording of "myths." As such, although Mitiarjuk's manuscript became Saladin d'Anglure's primary text, it was also no doubt his most influential secondary text, as Mitiarjuk herself was glossing, interpreting, and ultimately controlling the representation of the culture that he was studying. In this way, *Sanaaq* becomes more than simply an ethnographic document, an unwitting cultural envoy in need of external commentary. Rather, the novel is also a creative and critical intervention into the process of representing Inuit experience. In allowing Mitiarjuk this position of expertise and authority — instead of positing her merely as an "informant" or object of study — Saladin d'Anglure works to correct the problematic power dynamics of ethnography. In 1965, he got a grant to go back to Kangiqsujuaq and work with Mitiarjuk and a few other local people to create a standardized version and a line-by-line translation of the manuscript (d'Anglure 9). Thus, he became the editor and translator of Mitiarjuk's novel, a process that must have further complicated his research methodology.

This extensive editorial process interferes somewhat with the romantic narrative that Saladin d'Anglure creates about the origins of *Sanaaq*. The idea of the self-taught artist who unwittingly creates the literary masterpiece of her people is a compelling one — and it seems to

momentarily capture her editor's imagination. But Saladin d'Anglure is well aware of the way in which anthropologists have a tendency to downplay their own role and their own impact in the creation of knowledge. D'Anglure reminds his readers that the creation of *Sanaaq* was, in many ways, influenced by the presence of the outsiders who commissioned the text; this mediation impacts the style of the language, which — intended to teach vocabulary at the same time as it develops a narrative — features a varied and detailed diction (8). Indeed, the characters' conversations sometimes contain what seems to be an unnatural level of detail; as Sanaaq directs her household, we get the sense that she is annotating its activities for the sake of an uninformed outsider. For example, instead of simply saying to her daughter, "the lamp is out of oil," she says, "Cadette! Prends les morceaux de gras qu'on doit faire fondre, martèle-les pour en extraire de l'huile, là, dans le petit récipient" (Nappaaluk 23).[6] It seems unlikely that the other women in her household would require such detailed instructions regarding the basic tasks that they carry out daily.

However, in 1984, when the original Inuttitut version of *Sanaaq* was first published, it began to be used in Nunavik schools, thus, to some extent, altering the power dynamics of the ethnographic literary text, which is usually geared toward an audience of outsiders. Some of *Sanaaq*'s first readers were Inuit students, all of whom most likely had been raised in town. Thanks to Mitiarjuk's work, they have had the opportunity to read about the lifestyle of their parents' and grandparents' generations — the time before the authorities moved Inuit off of the land and into permanent settlements. Here, *Sanaaq* becomes a means of access to Inuit history and traditions; it becomes a way for Inuit students to see their culture and language reflected in their curriculum. In this context, ethnographic writing, or reading, becomes less problematic and more empowered. As a novel, then, *Sanaaq* performs a series of complex intercultural functions, simultaneously mediating Inuit culture for both Inuit and *qallunaat* audiences.

Inuit Literature: A Developing Tradition?

Mitiarjuk began her novel well before N. Scott Momaday won the Pulitzer Prize for *House Made of Dawn*, before James Welch's *Winter in the Blood*, and before Maria Campbell published *Halfbreed* — in other words, before contemporary Indigenous literature had begun to make

inroads into the North American consciousness. Yet it took thirty years before Mitiarjuk's work was published, and when it was, it appeared in syllabic Inuttitut — a language that very few people outside the Eastern Arctic could read. Due to the dedication and linguistic ability of Bernard Saladin d'Anglure, *Sanaaq* is now available to a much wider francophone audience. An English translation is due to be published by Avataq Cultural Institute in late 2010, but during the time that one has not been available, this cornerstone of Inuit literature has been effectively barred from the field of anglophone Indigenous literature and literary criticism. As an exclusively French- and Inutittut-language text, *Sanaaq* could not be excerpted in Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie's highly influential *Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English* (now in its third edition), and it cannot be taught in English-language Aboriginal literature courses. Today, when the Canadian news media is saturated with stories of climate change and Arctic sovereignty, of residential schools and the impact of colonial history on Aboriginal peoples, most of the country does not have access to the words of one of its most authoritative experts.

