

The Crow Reincarnated as Jesus¹

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In memory of Tommy McGinty, a Tutchone First Nation Elder of great memory, a friend and a mentor.

Memory lives. It lives in real time. It constantly reinterprets itself, relates itself to the present. Otherwise it is no more. . . [The] continued proclamation of what Jesus said and did, *based on memory*. . . , is a continued historical event in the preaching and liturgy of the church. . . . As stages of consciousness succeed one another, [such a proclamation] reflects the changes. In a highly mythological era, it speaks to the mythologically tuned mind. In our historicist age, it attends to its own historicity, and even "demythologizes." (Ong, 1981: 168, italics supplied)

What Father Walter J. Ong, SJ, concedes about Christianity may always have been true of other faiths. Religion, when challenged by change, may well be a discourse to be simply "retold" and "reheard" in new terms, but remembering and keeping alive what it is remembering. One striking instance is given by the manner in which the last three or four generations of Northern Tutchone people of the Yukon Territory (Canada) have made the Athapaskan sacred chronicles they orally received from their forefathers and foremothers speak anew. Thus, the contemporary version of the *Story of Crow* (the Tutchone account of the creation of the world by the crow²) addresses issues such as the invention of submarines and motor boats or the connection between the crow, Virgin Mary, and Jesus Christ. Taking this contemporary narrative as an example, I present how new inclusions are made and the questions they answer. To skirt the danger of over-interpretation, I deliberately remain at a descriptive level, providing only what became absolutely obvious in my discussions with Tutchone Athapaskan elders in the field.

In the case at hand, what seems clear is that the supplements given to the story are in response to the Euro-Canadian cultural universe that has surrounded the Tutchone for close to a hundred years. This competing reality gradually introduced new objects, social facts, and symbolic configurations that were obviously unknown and, thus, unaccounted for in the earlier ver-

sions of the Tutchone chronicle of the creation of the world. However, over time, hiatuses appeared between the world evoked in the older Tutchone narrative and today's transfigured Tutchone universe. To bridge these gaps, Tutchone embedded additional components in their narrative. Yet, as will be seen, these supplements neither dilute the Tutchone content of the religious narrative nor adapt their tradition to make it fit the ideas lying behind the new Euro-American ideas and concepts (submarines, motor boats, Jesus, Virgin Mary, socio-cultural changes, etc.). In so doing, the inserts consolidate the relevance of the Tutchone account of the genesis of the world and thus prevent its otherwise certain demise from the contemporary Tutchone universe.

The field data support Jean Pouillon's insights (1991: 710-712) on the transmission of oral tradition. To reiterate a sacred narrative as exactly received is not necessarily to be faithful to it. When communication is exclusively oral, there is never a single "script" that must be told exactly as is, again and again. Oral tradition consists in the narrator remembering not a word-for-word "text" but an overall structure that tolerates and even fosters creativity (see also Goody, 198: 167-182). Field observations also allow us to go one step further. They give detailed particulars on how an "overall structure" recreates itself and perpetuates its relevance through the incorporation of carefully selected supplements and why it cannot be otherwise.

The Cultural, Historical, and Research Background of the Contemporary Narrative

Thus far, the *Story of Crow* has been termed a religious or sacred narrative. And so it is, but there needs to be some clarification at the outset. Even though the crow made the world, it never was, nor is, a god or God. Yet, but said quite otherwise, in as much as one must speak of God, in the mind of Tutchone, He is the crow—a proposition that paradoxically shatters the very Western concept of God, for the crow never was, nor is, worshipped.

The crow, which has been responsible for the genesis of the world, is the actual bird. However, at the beginning of times, it was not simply a bird. As elders put it, it was "both a human being and a bird, either way, back and forth." The crow of time immemorial is still present today in the form of the actual birds. When encountered in the bush, it may be saluted like a person, usually by an expression like "hello, grandfather" (after all, elders say, it is he who made the world), or it may not be. But other animals that do not have a role in Tutchone religious narratives are also talked to. When crows bother people, they may be shot at and killed like any other animal. The crow plays a role in shamanism by offering some individuals its help through its *zhäak*

(its spiritual power as well as its ready-made medicine songs), but it does so as an animal and as any other animal may do (except for the hare, which has no *zhānk* and is the only “clean” animal). Among Tutchone, the general position of animals in relationship to human beings has no true equivalent in European and Euro-American cultures. Animals never are simply animals in the Western sense. Conversely, the Western concept of god or God or deity and of the relationship human beings establish with such entities through sacrifices or prayers has no real equivalent in the Tutchone world view.

In regard to the historical background, the following should also be noted. Except for obviously recent inserts or ancillary comments, most of the episodes of today’s Tutchone story of the crow can eventually be related to the characteristics of the pre-contact culture (prior to the Klondike gold rush of 1898). What were the latter’s main features? How was it modified by the arrival of Canadians and Americans of European descent? A brief outline will provide the original socio-cultural context of the narrative and delineate the historical processes that led the *Chronicles of the crow* to come to treat the Euro-Canadian universe as already given since time immemorial, by the crow itself.

Northern Tutchone are a subarctic Athapaskan-speaking people that, around 1850, counted a dozen or so independent band societies—in all, about 1,100 individuals occupying an area almost as big as England, *stricto sensu*.³ Their economy was based exclusively on hunting and fishing. The gathering of berries and a few roots was a very minor activity, at best five percent of the production. There existed a form of social stratification, with some individuals being richer than others and in control of strategic resources as well as some being poor, and some others being domestic slaves to the rich. Crow’s chronicle makes a reference to such statuses.⁴

Descent was matrilineal, and all local groups were divided between two strictly exogamous matri-moieties: the crows and the wolves. There were no other kind of unilineal descent groups (clans or lineages, etc.). Residence was strictly matrilocal (or avunculocal when a man married his actual mother’s brother’s daughter). Polygyny and polyandry existed, as well as the sororate and the levirate. Without exception, there was total avoidance between mother-in-law and son-in-law. Later, we shall see how the crow dealt with this taboo.⁵

Tutchone were left alone and continued to be a politically independent people until the late 1890s.⁶ However, “left alone” does not mean isolated. By the early 1800s, Russians were trading with and settling among the Tlingit of the northwest Pacific coast. The Tlingit traded with the Southern Tutchone and these with the Northern Tutchone. By the late 1830s, the Northern Tutchone entered into direct annual trade contacts with the Tlingit. Accounts

of the Whiteman's ways and beliefs were then circulated. By the 1840s, many other Athapaskan peoples to the east and north of the Tutchone were dealing directly with non-Native fur traders and missionaries. These Athapaskans spread further information of the outside world. Thus, until 1848, Tutchone learned of new realities only by hearsay. After, contact was sporadic.

