

# Circumscribing Silence: Inuit Writing Orature

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The Inuk most oft-quoted in English print is surely the shaman Orpingalik, who explained to Knud Rasmussen the nature of Inuit song composition. "Songs are thoughts, sung out with the breath when people are moved by great forces and ordinary speech no longer suffices" (Rasmussen 321). Orpingalik's sentiment is often recalled because it so exquisitely captures the profound beauty and mystery that cloaks Inuit inspiration in the eyes of non-Inuit. Yet, poetic as it is, Orpingalik's statement is also grounded in literal meaning, as Armand Tagoona reveals in his assessment of Inuit singers singing non-Inuit songs, "White man's songs have stops, but Inuit songs do not. If two Inuks [*sic*] sing together, one stops to breathe and the other continues singing" (Petron 216). In other words, sections of a song are literally sung out through the duration of a breath. Consider, then, the various editions of Inuit songs available in print, in which both transcribers and editors impose on oral compositions a visual structure—punctuation, form and (in most cases) language—they were not originally intended to assume. Such interference is rarely mentioned in the text, despite the profound and unavoidable effects of print on the protean original. In post-colonial terms, the result is that of "creat[ing] the Other in the guise of describing it," as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin articulate in *The Empire Writes Back* (59). But what happens when that newly literate "Other" attempts to describe his or her own reality, to transfer and transform oral culture into text? Even when writing in Inuktitut, the Inuit writer encounters a space wherein his or her cultural experience is silently located—beyond the reach of text—in the gap between orality and literacy. Inuit authors sometimes attempt to white around that space by articulating aspects of the storytelling performance that are literally silent, as well as by addressing the subject of language directly within the text. These articulations occasionally seem intrusive and superfluous to the non-Inuit reader, and this incongruity consolidates the difference between Inuit oral culture and the imperial demands of literacy. Such expressions, in the words of Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, "signify a certain cultural experience which they cannot hope to reproduce but whose deference is validated by the new situation" (53). Inuit writers thus confront and circumscribe the inadequacies of text for expressing the experiences of an oral culture.

In the traditional Inuit world view, language and reality coincide; the spoken word is the embodiment of truth, reality and spiritual order. "The Eskimo believed that the emitting of a word evoked an image which was an actual reality. . . both the physical objects and the words used to evoke them are, in Eskimo thinking, equally real" (Williamson 23). The intrinsic connection between speech and reality thus makes lying a virtual impossibility for the pre-literate Inuit. And language itself plays a role in making reality, as all words are verb forms. Inuktitut "isn't a nominal language; it doesn't simply name things which already exist, but rather brings both things and actions (nouns and verbs) into being as it goes along" (Denevi 78). Inuit religion also strongly influences language perception, as shamans possess the power to manipulate reality through magic words and incantations.

It is not without some irony, then, that Christian missionaries are primarily responsible for introducing literacy into Inuit culture. In discussing Tzvetan Todorov's *The Conquest of America*, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin observe that, in Aztec reality, "the Other was always that which could be foreseen," and, faced with outsiders, the Aztec's "only explanation was that they [the outsiders] were gods" (79). A similar world view is apparent in the name "Inuit" – "the people." But the people's experience was perhaps less that the newcomers were gods than the fact that they brought word (The Word, as in John's Gospel, moreover) of a new god. Inuit were confronted at once by foreign religion and foreign communication and, "faced with the inexplicable, the only recourse of the oral system is silence" (Ashcroft 79). For Inuit, this silence was not only a communal reaction to otherness, but was also imposed, particularly on their indigenous religion, by the outsiders. The monotheistic demands of Christianity forced the denial of shamanism. Notably, this taboo extended only to linguistic expression, as K. J. Butler relates: "People are not willing to discuss. . . anything about shamanism if confronted on the subject, but they will put the same material into drawings because there's no Church taboo regarding drawings" (Seidelman 146). The taboo is significant because belief in the spoken word is such an integral part of Inuit shamanism, and discounting the latter likely had a profound effect on Inuit perceptions of language as intrinsically truthful and actualizing. "Once writing was introduced, the Voice of God was supplemented by His hand; scriptural authority is the authority of the written (scripted) word, not the oral one" (Tannen 211).

