

ENCOUNTERING THE WHITEMAN IN JAMES BAY CREE NARRATIVE HISTORY AND MYTHOLOGY

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Introduction

This paper discusses eastern Cree perspectives on contact with Europeans, as glimpsed through narratives both historical and mythical in genre.¹ Some are explicitly about first contacts and early relations with the French (*upishtikuyaauch*) and the English (*waamishtikushiiyuuch*)² at James Bay. Others not specifically situated in historical terms, address more abstractly the problem of Cree relations with a category of strangers, outsiders, and enemies known as *pwaatich*. Taken together, these narratives highlight ways in which indigenous constructs of group identity and intergroup relations apply to Europeans, constructs that have been remarkably persistent through a three century contact history, and that have contemporary manifestations in the rhetoric of aboriginal rights and conflicts over use of the environment.

The Cree elders who in the late 1970s and early 80s related the narratives hereunder had spent most of their adult lives as hunters, in a 'traditional' fur trade setting. They were, at the same time, actively engaged in reflecting upon and attempting to influence the circumstances of their existence in a modern economy and state. The first decade of conflict with the Government of Quebec over damage to their lands and waters for hydroelectric development had just passed. Hence, while the narrative settings themselves are situated in mythical and throughout historical time, it would be a misapprehension to limit interpretation to the function of these narratives in a remote or 'traditional' past. Myth and

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¹ I wish to acknowledge the important contributions of two Cree elders, now deceased, Geordie Georgekish and Jacob Georgekish of Wemindji, James Bay, Quebec. Theirs are the narrative renditions that comprise the core of this article.

I also wish to thank Sylvie Vincent, and two anonymous readers for *Recherches Amérindiennes au Québec*, whose excellent commentary I have tried to take account of in the published version of the paper.

² *Waamishtikushiiyu*, at a relatively general level in the taxonomy of ethnic categories, is used by Wemindji Cree speakers to designate any 'Whiteman', in opposition to *iiyu* ('Indian'), for example. At a more differentiated level, *waamishtikushiiyu* has the particular designation 'Englishman', in opposition, for example, to other ethnic variants of Whiteman: *upishtikuyaa* ('Frenchman'); *kaachiinashtuudinaat* ('German'); etc. Similarly, the category *iiyu* can mean 'Cree', 'Indian', 'human being', or 'living being' as one moves from more differentiated to more inclusive taxonomic levels.

history, intimately connected in all culture, derive their vitality from the sociopolitical preoccupations of the present.

The interpretation of the narratives in indigenous and modern contexts requires exploration of the ways in which a logic of reciprocity generates categories of humanity. In Cree discourse, notions of reciprocity apply to a broad matrix of domestic, inter-societal, and ecological exchanges, while human social categories have reference to a spectrum of cognitive/evaluative positions - ranging from kin through stranger to cannibal - determined largely through assessments of the state of reciprocity relating Cree selves to others.

Before turning to the Cree narratives, I refer to some general themes in aboriginal political discourse in Canada which, as we shall see later, echo the symbolic schema of the narratives. Related instances of the contemporary rhetoric of Cree and other Algonkian speakers are returned to in the conclusions.

Reciprocity and Aboriginal Rights

The thematic of sustained reciprocity between Cree and Whitemen connects myth and oral history to present political struggles with the state. This thematic is not particular to the Cree. Aboriginal speakers in public fora continually assert that the whiteman would not have survived and prospered without the knowledge and assistance of First Nations in trade, in military alliance, in treaties of peace and friendship, and in land transfers to the Europeans. Aboriginal leaders challenge state authorities to honour this founding relationship in contemporary practice.

The moral claims of the aboriginal party depend on the differences in material power that separate them from their European colonisers, as analyses of 'symbolic competition'³ and 'moral opposition'.⁴ Inequality implies failure to share, leaving the exploited in the morally superior position. Aboriginal speakers refer to this asymmetry when they challenge their non-aboriginal counterparts to become authentically human, by conducting their relations with First Nations in a spirit of generosity and respect. To the extent that Whites share, their moral position improves, along with the political economic position of their aboriginal partners. The phenomenon of so-called 'liberal guilt' in mainstream culture suggests that, at least in the context of popular ideologies which favour public welfare, disparage racism, and are sympathetic to decolonisation, these arguments enjoy some transcultural suasive power.

Symbolic competition and moral opposition have in fact become extremely uncomfortable for state authorities. On the opening morning of the first of four nationally-televised First Ministers' Conferences (FMC's) on Aboriginal Constitutional Matters held during the 1980s, a Native elder offered a prayer to the Creator, in an aboriginal language.⁵ On the second day, when Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau attempted to open on a more secular note by going straight to business, he was interrupted by a request from the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations to again open with an elder's prayer. Trudeau rather testily replied, 'Will you pray every morning in public?' When the aboriginal side persisted, Trudeau commented, 'Then everyone should pray to his own God', and as a Native elder prayed aloud, Trudeau at equal volume intoned the Lord's Prayer. The Prime Minister sought to curtail the moral authority of the aboriginal position, but his actions seemed a callous refusal to acknowledge the spiritual oppression historically suffered by aboriginals. Sensitive to a public perception of affront to aboriginal participants, it was

³ Schwimmer 1972.

⁴ Paine 1985.

⁵ FMC's were held in 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1987.

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Trudeau who backed down. On subsequent mornings of the four Conferences, it became customary to open discussions with an aboriginal elder's prayer.

Indeed, the scope for sacred performance tended to increase as the conferences went on.⁶ Several tokens of moral and sacred authority were entered into exchange by aboriginal actors - prayer offerings, the passing of the pipe to First Ministers, and gifts to Prime Ministers Trudeau and Mulroney of an eagle feather, a whaler's cap, a Métis sash. The ceremonial display of 'two-row wampum' treaty belts reminded Canadians of the material and political concessions rendered in the past by First Nations to Europeans, through treaties that committed both parties to commerce and alliance without political and territorial interference.⁷ As media event, the FMC's were vehicles for inviting the Canadian public at large to recognise the long-term exchange, and to participate in its contemporary fulfilment and renewal.

The giving of sacred tokens and the ceremonial reminder of nation-to-nation treaties play two functions simultaneously. On the one hand, they differentiate aboriginal nations from others, a prerequisite for any political claim on powers conventionally claimed by the state. On the other hand, the idiom of gift-giving and exchange provides a model for sustained, albeit restructured, intergroup relations with European nations. Gifts proffered and accepted have certain moral consequences for subsequent transactions. To invoke a Maussian metaphor, aboriginal speakers/givers would generalise a standard of positive reciprocity to the status of 'total social phenomenon' in their dealings with the state.

These strategies are meaningful to non-aboriginals, I would argue, because it is a universal feature of human social life that to recognise the 'other' as like 'us' (as human, as member of society, as family) is at some level to admit judgments of balance or fairness in our exchanges with the other. Exchange presupposes both a distinction between partners, and a certain moral community uniting them. While exchange presents manifold opportunities for manipulation, treachery, or coercion on the basis of group distinctions, these negative terms are themselves meaningful only in relation to the moral unity also presupposed by exchange.