However, by the early 1850s, the period of indirect contact was over. A permanent trading post and a mission was established in the heart of Tutchone territory at Selkirk on the Yukon River. In 1898, the Klondike gold rush drew some thirty thousand Americans, Canadians and other nationals across Tutchone lands. They gave the Tutchone recipes for home-brewed alcoholic beverages. With them came more North West Mounted Police, who suppressed the Native practice of using force among themselves, depriving the Tutchone of their traditional means of enforcing their laws. As a result, the hierarchical structure was weakened and violations of the infra-moiety incest taboo went unpunished, snapping the earlier culture's backbone. Steamers sailed the Yukon and its tributaries in the summer. New stores and missions were built at various locations. From 1910 onward, most Tutchone groups stopped spending the whole year in the bush and gathered for a few months around the mission and store closest to them. Deliberate attempts to uproot Tutchone traditional religious beliefs were initiated by the Anglican Church and taken up, later, by the Catholic Church.

After World War II, summer river transportation was replaced by year-round road traffic. Permanent villages were created. They were first made of log cabins that have since been replaced (mainly in the 1980s) by modern houses with electricity, running water, bathrooms, satellite TV, etc. Starting in the 1940s and 1950s, children were forcibly taken from their parents and sent to spend years in religious boarding schools meant to deculturize them and re-educate them in western ways and, it was hoped, give them a future in Canadian society. Time spent by children in hunting or fishing camps was drastically reduced. By the 1960s, the welfare state, the lifting of the Indian Act ban on the purchase and consumption of alcohol by Native people, and the development of village schools completed the process and many Tutchone fell into depression and malaise so typical of the "reserve" scene.⁷

Land claims negotiations had begun in the Yukon in 1973 and, in the 1970s and 1980s, some Tutchone elders attempted to revitalize their society and culture. The version of the *Chronicle of the crow* discussed here was recorded at the end of that period from Mr. Tommy McGinty, who was recognized by his people as the best and most knowledgeable narrator of his time, and also certainly the funniest. Behind his erudition stood his relatives' and, especially, his grandfather (a man born in the 1850s who raised him) Copper Joe's

knowledge. The narrative was taped on three occasions, in 1984, and twice in 1990-91—twice for research purposes alone and once for Tutchone students taking a three-month Yukon College course on Tutchone culture delivered in Pelly Crossing. In the last instance, in 1991, Mr. McGinty attracted young people from three Tutchone communities. Audience response was enthusiastic. Every week, many of these First Nations students drove some one hundred kilometres to listen to him and a few other elders.

Mr. McGinty's wish to have the narrative told, taped and written came from a fear that failure to do so might lead to its definitive demise. His fear is justified. For the last decades, all Tutchone children, teenagers and young adults had been educated in the Euro-Canadian school system that left no room for Tutchone culture, beyond rudimentary lip service. Camp life and time for storytelling had almost disappeared. His aim was to have a scribe (me) who could provide Tutchone schools with a written version of this narrative. His hope was that it would be passed down to generations to come.

This book was completed and published as *Tommy McGinty's Northern Tutchone Story of Crow*.⁸ How will the passage from an oral transmission to a written one affect the narrative? We shall have to wait and see. For now I focus on how the *Story* has been enhanced in the last three or four generations to account for an earth-shaking event—the exposure of the Tutchone universe to the Whiteman's world and the eventual colonization of the Tutchone world by Euro-Canadians.

Religious Beliefs and The Story of Crow

The contemporary Tutchone genesis begins at the dawn of time when the crow was both bird and man (either way, back and forth, as the Tutchone elders put it). Let us summarize:

Crow's mind is telling crow that a flood is coming. Crow kills two waterfowls, takes their skins, puts a duck skin on, and lets himself float to the sky. Water soon fills the space between earth and sky. Crow saves his life by putting on the second skin that comes with a long pointed beak and by breathing (thanks to this beak) through a hole in the firmament made by a star. After the water recedes only one rock emerges. A seal and her baby are resting on it. Crow steals the baby and blackmails the seal-mother: she will get her pup back only if she brings up from underwater pieces of earth that are needed to rebuild the world. She agrees. When she is finished, Crow gives her the baby back. Mother and pup swim away, never to return. Crow works for a long time on the pieces brought back to the surface, moving them around as he would do with rafts. When he is finished he has put together a new world over the water. However, to his dismay, there is no open place left for water. No one can drink or get fish to eat. After wandering throughout his world, he finally locates a hole in the ground. Beneath

it, there is water flowing and fish aplenty. But the hole is owned by an osprey who refuses to share. Crow retreats into the bush where he makes several birds out of the leaves of trees. One of them is an owl and becomes his sister's son. The others are hawks and become Crow's soldiers. Crow and the other birds scare the osprey away and steal his water and fish. They fill their bellies and fly away. Here and there, they drop water from the air to make lakes and rivers. Into them they drop a male and female fish belonging to the same species. Row tells the fish to reproduce and multiply. He also tells them the taboos that men, women and children will have to respect. Time passes. Trees and plants spread. New animals develop. Some of them are good, others are evil (giant snakes, etc.).

The details of this first episode show that it does not share very much, if anything, with Christian mythology. However, the same cannot be said of the part immediately following.

This second episode starts with the crow being unhappy about all that has turned bad in his world: "He is thinking: 'All the worst things have to go; the world has to be flooded again.' At this point, somebody talks to him from the air." The contemporary narrator adds that it may have been Moses:

The voice tells the crow to build a big boat. Crow does so and embarks the moose, the bears, the caribous, etc., but leaves behind his hawk soldiers (they forgot to come on time), the wild goats and sheep as well as the giant snakes, the elephants, etc. The flood starts and the waters eventually cover the whole earth except for the summits of the highest mountains. Goats and sheep are saved by climbing to these high places where they still live today. However, the hawks, the giant snakes, and the elephants are all drowned. After a while, through "medicine dreaming," crow causes the sea, lakes and the rivers to recede to their original level.

I use "medicine dreaming" or "medicine thinking" for the mental activity used in shamanism—a powerful type of action inaugurated by the crow for the use of all human beings to come.

The narrator concludes that the flood must have been very rough and reminds his Tutchone audience of the huge rocks it stacked up in the middle of the Pelly River—rock piles that are still there, close to the present village, as all Tutchone know too well. He adds that when the first Anglican missionary came to visit the Tutchone in the 1890s, Indians told him of this episode of crow's chronicle. The minister declared that it was a true story, that it was a Bible story. Then the narrator adds further concrete proofs for the second flood: "In the thirties he was working with two local Euro-Canadian prospectors. While digging the ground for gold, they came upon the frozen body of an elephant," (probably a mammoth). The narrator then explains what happened, "During the second flood, the animal was drowned and covered by sand and silt. After the water receded the ground turned into permafrost and had ever since kept the animal frozen there. One miner cut a steak for

himself from the mammoth's leg." For Tutchone, the second flood is as genuinely an Athapaskan episode of the true epic of the crow as the first one. What convinces that this is so?

