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## Used People: *La Rivière sans repos* as Postcolonial Poverty Narrative<sup>1</sup>

Sa vie s'usait au reste à tenter de suivre le progrès, un maître difficile le progrès : savait-on ce qu'il voulait et jusqu'où il entraînerait les gens!<sup>2</sup>

Gabrielle Roy, *La Rivière sans repos*

Quand revenait l'été, on la revoyait, un peu plus usée, un peu plus courbée, passer au bord du ciel profond, parallèlement à la chaîne lointaine des vieilles montagnes les plus rabotées de la Terre.<sup>3</sup>

Gabrielle Roy, *La Rivière sans repos*

**A**t roughly the same cultural moment in which *La Rivière sans repos* was set, one of Canada's most prominent economic historians, Harold Innis, reading a paper before the American Economic Association in 1950,<sup>4</sup> remarked that constant change in technology (telephone, radio, TV, etc.) coupled with the capitalist push to increase production and consumption in industrialized societies eclipsed the recognition of balance and proportion in earlier societies. Over half a century later, Ronald Wright would draw a similar conclusion about blindness and progress in his Massey Lectures entitled *The Short History of Progress*,<sup>5</sup> observing that the drive toward change is often short-sighted, if not a trap, since progress tends to serve the "inertia, greed and foolishness" of elites within social pyramids. Gabrielle Roy's novelistic rendering of the intercultural relations between Inuit and whites in *La Rivière sans repos* critiques progress in a similar way, laying bare the power relations behind the apparently natural "march of time."

The *Inuuk* at the centre of Gabrielle Roy's *La Rivière sans repos* are used up and worn out (as in the meaning of "*usée*" in my epigraphs) in many senses over the generations. Mother and daughter, Winnie and Elsa, are worn out by the sacrifices of mothering, the weight of adapting to the white

man's progress, poverty, the harsh elements of the tundra, hard domestic labour, and even by the natural process of aging. As Mother Courage figures, they inhabit the text largely as survivors. As in her urban novel, *Bonheur d'occasion* (*The Tin Flute*), Roy juxtaposes the role of the mother with that of the state and the community to raise questions about social injustice and mothering amidst poverty. Yet in this book, written 25 years after *Bonheur d'occasion*, women's poverty is narrated in the context of the economic and cultural disenfranchisement of the Inuit in Canada. It is in this sense that I refer to the Inuit as "used people," implying exploitation. Even though "used" is the "*faux ami*" of "*usée*" (worn out, used up), the novel develops the themes of fatigue and exploitation side by side. While acquisitiveness keeps Elsa from material poverty for most of the story, it contributes to the profound sense of cultural fatigue underlying the postcolonial poverty narrative, the fatigue of being both used and used up, while never "getting ahead."

When colonization displaces traditional values and everyday practices, the culture shock reverberates beyond the construction of race. Inuit lives are swallowed by progress: it destabilizes their family structures, their eating habits, their homes, and their human relations. Importantly, however, Roy dramatizes the complicity of the colonized subject, who learns to crave progress through mimicry and the training of desire on material wealth. Elsa's acquisitiveness and her drive to earn a wage and buy her son a way out of their racially abject position lead to spiritual impoverishment emblematic of the dislocation of the Inuit. The worn out lives referred to in my epigraphs are respectively Winnie's and Elsa's. Surprisingly, the first citation about progress describes the aged mother while the second, about aging and fading into the natural landscape, describes her daughter. The doubling of mother and daughter, in addition to tracing a cosmic cycle of mythic time, underscores what their everyday lives have in common: they both attempt across generations to meet their children's expectations when those very expectations have been transformed by colonial contact and capital.

This novel teaches very well because it is a textured story of material lives and, despite being written by a non-native who visited the North very briefly as a tourist and journalist, is among those rare sustained fictional treatments in Canadian literature of how wealth, technology, and consumerism in the guise of progress shape indigenous subjectivity. Roy's novel depicts the Inuit of Ungava Bay having abandoned, for the most part, the traditional nomadic ways of their ancestors and having moved into fixed communities to mimic the white ways of progress—both through consent and coercion. But the

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trap of progress brings a loss of balance and proportion as time and a mother's care are segmented into commodified spaces. Consumerism, in Elsa's everyday life, mediates her relations with others, her sense of self, and the way she mothers. Since Roy's text is both romantic and resistant (both colonial and anti-colonial), however, it is not my goal to defend its politics, but rather to decode the ideology of representations of progress and colonial contact so that the pedagogical potential of the novel will be more apparent. When we attempt to read everyday lives instead of merely theorize colonial power relations, our reading of this novel pushes us to inquire about the specific concrete and lived realities in Inuit communities.