Positive Reciprocity in Narrative about Whitemen

In eastern Cree, as in other Algonkian traditions, narrative is classified into two broad genres: 'myth' (*aatiyuuhkaan*), in which narrated events transcend secular time - a predominantly figurative mode; and 'news/history/tidings' (*tipaachimuun*), a descriptive mode in which reported events are understood literally to have occurred in the experience of living people or their ancestors.⁸ Narratives dealing with the Whiteman are given in both genres.

The narratives presented in this section and the next are selected from a collection recorded with several Wemindji elders between 1979 and 1982.⁹ Narrators were informed that I was especially interested in stories that had to do with life on the land, with animals,

⁶ One observation might be that symbolic concessions to the aboriginal party were on the increase, as aboriginal leaders were prevented by several First Ministers from achieving their central demand - the entrenchment of an inherent right of self-government in the Constitution.

⁷ As depicted by the two rows on the wampum belt, the ship of the European and the canoe of the Native partner would enjoy parallel but autonomous passage on the river of life, a reciprocity of respect for the sovereignty of the other.

⁸ Hallowell 1964; Preston 1975a; Savard 1979.

⁹ Scott 1982a.

or with *waamishtukushiiyuu* (the 'Whiteman'). Aside from this extremely general solicitation, narrators chose for themselves which stories to present.¹⁰

The first myth presented here involves the Cree-Montagnais hero/transformer, *Chakaapaash*. The narrator included this episode as the last in a cycle of seven *Chakaapaash* episodes:

*Chakaapaash Encounters Whitemen*¹¹

As *Chakaapaash* was out walking along the coast, he saw a ship floating in the ocean. So he went over to see the ship, and when he got on board he was given Whiteman's food by the people who were on the ship. It was something which he had never eaten before. So he took some home to his sister. The people in the ship had told him to give them something to eat.

So he went home and when he got there, he gave the food from the ship to his sister. She showed how grateful she was for what he brought back for her, and the people were able to hear her all the way out on the ship when she thanked them for the food.

'They want some food so I'll take it back to them,' he said to her. So he took meat to them. He took one whole leg of a red squirrel to them. When he got there, he brought aboard the leg of squirrel. When he put it down, its weight was so great that the vessel began to list sharply. That ends the story about the ship.

Geordie Georgekish

Wemindji, 1979

It is said that ideal behaviour is to recognise what someone needs and to provide it without expectation of return, although one may let one's need be known in case it has not been noticed. Rarely, except in the case of an already intimate and secure partnership, would one ask directly for something; and then preferably through an intermediary, minimising embarrassment to both parties should the answer be 'no'. Perhaps the Whitemen were weak on etiquette in asking *Chakaapaash* to bring them food, but the hero takes them a leg of red squirrel, a gift that while seeming absurdly small proves to vastly outweigh the generosity of the Whitemen.

To fully appreciate both the ambivalence and the hyperbole of the situation, it helps to know that the squirrel is considered among the least important of game, normally reserved for small boys. As such, it is opposed to the black bear, the most important of animals, killed by youths only after being properly introduced by an experienced adult. The opposition is explicitly underlined in this synopsis of another mythical episode:

The squirrel wanted to be a bear, which was rather bold of him, being so small. He was answered with the argument that considering all the squirrels in the world, there would hardly be a place for them if they were bears. The white rims around the squirrel's eyes are from all the weeping he did because he couldn't be a bear.

From one vantage point, then, *Chakaapaash*'s gift of 'unimportant' food puts at risk reciprocity with the Whiteman. But as those familiar with the *Chakaapaash* cycle of myths know, squirrels are the hero's favourite game, the animal with which a hunter has a special

¹⁰ Free translations into English were transcribed by Cree assistants shortly following each interview, these we reviewed together, and any ambiguities in the translations were referred to the narrators for clarification. The expert assistance of Abel Visitor, Daniel Natawapineskum, Francis Visitor, Robert Visitor, and Eva Louttit is gratefully acknowledged.

¹¹ For ease of reference, brief descriptive titles are provided; these were not part of the narrators' presentations.

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sacred relationship, and from that point of view a respectable gift. *Chakaapaash* commands the trickster's ability to make small of large, and large of small. The Whiteman's ship tilts precariously under the weight of the gift.

Myth bases the original relation of the Cree hero to Whitemen in an exchange of food, the most sacred basis possible for securing the original relationship of reciprocity. Historical narrative (*tipaachimuun*), on the other hand, represents reciprocal exchange in the form of secular trade goods. The first version, provided by the same narrator as the *Chakaapaash* encounter, focuses on an original exchange of clothing. In a second version from a different narrator, the gift of a firearm is also involved.

The First Whitemen (Version One)

This is an old story that goes all the way back to the time before the Whiteman first came to this land. There was a certain man living at that time who could conjure (*kuusaapitam*) using the shaking tent (conjuring lodge) and he had the ability of being able to know what would happen in the future, with the help of a *mistaapaau* (spirit helper).

[Narrator assumes the voice of the *mistaapaau*, who is seeing into the future for the man who could conjure]: 'I see someone out in the ocean. He is standing in the water. He looks like a huge person in the form of a white spruce (*minhiikwaapaaiyuu*).' The strange person was just standing there. After a while, the *mistaapaau* spoke to the man again: 'Remember what I saw in the ocean? I told you it was a huge person in the form of a white spruce. It is not a person. It is called a ship (*chiimaan*).' So he looked around, and it was still just standing there. He spoke to the man once again: 'He might find you, but don't be afraid of him. Don't be afraid of him. He might find you. You can go to the ship. You can go to the ship.'

Then the people saw the ship. The man wanted to paddle over to the ship, but none of the men wanted to go with him. Only his wife would paddle to the ship with him. Soon he was on his way, and shortly he arrived. Their jackets were made of fur from animals that he had trapped. So the people on the ship gave them some other clothes to wear. 'Take your clothes off', they were told, and they understood what they were told. 'Put these clothes on,' they were told. [narrator jokes: 'I guess they took their clothes off where nobody could see them. There must have been a small room where they could undress']. So the woman, whose pants were made of muskrat fur, removed her pants. And they went home wearing the clothes that the people from the ship had given them.

As for the other people who hadn't wanted to go to the ship, they paddled over, and they were also given some clothes to wear by the people in the ship. And that's when the first Whitemen came to the Indian people, in a place called *Paakumshumwaashtik* ('River Spills Out'; Old Factory or Viewx Comptoir on official maps).¹²

They lived on an island known as *Upishtikuyaaukamuhk* (Frenchman's Island, in the bay at Old Factory). They began building houses there. The news of the first Whitemen's meeting with the Indian people spread in the world. As the news was heard more and more Whitemen came to the Indian's land. They started living on the Indian's land. Here in a place called *Maatuskaau* (Moar Bay), it is said that an old

¹² The village site at Old Factory was abandoned in 1958 in favour of the present-day site at Wemindji. Wemindji community members feel a strong historical identification with Old Factory.