First, the structure of this episode with its ancillary comments follows the Athapaskan delivery style. In daily life or in the course of a narration, crow's actions are often used to explain the world. Some of them account for physical aspects of the environment, others for facets of society, etc. An example will illustrate this point. While canoeing on a major river, my main informant and I came upon a high bank showing several layers of soil of different colours and textures. Curious, I pointed out the bank. To my Tutchone friend, the phenomenon was unsurprising: it was from the time when the crow made the first world, moving around and piling up pieces of earth retrieved by the seal mother from under the waters. "This kind of place," he added, "is what proves that crow's story is really true—and there are lots of things everywhere showing his other doings in this Yukon country." The correspondence between the details of crow's acts described in the full-length narrative (not in the above summary) and the appearance of the site was striking. This puzzled me. Congruence between epic and reality satisfies curiosity about the real while awakening it to the epic: Why couldn't it be true? What if it were? Should it not be? The correspondence between the narrative and the appearance of the bank made it unbearable to sever epic from reality again—even for me, with my awareness of the competing claims of geology.

The narration of the second flood fully resorts to similar traditional mesmerizing devices. In it, reality and epic are also in harmony. First, the episode explains why sheep and goats live on the summits of the mountains. Second, the audience is referred to huge rocks amassed here and there in the middle of the Pelly River by the flood. Last, the narrator evokes a frozen mammoth ("elephant") that was found in the ground. This makes the match between reality and this part of the contemporary version of the sacred *Story* even more concrete. How could this have happened if the crow had not left some animals out of his boat?

Yet, here the audience may have some doubt about the truth of the anecdote. Only the narrator has seen the frozen animal. The only "elephants" ever spotted in the Yukon are those shown on television or at travelling circuses. The narrator anticipates the problem and solves it by anchoring the episode to a detail that Tutchone will not dispute: no Indian in his right mind would have eaten a steak out an unknown animal but White folks are known to be so daring. As White people are also known to the Tutchone as breaking all kinds of Indian hunting and cooking taboos without bringing any bad luck upon themselves, the incident may very well be true. By extension, the

narrator's comment on the mammoth and the story of the crow must also be true.

A second factor contributes to convince Tutchone of the pre-contact origin of this episode. During his childhood, the narrator was taught that the second flood was part of his ancestors' religious heritage before they had met missionaries. He reminds his audience of this. This legacy is most likely accurate for the following reasons. Tlingit Indians heard some of the Christian lore from Russians who had settled among them in the 1800s and, early on, may have spread some of the tales into the southern Yukon, among the Tagish and Southern Tutchone with whom they traded. As is common in such cases, the tales may have already been reworked to fit into the pre-existing Tlingit mental universe. From there, the stories may have been further transformed and later diffused to the Northern Tutchone groups (see Map 1) where they arrived in an Athapaskan format. The sheep and goats detail in crow's second flood seems to indicate that it happened in this way. Obviously, this item is not from the Noah's Ark story. It comes from an altogether different sacred tale current among Southern Tutchone and Tagish (see McClellan, 1974) but not among the Northern Tutchone. Other data indicate that the Athapaskan decomposition of the Ark episode could very well have taken place in the southern Yukon before the 1830s and could have been passed on to the Northern Tutchone during the same period.

That an oral tradition may be modified without external pressures needs to be explained. Athapaskans do not function as if they were creative within an "overall structure." They believe that they tell their oral tradition exactly as it was handed down to them. However, they deny that the oral context in which this tradition was received has allowed for enrichments, enhancements and supplements. As Stanley Jonathan, one of the most knowledgeable narrators once explained to me:

Marriage makes men move around quite a bit [residence is matrilineal]. So, in any camp there are some who come from different places and tell the same story in different ways. To know the true story you have to listen to everybody and put the pieces back together. This is what I did when I was young. I always sat by old stumps [old men] and listen to all of them and that is why I now know how to tell their stories the right way.

Thus, what may have happened when some Southern Tutchone started to narrate a new flood episode could have been as simple as follows. Some Northern Tutchone listeners and future narrators noticed that it was too different to simply be another version of their own flood story; yet, as the idea of a flood was already an Athapaskan belief, they accepted the second account as plausible and came to the conclusion that there must have been

two different events. In passing, it should be noted that if an oral text can be and is regularly transformed in such a manner, it might be illusory to at-



Map 1 The Yukon and location of Aboriginal occupation. Chilkat trails and waterways into Tutchone country and Chilkat-Tutchone meeting and trading grounds between 1843 and 1852, based on information given in 1867 by a Chilkat leader named Koh-Klux. Map by author.

tempt to derive its deeper meaning from the precise sequence of its episodes in a given culture at a given time as some schools of thought such as structuralism once did.⁹

Here, however, the important point is that the local history of the diffusion of ideas made the first missionary among the Tutchone acknowledge that one of crow's flood episodes was the same story as the one Christians believe in. For Tutchone this was and still is crucial. To them, it meant and still signifies that *Indian* tradition concurs with that of the Christian newcomers. By implication, all the episodes of crow's chronicle could not but be equally true and part of what the colonizers called the Bible, a text that nobody had really heard. From then on, narrators started to conclude some accounts of crow's most spiritual doings with phrases such as: "That's why old Indians called this crow's story the Bible story." In many such cases, though, no parallel can be drawn between what the crow did in the Athapaskan narrative and anything told in either the Old or New Testaments. For instance, the quotation above comes from the end of the tenth episode of crow's epic, right after we are taught that crow's mind went to the sun after his last death, and that, because of this, it is also the dwelling place of the souls of First Nations people who do not wish to reincarnate on earth anymore.

Today's Tutchone have heard the Biblical version of Noah's Ark. However, it is easy to see why the narrative of crow's second flood perpetuates itself in its composite form. It gives the actual Biblical account of the flood the status of a relative truth and allows its Judeo-Christian form to be challenged by Tutchone. It thus contributed to plant doubts in the minds of those Natives who could be tempted to reject Athapaskan traditions in order to adopt Christianity as if such a rejection were necessary.

As the missionary who holds a book and says, "Here is the Bible and it contains the truth," the Tutchone narrator tells his people: "Here is a true story, our first minister said so, this is the Bible story." Missionaries are still competing for Natives' ears and minds, still insisting the "Bible story" is the one and only truth. To apply the name of the Westerners' sacred book to the Tutchone tradition helped and still helps to keep Tutchone within their own sacred account of the world. This episode is also key to allowing Tutchone to refuse missionaries' beliefs in a single truth that excludes all others. In fact, in as much as the colonizer does not and cannot recognize the value of Tutchone religious tradition, to make such an equation may be interpreted as an act of resistance on the part of a disempowered people. Crow's second flood is the bridge over which the Tutchone may carry their religious tradition into the only universe that colonizers will perceive as spiritual.