The view of language inherent in Inuit oral culture perseveres nevertheless. In his discussion of aboriginal literacy in the Northwest Territories, Perry Shearwood asserts that "assumptions of conventions deriving from [one's] cultural background may influence [one's] expectations about learning to read and write. . . . Young people may not know their ancestral language

but still retain the cultural values of the community (632). Missionaries and government representatives have not completely excised all vestiges of the pre-literate Inuit culture's unique perception of language. But tradition views are nevertheless acquiring radical new meanings. Robin McGrath explains that "there is a major difference between the old people working in the oral tradition and the usually young writers who have emerged in recent years; the contemporary authors and storytellers are aware that what they are writing or saying is deliberately fiction" (81). More to the point, it is through the fact of writing itself that many traditional stories have become fiction. The differentiation between fact and fiction is a development that coincided with writing.

Despite the blurring of boundaries between history and myth, Inuit tellers have traditionally been careful to specify the precise degree of their own knowledge. Speaking with Rasmussen, Qaqortingneq of the Netsilik insists, "I myself know nothing for my own part; I only repeat what I have heard" (Petronne 31). Susan Martin indicates likewise regarding her knowledge, "I don't know much about the real early days. . . These are stories that have been passed down to me" (Moses 52). Robin McGrath accounts for the statement of sources in much Inuit narrative by suggesting it is a means of dealing with illogical or conflicting accounts (70). Scollon and Scollon note that "[in the tradition of] nonintervention, the storyteller, to protect his own autonomy, characterizes his knowledge as being only his own experience" (105). Yet this phenomenon acquires new meaning with the advent of literacy. The vast majority of Inuit stories accessible to non-Inuit have been gathered by outsiders to Inuit culture, collected by Inuit from tellers with some awareness that their words would be recorded, or actually written by Inuit. Therefore, non-Inuit have access to few samples of Inuit orature completely untouched by print culture. This is not to deny the integrity of Inuit storytellers and writers, contemporary or past, but only to emphasize that the corpus of Inuit literature in print has been spoken, collected, written, translated, edited, manipulated, or somehow affected by some awareness of the existence and power of the printed word. Considered thus, the many instances of Inuit speakers and writers continuing to note the sources of their knowledge may also be interpreted as a reflection of the effect of the presence of literacy, with its attendant notions of history and truth.

This documentation of source knowledge now often embodies an awareness of the complexity of the written word and the power of the medium. In *People From Our Side*, Dorothy Harley Eber chooses for an epigraph Peter Pitseolak's statement, "I am telling the true things I know. I am not adding anything and I am not holding anything back" (7). Pitseolak's use of the word "true" (if it has not been obscured by translation) is significant

because it speaks to an awareness that there is a distinction to be made between truth and falsity in a culture that preserves things on paper, Pitseolak addresses both embellishment and evasion in his notion of truth, and his concern is a product of literacy as well as evidence, possibly, of exposure to the Christian insistence that lying is sinful. Hans Hendrik recognizes the need to clarify his intentions in writing about an overheard conversation: "To be sure, as I am not very clever in English, and do not know whether I have thoroughly understood their meaning, I only have written this without any particular purpose" (Petrone 75). Hendrik writes in order to record his suspicions, yet he is also aware of the potential power of his document to accuse, and he attempts to balance himself between the two. Simon Arnaviapik demonstrates concern regarding documentary errors in his autobiographical narrative: "My eyesight is very poor now and I have probably made many mistakes with my pencil" (Petrone 143). Arnaviapik's comment points to the importance of physical health for writing (which, arguably, requires more complex physical control than speech), as well as to the greater notice afforded written errors over otherwise comparable verbal ones.

Literacy has clearly problematised the Inuit notion of language as truth. Using syntax that, for the ear of Anglo-European descent, aligns her existential conundrum with Hamlet's mortal struggle, Martha Flaherty writes, "Since I've learned a bit about the *qallunaat* way of living I can now take advantage of it. Lie or not to lie—it is up to you" (Petrone 275). But the seemingly cavalier *qallunaat* approach still meets disapproval within the Inuit community. Dorothy Harley Eber reports community outrage at Pitseolak Ashoona's exaggerations in *Pitseolak: Pictures Out of My Life*. Among her detractors was Peter Pitseolak, who was himself similarly criticized regarding his life story. The teller's habit of exaggeration for the sake of story has become implicated in the documentary effects of literacy on an oral culture. Written language demands that Inuit be consistent storytellers, while Inuit culture recognizes the same story to be born anew with each telling.