Englishman lived. The place belonged to the Indian people. Of the Whitemen that had come to the Indian's land, I guess he was the oldest. So he got the name *Chishaawaamishtukushiiyuu* (Elder Englishman; *chishaa-*, meaning 'old', also connotes 'wise' and 'great'; *waamishtukushiiyuu* translates 'Englishman'). His (Indian) wife also came from the place called *Maatuskaau*. It is also said that he had a son-in-law who was Indian.

There was another Englishman who lived in Eastmain. He was the first Whiteman who ever came to that place. He sold rifles and shotguns. He sold them to the Indian people. And he gave them to the Indian people. People came from the north to Eastmain to pick up firearm supplies such as powder for their shotguns. One type of shotgun was known as the 'seal-tailed' shotgun (*kaa-achikwaayuuch*). Another was called the 'duck-billed' shotgun (*shiishiipukutuuch*) [narrator comments: 'I have seen the duck-billed shotgun']. A third type of shotgun was known as the 'fat-thighed' shotgun (*kaa-michipuuumiiyaach*). Those are the types of shotguns that the Whiteman gave and sold.

Concerning some people from the north who went to pick up ammunition in Eastmain, when they returned (from trapping), they just walked by (place reference unclear) and headed straight to Frenchman's Island. That's where the Frenchmen lived here at Old Factory. The Frenchman runs toward them, and when he reaches them, he unfastens their dog sleds and takes all the fur that they had wanted to sell him. But they get nothing at all from him.

Now Elder Englishman who lived at *Matuskaau*, when he heard about this, wanted to see for himself what he had heard. He wanted to see what the Frenchman did to the Indian people. 'Well, if I had the chance to return to where I came from, I could show the Frenchman something he wouldn't like, for what he had done to the people. So I guess I'll go home,' said Elder Englishman.

He asked his son-in-law to go with him. He was told how to behave when they got to the town: 'Always be careful how you behave when you get to that place, toward the people that you're going to see there.' He was the type of boy who used to say things just to get everyone else to laugh at his jokes. When they had finished saying what they wanted to tell him, he told the people the name of the place that they were going. 'I guess I'll have my chance to fool around with the women there,' he said, laughing.

Soon, he and his father-in-law were on their way to that place. That's where the big fight started, the fight between the Englishmen and the Frenchmen. The Company (*Kaampaanii*, referring to the Hudson's Bay Company), as it turned out, won the fight. That's when the Company first came to the Indian's land [Narrator's aside: 'But I just wonder what year it was when all this took place']. This was something that the old people did in the past. It was from long ago that the Indians first lived in this country, before the first Frenchmen, who found the Indians, came to this place. Then the Frenchmen and the Company fought. The Company won the fight. Right now, the Company still stands for the Indian people.

Geordie Georgekish
Wemindji, 1979

The First Whitemen (Version Two)

Before the first Englishman arrived here, and even before the first Frenchman arrived, only the Indian (*liyuu*) was here. The first Indian people who lived here had their home at Old Factory. There was a person who had a 'shaking tent'. The person (a *mistaapaau*, spirit helper) who was talking to him told him: 'There is a white spruce

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standing in the water'. He didn't understand what the *mistaapaau* was saying to him. Everytime he looked into it (the 'shaking tent'), the person who was talking to him always said the same thing. What he was really talking about was a ship. This person was telling him to expect a large ship which would arrive anytime now.

Later, out in the Bay, he saw something like a white spruce standing straight up into the air. He saw the flags of the ship in the distance. It was a large ship. It belonged to Frenchmen, not Englishmen. They watched as the ship sailed closer and closer. When they saw that the ship had stopped, one of the men said: 'Let's go over and check on it.' The others were frightened, so he asked his wife to go with him. 'They probably won't do anything to us,' he said. But the old man (his father-in-law) took hold of his daughter and told her not to go. The man told his father-in-law: 'Let her go, let her come with me. Those people probably won't do anything to us.'

All their clothing was of different kinds of fur from animals. The man paddled over to the ship with his wife, while the other people watched. When they arrived, the people on the deck threw a rope down so they could secure their canoe. They invited them to come on board. Although they didn't understand their language, they understood what they meant. The fur that they were wearing generally came from animals like the beaver and otter. Also, the footwear they had was made of hide. When they got onto the ship, all of the fur they were wearing was exchanged for the strangers' clothing. After they had put on the clothing, they looked really fine. The man was first to try on the new clothing; then the woman did the same thing. After they had their new clothing on, the man was shown a shotgun. After he had received the gun, they threw something up into the air, and the man shot at it. They showed him the different parts of the gun, including where to load it. He received the shot gun as a gift. They gave him the shotgun because they were delighted that he had come aboard to check on the ship.

The woman looked really fine, too, (in new clothes). They (the Whitemen) took all the fur that they had been wearing; everything, including the moccasins. When they had received everything from the people on the ship, they headed back to their home. The old man who had tried to keep his daughter back was very surprised when he saw her. He told the other men to paddle over to the ship, saying that they might also be given some clothing to wear. So they paddled out to the ship - probably the women went with them, too. When they arrived, the people on the ship treated them as they had the first ones.

It is said that the French were the first group to see the Indians. They stayed with the people for a long time. I don't remember what happened after that. I wasn't born yet, and my father wasn't born yet, either. The French were the first ones to come to the Indians people. Then after a while, the Company (Hudson's Bay Co.) came to the people.

When these people from the ship stayed with the Indian people, the only food they relied upon was fish. They gathered hundreds, and put them in barrels, then buried these barrels under the snow. From time to time they took some out to eat.

Finally the time came when they had to leave for home. After the French left it was the Englishman's turn to meet the Indians. But the Company never had any intention of leaving the Indians. From time to time large ships came in to bring goods to the people [narrator's aside: 'I remember seeing them - they were the ones

with a number of sails, one on top of the other - *skutaau chiimaa* ('fire ship')).¹³ The newcomers started building some houses to form *istaaun* (from the English 'town'; the post). Eastmain was one of the first ones built around here. Old Factory didn't even exist at that time. But people often came down to there from inland, even before it was a post. Most of the people at that time headed to Eastmain, when they came down.

When people brought their fur to sell, they took it to the post at Waskaganish and they sold it there. This is where all the fur was collected to be taken out. When people wanted to charge something, they usually went to Waskaganish, because at that time, the manager at Eastmain wasn't very experienced. The people got most of the things they wanted from that particular post.

That's the end of the story.