Later on, after 1900, Tutchone were taught various other elements of

Christianity. They heard them when visiting trading posts, directly from missionaries, in a Western format, and, in these instances, they were unable to recognize in them episodes of their existing Athapaskan traditions. These new accounts were, however, also being labelled Bible stories by the ministers and, as by then Bible story also meant crow's story for most Athapaskans, Tutchone attempted to make sense of them.

Many parts of the colonizers' religious traditions could not meaningfully be connected to crow's chronicle, even indirectly. The Tutchone never listened to these and they never became associated with Tutchone tradition. However, they recognized in some Christian tales, ideas or concepts analogous to those already set forth by the crow, truthful elements they appropriated as further developments of the Athapaskan Genesis. The best example of this process is present-day narrators treating the life of Jesus as a sequel to crow's story and thinking it is perfectly congruent with their tradition.

In order to see how the connection between the crow and Jesus is made, we must look first at the last episode of the *Story of Crow* and then return to the tenth that explains on what ground Jesus may be interpreted as being an avatar of crow.

The final episode of the entire chronicle comes many generations after the crow had divided an original all-male people into male and female, giving them a law strictly prohibiting incest (moiety endogamy), and instructing them to reproduce and how to have sex the proper way:

After much time has passed and many further adventures, crow feels that Indians are getting to be too numerous. He worries about them killing off game animals and decides that some people should die. This he resolves to achieve by making them starve. It is winter time. Every morning, crow sits on a tree, watches where the hunters are going, flies ahead of them making lots of noise, and thus chases all the game away. People starve and start to die. Their relatives cover their bodies with spruce branches before abandoning them. Crow spots the green patches from the air, waits for everybody to be gone, lands on the patch, pushes the branches aside and pokes out the eyes of the corpses, looking for the eye-fat. This is what he loves to eat the most, and this is what he still does today with dead animals' eyes. At last, a couple discovers a stratagem to stop crow and escape death. They live in an area with lots of snow and moose. They make camp under a coniferous tree with very low branches that hide them. Crow hears them talk, though. When will they die? He decides to leave for the night and come back to check again in the morning. As soon as he is gone, the man starts digging a tunnel under the snow from the base of the tree. He works all night and comes out in the open after passing several hills. . . . Crow comes back to the camp in the morning. Only the woman is around. Crow asks questions. She says that her husband is still sleeping under the tree branches and that if he dies she will let him know. Crow agrees and leaves for another camp. Meanwhile, out of sight

thanks to the hills, the man kills two moose, lights a fire, and brings back cooked meat using his snow tunnel. Husband and wife eat under the tree branches. Crow goes to sleep on a tree nearby. Next morning, the man plays dead. His wife covers him with fresh spruce boughs, starts to holler that her husband had died and then runs away in the bush. Crow wakes up and follows her asking her where she is going. Then he realizes his stupidity: the fat of the eyes of the dead man is going to freeze. He rushes back to the camp. The woman turns around and follows him. Soon, she hears her husband hollering. Crow had landed on him to punch his eyes out. The man had taken his hands out from under the branches and grabbed him by his two legs. The woman joins her husband. Crow is caught for good. They strangle him and then cut him to pieces. They throw them into a huge fire which they let burn all day and night. In the morning the man looks through the ashes. Everything is gone but a tiny piece of crow's liver. The man makes another pyre. Yet, the piece of liver never burns. And it stinks. Disgusted, he finally throws it far away in the snow. . . . However, crow comes back to life as soon as his piece of liver touches the ground, and he flies away promising to be back in two days.

The narrator concludes the entire sacred epic with the following remarks:

Crow's last words were: "I'll come back in two days." But he has not come back yet. . . . He went some place East to be born again through the Virgin Mary. Crow turned into a Whiteman. . . . Into Jesus. He went to work for the Whiteman. . . . And as Jesus, he preached pretty near all over the world but not here, not in this Indian country. And after crow was put to death on the cross he went to the sun for good. . . . That is why old timer Indians say that crow's story is the Bible story.

Clearly, to recognize and make Jesus' story part of crow's epic reveals very skilful thinking about the nature of the relationship between two sacred traditions in a colonial context. First, it resolves why colonizers did not and still do not know about crow's epic. It also tells Tutchone not to worry about it. What can be expected from a people unfortunately left ignorant? Second, it untangles the question of why Indians never heard of Jesus before encountering missionaries. Third, while making belief in Tutchone and Christian traditions compatible, it maintains the crow as the agent of Genesis. By transforming Jesus into an avatar of the crow, it preserves the relevance of the Athapaskan sacred narrative. It also confers more knowledge about the spiritual to Indians than to Euro-Canadians—an assertion through which pride in the Athapaskan culture is rekindled.

But again, why are Tutchone convinced that Jesus' story is but a sequel to their tradition? The answer lies in an earlier and longer episode of the *Story* in which crow married a muskrat woman. A summary will clarify the matter:

Crow and his muskrat wife are walking along the shore of a lake. A trout swims nearby. Crow provokes the fish: "Fish, see this good-looking woman here with me. I wish she were your wife. But that's mine." Crow keeps on walking, followed

by his wife. Later on, he turns around to talk to her and to his horror discovers that she is gone. The fish calls him from the middle of the lake: "Look at my wife here." The rat woman is sitting on the trout's back. The fish dives and disappears with the woman. After crying a lot, crow finally resolves to get his wife back. An old frog woman proposes to help. She lifts the water like one lifts up a blanket to show what is going on at the bottom of a bed. Crow's wife is at the bottom of the lake bed and behind her some sort of huge fire is making a kind of light that is absent in the world above. It is the sun. Now crow wants to steal not only his wife back but the sun too. The frog lets the water fall back into the lake. Before she will let crow go in, he will have to guess what kind of bedding she wishes to sleep on. After many trials he discovers that she wants to lie down on a pile of pussy willow. He satisfies her request and she lets him go to the lake bottom by lifting the water up again. There, he discovers that the trout has a wife and a daughter. This is a "big shot" or high-class family. They never work or do a thing. The daughter is not allowed out and when she needs to go to the bathroom a woman walks with her, "wipes her ass," etc. The trout has made crow's wife a slave. Crow meets his wife in secret. She tells him that her boss keeps the sun in his house never letting anyone touch it and that the only thing he is afraid of is steam. Crow thinks a stratagem through and instructs the rat woman about the part she will play in it. From afar, he sees the trout girl stepping out. He starts to medicine-think. "Get dry, thirsty," he tells her, getting through to her mind directly. "I wish you walk down to the river and take water yourself." She gets thirsty. Her muskrat slave offers a cup. She refuses it. Same thing with her mother, and then with her father. She insists on going alone to the river. She is finally given permission. She reaches the shore and fills her cup. There is a tiny speck of black dirt in it. She dumps it and fills it anew. The speck is still there. Again and again it comes back. Crow, who is hidden nearby, gets through the woman's thinking once more: "you drink it down with the dirt inside." She does and goes back to her camp. Soon after she is pregnant and has a baby boy.