"Thus literacy leads to the development of historic consciousness... [and establishes] a distinction between 'history' and 'myth'" (Ashcroft 81). This is not to say that pre-literate cultures lack history, but that literacy brings an awareness of history; literacy subdivides stories into the real and the imagined, as well as distinguishing the present from the past. Minnie Aodla Freeman elaborates in a 1980 speech in Yellowknife: "Oral history has always been very strong in Inuit culture. You could imagine how old this history could be. I cannot date it myself, but I know that the telling of those first *qallunaat* arriving to the Arctic were not fantasy stories, but they were old nevertheless" (Petrone 236). Freeman speaks from her own cultural history, perceiving no need to mention the records left by European Arctic travellers

in order to confirm the oral history told by her predecessors. She emphasizes her faith in this enduring history while simultaneously downplaying the obsession with temporal precision that is an integral part of Euro-American written history.

Literacy introduces an oral culture to the notion that stories can be possessions. Robin McGrath notes that Mary Panegoosho's essay "Where are the Stories of my People?" draws directly from Laurens van der Post's novel *The Heart of the Hunter*, observing that "Inuit writers, being unfamiliar with non-Inuit culture, may have trouble identifying what is mythic and what is personal in that culture" (112). This difficulty stems from the merging of fact and fiction in traditional storytelling, so that even the teller's autobiographical anecdotes become communally known and repeated. But what is more significant within Panegoosho's essay is the matter itself. She writes, "Someone who cared about their language asked one of these hunters, 'What will you do when you get out of hospital?'" (Gedalof 13). The hunter responds that he longs to hear the stories of his people. Panegoosho's tone in the opening line—"someone who cared about their language"—captures her subject in such a way that the borrowing is subordinated to her purpose; it underscores the irony of a text whose subject is the desire to preserve one's own language and orature.

The concept of owning a story seems contradictory to those immersed in the experiential transmission of narrative. Traditionally, learning a new story entailed hearing it directly from the source, so listeners also experienced the events of the tale;

For to recite in the particular tribal language a myth dealing with creation, for example, is actually in the experience of the participants to be present here and now in those sacred events of a mythical time not exclusively of the past but of a time that is real and happening at every instant, nowever and forever. . . the occasion [of storytelling] is one of recreation for all participating persons, and for the totality of all that is. (Brown 143)

That intimate experience has lost prominence in light of the solitary act of reading, in which both writer and reader are distanced from the storytelling experience. Inuit writers face the impossible gaps that arise in transforming what has traditionally been a dynamic, communal experience—the Inuit oral story—onto paper for a silent, solitary audience. These writers circumscribe the gap between performance and page by stating their identity and including markers of form and process within the text; Inuit writers also create a space for the received notion of truth that traditionally operates within Inuit discourse. Such methods—whether intentional or not—seem to suggest that literacy, as in Jan Mohammed's estimation, "destroys the immediacy of per-

sonal experience and the deeper socialisation of the world and consequently the totalising nature of oral cultures" (Ashcroft 81).

So much is implicit in the act of storytelling that even the simplest aspects do not transfer smoothly to the page. Sean Kane contextualizes the complexity of the experience: "The storyteller is engaged in a kind of dialogue with his or her listeners. . . [e]ven if [they] are totally silent. . . . The listeners have heard that tale many times before. Each one of them could recite it with style. . . . the storyteller is simply the one who speaks the myth on behalf of the listener" (189). Traditionally, the audience would know from memory when the story was over, but in writing, the Inuit storyteller (or the teller who speaks on record) attempts to communicate such silent parts of the oral experience. This is perhaps why many Inuit writers insist on articulating closure within their writing. In her letter to Father Thibert, Naya Pelagy's closing remark is "this is the end" (Petronne 133). Telling a story to Knud Rasmussen, Kibbarjuk, "here ends this story" (Petronne 38). An anonymous writer of a whale tale published in *Inuktitut* concludes simply with "that is all" (Gedalof 52). Such seemingly odd articulations reflect both an awareness of the need to round out the experience for the outsider, as well as a gentle naivete regarding the printed page. These writers are at once aware of the inadequacy of documenting the oral experience, while simultaneously unmoved by the closure implicit in written language when the story ends.