Jacob Georgekish
Wemindji, 1981

These narratives are concerned with an important issue also addressed by the *Chakaapaash* myth: what sort of person was the Whiteman, friendly or dangerous, and what sort of relations with him were possible? The central character of the narratives has foreknowledge of an approaching stranger through his spirit helper or *mistaapaau*, who speaks to him through the medium of the conjuring lodge. The initial percept of the ship is ambiguous, but further reconnaissance enables the *mistaapaau* to report to the man that the white spruce 'person' is really something called a 'ship', and that it might find him. Although, on the advice of his *mistaapaau*, the man feels that it is safe to approach the ship, more conservative opinions are expressed enjoining him not to do so. Ambivalence toward the unknown strangers is expressed in social structural terms. In the second version, the man's father-in-law attempts to prevent his daughter from going with her husband (the younger man would normally reside with his parents-in-law for an extended period following marriage, and the father-in-law possibly represents an elder authority of the group).

The positive reciprocity affirmed through the remainder of the narrative is indicated in three principal ways. The first is economic. Secondly, potential and actual instances of marital and sexual reciprocity are alluded to. We learn that the first Elder Englishman marries an Indian woman from Maatuskaau (Moar Bay just north of Old Factory). Their daughter marries an Indian, so that in the patrilineal terms of Cree marriage exchange, marital reciprocity with the Englishman's wife's group, with whom he resides, might be deemed to have been fulfilled. Still, there is asymmetry. European men always arrived without women.¹⁴ The son-in-law's visit with his father-in-law to the latter's home represents an extremely rare circumstance, under traditional fur trade conditions, where eastern Cree men might even have come in contact with European women. The son-in-law jokes about how he will fool around with the women there, while being admonished to be careful how he jokes with the Whiteman.

A third element of reciprocity is military assistance. Cree who have received hunting arms and ammunition from the English at Eastmain take their furs to the French post at Old Factory. Given that trade relations with the French predated those with the English (according to Cree oral tradition, but not according to historians), perhaps an issue of

¹³ The narrator, in his nineties when this story was told, remembered a time before sail power was replaced by steam.

¹⁴ Concern over this asymmetry of course reflects a Cree male bias. Although women were among the elders who recorded narratives for my research, narratives about Whites were offered only by men.

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loyalty to the French is involved. But the French take the furs, giving nothing in exchange. The old Englishman's journey home results in a punitive expedition against the French. The Cree history refers, in all likelihood, to the expeditionary force that was sent to James Bay under James Knight in 1692, who wintered at Old Factory before expelling the French from James Bay.¹⁵ The expulsion is interpreted as protection of the interests of Cree allies by the English Hudson's Bay Company.

There is much in historical narrative representations, then, that would seem to favour the hegemony of the Company. The English are seen as generous and legitimate partners in trade, more interested than their colonial and commercial rivals in the Indians' welfare. Loyalty to the Company is presented in a positive light, an important factor where material means of enforcing Company authority were always limited.

At the same time, one should not underestimate the extent to which Cree hunters influenced the form and terms of exchange. Periods of competition between rival trading companies were associated with significant concessions to Cree demands for ritualised gift-giving, a trading context in which the authority of Cree 'trading captains' depended on their ability to secure European largesse for their followers.¹⁶

The obvious question arises, to what extent did Cree perceive material asymmetries in exchange with the Company? While the power of Whiteman technology was evident, capital accumulation from the trade was a phenomenon mostly invisible to Indian trappers, since the surplus value of furs accumulated only in Britain or southern Canada. Local post infrastructure was relatively modest, and it is doubtful that many hunters envied the lives of Hudson's Bay Company personnel.

Salisbury suggests that the respective values obtained by the Cree and the Europeans were incommensurable.¹⁷ European goods enhanced hunters' labour efficiency and security on the land, so there were clear advantages to the Cree of involving themselves in the trade, issues of material asymmetry aside. What Cree oral tradition presents us with, however, is a sustained intellectual effort to interpret and influence precisely the state of balance in the exchange, through metaphors that juxtapose 'incommensurables'. And often enough, the metaphors invoked are ones of alliance and positive reciprocity.

Negative Reciprocity in Narrative about *Pwaatich*

But there are also metaphors which condemn. Less savoury images of the Whiteman are associated with a rogue called *pwaat* (*pwaatich*, *pl.*). *Pwaatich* are a category of humans (or pseudo-humans) who lurk on the margins and transgress against authentic human community. In mythical narratives, *pwaatich* are strangers/outlaws/enemies not explicitly identified with Whitemen. At this level, the *pwaat* category may be a general designation for anti-social behaviour, and its application to the members of any particular ethnic category a matter of contingent history.

Why is the Whiteman as positive reciprocator explicitly identified in myth, when as negative reciprocator he is associated rather more mysteriously (at least from the outsider's standpoint) with *pwaatich*? There are culturally appropriate reasons for this circumlocation, which enables speakers to avoid referring directly to the Whiteman in unflattering terms. For many Cree elders, to openly display disrespect for any person would be viewed as ill-

¹⁵ This event is discussed in the context of the French-English struggle for James Bay in Francis and Morantz (1983).

¹⁶ Morantz 1977.

¹⁷ Salisbury 1976.

considered, foolish behaviour.¹⁸ This attitude relates to aspects of colonial experience with Whites, as well as a cultural disposition, given 'percept ambiguity',¹⁹ to be cautious in dealings with others, especially in potentially conflictual situations. Simply to name a person, under certain circumstances, is considered disrespectful - the black bear or certain powerful humans, for instance - are said to know when their name is uttered, and to resent it. And disrespect shown even to weaker persons can backfire when the cooperation of that person may some day be needed.

During the early stages of my fieldwork I did not recognise that the *pwaat* myths presented hereunder might have special relevance to Europeans, even though I had indicated to informants a specific interest in narrative concerning Whites. Descriptive commentaries and anecdotal history, however, led to recognition of close symbolic connections between historical Whitemen and mythological *pwaatich*.

For many eastern Cree, the association of historical *pwaatich* with Whitemen seems to be primary. At Wemindji, *pwaatich* are described as white- and hairy- faced.²⁰ Good-natured teasing of Whites in social situations sometimes takes the form of calling them *pwaat*²¹) may take them if they are too noisy in the bush, or otherwise misbehave. A story is told at Chisasibi of a young girl who became separated from the group during a school outing into the forest with the Roman Catholic nuns and was sexually abused by *pwaachikii*.²² Anecdotal history at Wemindji refers to incidents of Cree women molested in bush camps by White *pwaatich* while their men were away hunting.

At Whapmagoostui, Trudel (1986-87) reports that, according to an informant, 'ces Pwat sont des Blancs, les premiers a etre venus dans la rétion, et ils kidnappaient des femmes indiennes.'²³ Adelson found during her fieldwork at the same community that *pwaatich* are identified with White strangers who travelled in groups of several men to a canoe (Naomi Adelson, personal communication).