**Re/Viewing the Genesis and Reception of the Text**

*La Rivière sans repos* as a poverty narrative with a postcolonial critique puts the complex everyday experience of "used people" centre stage not simply to lament their fate, but also to find a space for solidarity with their struggles. At the same time, Roy universalizes their struggle against the march of progress and linear time, pulling it beyond the culturally contingent toward the mythic. Originally identified primarily as a story of faith, spirituality, and humanism (Gagné, Sirois, Ricard, Socken, Hughes), *La Rivière sans repos* has more recently been interpreted as a story about various forms of alterity based on race, colonization, and gender (Dansereau, Babby, Pascal, Chapman). It is both, and more. Myth, allegory, and social realism come together in this transgeneric work: a decidedly materialist bent colours an odd mixture of colonial and anti-colonial politics.

Earlier readings focused on the mythic dimension of the text, its characters, and its humanist discourse of abandonment and aging. These readings tended to stress the universal aspects of the narrative. The wide sky, the sound of the sea and the restless river, and the alternately brutal and tender horizon of the tundra create an elemental, if not cosmic, setting and a universal frame for this story of contact. The allegory of dislocated souls spirals into the mythic, universal, and cosmic realms, beginning with the birth of a blonde, mixed-blood baby who embodies the meeting of cultures and appears as wondrous as a new star in the sky, "*l'apparition dans leur ciel d'une étoile inconnue*" (94). Jimmy's alterity, the product of miscegenation, is mostly wondrous and beautiful in the text, until by the end of the story, he abandons his Inuit mother to flee south and join the white man's airforce, to "pass" as white. Contemporary readings tend to favour an analysis of interracial relations that focus on racial difference, hybridity, and miscegenation.

The mixed-blood child and his adoring mother are modeled on a mother and baby whom Roy had seen in her brief trip to the region years before writing the novel. According to “Voyage en Ungava,” Roy had been particularly struck by a mixed-blood Inuit mother who played adoringly with the curls of her blonde baby. That vision of racial contact as dislocation, both wondrous and somehow sad, inspired the novel (Ricard 386-7; Gagné 1976, 376). In fictionalizing the incident, Roy would change the mother to a “pure” blood (authentic) Inuk, and the baby to a blond-haired, blue-eyed cherubic figure (Ricard), thus more easily staging a precise moment of cultural contact in the rape of Elsa (and her people) by the American GI (who embodied the occupying non-native forces).<sup>6</sup> Roy then uses realism to show that both the imposition of white man’s desire and the reshaping of Inuit desire lead the community of Old Fort Chimo to cross the river and follow progress. The Inuit have moved from an indigenous culture of sharing, use value, and nomadism to the market culture of accumulation, exchange value, and wage labour. Elsa embodies desire channelled into the frantic buying of toys, food, and clothing, and the equally frantic cleaning and work schedule of white society, while the police, schools, hospital, and the company store embody the institutional authority of capital, race, and state. The two stories of contact, stories of both individual and collective desire, flow beside each other symbolically and realistically throughout the narrative. Both stories unfold a deep ambivalence toward progress among the Inuit characters, who alternately consent to and resist the coercion and seduction of Western culture.

In order to understand the modernity of the myth alongside the bite of social realism, it is necessary to engage with the text through more than a mythopoeic reading or a postcolonial reading focused on racial relations. In reading the text as postcolonial poverty narrative, critical of the role of capital in personal relations, we sound the greatest depth of Roy’s social critique of contact in the North. In an essentially “contaminated” text, in which a white author ventriloquizes the thoughts and lives of Inuit and mixed-blood subjects rather than reporting their “authentic” voices (Brydon), the ethics of speaking for the Other is raised: how does the author stage history, and how do we in turn read and teach the text? As my epigraphs demonstrate, the novel disrupts the discourse of progress by interrogating the direction of changes brought through cultural contact, but it also reinscribes certain colonial assumptions from within the discourse of progress. For example, the Inuit are represented as closer to nature than to civilization in images