This omission is, to some extent, representative of the condition of Inuit literature as a whole, which tends to be under-represented in the South. Zebedee Nungak sums the situation up neatly in the winter 2008 issue of *Inuktitut* magazine:

> Since Inuit traditions are oral and not literary, Inuit have had to process through a transition to find a suitable "zone of comfort" in the field of written literature. In past times, writing seemed to be something for "others" to do, and was not at all a pre-occupation of Inuit. For a long time, it seemed that Inuit were neither meant, nor expected to be, writers. That is, in the way that Qallunaat [white people] have been authors, poets, and producers of written works for centuries.
>
> From the late 1950s onward, Inuit have proven themselves more than capable as writers ever since magazines, newsletters, and other publications have been available to them across the Arctic. But for the most part, Inuit writing has yet to make its presence memorable in the world of mainstream literature. Several Inuit have pioneered the literary trail as published authors, but these are still far too few. Inuit writers have yet to attain such "firsts" as making the bestseller lists, or winning mainline literary prizes for written works. (64-66)[7]

Aboriginal literature courses now often include work by the late Alootook Ipellie, or perhaps the Igloolik Isuma Productions film *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*. On the whole, however, many students and scholars profess a certain degree of ignorance about the Inuit literary tradition. They are often unaware of the autobiographical writings of Abraham Ulrikab, Peter Pitseolak, Minnie Aodla Freeman, and Anthony Apakark Thrasher; they do not know the poetry of Aqqaluk Lynge or Taqralik Partridge; they have not read the fiction of Markoosie, Rachel A. Qitsualik, or Michael Kusugak; and they have not browsed the extensive collections of oral histories and traditional stories and songs that are being recorded and published at the community level.

The possible explanation for the shortage of critical attention to Inuit literature is open to debate. My suspicion is that the reasons go beyond the legal, political, and cultural differences that separate Inuit and First Nations; after all, a parallel distinction between First Nations and Métis has not worked to exclude Métis authors from the Aboriginal canon. Engaging in research and discussion about Inuit literature over the past several years, I have encountered with great regularity two questions that seem to shed some light on the topic. The first — "Isn't it mostly oral tradition?" — demonstrates a lack of familiarity with Inuit written texts, and points to some uncertainty about the nature and study of oral tradition.[8] The other question — "Are there any novels?" — is the one that interests me here, as I believe it gestures to larger issues regarding the way in which the academy processes Indigenous writings, and the extent to which, despite its best efforts at decolonization, the academy continues to privilege literary expression which appears in familiar forms such as the novel.

Novels are understood by many to be the true currency of a literature or a sign of its maturity. Noah Richler, in his 2006 book *This Is My Country, What's Yours?* remarks that the novel "is the literary vehicle of the values of the Enlightenment" (44). As Ian Watt explains, the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century is connected to the rise of individualism; the novel's "primary criterion," he says, "was truth to individual experience — individual experience which is always unique and therefore new" (13). Innovation thus became a marker of literary excellence, as novelists turned away from adherence to tradition and to the formal conventions of the past. The novel is firmly embedded in ideas of progress, an ideology that Richler espouses through his asser-

tion that the genre of the novel is commensurate with individual and human rights, in apparent opposition to the prioritizing of community concerns that takes place in "myths" (47).[9] For Richler, "myths" and "creation stories" are bound to a time of subsistence and survival; their role, he believes, is largely to explain things, a function which apparently "impedes a kind of questioning that might have led to a more rebellious outcome" (80).[10] The novel, he suggests, is a marker of progress, sophistication, and independent, critical thinking — a form that is not only aesthetically but also morally superior.[11]

The current preference for novels may indeed be shaped by ideology, but as Ian Watt explains, their ascendancy was also linked to the eighteenth-century growth of the reading public (35-59). Novels are a convenient genre: the publishing industry favours them for their marketability; consumers prefer them for their simultaneous portability and scope. The reading of a novel represents a significant investment of time, and its length makes the imaginative leap of entering a fictional world worthwhile; readers will not be faced with the frustration of "getting into" a story only to have it abruptly end. As a result, major literary competitions tend to be novel-oriented, and writers who produce only short stories may be viewed as having their most significant (or lengthy) work still ahead of them. Should they fail to write these novels, they are in danger of being remembered as having produced mainly a litter of runts or of having not lived up to their potential.