But the *pwaat* category may not apply exclusively to Whites. At Chisasibi, Trudel²⁴ finds that 'ces meme Pwat sont plutot des Indiens du versant ouest de la Baie James, soit de Moose',²⁵ and, citing Aubin and Lee,²⁶ he notes that 'le terme signifie enemi' en proto-algonquien, et 'Sioux' chex les Cris de l'Ouest'. The oral tradition of eastern Cree, Attikemak, and Montagnais at different times and places represents Iroquois, Inuit, White,

18 I recall an occasion in some friends' home being teased by Cree children, who attributed to me some unflattering qualities associated with *pwaatich*. I was surprised to hear them reprimanded rather sharply by their parents, who advised them not to speak to 'the Whiteman' in that way.

19 Black 1977.

20 Not coincidentally, perhaps, the term *waamishtikushiiyuu* (Whiteman), contains reference to beardedness (-*mishtiku*-)?

21 At Wemindji it was suggested to me by an interpreter that *pwaachikii* is a Cree phonological rendering of 'Portuguese'. This connection was also mentioned to physician and medical anthropology researcher Richard Scott at Chisasibi in 1991, with the speculation that the term might have originated with some early contact with Portuguese. He found at Chisasibi, as I did at Wemindji, that *pwaachikii* were spoken of as being White.

22 Richard Scott, personal communication.

23 Trudel 1986-87.

24 Ibid: 93-94.

25 This finding differs from that of Richard Scott (see footnote 21).

26 Aubin and Lee 1968.

and Micmac enemies according to very similar narrative motifs, Trudel finds. This finding is valid, I think, and due largely to the fact that the particularities of historical experience with any ethnic 'other' are evaluated according to the same standard of reciprocity, whether negative or positive. Conflict and 'xenophobia' are just one possibility, however; the other is alliance and incorporation into legitimate exchange.²⁷

Pwaatich are often blamed for theft of fish from nets, animals from traps, and other property, although they are seldom actually caught in the act, and in fact are rarely seen.²⁸ The intrusion of airlifted White male trappers on Cree hunting lands in the 1920s and 30s, which contributed to game depletion and famine prior to the establishment of beaver preserves and registered Cree traplines, probably deepened the association of *pwaatich* with White strangers of mysterious provenance. Today, thefts from hunters' cabins and caches by tourists and southern workers help to perpetuate these negative perceptions.

The possibility of encounters with *pwaatich* in the bush continues to provoke great interest and concern, as I witnessed on a spring hunting trip along the Wemindji coastline in 1981 when an adolescent member of the group reported a glimpse of a solitary stranger at the forest's edge. The incident later prompted an anecdote by another hunter in the group about some Cree from Moose Factory who actually caught *pwaatich* in the act of stealing fish from their nets; a relatively innocuous variety, as it turned out - a pair of tourists from the south, father and son, who had grown weary of fishing for their dinner.

Mythical accounts of *pwaatich*, I think, reflect social structural concerns that became particularly acute in the context of historical exchanges with Europeans. In the following mythical account, a young woman is kidnapped:

A Woman is Abducted by Pwaatich

This story is about a man who lived with his mother and younger sister. The man and his sister were both full-grown. The three of them lived together. He went out with his sister to check their fishnet. As they worked at their fishnet, *pwaatich* came paddling toward them. There were a lot of them, using a single canoe. The man's sister was wearing a hat covered with beadwork, and when the *pwaatich* reached them, they were fascinated by it. They took the hat from her head and returned to their own canoe.

'Why are you taking my hat?' she asked them. 'We won't return it to you,' they answered; 'you come and take it from us.' The girl reached over to take her hat back, and the *pwaatich* pulled her into the canoe. When they had pulled her in, they pushed the man's canoe away from their own. They began paddling off, and the man was unable to overtake them. Soon they were gone, with his sister. These *pwaatich* were all men.

When the man told his mother what had happened, she started to weep. From then on, his mother was always weeping, and it troubled him. She was always weeping

27 In Wemindji narrative, Whitemen and Inuit are presented in both ways, depending on historical circumstance. As recently as the last century, raiding occurred between Cree and Inuit groups. Wemindji stories of these conflicts, and the peace that was made, are recorded in Scott (1982a).

28 *Pwaatich* are characterised as elusive persons, and encounters with them are often very fleeting. Richard Scott (personal communication) was told by a Cree woman at Chisasibi in 1991 of an encounter that her father, who had been hospitalised in the south, once had with a patient in the next bed, who turned out to have been a government surveyor in the northern bush some decades past. The room-mate explained that they had instructions to avoid contact with Indians, information that the Cree man associated with the furtiveness of *pwaachikii*.

over what had happened to her daughter; always thinking about her daughter, wondering if she would ever have the chance to see her again.

'Don't cry, mother,' he told her. 'I'll try to find a way to get my sister back.' Now he was on his way to look for his sister. As he went along, he came every now and then upon the abandoned camps where the *pwaatich* had stayed. Soon it was winter, and he continued his search for them. 'You stay here, while I go out to look for my sister,' he had told his mother. He was on his way, and kept to the trail of the *pwaatich*.

As he went on, he came upon a lodge. He saw his sister come out, with a baby in her arms. 'Do you like the baby?' he asked her. 'No, I am not very fond of him', his sister replied. So he told her what to do with the baby: 'Put the baby in hot water, and then call out, 'Oh! I have scalded my child!' What are the *pwaatich* doing now?' he asked her. 'They're all inside sleeping,' his sister replied. So he instructed her, 'When I walk towards the lodge, I want you to come out. When you come out, bring your snowshoes with you, and when you have gone quite a way, put your snowshoes on and just follow the trail. By following the trail, you will try to get back to our mother.'

So the girl did as she had been told. 'I'm washing clothes right now' she said, 'right now they're all asleep.' The man watched his sister as she started off along the trail, and he began walking toward the lodge. Somehow the *pwaatich* had realised that their brother-in-law (*wiishtaawaau*) had arrived. They all called out, 'Aa-aa-aa! Our brother-in-law has arrived!' The girl had scalded her child in the water upon leaving the lodge to set out on her way - everything as her brother had told her.

'Aa-aa-aa! Our brother-in-law has arrived!' The *pwaatich* invited their brother-in-law to come into the *maakwaamapinaanch* ('main section' of the tipi). The man had a *mistaapaau*, and his *mistaapaau* told him not to go to the main section, but to sit near the entrance. 'I don't usually sit in the main section when I visit someone's home,' you will say,' his *mistaapaau* told him. It is actually the *mistaapaau* who was instructing him. 'They're going to give you a pipe to smoke - an old man will pass you the pipe to smoke. Don't light the pipe right away. At certain moments, hold the pipe toward the entrance. I'm going to remove the contents of the pipe. You'll pretend that you're just smoking. I'll take what's in the pipe, and replace it,' said the *mistaapaau*.