While documenting the orally transmitted story is highly problematic, some Inuit writers seem quite sensitive to the visual aspects of an oral culture, and their projects reflect this acumen. Ruth Finnegan emphasizes that, in oral performance, "[the] audience. . . sees as well as hears [so]. . . characterization, for instance, need not be expressed directly in words when it can be as clearly and as subtly portrayed through the performer's face and gestures" (78). This is perhaps why the front and back covers of Alooktook Ipellie's *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares* portray the author's face. Drawn by Ipellie himself, the front cover also portrays the hands of the artist, while these are absent from his photograph on the back of the book. The opening and closing stories in the collection present exorcisms conducted in a kind of topsy-turvy world in which devil and lord are equally frightful. The nightmarish cover sketch and dreamy photograph may be equally pointed, suggesting that technology's demonization of the self-sufficient life may be frightfully misleading. Photographer Peter Pitseolak is also ensured a visual presence in his texts, though representing his community to non-Inuit was not his original intention, and his published projects were largely the culminations of other people's visions.

Yet many Inuit writers without recourse to drawing or photography seek ways to maintain a presence within the text. In the live storytelling experience, listeners are constantly aware of the teller's identity, not only be-

cause he or she is part of the same community, but also simply because teller and listener share the same physical space. In print, the writer's name is a means of remaining present as an individual to the audience. But the idea of representing words—names or otherwise—visually must initially be quite an elusive concept for an oral culture to accept. Therefore, the idea of placing one's name contiguous to one's text on a page is likely an inconceivable abstraction to the newly literate, so Inuit writers often narrate themselves into the text via their names. Marion Tuu'luq introduces herself to the reader in the standard manner of polite Euro-American society (Gedalof 121), as does Martin Martin, though he includes both his name and his stage in life, perhaps as a means to bringing his image as well as evidence of his wisdom to the reader: "I am an old man now. My name is Martin Martin. I wish all a happy and successful life" (Moses 45). Martin's words seem to emulate the format of a letter, with both a complimentary closing and signature of sorts. Similarly, Simon Arnaviapik addresses the abstraction of recording time (as one might at the top of a letter or journal) through narration. "I began writing this on November 2nd, 1969. My name is Arnaviapik. Some people my age still use the old disc numbers that have been discarded. My number was E5-752" (Gedalof 129). By including his disc number, Arnaviapik clearly reveals who he perceives will compose a portion of his audience.

The writer's name sometimes appears in the narration of his or her activity. John Ayaruaq opens his autobiography with direction and determination: "John Ayaruaq is going to tell a story" (Gedalof 53). Taqulittuq's letter to Mrs. Budington states, "I now try to write you" (Petronne 72). Ada Blackjack Johnson sees writing itself as a diary subject, as "now I'm writing 11:00 in evening after I had a cup of tea" (Petronne 94). In Johnson's text, writing assumes a place beside the fundamental activities of subsistence, descriptions of which fill much of her diary. Thus, Johnson's allusion to writing coincidentally links language to sustenance in a manner wholly appropriate to contemporary Inuit concerns regarding language preservation.

Just as Inuit traditionally sang of singing, they now write of writing. But composition itself is less of a subject than it was in the oral tradition. Some Inuit writers seem to attach significance to mentioning their activity, but they then focus on their subject rather than reflecting on its composition. Writing seems to quell the oral impulse toward such digression. Regarding oral composition, Walter J. Ong observes that "words are not signs . . . but [rather] are constantly moving" (75-77). Writing is a slower, more laboured process than oral performance, and it is when words are written that they become signs. Having recorded his or her current activity, the writer is furnished with a visual reminder of having done so. He or she then proceeds, by the pull of visual linearity, to discuss the intended topic. The anticipation of the act



of telling is sometimes written into the narrative, perhaps as a continuous reminder of the task at hand, as oral narration used certain memory tricks like repetition in order to keep the story going while the teller planned ahead. Peter Pitseolak writes, "I am going to write down how many there were of us altogether that time in 1921 when we spend the winter in Eteenik" (108). As in other Inuit crafts, the goal of writing "is not just the completion or releasing of that which wants to come out from the raw material, but rather it is . . . the creative process itself that is of central importance" (Brown 145).