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such as those of the indigenous woman naturally aging and blending into the mountains and the rock. (Chapman remarks that white characters are sometimes objectified in the novel by being compared to nature, but to animals or birds, “not land, rock, and wood” as Inuit characters are [56-58].) The realism, however, is carefully grounded in the cultural specificity of Inuit/white contact in Ungava Bay in the late 1940s and 1950s. The story weaves its paradoxical themes of entrapment and freedom, restlessness and rootedness (echoed in both the French and English titles), from a continuum of social and spiritual possibilities situated between the extremes of abandonment and caring in the context of territorial and economic disenfranchisement. Entrapment is also reflected in the micropolitics of everyday life: for example, a Northern double-consciousness emerges through which some of the Inuit, most notably Elsa, begin to see themselves as the whites see them: in need of constant labour, cleaning, and consumption in order to flee the backwardness, laziness, and filth projected upon them and their people through a discourse of progress. Elsa rushes home from cleaning the white woman’s house to buy goods she has seen there and to scrub and rearrange the disorder in her own home, and the other Inuit return home from Elsa’s hut to see the disorder and poverty of their own homes. The double-consciousness of themselves as abject is rapidly reproduced as they mimic white ways, trying to curl the hair of their babies, bringing electricity into their homes, reading the books and consuming the films from the South, following the laws and spiritual teachings of the Whites.

Marc Gagné writes “*La Rivière sans repos* illustre la douloureuse alternance à laquelle l’homme se condamne quand il veut accorder sa marche à celle du progrès” (1973, 88). In his trilogy of detailed articles on the novel, Gagné juxtaposes the mythic dimension of the works against documentary sources, most notably “Voyage en Ungava,” Roy’s reportage on her one-week trip to the region in 1961 (a manuscript unpublished until 2000, but to which Gagné had prior access). Almost ten years after Roy’s trip, she would reposition the two villages she had visited, Old and New Fort Chimo, so that they appear in the novel to be directly opposite one another on the Koksoak river instead of a several kilometres downstream from each other. This imaginative displacement by the realist text would allow Roy to better dramatize the dislocation of the Inuit after contact: in other words to stage history. In the final scene of the novel, rich with dramatic effect, Elsa will pace the riverbank, torn between the old and the new settlement, while holding both in view.

In 2003, one of the first postcolonial readings of the novel appeared in *Quebec Studies*, comparing the positioning of the Inuit in the novel and the author's earlier travel notes, as well as in notes by some of the first white missionaries and traders in Ungava Bay. Rosemary Chapman's reading contextualizes the work within colonial history and is able to bring together the documentary and mythical elements of the story in a more coherent way than Gagné had previously, largely through an understanding of alterity and postcolonial theories of history and métissage. Chapman locates the anti-colonial thrust of the work in its depiction of Jimmy as a mixed-blood baby and métissage as historical process rather than merely essence. But the dominant trend in postcolonial and multicultural criticism has been to read hybridity as exoticized rather than conflictual space without weighing how colonization displaces earlier cultural practices through a discourse of progress grounded in conflicting economic interests and the lure of capital. A focus on race relations in the text attributes the violence of colonial contact to racism and profit-seeking in the past; but history tells us that the two are usually intertwined and ongoing under neocolonization (Young). Hence, I would like to shift focus from mother and son to the mother and daughter and to their material struggle as a site of resistance. Like many of their people, the Inuuk at the centre of the novel, Elsa and Winnie, are survivors of cultural invasion, racial marginalization, abandonment, harsh climate, poverty, and the profound imbalance in their lives brought about by progress itself. While Chapman locates the ideology of the story in relations between Second and Fourth World subjects, including the author herself, the development models of separate Worlds (First, Second, Third, and Fourth Worlds) can not be used in an unproblematic way without being unduly homogenizing. The (neo)colonization of the Inuit by capital cannot be subsumed within a discourse of development (Worlds) because the latter itself wields assumptions about progress. Roy was sensitive not only to the minority ethnic status of the Inuit and the historical occupation of their land, but also to the ongoing unequal economic relations resulting from "progress." For this reason, she gave attention to Elsa's complicity in her own inferiorization within a social hierarchy based on class, status, and gender as well as race. Roy's rendering of the (neo)colonization of the Inuit by capital, however, was by no means a polemic stance on class or technology. Instead, the novel's textured realism revealed the importance of class and poverty to women's everyday lives.

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The tale is presented as a locally situated and cross-generational testimony that demands a moral reckoning with the past. To this end, the opening of the novel mimics local truth claims to stage the text as oral testimony: “Ainsi en témoigne, telle qu’on la raconte là-bas, l’histoire d’Elsa, fille d’Archibald et de Winnie Kumachuk” (94). Yet, generically, the novel imagines beyond testimony and documentary to create a more empathic form of realist illusion based in psychological realism and rooted in a second level of meaning, a national and humanist allegory. Marc Gagné reports that Roy refused to consult her earlier travel notes when writing *La Rivière sans repos* several years after her trip to Ungava Bay because she wanted to enter the space of her imagination and feel the truth of the region empathetically and imaginatively rather than in any documentary way (1976). At the same time, her knowledge of the culture was limited to that of the non-native outsider. Both on the level of allegory and realist testimony, however, the novel functions as counter-history to interrupt the culture of consumerism and the seemingly natural path of colonization and progress with other values and alternative subjectivities, and most importantly the details of material lives.