Indeed, our current standards of literary achievement still lean noticeably toward fiction, or innovation, despite the fact that scholarship about autobiographical or historical writing has demonstrated the extent to which it, too, relies heavily on invention or emplotment.[12] Inuit literature includes a great deal of autobiographical writing; indeed, memoir is one of the predominant modes in the Inuit written tradition. However, it is often conceived of as being a precursor to longer works of fiction, which, it is assumed, require more talent and greater imagination, as the author has not "relied upon" his or her experience, or reality. For Robin McGrath and Penny Petrone — both of whom are key figures in the study of Inuit literature — life writing is understood as being a "transitional" genre, an early stage in a literature's "development" (Petrone 105). As McGrath explains,

> There are a number of reasons why autobiography is one of the first forms of written literature to emerge in a newly literate society.

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

McGrath's terminology ("newly literate," "pre-literate") unfortunately tends to evoke now discredited ideas of cultural evolution, and there is a sense in which it suggests that literary traditions, too, have a predetermined developmental path. Soon, it is implied, Inuit writers will no longer have to rely on the "easy" genre of the memoir and can "progress" toward the production of novels.

In other words, the assumption here is that Inuit literature is following the same trajectory as European literatures, but that it has not quite yet reached the point of maturity. Richler makes brief mention of the work of both Mitiarjuk and Markoosie, but dismisses them just as quickly: "Neither of these books are novels in any sophisticated sense. They are generally expository stories explaining a heritage through picaresque scenes" (82). Such statements are disconcertingly reminiscent of other popular evolutionary fictions, most notably, the idea that tribal communities of hunters and gatherers are on a lower rung on the ladder that leads to agriculture and statehood, or that the "oral" precedes the "literate."[13] The implication seems to be that only once a tradition includes an N. Scott Momaday, a Louise Erdrich, or a Joseph Boyden has it truly come of age. Thus, in the 1980s, critics proclaimed a "Native American Renaissance,"[14] as a critical mass of Indigenous novelists writing in English had begun producing literature in a form that could register on the radar of the academy.

The field of Inuit literature as an academic discipline, though small, does exist, and over the years, critics like Robin McGrath, Dale Blake, Penny Petrone, Sherrill Grace, Renée Hulan, Sophie McCall, and even Arnold Krupat have contributed to the body of secondary literature about Inuit writing and storytelling. Inuit literary studies, furthermore, is able to draw from the larger and better-established field of Inuit studies, with its extensive body of anthropological, historical, and linguis-

tic research. Interestingly, Inuit studies as a field is based primarily in Quebec, where scholars like Louis-Jacques Dorais and Bernard Saladin d'Anglure — both of whom are fluent in English, French, and Inuttitut — have worked tirelessly to promote it. However, even within this framework, very little attention has been given to Mitiarjuk's novel as a *literary* work, especially in the anglophone context. Although *Sanaaq* should have fulfilled the academy's desire for an Inuit novel — and championed the recognition of an Inuit literary tradition — it has thus far been unable to breach the many partitions which bar it from its rightful place in the Canadian Aboriginal literary canon.

Neither Solitude

Within Canada, Inuit territory includes parts of Labrador, Northern Quebec, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories; beyond Canada's borders, it extends east to Greenland and west to parts of Alaska and Siberia. Within this massive region, of course, traditional distinctions exist between Inuit regions and dialects, whether these be anthropological (such as "Mackenzie," "Copper," "Netsilik," or "Iglulik Eskimos") or Inuit distinctions between — *miut* groups (Uqqurmiut, Amitturmiut, Utkuhiksalingmiut, and so on). But over the last one hundred or so years, those Indigenous borders have been traced over, as the boundaries of nation-states, territories, and provinces were drawn, and as Inuit souls were divided amongst Catholics, Anglicans, and Moravians. Inuit political movements, furthermore, have split the territory up into four different regions based on the borders of independent land claims: the Nunatsiavut region in Labrador, Nunavik in Northern Quebec (part of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement), Nunavut (undoubtedly the most high-profile), and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories. The political and ideological boundaries that criss-cross the Inuit homeland, then, are as layered and complex as the conceptual lines that run through Mitiarjuk's work, and only serve to further complicate its rather uncertain position.