One young writer named Madeleine articulates both her process and intent in a manner that recalls the repetition characteristic of oral composition. "Madeleine is writing to Father Philippe. I am writing to you because I want a comb. How I would be happy if I had a comb; that is why I am writing to you" (Petronne 134). Madeleine's letter reads almost like a shamanic incantation; she follows her request with a description of how its fulfilment will satisfy her. Several times she refers to the act of writing—more even than to the comb itself—and she readily links the two: "If I write to you, it is because I want [it]" (Petronne 134). Madeleine's letter draws attention to repetition not only as a memory tool for the speaker, but also as a means of facilitation the listener's memory. Like Madeleine, the Labrador Inuk Abraham is aware of the power of writing to accomplish change, and in the face of injustice he is resolute: "If Mr. Jacobsen does that once more I shall write to England as I have been told" (Petronne 110).

In recounting an event from her childhood, Marion Tuu'luq addresses the problem of memory in a manner that indicates that story, whether history or myth, changes with each teller. "When I try to tell this part of the story, I am not confused about the details. It is something I will never forget" (Gedalof 124). Details of legendary stories do change from speaker to speaker, and a teller never tells the same story twice. In the first chapter of his autobiography, John Ayaruaq distinguishes between media by indicating his first writing of a particular anecdote: "I often talk about this, but this is the first time I have written it down in detail" (Gedalof 56). One wonders whether writing the story for the first time will concretize it in Ayaruaq's mind and influence successive tellings. Some tellers even suggest that the story itself controls the telling. Taivitaluk Alaasuaq concludes with, "This is all I can say" (Gedalof 82). Nevertheless, the teller maintains control over the telling, as Peter Pitseolak clarifies the organic nature of orature in the face of conceptions of linear narrative connected to writing: "I am telling a story but is not one thing after another" (74).

Akeeko acknowledges his presence and process in his text and recognizes that, by writing, he acts as the voice of the community:



This is Akeeko writing. Other Eskimos know much more than I do but they do not write. But I know their way of life. . . because lots of them come and tell me. And now they want stoves for the winter. I tell them to ask the teachers but many won't. I cannot help them though I feel sorry for them—especially the ones who are in need. (Gedalof 18)

Akeeko demonstrates concern for the community as well as a certain modesty in referring to his literacy. It is unclear whether others “do not write” solely because they are illiterate or because they choose not to, but the fact remains that almost everyone in an oral culture has the ability and the opportunity to share their knowledge. In a literate culture, this is not always the case. Yet contrary to the traditional Inuit belief in the power of words, Akeeko articulates a sense of helplessness, despite having acknowledged that he is a writer. A possible explanation appears later in the text. “The written explanations we get are hard to follow. That is why the things we are asked to do are never done. It would be better if we were told by tongue. Eskimos do not pay attention to written things—not even myself” (Gedalof 20). Akeeko’s writing highlights the gap between his community and his audience, suggesting that writing alone is not a tool that easily facilitates survival in a newly literate community.

Hunting, the traditional means of Inuit survival, was inextricably linked to creative composition, as Peter Pitseolak describes: “Singing was just an ordinary hunting method. The Inuit used to make up lots of songs . . . to get the animals used to the hunters. These early people were very clever. We people now have guns; in the old days people just used their voices” (38). Literacy is likewise sidelining the oral performance. Many Inuit are lately focussing on the preservation of their native language as a modern means of cultural survival. Pitseolak himself embraced writing in Inuktitut as a means of recording traditional Inuit ways. Martin Martin expressed similar hopes about literacy: “I have said what I have seen and experienced. . . . I hope this will be written down so that our children can be made aware of what used to take place in the past years” (Moses 43). Both men perceive an opportunity to intervene, however subtly, in the decline of oral culture facilitated by assimilation. They explore the possibility that writing may be a useful tool in a new phase of Inuit life, comparable to the tools made by hand in the past. The creative process remains an important aspect of writing (as it was of traditional tool carving), and, unlike oral storytelling, the process leaves a tangible—not just experiential—product.