At this point, the narrator offers a comment:

This is the same kind of story as that of Virgin Mary. The girl was talked to by a bird; from the beginning the black speck was crow's spirit. . . . She swallowed it and got pregnant without ever getting a man through her. Crow showed the way ahead of everybody. He did it for the Indians to follow in his footsteps and for the Whiteman too. That is why many dead peoples' spirits roam around villages. They try to find a young woman's womb, get in, and be born again. And when it happens to a girl you are pretty sure she has never known a man, she is just like Virgin Mary.

Then, the narrative is continued:

Crow makes the boy want to play with the sun as a ball. The trout-man, who adores his grandchild, finally gives in. However, as a precaution, he has a high fence built around the camp. The rat slave dumps water in the camp fire. It steams. The trout family runs into a hole except for the boy who keeps playing in the fenced yard. Crow makes the boy kick the sun over the fence, steals it and

runs away with it and his wife. A chase follows. . . . Crow and his muskrat wife escape. . . . Later, crow has his owl nephew (sister's son) and other birds hang the sun in the sky. Now the world is properly lit and there are days and nights.

This episode is very important to Tutchone. Their faith tells that people who do not wish to die reincarnate after their deaths. Only those who wish to relinquish the possibility of life for ever go to dwell on the sun. A reincarnated person looks like a normal baby except that when it starts to speak it remembers places where it has lived before, etc. Sometimes its own parents will call it grandfather or aunt, etc., if it is believed to be the reincarnation of this or that person.

For our purposes, the most interesting aspect of the contemporary version is that the very possibility of reincarnation comes from crow's ideas and actions. For Tutchone, to attribute such a genealogy to their own institutions is entirely within tradition. Many ancillary comments in the narrative remind audiences that behind most episodes lie deeper concepts that the crow devised for the benefit of the world. For us, it reveals that, long before being exposed to Christianity, Tutchone had both a notion of spiritual incarnation and of virgin births, and that these two notions were fully rooted in their charter sacred narrative. Thus, it now becomes clear why the epic of Jesus can satisfactorily be treated as part of that of the crow. Was not Jesus conceived by a spirit? Was not his birth announced by a bird? Was not Mary both pregnant and virgin? Is this not a mystery for the Church? Is it not more intelligible to a culture that has been bequeathed crow's story and that has believed, from time immemorial, in the possibility of the maker of the world reincarnating at will through a dissociation of body and spirit, and for people to do so after death has caused this dissociation?

Indeed, the particulars of Jesus' birth in the East make perfect sense to Tutchone. First, they conform to the older accounts of crow's ways and doings. Second, and no doubt more importantly, they explain in Tutchone terms why colonized and colonizer have different traditions. Thus, Tutchone tradition reaffirms a link between the Athapaskan epic and the new social reality. Faith in the contemporary version of the narrative ensues from this match and seems to originate, at least in part, in mental processes already evoked: those that lie behind the mesmerizing of the mind when there exists an indisputable congruence between observable reality and the details of a sacred "text"—in other words, in processes that lock the mind into the aesthetic of congruence or co-contingence.

Laws of Nature and Western Technology are also Derived from What Crow did at the Dawn of Time

Tutchone insistence on the relevance of their most sacred narrative does not stop at the religious sphere of the colonizer, however. For Tutchone, the *Story of Crow* also explains Western technological inventions as embodiments of concepts already developed in crow's epic. Many instances exist in the *Story*. The sixteenth episode provides one such example, and illustrates how traditional form of accounting for reality may be extended to new facts. This episode opens when people are eaten by a cannibal horsefly man living upriver:

Crow decides to kill it. He makes a canoe out of sand in the way one makes a sand castle but uses his urine to smooth the sand and make it set into a harder compound. He medicine-thinks over the boat and makes it the fastest in the world. Crow reaches the horsefly's place in no time. He entices the cannibal into a canoe race and easily wins. Then, at the instigation of the crow, the horsefly and crow exchange canoes. The insect-man reaches the middle of the river while crow is still close to shore. Crow starts to medicine-think again and makes the urine-sand compound dissolve. The sand-boat sinks. The horsefly, who does not know how to swim, has terrible difficulties staying above water. Crow rushes in, grabs the man-insect by the back of its head, lifts it up and bends its neck backward over the edge of the wall of the canoe, exposing the throat. He then cuts off the insect's head. The body sinks. Crow keeps the head, brings it back and shows the people who [it was that] was eating them.

Today, as in earlier times, the episode is concluded by such remarks as, "This is why a horsefly can now turn its head around several times; and it is the crow who did that, it is he who made the world go this way." The contemporary version also extends the explanatory scope of the *Story*. The episode now serves to account for why White people have been able to build speed boats and also why the huge steamboats they launched on the Yukon River have sometimes sunk. The Whiteman's idea for the speed boat clearly comes from crow's sand boat scheme. The Athapaskan chronicle of how the world was made has existed from the beginning of time; Euro-Canadians have simply followed in crow's footsteps.

A last example may be provided from the eighth episode that nowadays also refers to submarines. In it, the connection established between the *Story of Crow* and the new reality seen in films or on television is as congruent as the parallels drawn in the apparently much older sediments of the narrative. This episode starts with crow looking for something to eat:

He is on the shore of a lake. He gathers some dry wood and native matches, some rocks and a birch bark pot filled with water. A sucker fish swims close by and is tricked by the crow into opening its mouth. Crow flies inside and lands in its belly. As he finds the place too stuffy, he cuts open the fish's blow pipe. Now he can breathe well. He looks around. The guts are all covered with fat. Crow gets all excited. He is going to make fish grease and eat real well. He makes a fire, gets his rocks red hot, throws them in the bark pot and gets the water boiling.