There is a chapter in *Sanaaq* that describes the arrival of the first missionaries to the Kangiqsujuaq region. The Inuit there have met white people before, but this time, a boat arrives, and Sanaaq's husband Qalingu goes to help unload. There he meets a Catholic missionary who, the narrator says, seems to be a very nice man (Nappaaluk 161). But also on board the boat is an Anglican minister who invites Qalingu

to his cabin, where he gives him a book, and he tells Qalingu what he thinks of the Catholic missionary: "Il ne faut pas du tout écouter les gens comme lui, car ce sont de grands menteurs!" (162).[15] What follows is a fairly lighthearted and funny story about the family then trying to figure out who the liar is and whom they should trust. The community becomes somewhat divided on this; some want to follow the Anglicans while others put their faith in the Catholics. In a more serious way, this is representative of the "battle for souls" that was taking place throughout the Arctic, and of the divisions that this conflict has created in Inuit territory.

The division illustrated here, however, is obviously not only doctrinal but also linguistic. Indeed, the parcelling of Inuit territories and peoples into French and English camps — based usually on the language of the editors, translators, and collaborators — has had perhaps the most significant impact on the reception of Inuit intellectual traditions in the South. Canada's offical bilingualism, after all, is more of a policy than a lived reality, as we are reminded in every anglophone Canadian literature class that includes no work by Québecois authors. This unwitting reinforcement of the two solitudes is rationalized by the inability of most university students and faculty members to function in both official languages, and by our anxiety in literature departments about studying works in translation. I often wonder, however, if the flaws inherent in translation would not be preferable to the conspicuous lack of dialogue between francophone and anglophone literatures and scholarship. In the fall of 2008, Université Laval organized a conference entitled "Littératures autochtones émergentes: Canada, Afrique du Nord, Océanie française," which was held at the nearby reserve of Wendake. While in attendance, I was astounded not only at the rustiness of my French but at my complete ignorance of the rich field of francophone Indigenous writing. Thanks to scholars like Maurizio Gatti, editor of *Littérature Amerindienne du Québec*, this is now beginning to change, even if I am still unable — due to the monolinguialism of most of students and unavailability of translations — to include the works of francophone Indigenous authors in my courses at the University of Alberta.

At the Wendake conference, however, it was also evident that the discussions of francophone Indigenous literature were occurring largely without reference to the immense body of critical and literary theory

about Indigenous writing that is being produced in English-speaking Canada and the United States: for instance, the work of Indigenous scholars like Neal McLeod, Craig Womack, Robert Warrior, Jace Weaver, Lisa Brooks, and Daniel Heath Justice, to name only a few. One has to wonder, then: are the politics and (im)practicalities of translation maintaining — or imposing — the two solitudes in the field of Indigenous literature? Has the use of European languages — English and French — become so naturalized that anglophone scholars of Indigenous literatures are unable to conceptualize francophone literatures as having some connection or parallel or relevance to their field? Do Quebec scholars not see that the work being produced outside of the province's borders could have much to say about the reading and writing of francophone literature? Or does it simply come down to issues of accessibility, the fact that there is a shortage of translations and an anxiety about relying on them?

One of the most extensive collections of Inuit writing is Penny Petrone's 1988 anthology *Northern Voices*. The product of tireless research, this collection brings together Inuit texts in a wide variety of genres: the traditional songs and stories, letters, memoirs, political writings, and poetry. This anthology is restricted, however, by its subtitle "Inuit Literature *in English*" (emphasis added), and Mitiarjuk's work is not included. Likewise, Robin McGrath, who in 1984 published a study entitled *Canadian Inuit Literature: The Development of a Tradition*, and who has since written a series of articles on the topic, does not discuss *Sanaaq*. "Only two modern young Inuit writers have produced more than just an occasional short story; Markoosie and Alootook Ipellie," she says (*Canadian* 81). Mitarjuk's work is notably absent. McGrath's scholarship, though extremely useful and the result of extensive research, is also restricted to Inuit literature in English or in English translation.