'Our brother-in-law will smoke.' But he didn't smoke immediately. He just pointed the pipe toward the entrance. His *mistaapaau* took the contents of the pipe. The *pwaatich* had actually put something in the pipe that would kill the man. 'Well, I think I'll take a smoke on the pipe ...'; he knew that the *mistaapaau* had removed what was in the pipe; '... I think I'll take a smoke on the pipe.' So the *mistaapaau* had filled the pipe. His *mistaapaau* watched what he did; nothing at all happened to him. 'After you have smoked, I want you to continue talking, and as you talk, keep pointing (toward the entrance) with your pipe. Then I will refill the pipe. First, you'll pass the pipe to the old man, then the others will smoke, too. You will tell them to be quick in smoking the pipe. Tell them that the contents of the pipe won't last long', said his helper, the *mistaapaau*.

So they all proceeded to smoke. The old man was the first one to smoke, but nothing happened to him after he had smoked. 'Hurry, what's inside the pipe won't last very long!' he told them. 'I want all of you to smoke some.' Suddenly, the old man fell over backwards, and his feet started thrashing about. Presently he lay there dead. The same thing happened to some others. There were others still in the lodge.

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He 'brained' one of them as he tried to run out through the entrance. He did the same to another. Finally, he killed all the *pwaatich*.

When he had finished getting rid of the *pwaatich*, he thought: 'I'd better start for home. I came a long distance. I'll be home late.' The *pwaatich* had been helpless against him. Having killed all of them, he left them there. They had merely smoked the pipe. He saw the path that his younger sister had taken. He caught up with her just before he reached their home [Narrator's comment: 'And he sure got there quickly!']. 'Mother,' he said, 'I have brought my younger sister home.' 'Oh, how wonderful, my son!' she said. Then she saw her daughter enter. She was delighted to see her again. And there they lived with her. That's the end of the story.

Jacob Georgekish

Wemindji, 1981

The story opens with a household that includes a son and a daughter who are full-grown and therefore of marriageable age, though significantly neither is yet married. The moment is appropriate for a marriage exchange. This ordinary situation contrasts with the group of *pwaatich* who, we are told, are all men. They steal the sister's handiwork, then the sister herself, doing violence to her wishes, and ignoring the usual period of hunting for the bride's parents. Her later treatment of the baby born of this illegitimate union, at her brother's suggestion, signifies the rejection of the sister's 'marriage' to the *pwaatich*, despite the attempt by the latter to hail her brother as their 'brother-in-law'. On the advice of his spirit helper, the brother smokes the pipe with the *pwaatich* - normally an act of alliance and friendship - but in this case, his spirit helper poisons the pipe. Thus he is able to overcome and kill the *pwaatich*, and reunite his family.

In a second *pwaat* myth, the villains behave even more atrociously, stooping to cannibalism, the very antithesis of human sociality. This time the victim, *Kituunaa*, is male:

Kituuna is Abducted by Pwaatich

Kituuna was once taken by some *pwaatich*. There were a lot of them, a lot of *pwaatich* at that time. This is an *aatiyuuhkaan*. 'From that point, I lived with the *pwaatich*,' he said. 'I lived with the *pwaatich*. I was treated very badly by these *pwaatich*. Moreover, it was very cold at that time. It was no longer possible for me to live indoors, due to my treatment. I was no longer allowed to stay inside. But I felt a little different whenever a caribou was killed. I used to keep myself warm with the hide of the caribou [narrator interjects: 'He probably looked at his penis (*unaapaawin*) as well' - in this way, as *Kituunaa* lost weight, he could ascertain what vitality remained]. Whenever I looked at my penis, I could see that it was alright.'

Food was getting scarce. He had lived with the *pwaatich* for a long time now. Then the *pwaatich* had an idea: 'Why don't we make a stew out of *Kituunaa*, since we have nothing to eat?' they said. 'Oh, but was I unhappy when I was laid down on the *ishpishakaan* (butchering-sheet). "How miserable I am," I thought.'

"Alright, start cutting some wood, to cook *Kituunaa*," they said, after I had been laid down. Was I ever unhappy to hear what they were saying! So the women started cutting the wood. Then I thought, 'I wish that they would say: "We have spotted some ruffed grouse (*pispischuuch*)."' Before long, the women said: 'We saw some ruffed grouse, and there are a lot of them.' Again, I was thinking: 'I wish they would say: "Let's get *Kituunaa* to kill some food one last time".' Soon, they said: 'Let's get *Kituunaa* to kill some food one last time.'

I commenced shooting the ruffed grouse. Soon I had hit a lot of them. I went shooting the farther ones. Before long, I was out of sight as I continued shooting.

As soon as I was out of sight, I ran off [narrator comments: 'He was naked - he was wearing nothing at all. I guess he didn't get cold easily']. Soon I was very far. Then I looked back along my path. I saw two *pwaatich* coming after me. I dealt them blows as they ran past, and I knocked them both down forward [narrator interjects: "These were the ones who had wanted to kill him]. So I set them with their asses facing the direction from which they had come. I spread their asses with some sticks. Then I started running again.

Then I came upon the tracks of two otters. I went after those otters. I killed them and I skinned them. Then I pulled the pelts on over my feet as leggings. I started running again. I looked back along my path, and I saw two more *pwaatich* running after me. When they saw what I had done to the other two *pwaatich*, they said: 'Oh!, *Kituunaa* will kill us all.' Then they turned back to their own home. I started to run again. I came upon a path. I knew where my older sister (*nims*) lived.'

One of the children used to say: '*Kituunaa* is coming.' Then the people would say: 'How could he be coming? He was abducted by the *pwaatich*.' Everything that the child said would usually come true. Then one day, as the child went outside from their dwelling, he saw *Kituunaa* coming down the path. He was naked. '*Kituunaa* is coming,' the child said. 'How could he be coming? He was taken away by the *pwaatich*,' they replied. Then they all ran outside, and they saw him coming down the path. They were delighted to see him coming. All were very happy about his arrival.

They declared that they would go after the *pwaatich*. A *maamakusuuyaan* would be used [narrator explains, 'A *maamakusuuyaan* is a type of bear skin which is removed from the bear without cutting it down the breast. A man usually wears this over his body in an upright position']. 'We are short one person,' they said. 'Why don't we have *Kituunaa* come with us?' said the child.

[Narration resumed in *Kituunaa*'s voice:] 'My, was I angry when I heard the child say that! That's where I had just come from, where I had been treated badly. I went with them. When we sighted the *pwaatich*'s dwelling, we decided not to approach it just yet. So we spent the night there. Next morning, the bear skin was fitted over me. Then I was instructed to go to the entrance of the *pwaatich*'s dwelling. Next I was told to make some strange sounds. So I did as I was told. I made strange sounds. '*Maamakusuuyaan*, *maamakusuuyaan*,' I said. 'I've had a chance to put it on. Now come and look at it.' The *pwaatich* ran out the entrance. They took a good look at me. Some just barely made it back into their dwelling, where they fainted and died. Some of them didn't even manage to get back inside before fainting and dying! [Narrator comments: 'These were the ones that laid him on the butchering sheet']. The women were also killed. Then they took the bear skin off me.

Once again I lived with my people.'