But Peter Pitseolak has not embraced literacy without a sense of irony. In the oral autobiography that accompanies his written memoirs, he reveals,

Even before I was able to talk I had learned all the alphabet songs by listening

to people sing them. Okhamuk [Reverend E. J. Peck] taught the people the alphabets by singing. When the government had come to the north and they were handing out these papers with the Eskimo alphabet and the English alphabet, a man come and said, "You have to learn these." I told him, "I knew them before I could talk." He said, "You can't possibly know these," and I said, "What do you want me to do? Close my eyes and sing them to you?" He was very surprised that I knew them in both languages. He said, "So you have learned." (40)

In his exchange with the government official, Pitseolak denies the primacy of the imperial culture's medium. He had learned both the Inuit and the English alphabets, but his attitude depicts written language as being something even less than baby talk. At the same time, he admits he did not actually learn to *write* these written alphabets. One wonders whether Pitseolak isn't exaggerating for effect in saying that he knew the alphabets before he could talk. Taken at face value, however, his anecdote places singing prior to talking, so that the creative use of language is learned prior to its more pedestrian usage, at least according to this Inuk.

Contemporary writer Alooktook Ipellie often assumes a more consciously satirical approach toward writing for survival. In the poem "Waking Up," he takes a decidedly less enthusiastic view of the more modern descendent of handwriting: "The Arctic has become a classless society/Since the tools of the twenty-first century/Have finally arrived/. . . Waking up/Sitting in front of a damn computer/Breathing only used oxygen/Remembering my glory days/As a powerful shaman" (Moses 258). Ipellie recognizes technology as a tool, but his image of breathing stale air recalls Orpingalik's poetics with bitter irony; this shaman damns the technology that stifles his creative breath. Ipellie is also aware of the complexities inherent in assuming a shamanic role. A self-proclaimed outsider to both the Inuit and non-Inuit communities, Ipellie styles himself as a modern shaman in the introduction to *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares*. "I write about what I think is right in translating the failures and accomplishments of a distinct culture caught in an unpredictable cultural transition" (xiii). Ipellie occupies a place between his desire to assume the position of his people's shaman and the reality of his interpretive role for non-Inuit. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin characterize the position in *The Empire Writes Back*: "In that divided moment the interpreter discovers the impossibility of living completely through either discourse. The intersection of these two discourses on which the interpreter balances constitutes a site both exhilarating and disturbing" (80). In "Walking Both Sides of an Invisible Border," Ipellie articulates his post-colonial position: "Sometimes this border becomes so wide/That I am unable to take another step/My feet being too far apart" (Moses 264).

Inuit writers like Ipellie sometimes confront the alienating aspects of

being a postcolonial writer though satire, a genre that is firmly grounded in traditional beliefs. "Nowhere in Inuit lit[erature] is the belief in the power of words more evident than in the frequent use of satire" (McGrath 106). Alexis Pameok Ukatnaq's treatment of freedom of speech in "Blood-thirsty Enemies" is interesting for its challenge of the politics of that power: "I am appreciative because of the fact that in Canada there is what you call 'Freedom of Speech.' And I am most happy to know that many people take that advantage. I, for one, will take this opportunity and write about my ideas. I am not asking that there be action taken about this. . ." (Gedalof 83). Ukatnaq's subtext might suggest the government whose schools forbade Inuit children to speak their native language, while at the same time guaranteeing freedom of speech to the masses. Ukatnaq seizes her opportunity cautiously, careful not to ask for too much in light of the government's all-too-recent policy of assimilation. The ultimate inversion occurs when Ukatnaq reveals that the enemies "which have been irritating us, agitating us, even terrorizing us for many years" are mosquitoes. Ukatnaq perhaps ridicules the paternalistic approach toward Inuit life historically taken by the government agencies.

The rapid transition from orality to literacy in Inuit culture has produced a wealth of literature while imposing a semblance of silence on the oral tradition. In coming to terms with a new mode of expression, Inuit have had to confront the transference of voices from their traditional location within the community to a silent visual medium. As a result, Inuit literature embodies—intentionally or not—the realization of a gap between medium and culture; in allowing that space and writing around it so as to draw attention to it, Inuit writers have taken possession of the medium in a manner that preserves the tension between spoken and written language. In "Wonderful Life," Leah Idlout begins by articulating a desire to be the site of cross-culture understanding: "I wish I was a paper so everyone can see me or read me in their own kind of language with their own kind of taste and feeling" (Gedalof 57). Idlout's utopic image describes a tangible document available to all, one that allows each reader to maintain a distinct language while still understanding the text. But Idlout quickly abandons her wish, and ultimately welcomes (and writes) herself: "I am going to be just what I am." One hopes that Inuit writers will continue to embrace Idlout's resolve by subverting their silence and assuming their space within an emerging literature.

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