HELP OR HINDRANCE?: THE ROLE OF COLLABORATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN THE QUEST FOR INUIT SELF-DETERMINATION

By

ANITA L. SWING

Integrated Studies Project

submitted to Dr. Carolyn Redl

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts– Integrated Studies

Athabasca, Alberta

July, 2006

The majority of texts classified as Inuit autobiography have not been initiated by Inuit themselves. This is not surprising in light of Canada's colonial past, relatively recent Inuit acquisition of literacy, and the ongoing thirst of ethnographers for subject material. Nor is it surprising given the genre's roots in the western tradition of individualism; autobiography is distinctly not an indigenous form of expression (McGrath 84). Missionaries prompted the earliest samples; later, anthropologists, or in some cases simply interested friends or supporters, encouraged autobiographical projects. In at least one instance where an Inuk subject chose independently to write about her life, non-Inuit assistance was offered and accepted. The non-Inuit mediators' presence in the completed texts is apparent to varying degrees in introductions, forwards, epilogues, historical notes, margin notes and footnotes. It is more obscured in other aspects of the texts. For example, there is not so much obvious evidence that these mediators may, among other things, have proposed content and then altered that content through translating, transliterating, structuring and editing it in certain ways. Indeed, as H. David Brumble notes in writing about the corresponding phenomenon in Native American composite autobiography, "...it may well be taken as evidence of these editors' skills that even scholars have written about these autobiographies in ways which assume that the narratives were published, crisply pure, just as they flowed from the mouths of Indians" (6). In any autobiography, choices must be made regarding representation of the subject, since the autobiographical text is "a narrative artifice, privileging a presence, or identity, that does not exist outside language" (Smith 5). While in the case of self-initiated autobiography, the subject him or herself generally has the most control over this representation, with collaborative Inuit autobiography, the subject's control is not a given.

Indeed, many of the earlier examples in particular construct Inuit subjects in simplistic and stereotypical ways, reflecting colonial superiority and a desire to cater to a white audience's

expectations. In this, the collaborative process has been hegemonic, contributing to a dominant discourse which has disempowered Inuit (Grace xv). However, in this arguably post-colonial era, Inuit are increasingly representing themselves, both politically and artistically. In literary expression, this self-representation often constitutes the idea, from post-colonial theory, of "writing back," whereby colonized others "...[emphasize] their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre" (Ashcroft et al. *The Empire* 2). Certainly, this has been said of Minnie Aodla Freeman's 1978 self-initiated autobiography, *Life Among the Qallunaat* (Grace 243). "Writing back," along with its oral equivalent, and the self-representation which constitutes them, are seen by many as crucial in the quest for Inuit political self-determination. For proof, one need look no further than the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, where Inuit and other northern aboriginal peoples spoke out and were heard, and the extensive initiatives which resulted in the creation of Nunavut in 1999. While Kathleen Mullen Sands acknowledges that it is worthwhile considering to what degree the collaborative autobiographical process is hegemonic, she argues that what is more important is how the admittedly flawed process still produces works of "ethnographic and literary value" (45). In the case of the Inuit, however, and their collective quest for self-determination, I would argue that it is of utmost importance to examine all factors which might contribute to or hinder the achievement of material goals, with examination of the phenomenon of collaborative autobiography an important part of this.

Thus, this paper will look at several issues which have a bearing on these concerns: the debate over terminology which surrounds collaborative autobiographical texts, the history of Inuit/white interrelations, the influence of ethnography, and the decisions involved in the production of collaborative autobiographies. In so doing, it will try to determine to what degree the practice of mediated autobiography may be supportive, or with what precautions and principles such projects must be undertaken, in order to support the process of Inuit self-

determination. Support material has been gleaned as much as possible from the autobiographies themselves in order to acknowledge Inuit authority on matters concerning their own lives. At the same time I acknowledge that, like many of the mediators, I have arranged these words for my own purposes. Nonetheless, this decision is a break with the once common anthropological perspective that a subject's own testimony is too subjective and therefore unscientific (Brumble 106) as well as with the tendency to accord authority only to institutionally-recognized experts (Alcoff 13).

This is not intended to be an exhaustive study of mediated Inuit autobiography, but rather a contribution to the discussion about the factors involved in collaborative life inscription and the ways the Inuk narrator has the best chances for self-representation and narrative authority. I am not an Inuk, and am aware of the risk of appearing to pronounce on what is "good" for Inuit. Thus, I wish to assert that my perspective is that of a non-Inuk reader who has tried to listen carefully to what seems to be important to many Inuit in their self-expressions. As Arnold Krupat says, while there can be "no nonviolent *criticism* of the discourse of Others," because the very bases of that criticism are dependent on a western epistemological tradition, "[t]he question is whether...it is worth pursuing certain projects of inquiry in the interest of a rather less violent knowledge" (*Ethnocriticism* 6). This is what I hope to do here. I also take to heart Kathleen Mullen Sands' warning that critics of collaborative life writing have often never tried to do such work themselves and therefore may fail to appreciate the complexity of the process (48).

First of all, the debate over the terminology used to classify collaborative autobiographical texts has both literary and political ramifications. There are some who feel that the term "autobiography" is not appropriate for this offshoot genre, and for various reasons. From a literary perspective, the "auto" part is more or less pertinent depending on the degree to which the subject's own words and content selection constitute the work. The "graphy" portion is also

in question, depending on the process involved in the work's production. Some of the texts considered here were initially written by their narrators, while most were spoken, recorded and and then transcribed by the collector/editor. Another problem with the term "autobiography" is, as Hertha Wong puts it, that "The word itself reveals European assumptions about the importance of the *individual* life and the necessity of *writing*" (6). Nuala O'Faolain, in her *Are You Somebody? The Accidental Memoir of a Dublin Woman*, provides a clear example of the former. Musing about her "qualifications" for writing autobiography, she writes, "I've never done anything remarkable; neither have most people. Yet most people, like me, feel remarkable. That self-importance welled up inside me. I had the desire to give an account of my life" (5). Autobiography has developed as a genre from a western tradition of individualism, one not shared by traditional tribal peoples who are generally held to be more collectively minded. For example, none of the Inuit autobiographers considered in this project seemed motivated primarily by a need to emphasize his or her accomplishments, or, particularly, to reflect at length on the repercussions of one life choice or another, as is common in the genre. For these reasons, various alternatives have been suggested. For example, Arnold Krupat has emphasized that "Indian autobiography" is based on "the principle of *original bicultural composite composition*" (31), while Kathleen Mullen Sands employs the terms "composite autobiography" and "collaborative inscription" (39) in her work. These alternatives also help reflect that the final texts of collaborative autobiography are ultimately about both (or all) people involved rather than about a single life. She writes, "In Native American autobiography two stories collide, coincide, contradict in complex interpenetrating patterns. It is, ultimately, the intertextual form, the interstice of dominated and dominant discourses that yields meaning" (46). In this way, these texts deviate significantly from western autobiographical expectations, and clearly there is a point to be made for using alternative designations.

From a political perspective, using the term "autobiography" could be seen as another hegemonic move whereby a western practice is considered universal and thus subsumes and erases cultural difference. On the other hand, emphasizing the collaborative texts' difference from traditional autobiography might position them as peripheral and guarantee their exclusion from the autobiographical canon. Given this outcome, any potentially politically-mobilizing "writing back" by the subject would likely be consigned to the void ensured by marginalization in the literary world. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's reminder is relevant for collaborative autobiography: "While inviting all subjects to participate in its practices, [autobiography] provides the constraining template or the generic 'law' against which those subjects and their diverse forms of self-narrative are judged and found wanting" (xviii). Furthermore, some of the arguments for alternate terminology can be questioned. For example, Hertha Wong challenges the binary opposition whereby westerners are considered individuals and tribal peoples collective. She deems it an oversimplification to say that "...in self-narrations Westerners write in first-person singular and indigenous people write (or speak) in the first-person plural" because "...a subject is not either individual or relational, but may be more or less relational in diverse contexts, and... subjectivity is not determined entirely by either biological or social-cultural discourses" ("First Person" 169). Moreover, to include composite texts in the canon might, Wong suggests, necessitate a useful reexamination of autobiographical theory for its possible limitations (4). But even more importantly, as Arnold Krupat points out, "Any attempt to expand the canon– not merely add to it...but open it up to work deriving from other values– is an attempt to call into question the particular value it institutionalizes, and this...has important political implications" (24-5).

H. David Brumble supports the use of the term "autobiography" for collaborative texts. A scholar whose focus is Native American autobiography, Brumble dismisses the contention

made by some that these texts should even be considered as biography, arguing that those concerned with autobiography as a genre are now less concerned with "truth" than previously (13), and asserting that the study of autobiography is theoretically interesting because it examines the *ways* in which humans have spoken about their lives rather than the lives themselves. Based on these views, Brumble defines autobiography as "first-person narrative that seriously purports to describe the narrator's life or episodes in that life" (17), and says, on the distinction between biography and autobiography that "[p]oint of view and form are essential. Even the most heavily edited autobiography at least pretends to be told from the Indian's point of view and in the Indian's own way. Biography makes no such generic promise" (17). Following Brumble's reasoning, most Inuit stories told through a collaborator are aptly defined as autobiography.