The smoke darkens the inside of the fish but crow does not care. He furls the guts into the hot water and makes fish grease, lots of it. He drinks it all. But this is much too much. He gets bad stomach cramps. He has to go to the bathroom right away. He sees the fish anus at the other end, runs there, makes it his toilet bowl and shoots his grease out. . . . But he is still hungry for fat. He runs back to his pot, drinks more. The cramps come back. He rushes to his back-house. Yet, he cannot stop eating and is soon running back and forth between the pot where he makes more grease and the toilet bowl. From the lake shore it looks very funny. Behind the fish there is a huge trail of grease. . . . Finally, there is no more suet on any of the guts. Crow cuts the heart to get its fat. The fish is now agonizing and, as a last reflex, jumps all over the place as fast as a bullet. Inside, crow is tossed around like a piece of loose cargo. He tries to steady himself by grabbing a piece of hanging guts. But it is too slippery. He skids to the back end of the fish, falls into the fish's ass-hole and gets nearly drowned in what he has shot out earlier. . . . In the end he extricates himself from this mess.

As in the past, this episode is still given as the explanation of a natural phenomenon. At the appropriate time the narrator reminds the audience of the peculiar appearance of the inside of suckers:

When you gut it, you can see lots of black skin inside. This comes from the time of crow's smoky fire. Another thing you notice is that there is never any fat on a sucker's guts or heart—there is never any, not even when the rest of the fish is really fat—and this, that is because crow ate it all. Something else: when you open this kind of fish, it smells real bad. That is because crow's bathroom was in there. With the sucker, that is why you gut the ass-hole off first and throw it right away.

Today, however, the episode also accounts for additional and new phenomena. Just after the crow found a way to breathe by cutting the fish's blow pipe, the narrator comments as follows:

And this crow did for everybody to follow in his tracks. That's why the Whiteman can make submarines and work in mines. Crow's big fish, that's just the same ideas as the submarine. Same thing with mines: when guys go five hundred feet underground, they bring air with pipes and they breathe good all the same. The Whiteman didn't find all this by himself. He just went the same way as crow went with the big sucker fish.

The narrator also preserves the humour of the episode by finally comparing the long trail made by crow's greasy excrement coming out of the fish's anus to the oil spill left behind a submarine hit by a mine—a scene he saw some fifty years ago in a newsreel shown in the capital city of the Yukon during World War II.

Three questions arise from such supplements. Why are they made? Why are they successful with Tutchone audiences? What are their social effects? I shall answer on the basis of discussions with the narrator and other Tut-

chone. Tommy McGinty's early education was thoroughly traditional and, except for a few seasonal paid jobs as a deck-hand on steamers, a logger, etc., his whole life was that of a fisherman, hunter and trapper—that is, from his standpoint, of a man who, to feed a family of six, worked on obtaining the cooperation of wild animals in large part through medicine-thinking. His life experience is that behaviours and processes in nature and society conform to facts and laws instituted by the actions of crow (a reference to what I term congruence between the epic and the real). His faith in *Crow's Story* never wavers.

At the same time, he is also quite open to the Whiteman's universe. In the thirties, in his late teens, after seeing his first hydro-plane, he observed its floating technique and used it to invent a faster raft that he called an air plane raft (instead of the traditional twenty logs side-by-side, a single big log with two others mounted on a cross-piece to keep the centre log steady). What Western implements do and how they work does not surprise him much for he comprehends their functioning quickly. However, what does puzzle him is where White people got the concepts for the implements. Firm in his belief that the crow gave general blueprints for all human activities to come and that the crow reincarnated among White men as Jesus, he is, unavoidably, led back to the Tutchone account of Genesis. As he, himself, states, in effect, the issue is to think through the manner in which the Whiteman's activities match crow's. And one must admit that his analogies are often consummate. The crow in the sucker is, indeed, like a Whiteman in a submarine and, in any case, the idea of the submarine does, in fact, precede its invention.

At this juncture, why innovations are made in the narrative becomes obvious. They are answers in traditional epistemology to perceived gaps between the *Story* and new facts that are adding up into the real from outside. To make such innovations is to keep what was meaningful in the past just as meaningful today and this without any serious paradigmatic shifts. The world view of the First Nation is thus transmitted almost intact, structurally speaking.

One may now answer why the contemporary narrative is so successful with younger Tutchone, who have been estranged from part of the culture by the imperiousness of Euro-Canadian schooling and missions. Basically, as now told, the narrative demolishes in the mind of the colonized, the Euro-Canadian colonizer's claim to superiority and progress. Certainly, the Whiteman's accomplishments are interesting but they are not really his. The crow, the Athapaskan maker of the world, gave him concepts that have existed from the beginning of times for all to use. Progress is an illusion. In all cultures, peoples exert the same intellectual capacities. What motivates Western-

educated Tutchone to listen to and uphold the *Story of Crow* might be that, in the Yukon, it is the only existing discourse that attempts to position peoples of European and Athapaskan stock on an equal intellectual footing.

Why, then, should the disempowered, rather than the rulers, make this move toward coevalness? Albert Hourani (1991: 300), who studied the impact of being colonized among Arab-speakers, provides a thoughtful observation:

Defeat goes deeper into the human soul than victory. To be in someone else's power is a conscious experience which induces doubts about the ordering of the universe, while those who have power can forget about it, or can assume that it is part of the natural order of things. . . .

Breakdown in the Cultural Order Also Stems from the Crow

So far, we have focussed on Euro-Canadian addenda to the Tutchone aboriginal universe and the potential of *Crow's Story* to account for them. But these have also been subtractions from the aboriginal cultural order: younger individuals do not respect many of the former taboos, other older Tutchone laws are on the wane, etc. Can crow's epic also explain such changes? Our contemporary narrator believes it does. He locates in the aboriginal narrative the origin of the possibility of such disorders, transforming today's changes into facts that were to be expected because of what the crow did at the dawn of times, going so far as describing under what conditions he, the narrator, has himself been able to transgress some prohibitions with impunity. His position comes from a specific episode making the crow responsible for the idea of cultural breakdown. This part of the narrative begins with the crow meeting a young woman and her mother. "Crow proposes to the girl and marries her. Night comes and everybody goes to bed. The girl lies down in the middle between crow and her mother. . . ." (Tutchone law totally forbids a man from touching, watching or talking to his mother-in-law. No matter what, he must tell what he wants to his wife and then she must repeat it to her mother.) The narrative continues:

A fire is burning at the entrance of the brush-camp throwing heat and light around. The girl's mother gets too hot. She lifts her legs up and takes her pants off starting from under the buttocks. Crow raises his head and watches sideways over his wife's body. "Gosh," his mother-in-law has "real good-looking legs." He "falls in love with them" and spends all night thinking about what he is going to do. In the morning he has found out. He plays real sick and tells his wife he is going to die unless someone goes to fetch a special plant that is the only remedy for his illness.

"Tell your mother to go on top of the back-hills. That's where the medicine grows. It is easy to find. When you come close, it shouts: 'dän aa zak, dän aa zak. . . .' She just has to walk to where the noise comes from and when she reaches it, she

has to turn around, pull her pants down and sit on the plant. After that she can pick it up."