The case of Markoosie, in particular, makes a telling comparison to Mitiarjuk's work, and reveals something of the way in which language politics have impacted the reception of Inuit literature. Markoosie, like Mitirajuk, is a Nunavik writer; he was originally from Inukjuak, although his family was caught up in the High Arctic relocations.[16] In 1967, Markoosie began writing a novel, *Harpoon of the Hunter*, which was originally serialized in *Inuktitut* magazine (McGrath, *Canadian* 81). Like Mitiarjuk, Markoosie wrote his work in syllabic Inuttitut; unlike

Mitiarjuk, his work was translated into English, and as a result, it gained a wider Canadian audience. As McGrath wrote in 1984, *Harpoon of the Hunter* "is certainly the most highly visible modern work of Inuit literature to date" (*Canadian* 81). Arguably, Markoosie's limited renown has now been overshadowed by the 1993 publication of Alootook Ipellie's *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares* and by the work of Igloolik Isuma Productions (which, I would argue, constitutes a significant literary as well as filmic achievement). Nonetheless, despite the fact that his novel is out of print, Markoosie is quietly celebrated in English-speaking Canada as an Inuk novelist while Mitiarjuk, whose work is not only more extensive but also available to order, goes largely unknown.

Indigenous cultures and literatures represent a different way of conceptualizing North American geographic and intellectual space. Traditional territories and languages draw different borders than the ones that appear on official maps, and thereby undermine the certainty of the boundaries that we have become used to navigating. Inuit territory, for instance, may now be divided up into new political units, but the common intellectual traditions of the Arctic can be seen as uniting these disparate pieces, and thereby suggest the possibility of cross-border dialogue. And this, no doubt, is something from which literary studies in Canada can benefit. Inuit literature, after all, does not always fall as easily into the separate French and English camps; rather, the ever increasing body of literature that is being produced in Inuktitut resists this polarization. Films like *Atanarjuat* (*The Fast Runner*), not to mention Mitiarjuk's and Markoosie's original Inuttitut publications, to some extent, constitute their own solitude — a sovereign literary field. Although translations can make these works accessible to scholars in the South, their existence and persistance in their original language provides a challenge to literary studies in Canada: can southern institutions — as much as they have improved over the last few decades — make room for Indigenous literatures without first requiring those literatures to take on the familiar forms of English- or French-language fiction?

Again, Inuit literature as an academic discipline is still plagued by the impression that it has not yet arrived, or reached its golden age, because long works of fiction still make up a fairly small percentage of its corpus. In Thomas Berger's 2006 report on the implementation of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, he identified major deficiencies in the Nunavut education system and advocated for a truly bilingual

English-Inuktitut system that would produce graduates with advanced literacy skills in both languages. "The Inuit are a bright tile in the Canadian mosaic," he says, "Why not an Inuit literature?" (xii). This is a question that I would like to cheekily pose back to him. Why indeed? In other words, why assume that there is no Inuit literature already in existence? Is it not possible that the literature already exists, if only in a form that outsiders struggle to recognize? The Government of Nunavut has been supporting the production of written Inuktitut literature; the Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth sponsors the annual Nunavut Literary Prize, which "encourages the writing and publishing of new literature in Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun" ("Nunavut"). This is an important initiative and may lead to a few more novels to stand alongside Mitiarjuk's *Sanaaq,* Markoosie's *Harpoon of the Hunter*, and Michael Kusugak's *The Curse of the Shaman*. And while I am eager to see more Inuit fiction in print and in classrooms, I believe that there is also a lot of conceptual work to be done on the part of the academy in the recognition of the literary merits of texts in other modes and in other languages that do already amount to an established literary tradition.