In fact, all but one of the mediated Inuit autobiographies considered for this paper fit Brumble's spacious definition. The exception is *Land of the Good Shadows* by Heluiz Chandler Washburne and Anauta, the latter being the Inuk subject of what Dale Blake calls an "autobiography in the third person" (73). As such, it deserves to be a contender for the Brumble definition. In spite of Washburne's narration of Anauta's story in the third person, the text was written with the intention of presenting Anauta's life, and the subject herself approved the text as her life story. In a letter to Washburne, she purportedly wrote, "'You know, Anauta book to me is not just a book. It's all my life, the lives of all my most loved people, my own inmost feelings and thoughts....I live more myself in that book than I do any time now in this new life of adjusting myself to a new world'" (xv-xvi). In spite of the value of alternative designations to "autobiography," I think it important to maintain this designation, with qualifiers if need be, for collaborative Inuit life stories. Otherwise, membership in the autobiographical canon is unlikely. Another possibility-- the creation of a canon of composite texts-- seems also unlikely, given that the western tradition of individual authorship would first have to be contested. As James Clifford

notes, “the very idea of plural authorship challenges a deep Western identification of any text’s order with the intention of a single author” (*Predicament* 51).

Next, in evaluating the phenomenon of non-Inuit mediation of Inuit autobiography, this paper will discuss Inuit/White historical interrelations with the aim of understanding the legacy of power relations involved in the mediator/narrator relationship. Above all, it is necessary to keep in mind that this has been a colonial relationship in which the mediator, a member of the colonizing society, has generally had most of the control over the text. The Inuit have a long history of interaction with Europeans, one that is frequently depicted as being, especially in the beginning, mutually beneficial. For example, in the mid-nineteenth century, Inuit assistance enabled whalers to overwinter successfully, and, in return, they benefited from such items as firearms and various food products (Brody 189-190). However, relatively quickly, Inuit lost their independence, first by sacrificing their subsistence lifestyle to participate in the fur trade and continuing when they were forced off the land and required to send their children to school. In addition to such brute forms of domination, domination by consent-- hegemony in the Gramscian sense-- also came to prevail. As Ashcroft et al. explain,

> Consent is achieved by the interpellation of the colonized subject by imperial discourse so that Euro-centric values, assumptions, beliefs and attitudes are accepted as a matter of course as the most natural or valuable. The inevitable consequence of such interpellation is that the colonized subject understands itself as peripheral to those Euro-centric values, while at the same time accepting their centrality. (*Post-Colonial* 117)

Much of this consent was achieved by the missionaries who, as Hugh Brody explains, “took advantage of shamanistic openness to new ideas, and insinuated their doctrines into existing belief systems” (207). Indeed, it was missionaries who encouraged the earliest Inuit life story writing, which explains why “early examples tend to show the author’s appreciation for and assimilation

into the new, colonizing culture" (Hulan 83). Clearly, then, the encouragement of autobiographical expression was one aspect of interpellation contributing to the developing hegemony of European values.

Unmistakable evidence of the absorption of European values is evident in Apphia Agalakti Awa's testimony in *Saqiyuq: Stories from the Lives of Three Inuit Women*. A great many of Awa's comments testify to her acceptance of the colonizers' beliefs and dictates: "We were grieving more back then because we didn't believe in Jesus. We didn't know that if a person died they went to heaven" (28), "I had trouble with my pregnancy that time, and the Qallunaat said I had to be sent out" (103),"In the 1960s it seemed as if all our children were leaving us to go to school. They had to, that was the law of the teachers, that every student had to go to school" (107) and "We were married by the minister because the government told us we should" (112). If Awa's experience can be generalized, it would appear that indoctrination of the first generation moving off the land was exceedingly successful. Apphia's daughter, Rhoda Kaukjak Katsak, corroborates this from her perspective. At one point she describes an event from her childhood when scientists came to Igloolik and performed tests on certain residents, including taking plugs of skin out of Rhoda and her siblings' forearms. Katsak recalls, "I think my mom was there. Of course we were her children, so she had to be there, maybe to consent or something like that. But I don't think it was a matter of her consenting, I don't think she thought of it that way" (175). A few pages later, she declares, "It would never have even occurred to her that she could say no to the Qallunaat" (177).

Certainly, there are examples in these autobiographies of successful Inuit resistance to white authority. For example, Rhoda's Katsak's father, Mathias Awa, managed to keep one of his sons out of school in order to teach him traditional ways, even though at one point he had to remove Solomon forcibly from the classroom (169). Dorothy Mesher, in *Kuujjuaq– Memories*

and Musings, also describes an act of resistance on the part of her father. When all the Inuit were told that they'd have to move across the river from the military base which had been set up, all but Mesher's father followed the order. She reflects, "When I look back on it, it was interesting that no one expressed the slightest bit of resentment or resistance to the directive..." (50). Nonetheless, in spite of these instances of resistance and no doubt others, the Canadian government did, ultimately, accomplish its mission. As Hugh Brody writes, once "the police consolidated what traders and missionaries had begun...the newcomers claimed the right to determine the bases of economic, moral and social life" (213).

Although many Inuit of Rhoda Katsak's generation (she was born in 1957) are now in effect "writing back," this does not mean that colonialism has loosened its hold on Inuit psyches. Indeed, as Dale Blake writes in her doctoral dissertation, "Some would suggest that the North has not yet fully emerged from the colonial era, and hence its peoples still do not have access to the means to change their lives and meaningfully resist the domination of outside forces" (17). Rhoda Katsak is clear on the point that her ability to speak her mind has been hard won. Reflecting on the climate in which she was raised, she explains,

> There were a lot of different things going on back then, things going on to make us look up to the Qallunaat...our heroes were all Qallunaat. It is difficult even today to change that mentality, to change it even to a point where you think, 'I am an Inuk, I am a good enough person as I am.' When we were growing up, the Qallunaat were the better people. We were supposed to look up to them. (196-7)

And she adds, "It is only within the last few years that I have matured to a point where I feel that I have a choice about how I want to live" (197). These points are echoed in Dorothy Mesher's 1995 *Kuujjuaq– Memories and Musings*, written in collaboration with Ray Woollam. Mesher, like Rhoda Katsak, accepted colonial superiority in her youth. She says, "When I was

young I think that most of us thought the Qallunaat were all like Kings or Queens. We were sure that they must know everything that was worth knowing" (83). Although Mesher herself now clearly questions her earlier perspectives, she attests to the force of the dominant culture in noting,"We [Inuit] are expected to function as a minority group, even in our own land where we *are* a numerical majority" (87) and this despite the fact that "all our children have *become* Qallunaat in all of their ways" (88). She continues, "The reason that I know we're under the white man's feet is that we're still constantly 'trying.' We're trying to get there in Qallunaat terms....All to myself I keep wondering and wondering. Is it possible for the Inuit to be confident without seeing and doing everything in the European way? Or are we confident only when we are like them?" (92). The reflections of Katsak and Mesher point to continuing hegemonic domination and thus serve to confirm the inevitability of power imbalance in white mediator/Inuit narrator relationships.

A further aspect of Inuit/white historical interrelations has been the countless ethnographic enterprises, both professional and amateur, which have played a role in representing and therefore constructing Inuit. Indeed, several of the collaborative autobiographies considered in this paper constitute such projects. While the discipline of ethnography has evolved enormously through self-critique, some argue that it is intrinsically an imperialistic and hegemonic practice. For instance, Tajaswini Niranjana, in *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*, conceives of ethnography as a kind of translation. She explains that translation in the interlingual sense has been seen historically as "the quintessential humanistic enterprise" (47), and that social anthropologists and ethnographers have "seen their task as epitomizing humanism" in their role of providing knowledge for their western audience about unknown peoples. However, she maintains, "The desire to translate is a desire to *construct* the primitive world, to *represent* it and to *speak on its behalf*" (70). One effect of such translation is that it

"produces strategies of containment. By employing certain modes of representing the other– which it thereby also brings into being– translation reinforces hegemonic versions of the colonized, helping them acquire the status of what Edward Said calls representation, or objects without history" (3). While James Clifford acknowledges that "Ethnographic work has...been enmeshed in a world of enduring and changing power inequalities, and it continues to be implicated," he suggests that "its function within these relations is complex, often ambivalent, potentially counter-hegemonic" ("Introduction" 9). In spite of the fact that many contemporary ethnographers are exploring ways to be "counter-hegemonic," Julie Cruikshank and Nancy Wachowich among them, this does not alter the fact that damage has been done. Moreover, in spite of various experiments in self-reflexivity and other techniques, there is not yet any definitive ethnographic method which ensures a balance of power in the ethnographer/subject relationship. As Trinh T. Minh-ha writes, "A conversation of 'us' with 'us' about 'them' is a conversation in which 'them' is silenced" (67). Trinh also writes of the "Natives" as the "handicapped who cannot represent themselves and have to either be represented or learn how to represent themselves. Whatever the issue, they are entrapped in a circular dance where they always find themselves a pace behind the white saviors" (59). Perhaps equality will only be reached when the "natives" study and write about the whites among them.