The girl tells her mother and the older woman is on her way. Crow tells his wife he is going to soothe his ache by cooling down his head in a brook close by. As soon as he is out of sight, he takes off and runs to the hill top. He finds a place covered with thick moss. The plant he was thinking about grows there. It looks like a penis, a hard one. He picks one up and goes to hide under the moss blanket with it. From underneath he makes a hole and sticks his penis out through the moss. He hears his mother-in-law coming.

"*Dän aa zak, dän aa zak. . .*," he hollers.

She comes to the spot, looks and sees the plant, turns around, walks backward, pull her pants down and sits on it. Crow pushes his hands through the moss, grabs her hips and makes love to her. When he is finished, he pulls his penis out real quick and replaces it with the plant. His mother-in-law gets up. She is startled. It is a plant alright.

"Golly, it must be a strong medicine," she says. Yet, she cannot help remembering seeing two hands on her hips, too, and with only three fingers. She picks the plant up and goes back to camp. Crow gets out and runs back full speed. Before getting to the camp, he wets his head in the brook. His wife is worried about his tardiness, but he explains that it took a long time to quiet down his headache. His mother-in-law arrives. Crow pretends that he feels a little better. He will take the medicine only if he gets worse again. . . .

Next morning he goes hunting. During the day the mother tells her daughter about the two hands with three fingers on her hips. They agree that crow tricked her. Night time comes. Crow finds his bed set in the middle, between the two women. He says, "what for? I can't sleep there!" His wife tells him that they have found out and that he might as well take daughter and mother as wives now. Crow is relieved. Soon he jumps all around shouting: "I've two wives now!" At daybreak he goes back hunting again. But as is well known, he is a very bad hunter and, as usual, he gets nothing. Now, he is going to have to be real smart if he wants to keep his two wives as he intends.

The narrator explains that a good hunter leaves the moose carcass for his wife to bring back to camp next day and comes back home with only some of the animal innards in his pack-sack.

As crow knows that he is never going to kill a moose, he takes his knife, cuts his own ass-hole, pulls his guts out and packs everything home. "My wives, I got a moose," he says. "Take the guts and cook them." His new wife complains that the guts taste like shit. "Don't worry, that's because the moose fed in a muddy lake," he replies. She eats. Everybody goes to bed. During the night crow starts bleeding badly between his legs. He tries to stop the flow with a plug made of the kind of moss used for menstrual blood and baby diapers. His attempts fail and he is found dead in the morning. His wives cry but soon discover the truth of his death. "No wonder these moose guts smelled so bad!" Disgusted, they throw crow's corpse over the bush. As soon as it touches the ground, crow comes

back to life and flies away.

In this episode, the crow transgresses two taboos. First, he tricked his mother-in-law into having sex with her son-in-law. Second, as if this were not bad enough, he had sex with her on top of him (in Tutchone culture under no circumstances are women allowed to step over a man—this would make him lose his animal spirit-helpers for hunting). As all crow's doings were to inspire people, to give them ideas, clearly today's transgressions can be blamed on the crow. Breaking existing laws is as old as crow's idea of the submarine.

Should people really follow the example? Not quite. After all, the crow loses his hunting luck. But Mr. McGinty, the narrator, suggests a middle ground:

True, it's *duhuli*, "bad luck," for a man if a woman steps over him. Real "bad luck." Everybody knows that. But there are ways around. Before I was married, when I worked as a deck-hand on steamboats on the Yukon River, one American tourist wanted to make out with me. She was pretty good looking. So we went some place. But then she wanted to make love and tried to step over me to sit on top. We undressed but I told her about the *duhuli*. She didn't understand anything about it. She just looked at me with her big round eyes: what's *duhuli*? Me, then, I didn't know the Whiteman didn't know about the "bad luck" laws. And she still wanted to go on top. She wouldn't change her mind and was going to leave. So, I said: "Never mind about the *duhuli*, I just found a way to get around it anyway. You stand there with your legs wide open. Wait for me. I'll lay down on the ground away from you. Then I'll crawl on my back until my body is right between your legs and my own thing right under your bunny. Then, you'll sit down on top of me" So, that's the way we did it. She never stepped over me. That's me who moved under her. No *duhuli* this way, I guess.

Now this anecdote might not be true. But it could very well be. The narrator was an earthy and witty man. The truth might also lie elsewhere. In his culture, tradition is not necessarily contradicted by innovation. Is it not true that his own story is very much in the style of what the Athapaskan maker of the world, the crow, has done under the pressure of similar urges? That is why it also makes us laugh. It might, in turn, be a way to prove the relevance of the spirit of the crow in today's transfigured world—more precisely to demonstrate the continued pertinence of the crow's sacred and yet comic frame of mind before his reincarnation as Jesus, and to his "being suffered on the cross by the Whiteman."

Conclusion

Thus far, the gist of this essay is that Tommy McGinty and the Tutchone Elders who preceded him relied on the interpretative potentials of their character sacred text to integrate new social facts, beliefs and commodities into their

own tradition. However, while this is true in a Euro-Canadian perspective, the statement is false from a Tutchone philosophical standpoint. In the latter case, each Euro-Canadian story, social fact or object was first decoded as other human beings' expressions of ideas that were already present in the most ancient and sacred Tutchone oral narrative. Thus, Christian lores were not heard as bringing new "Good News" but, rather, as *incorporating some Athapaskan truth—a truth content somehow twisted or distorted by Euro-Canadians who never knew the crow before his reincarnation as Jesus*. Western technological thought, as embodied in engines, motor boats, submarines, etc., were similarly recognized as the implementation by foreigners of some of the ideas that the Athapaskan maker of the world had already set forth at creation. Even the socio-cultural changes induced by being subjected to the power of Euro-Canadians were accounted for in Athapaskan terms. Through trials, errors or plain mischief, the crow had given the example of breaking the rules in much earlier times.

This is why Jean Pouillon (1991) is right in insisting that tradition in an oral form can be faithful not by repeating itself word-for-word but by fostering creativity. In the Tutchone case, the incorporation of new episodes and new ancillary comments has been feasible without destroying the "overall structure" of the *Story* and, thus, people's faith in it. But, if we follow Father Ong, whom I quoted in the epigraph at the beginning of this paper, is it not true of Christianity too?

Younger Tutchone might cling to Athapaskan tradition for other reasons than Mr. McGinty and the men and women of the older generations. Their confidence may now come from the *socially and culturally integrative character* of the *Story* in that it makes Christianity and Athapaskan sacred traditions coeval—existing in the same age of the world. In contrast, Euro-Canadian Christians still present themselves as extremely parochial in as much as they are unable to recognize and make sense of the sacred when expressed in a different tradition. A recent case may serve to document the point: Some time in the eighties, a group of First Nation students from a high school in the Yukon had learnt the epic of crow and planned to perform it on stage for an end-of-term school celebration. However, at the last moment, the bishop responsible for this teaching institution learnt of the project and did not allow this show to be part of the festivities. The performance of the *Story of Crow* was cancelled, purely and simply. Obviously, First Nation persons claiming to have access to the sacred through the crow was still perceived by some as a profanity.