Jacob Georgekish
Wemindji, 1981

Kituunaa is kidnapped and enslaved, forced to hunt for the *pwaatich*, divested of his clothing, and forced out of the lodge to sleep. In the normal course of things, a young man would go to hunt for his wife's people, but *Kituunaa*'s lot is far less happy. Although there are women in this group of *pwaatich*, marriage for *Kituunaa* is out of the question. When times are hard, it occurs to the *pwaatich* to butcher and boil the hero. Again, superior spiritual power rescues the true human being. His will is strong, and his wish that grouse should appear - so that his captors may send him to hunt for them one last time - comes to pass. He escapes, desecrating the corpses of his enemies in the process.

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Kituunaa's group stages a punitive raid on the *pwaatich*. The surprise attack at dawn involves bear magic of such intensity that the *pwaatich* are struck dead at the mere spectacle. The *pwaatich* women are put to death with the men, treatment which is routine for cannibal women in other narrative mythology.²⁹ In historical raids against the Inuit, women from defeated camps were sometimes made wives of the winners, women to whom lines of descent are traced by some contemporary Cree. But the categorical refusal in myth to incorporate *pwaatich* women into *Kituunaa's* group suggests that having resorted to cannibalism, they are unfit.

In the foregoing narratives, it is tempting to identify a parallel between the all-male group of *pwaatich* who kidnapped the sister with the almost exclusively male composition of European traders, who frequently married Cree, but who were perhaps not perceived as full reciprocators. In the first myth, the emphasis is on exploitation of the sexual and reproductive power of a woman abducted from true human community; in the second, exploitation of the productive power of an abducted man, who is starved while hunting for the *pwaatich*. In narrative history concerning food shortage crises in this century.³⁰ and last,³¹ the failure of White traders to fulfil their responsibilities as partners in exchange results in the starvation and death of Cree who trapped for them.³²

Pwaatich hold an intermediate position between the ideal of positively reciprocating humanity, and the cannibal *atuush*, the starkest antithesis of human sociality.³³ The thoroughly dehumanised *atuush* figure presents the exploitative distortion of production and reproduction in its most powerful and condensed symbolic form. The *atuush*, like *pwaatich*, lurks exploitatively at the margins of society, practising a more extreme and horrific inversion of ordinary morality relentlessly tracking and killing humans, whom he regards as his 'moose', for food.

The distinction among Cree between appropriate forms of reciprocity with human persons and with food animal persons is extensively explored in metaphors that compare human sexuality with, while separating it from, the hunting of animals.³⁴ Both forms are said to involve generosity and love. But the form of love expressed in hunting is that animals are given to the hunter as food, indicating positive relations with animals, their species masters, and other spirit benefactors. The form of love expressed in sexuality is the complementarity of men and women in the reproduction of humanity. To consume persons of one's own kind is an abomination.

The *atuush*, confounding these primordial metaphors, feeds on his own offspring and sexual partners. In one mythical episode, an elder *atuush* plots the murder of his son to

29 Scott 1982a.

30 Scott 1989a.

31 Preston 1975b.

32 Interpretations of economic history of Cree hunters, in relation to some of the themes contained in the above narratives, are discussed in greater detail in Scott (1982b, 1989a).

33 Over the decades, an abundant literature has addressed the Algonkian cannibal motif from several perspectives: as a culture-specific form of 'psychosis', as a culturally conventional means of controlling witches or other deviants, as a metaphor for social structure, and as an emic reflection of etic subsistence deprivation. Preston (1980) provides the most penetrating review and critique of these interpretations. The transfiguration of physical deprivation or psychological stress into attributions of cannibalism, he finds, are 'Algonkian society's attempt to come to terms with radically antisocial behaviour' (ibid: 111).

34 Preston 1975a, 1978; Scott 1989b.

satisfy his hunger.³⁵ A second episode caricatures the confusion of the same cannibal household in failing to separate food production from human reproduction:

Maamiitaahaau Consumes His Own Sperm

I'll tell you an *atuush* myth. I'll tell you the myth about *Maamiitaahaau*, the *atuush*.

He told his son, 'My son! Would you go over there [indicating a place to hunt people]?' So his son left, started to walk away. And as for me [at this point, the narrator assumes *Mamaiitaahaau's* voice], I just lay there.

Soon it was night time, and my son still hadn't returned. Then I heard him coming. He brought a woman back with him, carrying her on his shoulder. He wouldn't even allow me to copulate with her. She lay there beside him. After he drank some coffee, he started 'working' on her, and I started to feel aroused as he took off her clothes. 'I think I'll have my turn too,' I told my son ... 'my son, would you stop copulating with her for a while? I'd like to have her.'

'Well, hurry up!' he told me. Somehow he didn't like what I had said to him. So I copulated with the woman and after I was finished with her, I told him to take the woman back. I just lay down again, because I was hungry.

Then he threw something at me. It was *wispiiyuu* [her reproductive parts, including uterus and vagina], that he had taken out of the woman. So I held it over the fire to roast it. Then I ate it. As I was chewing on it, I tasted something odd. My vision started to blur and as I looked around, everything that I looked at seemed to turn red. Then I spit out what I was chewing.

My son remarked, 'I wonder how that must have tasted, the way he spit it out!' I just laughed at him. I accidentally ate my own sperm.

The following morning, we went to the place where my son had got the woman. 'She must have had a little home,' I thought. So we went there. 'This is the place,' he said. We also saw a place where they had chopped some wood. We followed the trail as we drew near her home. We came to a large abandoned lodge frame. We could tell that there had been a lot of people living there! We continued on walking. The people had left this place the night previous. They had followed the borders of the lakes.

As we walked, for some reason I did not feel well. Then suddenly I fainted. I fell to the ground and lay there. The snow had already drifted in on one side of me, by the time I woke up, and my son was gone. 'He might have run into trouble,' I thought. As I walked along the lake, I saw something on the ice, and went over to check it out. It was my son. The snow had already drifted in on one side of him. I wondered what I was going to do with him. I dragged him to a place where it was less windy. I made a fire when I got him there. He started sweating as I tried to warm him up. Then he started to stir, as I continued to warm him.

'My son, don't bother tracking them because I think they've got the better of you.' So we headed in another direction.

Geordie Georgekish
Wemindji 1980

Maamiitaahaau quarrels with his son, who fails to accord him the normal privilege that an elder should enjoy in regard to 'game' brought in by a junior. The inversion is further highlighted as *Maamiitaahaau* is thrown the uncooked reproductive organs of the woman for his meal. Conventionally, the cooked head of an animal is presented to honour a male Cree

³⁵ The features of *atuush* behaviour are more fully illustrated in myths recorded in Scott (1982a). Only one myth is reproduced here.

elder. *Maamiitaahaau* stupidly consumes his own reproductive substance. Shortly thereafter, he and his son nearly perish, due to the superior spiritual power of the woman's people. The *attush* is the *reductio ad absurdum* of exploitative premises - human society consuming and destroying itself from within.