Several of the collaborative Inuit autobiographies have contributed to the spread of simplistic and therefore detrimental representations. In *I, Nuligak*, for example, there are several instances where Maurice Metayer, the text's initiator, editor and translator, has made a point of constructing Nuligak as "primitive," possibly with a non-Inuit audience's expectations in mind. In explaining his approach to translation, Metayer explains that he did not translate "word for word" (8). Nonetheless, he has Nuligak referring to the "machine-marking-cold" (136) and the "needle-to-guide-in-foggy-weather" (166) when his principles of translation would have dictated

choosing “thermometer” and “compass” instead. Another example pertains to the title of this text: Nuligak’s much-used Christian name was Bob Cockney, yet the only reference to this in the text is Nuligak’s passing mention of someone calling out to him, “Bob, come and join us” (179), confusing to a reader who has not been informed of the name by which Nuligak was widely known. Perhaps Metayer felt that *I, Bob Cockney* wouldn’t have quite the same appeal to a readership excited by the idea of “Eskimo” autobiography. *Land of the Good Shadows*, the story of Anauta, is also much manipulated in this regard. The foreword by Sir Wildred Grenfell, written in 1940, takes for granted the decline and disappearance of Inuit culture, saying that a personal record of the sort Anauta provides through Washburne “probably never will be again” (v) and consequently that “such a dramatic story should be preserved” (v). According to Grenfell, the Eskimos’ “virtues of gentleness toward each other, and resignation to the will of the great spirit and their peacefulness and merry temperament” (v) are an important example for those believing themselves to come from civilized nations. His perception of Inuit was a typical one: he claimed they were “happy...with the very simplest assets life has to offer...” (v).

These ideas are echoed by Heluiz Chandler Washburne as she closes her portion of the work: “Are we feeling the lack of these virtues today?,” she asks. “Perhaps from the stark realities of the struggle with arctic nature...may come some *simple truths* for us who live in this bewildering and shattering civilization” (320, emphasis added). Washburne reveals a definite sense of the audience she wishes to reach when she asserts, “it is the vivid, dramatic life Anauta lived and the customs of her people that interest us” (xv). This is apparently not an audience interested in complexity. As a result, stereotypes are left intact and dramatic language heightens the effect. For example, we read of Anauta’s stepmother Oomiálik, “She thought of her brave son drifting among the perilous icebergs. But he would not be afraid, not Anauta, for he was a courageous hunter” (9). In much Inuit writing, it is clear to see that, in fact, fear and courage

coexist for many a hunter. According to Dale Blake, "Wasburne portrayed Anauta as much more the primitive, noble, naive savage than she really was" (91). The same was the case with Robert Flaherty, who in his 1922 film *Nanook of the North* went to great lengths to depict "the kindly, brave, simple Eskimo" (*Nanook*). By his own admission, Flaherty's project was to take a single Eskimo and "typify him" (*Nanook*). According to Claude Massot's film, *Nanook Revisited*, shot sixty-eight years later, Flaherty had been dismayed by the changes contact had wrought on Inuit, and so had endeavoured to present to the world the "Eskimo" unspoiled by civilization. Consequently, rifles and metal tools, by then in widespread use, were disallowed in the shooting of scenes from "everyday life" (*Nanook Revisited*). Flaherty wrote, "'I am not going to make films about what the white man has made of primitive peoples....What I want to show is the former majesty and character of these people, while it is still possible...'" (qtd. in Francis 164). In spite of Flaherty's misrepresentation of the Inuit he filmed, *Nanook of the North* became widely enough known that it remains the model of Inuit life which many southerners take to be true (*Nanook Revisited*).

On the other hand, in the case of *Thrasher: Skid Row Eskimo*, by Anthony Apakark Thrasher in collaboration with journalists Gerard Deagle and Alan Mettrick, another sort of construction was deemed appropriate to the goal of the text. In order, it seems, to influence Thrasher's court case and subsequent appeal (Blake 103), he is constructed as a victim of white civilization and capitalist ideology, with his many misadventures in the south providing ample support for this construction. He writes, "I still haven't seen the beautiful cities I saw in those pictures they gave me when I was a child...pictures of the outside world. Maybe I started at the wrong place or got thinking the wrong ideas" (xi). Deagle and Mettrick are clear right at the start of their foreword that there is no hope for Thrasher: "This book ends with the author, who is an Eskimo, on his way to a hospital for the criminally insane. It ends there because to wait for a

happy ending is to wait for the musk-ox and the white fox to return to a white and simple north" (viii). Given that the journalists' role was, in their own words, "to collate what was essentially a loose-leaf diary into narrative form, authenticate that narrative as thoroughly as possible and expand it" (x), they had great licence in framing Thrasher's story. As a result of these efforts, Thrasher was perceived by the lawyer and judge as "a representative of the Inuit 'race'" (Blake 103). While some might perceive this construction of Inuk-as-victim to be helpful in counteracting that of the Inuk-as-simple-and-happy– as potentially enlightening to the reading public– in fact, it contributes to the construction of another stereotype: that of the lost, degenerate soul. And of course these seemingly opposing stereotypes can and do coexist.

Most agree that such representations have not been useful to the Inuit. Renée Hulan maintains that they "have allowed sustained paternalism, even neo-colonialism, in Canada's governing of the north" (61). Hugh Brody enumerates the repercussions of northern hunting peoples having to "survive in defiance of a stereotype": "Their ways of living and thinking are regarded as primitive, their wealth is characterized as poverty. This denies northern peoples their rights to land, challenges their freedom to hunt, fish and trap in ways of their own choosing; it questions parents' responsibilities for their own children, and obscures the viability of their way of life" (xv-xvi). Hulan remarks that even as late as 1972, "Canadians described Inuit in terms of the noble savage, as a people possessing a pure ideology under threat of southern civilization" (95). Most worryingly, though, she notes that even contemporary representations of Inuit romanticize and homogenize differences among them (76). Only recently in a display at a Canada Post outlet, I noticed a postcard depicting a rosy-cheeked and grinning Inuk child (see Appendix). He or she is nameless: the explanatory note on the back of the postcard reads only "Fresh faced and smiling in Tuktoyaktuk" (Hines). It is verging on the impossible to imagine the image of a white child being used in such a way. Daniel Francis suggests that in spite of the "tarnished"

image of modern Inuit held by some, "the image of the noble primitive persists, probably because it represents an idealized image that Canadians have of themselves as a northern people" (167). The postcard would seem to be evidence of this: "Canada" is written over part of the child's fur hood. Thus, despite widespread media attention to the formidable challenges facing contemporary Inuit, a tired trope reappears here for international circulation. Such an anachronism from popular culture gives rise to an important question. There is no doubt that earlier examples of collaborative Inuit autobiography have, as shown above, contributed to the political and material damage with which Inuit must contend. But might contemporary projects be unwittingly contributing to these problems?

An important factor to take into account at this point in the discussion is that of agency. While it is crucial to acknowledge that dealings with Inuit by the dominant society have had overwhelmingly negative repercussions, it is problematic to continue consigning Inuit to victim status. Many have pointed out the unhelpful tendency of postcolonial theory to "[rely] on the colonizer/colonized dichotomy...[which] casts the 'postcolonial' as passive victim..." (Bahri 145-6). Such constructions, while they may be initially useful in revealing the ravages of colonialism, tend to remove agency from the colonized subjects. This is a problematic move, since agency denotes "...the ability of post-colonial subjects to initiate action in engaging or resisting imperial power" (Ashcroft et al. *Postcolonial* 8). In fact, it appears from the collaborative autobiographies studied here that the narrating subjects quite frequently demonstrate agency. For example, almost without exception, the Inuit narrators find ways to express their own reasons for participation in the project, even when these diverge from the purposes of their mediators. Indeed, Julie Cruikshank's experience has revealed that "[a] contemporary narrator working in collaboration with an anthropologist usually has an agenda every bit as clear as that of the ethnographer" (16). In the autobiographies, agency manifests most frequently in the enunciation of various political

statements.

These political statements, often involving "writing back," whether intentional or inadvertent, are not difficult to find, particularly in the more contemporary collaborative autobiographies. Anthony Thrasher, for example, clearly sees himself as playing a political role. This may seem ironic given his autobiographical representation as a victim. However, as Dale Blake contends, Thrasher "is an autobiographical rebel who retains agency from a position of relative powerlessness, " and who writes "as one who possesses...the power to change others' lives as well as his own" (102). He declares in the preface to his autobiography,"I hope the younger generation of my people read my story. They will be easy targets, like me, if they are not warned. They should be told, not only about the good side of life in the South, but about the other part. The part that was hidden from me" (xi). He also laments, "There are 15,000 of us in the North. We need help if we are not to lose everything. We can't let the white man destroy everything we had before he came. We have been silent too long" (xi). This last sentence is repeated several times in the text, operating as a sort of exhortation.