Will the circulation of a written version of the *Story*, as requested by Mr. McGinty, help to foster more mutual respect? We may only hope so. How-

ever, will not having this tradition written down destroy the creativity that its oral aboriginal form allowed? In other words, will a *Book of Crow* betray the *telling of the story*? Pouillon would say so (1991: 711), but I am not as certain. What the narration of such a First Nation text brings to an audience are bursts of laughter, not devotion to some god or gods (see also Clastres, 1974). Even written, a sacred narrative that somehow makes one laugh about its heroes can never confer to the sacred the rigidity and dogmatism characteristic of a written tradition that takes its protagonists and itself for the Final Word the World over.

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Notes

1. This paper is the synthesis of two earlier papers read as "Reworked Oral Tradition and Continuity," *International Conference on Tradition, Continuity and Invention in North American Native Societies*, sponsored by l'Association pour la Recherche en Anthropologie Sociale and the 14th North American Indians Conference Organizing Committee, Paris, Collège de France, June 3-5, 1993; and as "Writing Culture' pour une premiere nation: défis et problèmes," *Séminaire du Laboratoire de Recherches Anthropologiques*, Département d'Anthropologie, Université Laval, November 10, 1993. My thanks for criticisms and suggestions made by Chantal Collard, Christine Jourdan, Guy Lanoue, Jehn Leavitt, Gérard Lenclud, Marie Mauzé, Mark Paulse and Michel Perrin. My field research with the Tutchone started in 1972, and has continued at various intervals ever since, with my last long field work conducted in 1990-91. After more than twenty years, most Tutchone I work with have become like my relatives and it does influence the tone and some deliberate particular wordings in the present essay in which I tried to locate myself with them in order to better translate their world view to Euro-Canadians and others. For the impact of long-term fieldwork on the researcher, see Foster (1979); for being changed by ethnographic participant observation, see Young and Goulet (1994).

2. Tutchone elders, who are far from being fully proficient in English, talk of "the story of crow" or "crow's story" even though the actual animal in question is the raven. Some First Nation people who have been educated in both English and Indian cultures prefer to translate the Athapaskan expression by *the* crow (no capital letter) or else *the* raven. For Bill Reid, the great Haida artist, "dropping the article 'the,' somehow diminishes the great figures of myth to imagined characters in quaint fold tales of unsophisticated simple people. . . (Reid, 1984: 64-65). For others, to speak of "Crow" rather than of "the crow" obscures the fact that in First Nation sacred narratives, animal protagonists are the actual animals called the raven or the otter, etc., and not some hero or deity or god having the form of an animal. In this text, I follow elders' long established adoption of the term "crow" for the raven. When quoting or paraphrasing an elder, I write as they express themselves in English: "crow did this or that. . . . In my own references to the raven I use the expression "the crow."
3. This excludes about 300 so-called Southern Tutchone, who were immediate neighbours of the Tlingit to the south, and who, by the 1850s, had been "Tlingitized." However, it is fairly obvious that by the 1850s the population had been heavily decimated by European diseases transmitted through inter-ethnic contact (Legros, 1981).
4. Tutchone elders translate the Athapaskan term *yandyé* as "slave." The existence of slavery among Northwest Coast First Nations is well documented. That slavery also existed among Subarctic Athapaskan worries my younger Tutchone friends. The fact could be used by hostile Euro-Canadians they have to live with to further diminish the value of their ancestors' culture and society. However, they should always remind Europeans and their North American cousins that, at the same time, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they, Europeans and Euro-American, had slaves on a grand scale and that the average life span of a slave on a plantation was roughly seven years. Much earlier, during the Roman era, Europeans also took each other as slaves and, in many parts of the Roman empire, up to a third of the population was in such bondage (see Braudel, 1991: 92-93). Tutchone slavery never reached these proportions.
5. For further details on nineteenth century culture, see Legros 1978, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1987, and 1988.
6. A European Hudson Bay Company explorer briefly set foot among the Tutchone in the 1840s and, between 1848-52, operated a trading post at the confluence of the Pelly and Yukon Rivers. The post, however, was unwelcome competition for Tlingit traders and the post failed and was abandoned. A close analysis of the relevant documents reveals that for all practical purposes the presence of this post had no effect on Tutchone political and cultural independence (see Legros, 1981).
7. There were no treaties and no reserves (in the sense used elsewhere in Canada) in the Yukon; thus, the quotation marks.
8. Dominique Legros, *Tommy McGinty's Northern Tutchone Story of Crow: A First*

Nation Elder Recounts the Creation of the World, Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service Paper 133 (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1999). To order, call 1-800-555-5621 or e-mail publications@civilisations.ca or visit the CMC Cyberboutique at <http://cyberboutique.civilisations.ca/>.

9. Caution on this score is further warranted by other facts. Among the Tutchone, a given text is almost never told in its entirety. When chronicle narration time comes, the storyteller only tells a few episodes, starting and ending anywhere in the overall narrative cycle. In order to write down the whole crow's narrative, I inevitably needed a chronological order and asked the narrator to clarify it for me. He readily agreed to think the problem through. This made clear that the episodes which are delivered are perceived to belong to a larger structured whole with a beginning, a middle and an end. But for some episodes finding a chronological order was like fitting pieces together in a jigsaw puzzle. Furthermore, to put the episodes in an exact and fixed order was not as crucial to him as a narrator as it was to me as a scribe. The revealing facts? It took us quite a few hours of discussion. If he was the most learned person in his tradition, why did he have to think so much? Finally, for two or three episodes, he never came to a fully satisfactory solution. The writing endeavour revealed another interesting fact. Pressed by time or forgetful a narrator may collapse two episodes into a new and different single one. This can never be taken into account when one works on a written version. Thus, the main problems with deriving the meaning of a written myth from the sequence of its episodes are as follows. First, the best narrators do not seem to attach too much importance to a fixed sequence and may change the order of some of the episodes. Second, at any given time one narrator exposes his/her audience to only short portions of the whole narrative without indicating how the various portions told at various times fit with each other. Third and last, different narrators in the same culture may somehow order episodes in different ways, skip some in one version, collapse two in another, etc. The main point is that the audience is never receiving a whole script nor the same partial scripts for the fragments it is exposed to. Thus the meaning it derives from what it hears must be different from what it would conclude from a fixed and supposedly chronological written version (see also Goody, 1987: 167-182).

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