In asking, then, why a work like *Sanaaq* is not receiving the attention on a national scale that it undoubtedly deserves, we might imagine the solution to be the forthcoming English translation and its potential inclusion in anglophone classrooms in the South. But will that really solve the problem? Or will it merely perpetuate the categories that continue to limit us? Will there ever be a way in which discussions of Inuit literature in institutions can include that Inuktitut-language text in a prominent way? This is a radical idea, in that it suggests that the re-imagining of intellectual boundaries happens through a transformation on the part of the academy, rather than on the part of the literature. To what extent is the university-level Aboriginal literature curriculum perpetuating the nineteenth-century idea that the extinction of Indigenous languages is inevitable, and that the conversion to English- or French-language expression is a natural or even desirable process? While the work of Indigenous writers has undoubtedly been shaped by the assimilative policies of the residential school system, these writers have also strategically and purposefully adopted European languages and genres and adapted them to suit their own experience and objectives. As a novel, *Sanaaq* demonstrates the way in which a community can absorb

a new religion or a technology like syllabic writing, and accomodate the arrival of outsiders with their own feuds and politics, while still retaining its language and continuing to tell its own stories. I look forward to the day when the anglophone institutions can welcome Mitiarjuk's work into the curriculum — not as evidence of the "maturity" of the Inuit literary tradition, but rather as a text that can expose the ongoing colonialism of Indigenous literary studies in Canada, and which, perhaps, can help us to re-imagine — or to think beyond — the linguistic borders that continue to restrict us.

Notes

[1] While the term *Indigenous* is increasingly preferred in academic circles, I occasionally use the term *Aboriginal* to refer to a more specific Canadian context.

[2] "Inuttitut refers to the Inuit language spoken in Quebec (as well as to particular dialects in Baffin Island and Labrador). When I am referring to Inuit languages more generally, I use the more conventional spelling Inuktitut."

[3] "At the age of twenty-two, Mitiarjuk thus reinvented the art of the novel — all the while being unaware of its existence." All French-English translations in the article are my own.

[4] Yves Thériault (1915-1983) was a Quebec author who wrote a series of novels about Inuit life in Northern Quebec. He is best known for his 1958 novel *Agaguk*.

[5] "One does not read *Sanaaq* for the beauty of the writing. The author simply narrates her life, which takes shape through a relentless struggle for food."

[6] "Daughter! Take the pieces of fat that need to be melted, and pound them to extract the oil, there, in the little container." References to Nappaaluk are to the 2002 French translation.

[7] *Inuktitut* magazine is published by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), Canada's national Inuit organization. This article was originally published in *Windspeaker* 22.1 (2004): 21-26.

[8] The complex implications and assumptions of this question would require a separate study, so I will not discuss them in any detail here.

[9] While Richler is aware of the novel's potential as a "proselytizing instrument" (45), he does not seem to view this as a problem — as evidenced by his painful (and rather patronizing) recounting of a conversation with Zacharias Kunuk, during which Richler attempts to determine why the maker of *Atanarjuat* no longer reads many novels (82-83).

[10] The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins has famously critiqued the ethnocentric understanding of hunter-gatherer societies as being merely "subsistent" or on the brink of starvation.

[11] Ironically, this ethnocentric premise is one that Richler hesitates to think very critically about.

[12] See, for instance, Paul John Eakin's *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* or *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*.

[13] For a more in-depth discussion, see Chamberlin's "From Hand to Mouth: The Postcolonial Politics of Oral and Written Traditions" and *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?*

[14] "This phrase is taken from the title of Kenneth Lincoln's1983 monograph, which explores the work of American Indian writers like N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, and Leslie Marmon Silko."

[15] "You really shouldn't listen to people like him — they are big liars!"

[16] In 1953, several Inuit families from Inukjuak and Pond Inlet were shipped north to establish the new communities of Grise Fiord (Ausuittuq) and Resolute Bay (Qausuittuq). This move was meant to bolster Canadian sovereignty in the High Arctic; as ITK president Mary Simon puts it, Inuit were used a "human flagpoles" (34). For more information on the High Arctic relocations, see Kulchyski and Tester's *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic (1939-63*), Melanie McGrath's *The Long Exile: A Tale of Inuit Betrayal and Survival in the High Arctic*, and the 2009 Igloolik Isuma Productions documentary, *Exile*.

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