Dorothy Mesher, in explaining her various reasons for writing, demonstrates a firm conviction in the importance of writing back to the dominant culture: "I...hope that older Inuit who recognize some of my story will be encouraged to write their own versions. There really should be more written accounts by Inuit of all ages, not only books by Qallunaat *about* us" (10). The youngest autobiographer considered here (born in 1973), Sandra Pikujak Katsak in *Saqiyuq: Stories from the Lives of Three Inuit Women* demonstrates unequivocally that she is no victim of the dominant society's representation. While her mother Rhoda acknowledges her struggle with thinking herself "good enough," Sandra lucidly questions the hegemony of the dominant discourse. She recounts, "There are many books that say Inuit don't use pleasantries much" and "In some written stories that I have read, Inuit are considered timid" (249). She agrees with the

first assessment, but questions the second, saying "I guess it is just that we are less talkative" (249). In a wonderful reversal, assuming her own world as the centre, she says, "Qallunaat who are up North, they shouldn't worry, though, if they are saying too much or too little. People, Inuit, understand these things. We know that Qallunaat are not always aware of these customs. Qallunaat shouldn't have to work at not saying pleasantries. Inuit will say 'thank you' to a Qallunaaq because we know he or she doesn't know these things" (249). With this sort of statement, Katsak is making a move towards righting the power imbalance between colonizer and colonized.

Even though such evidence establishes that collaborative autobiographical texts are *capable* of conveying Inuit agency and self-representation, their ability to do so is affected by the mediators' treatment of the material. As Kathleen Mullen Sands asserts, "Evidence of the dominance and control of the life inscription process is available within the text of every composite autobiography" (43), but they exist in varying degrees in the texts in question. Depending on a number of editorial decisions, the autobiographical subject is in effect accorded more or less narrative authority and respect. This is important to the current discussion, since these factors may influence readers' perceptions of Inuit subjects. This part of the paper will look at what some of these editorial decisions involve and assess how they are handled in the various texts.

One inevitable feature of collaborative life history texts is the explanatory, contextualizing material which is found surrounding, but sometimes embedded in the text, usually in the form of introductions, prefaces, footnotes, margin notes, appendices and epilogues. In many cases, these constitute what Ruth Behar calls a "speaking past the text, rather than to the text" (151); as such, they may ultimately convey the impression that authority resides more in the mediator than in the narrating subject. This seems particularly inevitable in autobiographical texts initiated by

ethnographers, in which the norm is to contextualize the narrator's testimony with ethnographic explanation. According to Julie Cruikshank, although the value of this convention "lies in providing a framework for hearing a narrator convey some of the richness and subtlety of experience by explaining how normative rules actually worked during her own life," she admits to the risk "that an outsider's synopsis may seem to explain away the subjective reality of the speaker" (4).

I, Nuligak provides many examples which illustrate this phenomenon. Through his footnotes, Maurice Metayer in effect undermines Nuligak's authority, partly by speaking in a collusive way to an assumed non-Inuk reader. For example, when he is explaining the social role of the "angatkok," or shaman, in the "Eskimo community," he notes how the "entire village was present, including children who thus came into contact with the mysterious region which the angatko *claimed* to penetrate" (63, emphasis added). To his credit, Metayer left his initials ("MM") after all his commentary, effectively highlighting its subjectivity in spite of the objective tone. Ultimately, however, Metayer retains the authority in the text. At the beginning of Chapter Three, "Unikparen -Tell Me a Story," he intrudes into the narrative at the start of the chapter to put Nuligak's stories in ethnographic perspective. Part of this brief preface includes the statement "The second story illustrates the *difficulty* experienced by the Eskimo in drawing the line between man and other living beings" (68, emphasis added). In addition, while most of Metayer's footnotes appear as neutral explanations (based, of course, on Metayer's understanding), some do not. For example, when explaining with *maktak* is, he notes, "Only Eskimo palates seem to relish maktak in this [raw] state. However, cooked white whale skin is delicious. It is prepared rather like pig's feet or calf's head, and tastes somewhat the same" (27).

Metayer's presentation of his own preferences as objectively true in combination with the care he takes to highlight the curiousness of Inuit beliefs fit Renée Hulan's depiction of the

typical realist ethnographer as transcendant observer; she writes, "The author's subjectivity, shown in his approval, displeasure, admiration, and disappointment, gleams on the surface of the narrative without any direct interrogations of its impact on his interpretation" (53). Even in a text lauded by some for its innovations in the collaborative life history form, Margaret B. Blackman's *Sadie Brower Neakok: An Inupiaq Woman* demonstrates the occasional problem of this sort. For example, in the Epilogue, consisting of an analytical summing up of Neakok's life, Blackman pronounces, "[Sadie's] success as a magistrate, in particular, has much more to do with her compassion and understanding than with her legal mind" (229). This seems an interpretation that would have been best left to Neakok herself to make if indeed she had wished to do so. It is worth noting that even self-initiated autobiographies such as Minnie Aodla Freeman's *Life Among the Qallunaat* may not necessarily be exempt from mitigation by representatives of the dominant society. For example, its "Foreword" by Alex Stevenson, "Former Adminstrator of the Arctic," in some ways downplays the potent critique of southern Canadian society found in Freeman's text. In asserting that the Canadian government did the best it could with a challenging situation in shipping tubercular Inuit to southern hospitals, and describing the young Freeman as "confident and attractive" and *Life Among the Qallunaat* as "enchanting" (11), Stevenson is in effect "speaking past" the text through tempering the autobiographer's often unforgiving assessments of her southern experiences.

On the other hand, Elizabeth Goudie's *Woman of Labrador* is a slightly older autobiographical text demonstrating a respectful approach to explanatory material. David W. Zimmerly, an anthropologist, served as editor. He explains how he came to assist in this way: "I heard of her writing project and went to see her about it. After I learned that she had no one to edit and process her manuscript I volunteered to do it, and, make arrangements for publication. We spent many sessions in her kitchen working over the manuscipt..." (xix). Zimmerly's touch is

a light one, probably owing something to the fact that the project was Goudie's to begin with. Although many of his margin subtitles, such as "Spiritual life," "Medical services," and "Housing" (8-9), reinforce his special interest as ethnographic, most, such as "Winter 1921" (28) and "First baby" (29), pertain specifically to Goudie's own life. Zimmerly is reserved and unobtrusive in his use of footnotes. In one rare instance, he has placed an asterisk next to the term "liveyers," explaining at the bottom of the page that this is a contraction of "live here" (37). In this, Zimmerly simply demonstrates consideration of where a non-local reader might require explanation. In another instance, Zimmerly offers an explanation for Goudie's use of the present tense in describing the past. He suggests that "Mrs. Goudie's occasional use of present tense indicates the tremendous impact many events and times had on her" (60). No doubt many editors would have "corrected" this idiosyncrasy to minimize audience confusion; Zimmerly's decision not to do so seems a respectful gesture. It also allows readers to arrive at their own interpretation of the stylistic feature.

Dorothy Mesher's autobiography, *Kuujjuaq– Memories and Musings*, converted to a written text with the assistance of Ray Woollam, also avoids the problem of the mediator's "speaking past" the text. First of all, they are Mesher's words which introduce and conclude, and therefore frame, the text in the "Introduction" and "Thank You" sections, respectively. Ray Woollam's one page long "Editor's Note" is not given pride of place as is usual in many texts, but rather appears as the first of the appendices. Furthermore, it is Mesher who provides most of the details of their collaborative process. The overall effect of these aspects of the text is that it is Mesher, the autobiographical subject, who comes across as having textual authority. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al. write about how editorial intrusions of the types discussed in this section, when they are made by the author him or herself, confer the status of a "post-colonial writer" who is no longer "the object of an interpretation, but the first interpreter" (61).

Narrative structure is an area in which mediators loyal to western autobiographical conventions tend to exert a great deal of control. One aspect of this involves rendering into chronological order material that may not originally have been expressed in this way. Another is the elimination of repetition. Both result, to some degree, from the need to conform to publishing and audience demands (Sands 47). According to Penny Petrone, who edited the first anthology of Inuit writings in English in 1988, even once Inuit made use of western literary forms, their work retained many features of a preliterate culture. She explains,"They told their stories in a loosely episodic and discursive structure and a plain, unadorned style" (104). The mediators of the collaborative autobiographies in question have all influenced narrative order, with the greatest amount of this occurring, by necessity, in the texts originally based on spoken material. To their credit, almost all see fit to explain how and why it was necessary to do so. Heluiz Chandler Washburne took the most licence here in her work of telling Anauta's story *as* a story, complete with dramatic suspense, although she attributes the difficulty of putting her notes "into some sort of chronological order" to the "fact" that "in [Anauta's] country the people kept no track of time" (xiv). In the case of *Sadie Brower Neakok: An Inupiaq Woman*, Margaret Blackman explains that "Sadie's life story was elicited in chronological order" in the interviews themselves (237), although Blackman suggests that Sadie would probably have chosen this approach anyway, owing to her western education and the chronological structure of her father's memoir, with which she was familiar (237). Nancy Wachowich notes that the stories in *Saqiyuq* "appear...in loose chronological order" (10), but explains that any apparent breaks in this order or other anomalies signal "the subjective nature of Inuit orality and the creativity of memory" (10). In the case of *Kuujjuaq*, it appears as though Dorothy Mesher decided to a significant degree on the structure and content of the text. At one point she finds herself getting off topic, and says, "But anyway I'm trying not to say much about those Labrador years" (63). Yet, she also

explains in her "Thank You" section that "Ray has spent many months of time putting that stuff into some sort of order, and into making many drafts that added up to this present manuscript" (123).