Preston³⁶ has noted the resemblance of the Algonquian cannibal to the 'wildman' of European mythology. A similar resemblance exists between Cree representations of *pwaatich* and European representations of 'savages'. Both, while potentially redeemable, are dangerously uncivilised, and may easily cross the threshold into cannibalism. But there are important formal and functional differences that distinguish *pwaatich* from 'savages' in the encounter of European and indigenous New World cultures. To Europeans, 'savage' Indians, like wild animals and indeed 'nature' at large, needed dominating and domesticating. As Michael Taussig³⁷ (1986) has described, European allegations of Amerindian cannibalism, coupled with fear and hatred of the jungle, fuelled overwhelming atrocities against Indians in the Amazonian rubber trade. The colonial 'mirroring of otherness' reflected the barbarity of the colonists' own social relations.

But for Cree, the forest, animals and other aspects of 'nature' are already securely involved in relations of reciprocity with indigenous hunters/stewards.³⁸ These relations may be undermined, through disrespect for animals of various kinds, including over exploitation or waste. But they may also be undermined through failures of reciprocity within the human group. It is a central proposition in Cree narrative and ritual that the refusal of humans to share leads to a refusal by animals and other non-human entities in the wider environment to confer their gifts on humanity. Deviant humanity, not the rest of nature, needs rehabilitation, through the restoration of positive reciprocity. And rehabilitation is always possible, as the mythology informs us. Even *Maameetaahaau*, in a third episode, shows compassion toward two young girls, whom he hides and assists in their escape from his ravaging son.

Conclusion

The Whiteman represents vast contradictions for indigenous ideologies of reciprocity. From the beginning, he was obviously materially powerful, and many of his gifts were useful. The attempt to commit him to premises of reciprocity was worthwhile, indeed imperative; eventually, neither physical aggression nor withdrawal from the relationship would be possible for the Cree. On the one hand, oral tradition on 'first encounters', mythical and historical, makes no mention of exploitation or self-serving maximisation in the original relationship. On the other hand, grievances over the unequal benefits received by Whites during post-contact history are not ignored, and have their own mythical representation.

Both positive and negative narrative images of the Whiteman tell us a great deal about the terms of exchange acceptable to Cree hunters. As a legitimate and respected partner in exchange, the Whiteman is located aboard ship, or his presence limited to trading posts. But narratives of the exploitative Whiteman find him in the bush, as *pwaat*, directly intruding on Cree domestic relations. There is functional complementarity in these formally contradictory views of the Whiteman. Positive images provide a model for 'keeping up' a necessary relationship, one which is represented as originally more balanced than it eventually became; while negative evaluations insulate Cree domestic relations from the

³⁶ Preston 1980.

³⁷ Taussig 1986.

³⁸ Feit 1973, 1986; Preston 1975a; Tanner 1978; Scott 1989b.

exploitative premises that emerged in trade with Europeans and that continue with more recent intrusions on Cree land for hydro-electric and other industrial development. The duality of image defends a cultural boundary, while insisting rhetorically on conditions for valid inter-ethnic (and ecological) reciprocity.

Few Whites during the traditional fur trade had the opportunity, the humility, or the cultural knowledge to perceive facets of their own identity in the outlaws of subarctic myth. Today, mass media communications bring these images to our attention as never before. During the public controversy over the first phase of hydro-electric development at James Bay, the journalist Boyce Richardson³⁹ was informed of the resemblance between the Whiteman and the blundering monster in Cree myth who destroyed the earth in a flood, until the monster itself was given refuge on a raft with a human being, and the animals who would repopulate the world.

More recently, as the Innu of northern Labrador and Quebec opposed military and other intrusion of their homeland, Chief Daniel Ashini described the rapacious appetites and activities of Euro-Canadians as those of *Atshen*, the Innu equivalent of the Cree *atuush*:

I sometimes think that the industrial society is an immense 'Atshen', a greedy, power-hungry monster that feeds of the flesh and souls of aboriginal peoples all over the world. As in the Innu myths, the Atshen does not share, but only takes to satisfy his own appetite and shows no remorse for the suffering he causes.⁴⁰

In ecological terms, anxiety over pollution among Innu of the Lower North Shore of the St. Lawrence is associated with fears about the possible return of *Atshen*, normally held in check by the animal Master of the caribou. Historically the appearance of the Algonquian cannibal has been associated with game scarcity and famine, difficulties which in the Innu case are presented by the game sent by the Master of the Caribou. Pollution, as a lack of human respect toward animals, could once again cause the master of the caribou to allow *Atshen* to attack humans (Sylvie Vincent, personal communication).⁴¹

These modern transformations of the Algonquian cannibal also reached the pages of *The Globe and Mail*, 'Canada's National Newspaper,' in a recent commentary by a leading Anishinabe author:⁴²

They ['weendigoes', as cannibals are called among more westerly Algonquian cultures] stalked villages and camps, waiting for, and only for, the improvident, the slothful, the gluttonous, the promiscuous, the injudicious, the insatiable, the selfish, the avaricious and the wasteful. ...

But no matter how many victims a single weendigo devoured raw, he could never satisfy his hunger. The more he ate, the larger he grew, and the larger he grew, the greater his hunger ...

It was assumed, and indeed it appeared as if, the weendigo and his brothers and sisters had passed into the Great Beyond, like many North American Indian beliefs and practices and traditions.

Actually, the weendigoes did not die out; they have only been assimilated and reincarnated as corporations, conglomerates and multinationals ...

39 Richardson 1975:183.

40 Ashini 1990.

41 The Innu, Vincent notes, attribute pollution in the form of littering as much to their own young people, who are said to be losing their culture and becoming 'like Whites', as to Whites themselves.

42 Johnston 1991. I am grateful to Harvey Feit and Sylvie Vincent for bringing these instances to my attention.

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The new, reincarnated weendigoes are little different from their forebears. They are more omnivorous than their ancestors, however, and the modern breed wears elegant clothes and comports itself with an air of culture and dignified respectability ...

What do these metaphors, with their implicit prescription for resumption of reciprocity between aboriginal and non-aboriginal societies, and with nature, accomplish in practical terms? Very little, one might argue, given the ease of denying abuses of the past; or if abuses are admitted, that we today should make restitution for what has been 'the inevitable path of progress'. The modest gains of aboriginal politicians in securing greater control of resources, or a greater measure of economic justice, could as easily be attributed to more general social welfare and human rights concerns of the state as to any sense of obligation toward aboriginal societies as partners in a protracted historical exchange. To think in terms of reciprocity, in this view, may actually be counterproductive, because it disguises the true conditions of subjugation, or diverts attention from more realistic processes for addressing social problems.

The indigenous critique of exploitative newcomers reflects, nonetheless, aboriginal people's conviction that their survival is threatened by the premise of competitive consumption in modern social life, a premise according to which 'sharing' is reduced to the status of utopian altruism. It is a critique that validates indigenous cultural values and identities, while appealing to a nascent consciousness among non-aboriginals of the connections between human inequality, environmental degradation, and the industrial imperative of economic growth.

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