Of the three texts originally composed in written form, only Maurice Metayer provides some details concerning his editorial decisions with regard to chronology. In the introduction to *I, Nuligak*, he explains, "The original manuscript is somewhat like a mate's log, where seasons and even years are not mentioned" (8). Therefore, Metayer provided chapters and subtitles in an attempt to provide more order. He explains further, "These pages may seem to lack methodological arrangement, but they have been written according to the logical order of living things, following the regular pattern of seasons and years" (8). In the case of Elizabeth Goudie's *Woman of Labrador*, there are no details provided to give a reader an idea of how much ordering David Zimmerly had a hand in. Nor is there much detailed explanation given by Gerard Deagle and Alan Mettrick to explain their process of ordering of Thrasher's story, except it is clear that, faced with a great deal of random material, their job was a considerable one. Interestingly, Minnie Aodla Freeman's self-initiated autobiography is not ordered chronologically. Its three sections detail, first, her arrival in Ottawa as a young woman; second, her childhood; and, finally, her experience with Qallunaat culture before going to Ottawa. Heather Henderson maintains that this is a deliberate reworking of "the familiar autobiographical convention in which the autobiographer moves chronologically through life toward a moment of 'rebirth.'" Instead, Henderson argues, "Freeman *begins* with her childlike entry into *quallunaat* culture and then turns back to measure the value of her new life against a past one that is rapidly becoming extinct" (67). Granted this is only one example, but it may suggest that, had they been given the opportunity, other Inuit autobiographers might have eschewed the chronological order forced on their narratives for other, more fitting, approaches to the telling of their lives.

How repetition is handled is another significant issue in the presentation of Inuit life stories, since its presence generally denotes connection to an oral tradition. Repetition is said to function in oral cultures by "[solving]...the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought" (Ong 34). Since this function loses relevance once material is inscribed, it is not surprising that many an editor would feel justified in eliminating it from written documents. H. David Brumble maintains that the editorial decision to retain repetition would simply not have been tolerated by readers in earlier days (77), probably because, as Robin McGrath points out, its appearance in writing "is responsible for a great many heavy eyelids" (13). Nonetheless, excising material deemed repetitive *de facto* alters a subject's story from how it was told. It may also, as Greg Sarris points out in his critique of Elizabeth Colson's *Autobiographies of Three Pomo Women*, destroy any meaning which repeated portions might convey and, in so doing, deprive a reader of the chance to interpret those repetitions for him or herself (100). In other words, Sarris implies that there may be more to an individual subject's repeating something than can be explained through an analysis of the characteristics of orality. In spite of these possibilities, elimination of repetition has been the norm in editing collaborative autobiographies. For example, in Metayer's introduction to *I, Nuligak*, he explains, "The original text had many useless repetitions; I have omitted them. I have deleted also reports on fishing and hunting expeditions related the same way year after year and without special adventures to recommend them" (8). As well, in her 1989 *Sadie Brower Neakok: An Inupiaq Woman*, Margaret Blackman informs readers that "The narrative was edited for redundancy and clarity" (240). Also deleted, notes Blackman, "were false starts and the ever-recurring expression 'you know'" (241). Blackman opts instead to explain in the Preface how her subject sounds: "Sadie's speech is animated. She is a storyteller who often reenacts conversations and the feelings that accompanied them. She punctuates her speech with exclamatory remarks and laughter" (xv).

On the other hand, Nancy Wachowich's treatment of orality in *Saqiyuq* truly allows readers the opportunity to "hear" for themselves each of the three subjects; indeed, one can quite easily discern from the text the differences in their patterns of speech. Wachowich's decision was a conscious one; she writes, "I have...attempted to preserve the sentence structure originally used by Apphia, Rhoda, and Sandra, including the repetitions...that distinguish oral from written discourse" (9). For example, Apphia Agalakti Awa, who was for much of the early part of her life preliterate, shows clear signs of belonging to an oral-dominated culture. She uses a great deal of repetition and some stock phrases such as versions of "That is how it was" (127) after she has concluded an explanation. The following is an example from Apphia's testimony: "The Arvaarluk family was my adoptive family. Arvaarluk and his wife, Ilupaalik, they were my adoptive parents. My adoptive parents were Arvaarluk and Ilupaalik. The husband was my adoptive father and his wife, Ilupaalik, was my adoptive mother" (18). One can also hear Apphia's daughter Rhoda "speaking" and discern her personal style: "We would look for eider ducks' eggs and- what are those called, those birds, they are smaller than eider ducks, tiny ones? Arctic terns, that is what they are" (159).

Another issue requiring thoughtful editorial consideration is the common practice of standardizing the English of subjects who speak what is now commonly called "non-standard English." Previously (and undoubtedly still in some circles), such expression was regarded as "incorrect," and therefore in need of "correction" to be deemed acceptable for publication. For example, in Rudy Wiebe and Yvonne Johnson's 1998 *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman*, which tells the story of the latter's life and incarceration, Wiebe chose to standardize the language in Johnson's letters and notebooks (xii). It is not until readers come to excerpts from court documents (360) that they realize the degree to which Johnson's spoken English deviates from that which Wiebe portrays her as speaking. Wiebe offers no explanation for his decision. It seems

possible that in an effort to evoke sympathy and understanding for Johnson's plight, he "made her" sound more like his non-Native audience might sound, in other words to make her seem *more like them*. Unfortunately, this move could instead cause some readers to wonder to what degree Wiebe has "created" Yvonne Johnson. In any case, Wiebe's example reveals the potential in standardizing English to influence a representation. There may be other reasons to engage in some amount of standardization. In *Saqiyuq*, Nancy Wachowich explains that "In an effort to avoid confusion and to present the stories as intelligibly as possible, [she] moderated the vernacular of the translators and made minor corrections to grammar and syntax" (10). Such changes, especially the first Wachowich mentions, may make sense for the creation of a coherent text. However, critics such as Greg Sarris suggest that it is important for a mediator to provide answers to the questions "how minor?" and "how often?" (98).

Exceptions nothwithstanding, it is increasingly common for various "englishes" to emerge intact from the editing process. This is largely the result of ideas such as post-colonial theory's concept of "abrogation" – the term used to describe "the rejection by post-colonial writers of a normative concept of 'correct' or 'standard' English" (*Post-Colonial* 5). "Abrogation" is considered to be "an important political stance, whether articulated or not, and even whether conscious or not, from which the actual appropriation of language can take place" (*Post-Colonial* 5). Thus, it is not surprising that a critic like Sherrill Grace, concerned with representation and its material effects, can argue that it is preferable for stories to "retain their often ungrammatical, oral qualities, which allow the Inuk story-teller to be heard through the english prose" (237). Likewise, Maria Campbell has, in her *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, inscribed tales transmitted to her orally from Métis elders "in the dialect and rhythm of [her] village and [her] father's generation" (2). Campbell explains what this decision entailed for her: "...although I speak my language I have had to relearn it, to decolonize it or at least begin the process of

decolonization. This has not been an easy task..." (2).

In an interview, Campbell explains further her efforts to reclaim the "broken English" of her earlier years, explaining that its use enables her to express herself and "express [her] community" more easily than she can "in 'good' English" (Lutz 48). Ron Marken, in the "Foreword" to *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, explains the significance of Campbell's approach:

> What Maria Campbell has brought to this book is a loving and painstaking governing of tongues, oral tradition printed on white pages, words to get your ears around....The accents and grammar of the narratives you will hear in this book are uncommon, but do not mistake them for unsophistication. Their rhythms and vocabulary are not of the school text; instead, they coil and spin lightly around the lives and voices of a complex and courageous people. (4)

In Marken's view, "standard English cannot appropriately accommodate the voices Maria Campbell assembles here; the authority and music will not be denied" (4). The association here of a person's "real" voice with the idea of narrative authority suggests that standardizing someone's English, for whatever reason, may just render it less potent a vehicle for self-representation.

Dorothy Mesher's autobiography is one of the few collaborative Inuit works in which the subject's words were transcribed very closely to how she spoke them into a tape recorder. As a result, the text includes such sentences as "Me and my friends, his daughters, were real impressed with this modern addition" (30). Furthermore, neither Dorothy Mesher nor Ray Woollam saw it necessary to "clean up" Mesher's language. Thus, another sentence reads "For sure we must have all got shit for doing that..." (45). Standardizing the English in autobiographical texts may, like eliminating repetition, obscure the potential for deeper insight into a subject. Claudine Raynaud, in an article which discusses the repercussions of certain sections being

omitted from Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, reveals that in the original manuscript, Hurston alternated between a southern accent and black dialect on one hand and correct English spelling and pronunciation on the other. According to Raynaud, "Hurston's 'errors' foreground her double and conflicting identity as both Barnard scholar and Eatonville girl" (39). In other words, Hurston embodied both these identities, and eliminating one resulted in a very different autobiography than would otherwise have been the case. In this instance, according to Raynaud, editorial intrusion led in the end to the presentation of a self that was less confident and more reverent than the Hurston of the original version (57).

Attribution of authorship is another complicated issue with collaborative autobiography. Does the position of author, still much hallowed in spite of poststructuralist claims to the contrary, rightly belong to the narrating subject, or to the collector/mediator who performs any number of other tasks to bring a collaborative text to the point of publication? The way this question is answered in individual cases is important, since authorship may be an important signifier of narrative and textual control and authority. Approaches to this predicament vary widely, but in most cases efforts have been made either to downplay the role of the mediator through the narrating subject's being inscribed as author, or to denote through co-authorship the equality suggested by collaboration. In an example of the former, Elizabeth Goudie's name stands alone on the cover to signal authorship. On the title page, beneath her name, is written in a much smaller font "edited and with an Introduction by David Zimmerly." The same is the case with *Thrasher: Skid Row Eskimo*, where "in collaboration with Gerard Deagle and Alan Mettrick" is also found on the title page. On the cover of *Kuujjuaq– Memories and Musings*, both Dorothy Mesher's and Ray Woollam's names appear. Mesher's name inscribed in quite large letters, and "with Ray Woollam" is written beneath it in significantly smaller letters. Maurice Metayer chose in effect to avoid the issue of authorship by calling the text *I, Nuligak*, and noting beneath it

"Edited and Translated by Maurice Metayer." This is the only case where a mediator specifies his role so explicitly, thereby conveying the message that he does not assume the position of author. In the case of *Land of the Good Shadows*, the subtitle is *The Life Story of Anauta, an Eskimo Woman* and the authorial inscription reads "by Heluiz Chandler Washburne and Anauta." For the most part in these examples, the narrating subject's role is portrayed as a reasonably authoritative one.

The same cannot be said in the case of *Sadie Brower Neakok: An Inupiaq Woman*, for which Margaret B. Blackman assumes the role of sole author. Reinforcing this, Blackman's photo appears on the inside flap of the dustjacket, with Neakok's gracing the cover of the book. The result is that a sharp distinction is made here between author and subject. I suggest that this is problematic for several reasons. For one, Neakok's words, initially recorded during interviews, far outnumber Blackman's in the text. For another, Sadie refers to the collaborative project in at least one spot in the text as "my book" (110). This might be a figure of speech. But it might alternatively reflect a sense of Sadie's ownership over the words *she* chose to describe *her* life. According to her own classifications, Kathleen Mullen Sands should consider this text to be a biography based on interviews (42) since, as she says, autobiography "denotes authorial control by the individual whose life is presented" (42). Yet, she engages in a lengthy discussion of this text in her consideration of mediation in Native American women's autobiographies, lauding many of its features (51-52). In fact, it is difficult not to see this as a case of the sort whereby "collector/editors have appropriated authorship of lives not their own" (Sands 41). Nonetheless, Blackman does indicate that all royalties from the sale of the book go to Neakok (xviii). This brings up another important issue related to authorship. While matters pertaining to copyright and profits are governed by individual agreements, appropriation of aboriginal peoples' property rights have historically extended to that of intellectual property rights (Ledwon). Still today,

"imperialist assumptions pervade the law and are perpetuated because court decisions ground themselves in precedent" (Brown). For these reasons, Lenora Ledwon feels that aboriginal subjects should always retain at least the position of co-author in their life stories. It is worth noting that none of the texts considered here apart from Blackman's makes any mention of agreements concerning royalties.

Nancy Wachowich, in a project very similar to Blackman's, has chosen a different approach to designating authorship. On the cover of *Saqiyuq: Stories from the Lives of Three Inuit Women*, the configuration of names, all written in the same size font, reads "Nancy Wachowich, in collaboration with Apphia Agalakti Awa, Rhoda Kaukjak Katsak, and Sandra Pikujak Katsak." Clearly this is a laudable attempt to "[accord] to collaborators not merely the status of independent enunciators but that of writers" (Clifford, *Predicament* 51). Yet, even this may be problematic. Clifford refers to such textual strategies as "a *utopia* of plural authorship," one reason being that "the few recent [ethnographic] experiments with multiple-author works appear to require, as an instigating force, the research interest of an ethnographer who in the end assumes an executive, editorial position." For this reason, "The authoritative stance of 'giving voice' to the other is not fully transcended" (Clifford, *Predicament* 51, emphasis added).

The foregoing discussion reveals that production and editorial decisions made by the mediators, and, increasingly, the autobiographical subjects, have an effect on the extent to which an empowered representation of Inuit subjects is possible. I would argue that collaborative texts initiated by their subjects have the most potential in this regard, with Dorothy Mesher's *Kuujjuaq– Memories and Musings* providing a shining example. Indeed, the very fact that one can confidently refer to it as *her* text is telling. On the other hand, life history texts initiated by ethnographers for professional reasons are inherently more problematic. These mediators, with their specific disciplinary goals in mind, seem ultimately and inevitably to control the text. The

task of balancing professional demands against today's imperative of preserving the right to self-representation by their subjects cannot be an easy one. I have demonstrated some of the problems this challenge can produce with regard to Margaret B. Blackman's *Sadie Brower Neakok: An Inupiaq Woman*. Now I would like to discuss in further detail Nancy Wachowich's efforts in *Saqiyuq: Stories from the Lives of Three Inuit Women*, a text which Sherrill E. Grace specifically cites when referring to "carefully mediated texts...in which [Inuit] speak for themselves" (243). While Wachowich is exemplary in many matters, I would argue that there are some blindspots in her efforts to embody in the text the spirit in which she has named the three Inuit subjects as co-authors.

In discussing the ideal scenario for producing collaborative autobiography, Kathleen Mullen Sands suggests that "every editorial step should be collaborative, with consultation and negotiation of each decision and detail." She adds that "The likelihood of such an intensive collaboration...is slim" (47). Nonetheless, Wachowich seems to have come very close to this ideal. She notes, for example, that she and Rhoda Katsak together drew up the proposal (9) and that Sandra Katsak flew to Edmonton to review the first draft of the collection (9). Statements such as "*We* are grateful to the editors..." reflect the principles of collaboration. Furthermore, in "Acknowledgements," Wachowich mentions that many other members of the family were audiences "throughout several rounds of editorial changes" (viv), demonstrating at least tacit approval of others affected by the project. Unlike many in the tradition of mediation, Wachowich details extensively how the project was carried out. For example, she explains at length how the process of recording the stories transpired. She notes that five different translators were involved in rendering Apphia's spoken Inuktitut words into English (6-7). Wachowich also discusses at length the issues involved in editing oral stories, making clear the number and gravity of the decisions she was required to make. She writes:

> In my attempts to translate oral histories into written narratives, I have worked to preserve as best I can the associative threads spun by Apphia, Rhoda, and Sandra. However, transcribing and editing the stories posed for me a number of methodological problems. At issue is the balance between the need for these testimonies to remain as much as possible in the women's own words, and the need for life histories to be comprehensive and 'reader friendly.' Perpetually conscious of the fact that editing (along with translating and transcribing) is a concentrated act of interpretation, one that plays a critical role in the reproduction of narratives such as these, I have tried to keep the accounts as close as possible to the spoken words recorded on tape. (9)

However, while Wachowich has clearly taken enormous care to be as faithful as possible to her subjects' testimony, the narrated portions of the text might benefit from her not concealing her own "presence." Wachowich is clearly aware of how audience influences text; for example, she notes that when Rhoda took part in some of the translating, "the stories that she chose, as well as they way she told them, were consciously shaped to fit verbal expressions and expectations of English speakers like me" (7). In spite of this awareness, she opted to "[remove] parts of the interviews, including questions and statements made by [herself], the interpreter, or by other people present in the room" (10). Stylistically speaking, this was probably wise. However, Wachowich's becoming what H. David Brumble calls an "Absent Editor" carries with it other problems. He explains, in reference to Native American autobiography, "Often these editors provide introductions to the autobiographies which describe, sometimes in detail, just how they went to work. But once the autobiographies are underway, the fiction is that the Indians speak to us without mediation" (76). In Carole Boyce Davies's estimation, what can result from such approaches is that "...the dominant-subordinate relationships are enforced and the editor becomes a detached, sometimes clinical, orderer or even exploiter of life stories for

anthropological ends, research data, raw material, or the like" (13). While this criticism is clearly too harsh in Wachowich's case, it points to the dangers of this textual strategy. Furthermore, even though Wachowich is officially "absent" from the testimonies themselves, traces of her presence may be discerned.

For instance, it is clear from the way Apphia Awa begins certain of her sections that Wachowich was providing prompts to elicit particular information. In apparent response to such prompts, Awa offers, "I only heard about the whalers from before, from stories since a long, long time ago. I never actually lived with them or saw them" (117) and "Yes, the traders, I remember them very well" (122). Without the prompts, Awa may have omitted this discussion, indicating their insigificance to her life at the time she was speaking with Wachowich. Others have successfully chosen the approach of less interference in and control over a subject's testimony. H. David Brumble, in discussing the issue of translating oral performance into writing, lauds the editors of *Shandaa In My Lifetime*, Gwich'in elder Belle Herbert's autobiographical work, for their editorial decisions, noting that "they respect Herbert's silences as well as her words." He points out that the editors might have made efforts to fill in what some readers could consider gaps in the text-- for example with ethnographic explanations-- but concludes that with their chosen approach "we are closer here to Athabaskan storytelling– and much closer to one aged Athabaskan woman's own point of view" than might otherwise have been the case (97).

Also problematic is Wachowich's failure to acknowledge her own position as a privileged member of the dominant society and to reflect upon what effect this might have had on her subjects' testimony and especially on their consenting to work on the project in the first place. As Tajaswini Niranjana points out,"What the discourse of ethnography traditionally represses...is any awareness of the asymmetrical relations between colonizer and colonized that enabled the growth of the discipline and provided the context for translation" (70). I would

suggest that in spite of Wachowich's considerable and sincere efforts at an egalitarian collaboration, an asymmetrical relationship between Wachowich and the three Inuit women is evident in this text. For example, Wachowich represents herself as an individual who has developed a warm and personal relationship with her informants, which she no doubt has. At the end of the "Introduction" she writes, "I have not yet mentioned how privileged I feel to have participated in the recording of these three women's life histories. My afternoon and evening teas and coffees with Apphia, Rhoda, Sandra, and members of their family have taught me much about graciousness and generosity. They have shown me how people can face adversity and still find things to laugh about" (10-11). I would argue that in a more equal collaboration, a reader would also be privy to the three Inuit women's reflections on working with Wachowich. This would also constitute an expression of agency on the part of the narrators, which would in turn offer support to the process of Inuit self-determination.

Some of Rhoda Katsak's comments might even reflect the power imbalance between Wachowich and her co-authors. In one passage of her testimony, Katsak discusses her experiences with researchers from the time she was small to the present:

> The researchers, most of the time they just did whatever they wanted when they were up here. A lot of the time they didn't bother to explain themselves very well. A lot of times we didn't really understand what was going on. We just did whatever they told us to do. People in the community, Inuit, would complain to each other during those years. They would say stuff like, 'Oh, here they come again to study us.' I think that maybe even today there are some of the same attitudes in town when a researcher goes into a house and starts asking questions. We might think, 'You again,' that kind of thing, but we would still be, what is the word... 'polite'– I guess that's the word. We would still say yes to being interviewed. Even though we might talk about it between ourselves, talk about all

> the researchers coming to study us, even though we might say those things to each other, a lot of times we would still be polite and agree. (176)

There is not enough evidence to determine how these comments might relate to the production of *Saqiyuq*. But Katsak's words are important for any ethnographer to take into account, as they reveal that consent and participation may not always be given happily or comfortably in a relationship which, in spite of an ethnographer's personal qualities and approach, is based on a legacy of colonial domination. In the end, a reader is left with the feeling that this is Wachowich's book. She initiated the project, decided how to present the testimonies, and provided the ethnographic perspectives which frame and contextualize the three Inuit women's words. Thus, while I agree with Grace that the Inuit subjects speak for themselves in the text, and that this is an important advance, there is room for improvement in what could otherwise be a model for many an ethnographer to emulate.

There are many compelling reasons to argue for the value of both past and ongoing collaborative Inuit autobiographical projects. For example, what H. David Brumble says in his study of Native American autobiography also pertains to Inuit: "Thanks to the many anthropologists, poets, psychiatrists, and amateur historians who collected life stories from Indians, we can read autobiographical narratives by nonliterate Indians. It would never have occurred to these people to sit down and tell the story of their lives whole. And yet we may read their 'autobiographies'" (4). Composite autobiography of traditional peoples also allows us to glimpse the early effects of colonization and to detect the emergence of the hybrid identities which exist today. In response to the charge of "appropriation" levelled at some for taking on projects which involve the presentation of an Other's life and voice, Renée Hulan cautions that the "well-meaning attempt to avoid appropriating the voice of others can have the same effect...if the voice of northern inhabitants cannot be heard" (62). She maintains that non-Inuit writers can

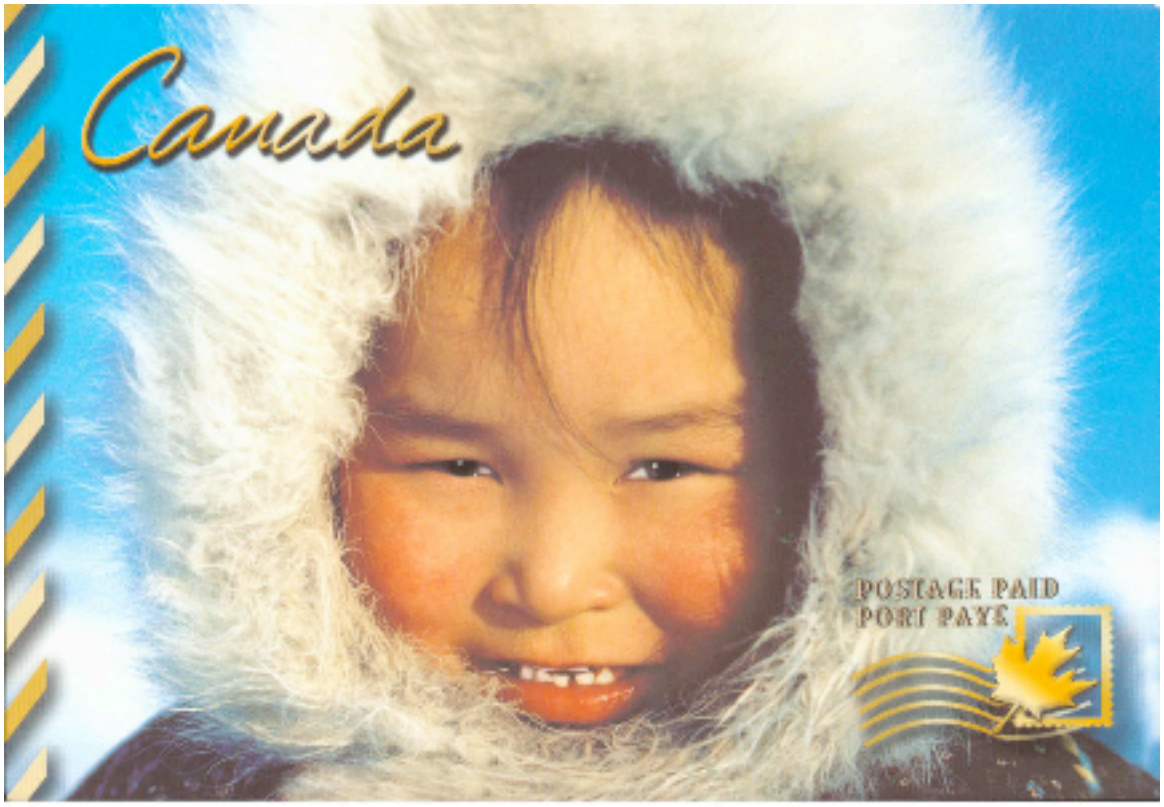
"speak for" Inuit "both by reaching an audience that Inuit writers may not have access to and by influencing how that audience will receive Inuit writing" (62), and cites Linda Alcoff's observation that "sometimes it is politically expedient to have a spokesperson speak on one's behalf" (62). Indeed, Margaret B. Blackman points out that such works "[have] given voice to those who might otherwise not be heard– the ordinary, the disadvantaged, women, minorities" (xi). Finally, Kathleen Mullen Sands contends that the composite form "offers non-Natives a venue for partnership with Native people [and]...provides Native narrators disinclined to write or deal with publication arrangements an opportunity to tell their stories" (54). After all, without mediators' efforts, the texts discussed in this paper and many more would likely never have been published.

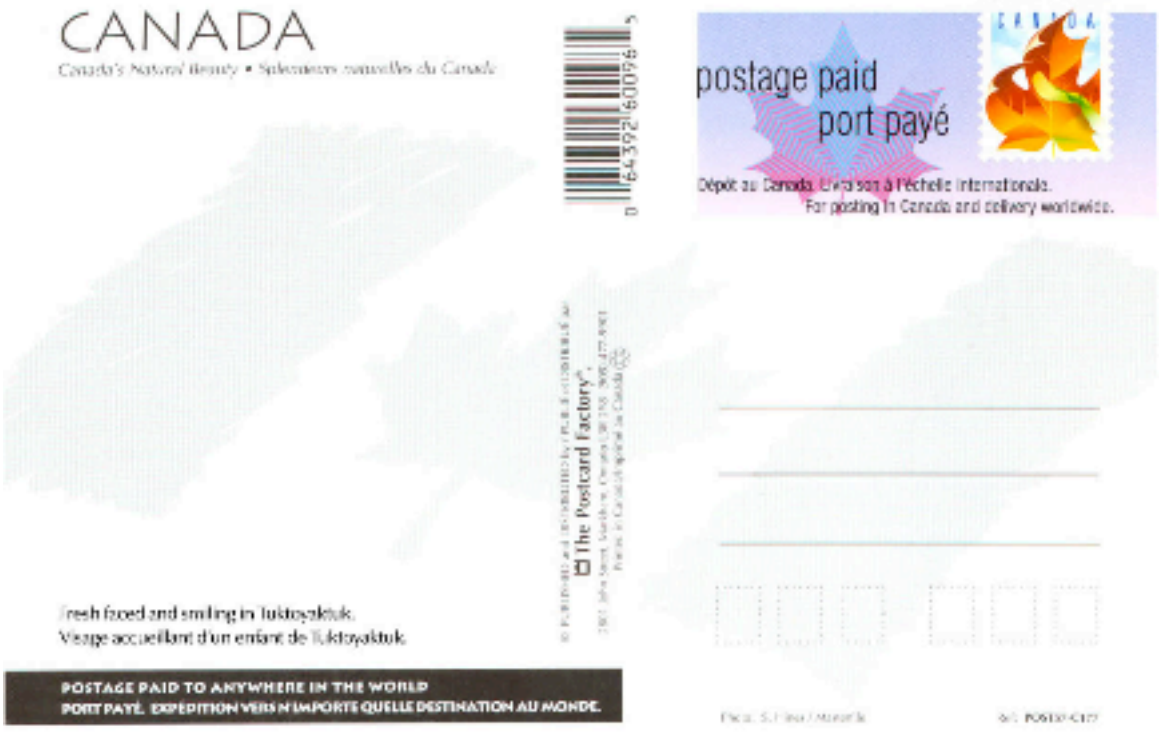
All of these points are well taken. Moreover, this paper has shown that collaborative autobiography, when executed sensitively, is capable of granting narrative authority to the subject and allowing some potent "writing back" to occur. But it is generally the mediators, especially in the case of ethnographic projects, who are doing this "granting" and "allowing." What are the repercussions for Inuit of their part of this equation? Might such projects perpetuate a hegemony initiated in the first instance by colonial domination? Dorothy Mesher's experience has revealed to her that in spite of Inuit struggling to live according to Qallunaat values, many Qallunaat "persist in attitudes that see [Inuit] as 'childish' or 'immature' or 'inexperienced' or 'irresponsible.' She continues, "[s]o the message is consistent that we are not-quite-ready, just yet, to manage our jobs or our affairs– and we are not-quite-ready, just yet, to mingle with them socially" (87). Happily, more and more self-initiated Inuit literary production is underway. As Penny Petrone notes, "Canadian Inuit writing in English is evolving. A growing number of Inuit writers are speaking for themselves about themselves in English. They are writing with a new pride and authority in their physical and spiritual roots and with new

confidence in their own literary efforts" (202).

Self-initiated autobiography may be an especially important part of this movement, for, as Hertha Wong argues, "Self-narration is part of the process of self-construction and self-representation" (*Sending* vi). Yet, this may be a challenge for Inuit. As Heather Henderson points out concerning *Life Among the Qallunaat*, "[the] egotism needed [by Minnie Aodla Freeman] to become an autobiographer, to focus upon the self, seems antithetical to everything she has been taught. Yet only as a translator and autobiographer can she accomplish anything for her people. Paradoxically, in the old days, survival depended upon the suppression of individuality; now, it seems to depend upon having the courage to speak up" (66). The issue of speaking up is also reflected in the "Foreword" to Maria Campbell's *Stories of the Road Allowance People.* Ron Marken explains how "European concepts of 'voice' are hedged with assumptions and undermined with problems. Voice equals speech. Voice has the floor. Voice is authority. To have voice is to have power. To speak is to hold others in sway, to register opinion. To be dumb or voiceless is synonymous with being ignorant" (Campbell 5). For reasons of political self-determination, Inuit need not only be capable-- which clearly they are-- but to be perceived as capable. As Ron Marken says, "... self-governing of the tongue can lead to all sorts of self-government" (Campbell 5).

Appendix


Canada
POSTAGE PAID
PORT PAYÉ


CANADA
Canada's Natural Beauty • Splendeurs naturelles du Canada
postage paid
port payé
Fresh faced and smiling in Iuktoyaktuk.
Visage accueillant d'un enfant de Iuktoyaktuk
POSTAGE PAID TO ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD
PORT PAYÉ. EXPÉDITION VERS N'IMPORTE QUELLE DESTINATION AU MONDE.

Works Cited

Alcoff, Linda. "The Problem of Speaking for Others." *Cultural Critique* 20 (1991-92): 5-32.

Ashcroft, Bill, et al., eds. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 2001.

---. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Bahri Deepika. "Coming to Terms with the 'Postcolonial.'" *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality*. Deepika Bahri and Mary Vasudeva, eds. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1996. 137-163.

Behar, Ruth. "Rage and Redemption: Reading the Life Story of a Mexican Marketing Woman." *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture*. Eds. Dennis Tedlock and Bruce Mannheim. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995. 148-178.

Blackman, Margaret B. *Sadie Brower Neakok: An Iñupiaq Woman*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989.

Blake, Dale S. *Canadian Inuit Autobiography: Challenging the Stereotypes*. Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 2002. Theses Canada Portal <http://www.nic-bnc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk2/ftp02/NQ59938.pdf>.

Brody, Hugh. *Living Arctic: Hunters of the Canadian North*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1987.

Brown, Alanna Kathleen. "Collaboration and the Complex World of Literary Rights." *The American Indian Quarterly* 21.4 (Fall 1997): 595. 9 pp. Online. *Wilson Web Journal Directory*. Thompson Rivers University. Lib., Kamloops. 22 June. 2006.

Brumble, H. David. *American Indian Autobiography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Campbell, Maria, trans. *Stories of the Road Allowance People*. Penticton: Theytus Books, 1995.

Clifford, James. “Introduction: Partial Truths.” Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. Eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. 1-26.

---. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Cruikshank, Julie et al. *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Elders*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990.

Davies, Carole Boyce. “Collaboration and the Ordering Imperative in Life Story Production.” Smith and Watson 3-19.

Francis, Daniel. *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2003.

Freeman, Minnie Aodla. *Life Among the Qallunaat*. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1978.

Goudie, Elizabeth. *Woman of Labrador*. Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1973.

Grace, Sherrill E. *Canada and the Idea of North*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001.

Henderson, Heather. “North and South: Autobiography and the Problems of Translation.” *Reflections: Autobiography and Canadian Literature*. Ed. K.P. Stitch. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988. 61-68.

Herbert, Belle. *Shandaa In My Lifetime*. Ed. Bill Pfisterer et al. Anchorage: University of Alaska Press, 1992.

Hines, S. “Fresh-faced and Smiling in Tuktoyaktuk.” Postcard. Markham: The Postcard Factory.

Hulan, Renée. *Northern Experience and the Myths of Canadian Culture*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002.

Krupat, Arnold. *Ethnocriticism: Ethnography, History, Literature*. Berkeley: University of

California Press, 1992.

---. *For Those Who Come After: A Study of Native American Autobiography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

Ledwon, Lenora. "Native American Life Stories and 'Authorship': Legal and Ethical Issues." *The American Indian Quarterly* 21.4 (Fall 1997): 579. 14 pp. Online. *Wilson Web Journal Directory*. Thompson Rivers University. Lib., Kamloops. 22 June. 2006.

Lutz, Hartmut. *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors*. Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1991.

McGrath, Robin. *Canadian Inuit Literature: The Development of a Tradition*. Ottawa: National *Museums of Canada, 1984.*

Mesher, Dorothy. *Kuujjuaq– Memories and Musings*. Duncan: Unica Publishing Co., 1995.

Metayer, Maurice, ed. *I, Nuligak*. Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1966.

Nanook of the North. Dir. Robert Flaherty. 1922. DVD. The Criterion Collection, 1998.

Nanook Revisited. Dir. Claude Massot. 1988. Videocassette. Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 1994.

Niranjana, Tejaswini. *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

O'Faolain, Nuala. *Are You Somebody? The Accidental Memoir of a Dublin Woman*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996.

Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. New York: Methuen, 1982.

Petrone, Penny, ed. *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988.

Raynaud, Claudine. "Rubbing a Paragraph with a Soft Cloth"? Muted Voices and Editorial

Constraints in *Dust Tracks on a Road*." Smith and Watson 34-64.

Sands, Kathleen Mullen. "Collaboration or Colonialism: Text and Process in Native American Women's Autobiographies." *Melus* 22.4 (Winter 1997): 39-59.

Sarris, Greg. *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts*. Berkeley: University of Calfornia Press, 1993.

Smith, Sidonie. *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1987.

Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson. eds. *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.

Thrasher, Anthony Apakark. *Thrasher: Skid Row Eskimo*. Toronto: Griffin House, 1996.

Trinh, T. Minh-ha. *Woman, Native, Other*: *Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Wachowich, Nancy et al. *Saqiyuq: Stories from the Lives of Three Inuit Women*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001.

Washburne, Heluiz Chandler and Anauta. *Land of the Good Shadows: The Life Story of Anauta, an Eskimo Woman*. New York: The John Day Company, 1940.

Wiebe, Rudy and and Yvonne Johnson, *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman*. Toronto: Knopf, 1998.

Wong, Hertha Dawn. "First-Person Plural: Subjectivity and Community in Native American Women's Autobiography." *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998. 168-178.

---. *Sending My Heart Back Across the Years: Tradition and Innovation in Native American Autobiography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.