*La Rivière sans repos* is Roy’s most socially critical work since earlier social realist novels (*Bonheur d’occasion* and *Alexandre Chenevert*); but it also remains one of Roy’s lesser known books, even in its English version as *Windflower*. The original French version appeared through Boréal in 1970, comprised of a collection of three short stories, “Trois nouvelles esquimaudes” followed by the longer story about Elsa, from which the collection took its title *La Rivière sans repos*. The English version, translated by Joyce Marshall, appeared in the same year, but without the three “Eskimo” (sic) stories. (Inuit are called “Eskimaux/Eskimo” throughout the text according to the practice of the time.<sup>7</sup>) The other three stories, though written much later than Elsa’s, in fact after its translation into English, opened the French publication in order to problematize and perhaps depersonalize the relation of the Inuit to the trappings of progress. This contextual function is evident in the titles: “Les satellites,” “Le téléphone,” and “Le fauteuil roulant.” In his biography of Roy, François Ricard reports how emotionally devastated the author was by the flat rejection of the novel by her long-standing English publisher Harcourt Brace and how she was further disappointed by the later refusal of McClelland & Stewart to include the other three “Eskimo” stories alongside the novel about Elsa (423-24, 414). The English version today is still a translation of only the longest, more individualized story about Elsa.

Both French and English versions of the work were transitional texts, appearing in the same year, but functioning differently in their respective linguistic and literary traditions. By “transitional” in English Canadian literature, I mean that *Windflower* falls between a modernist use of realism to testify to social injustice and a postmodern questioning of history and representation for postcolonial ends. Although three and a half decades after its translation, when postcolonial criticism has become one of the most popular means of analyzing, teaching, and constructing Canadian literature in English (much more so than with Québécois and Franco-Canadian literatures), critical interest in *Windflower* as a work about mimicry and miscegenation among the Inuit has been slight. Like other transitional texts in which a non-native author attempts to recuperate stories of an indigenous other, such as *The Diviners* and *Klee Wyck*, *Windflower* has perhaps been undervalued during the last few decades because of the hegemony of postmodern aesthetics. The novel may have appeared behind the times stylistically when English-Canadian literary criticism was beginning to privilege discursive play and postmodern fiction as preferred modes of postcolonial critique while eschewing realism as monologic (Moss). Even though Babby argued convincingly in 1984 that the novel engages with reality and spectacle as well as mimicking it, the problem of reception involves ideology as well as form. *Windflower* may have appeared contaminated ideologically because of the use of realism to recuperate stories of social injustice, the humanist and spiritual solutions to social ills, and the ambivalent portrayal of indigenous subjects shaped by an underlying ideology of romantic nationalism that idealized contact.<sup>8</sup>

As Janet Paterson and others have confirmed, the advent of postmodernism occurred later for the novel in Quebec than in English Canada. Ricard speculated that in the 1960s and 1970s Roy was perceived largely as a writer of “classics” who had already said what she was going to say. Furthermore, Ricard claims, her failure to embrace separatism at the height of the *Révolution tranquille* meant that by focussing on the Inuit she was writing against a “counter-culture in full swing” (428). Her enduring humanism and use of realism led to the perception by many that she was out of step with the times both politically and stylistically (407, 410-12). In Quebec, the focus on the Inuit as colonized other was perhaps out of step with the times, especially during a period when colonization of the French by the English and the clergy was foremost in the popular imagination.



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According to Gagné, the genesis of the text was prolonged: six years germinating and two years in the writing (1976, 367). In reading from Roy's travel notes, one is struck by the difference in tone between the description of the region by Roy the traveller and the region as it was imagined empathetically by Roy the novelist. "Voyage en Ungava" insists upon the sadness of the landscape, more often than not, commenting in surprise and disappointment, from the point of view of an outsider, on the monotony and loneliness, and apparent deficiencies of the tundra: for example, the dwarfed nature of the trees and the harshness of the climate, the "beauté tragique" (Gagné 370, 372, 379). The opening lines of the novel sketch the northern landscape from a similar point of view, as "rude," and "terrible." Chapman interprets this distance as the colonial eye cast on the landscape and on the Inuit by Roy, and documents how closely Roy's colonial point of view coincides with that of earlier missionaries and traders in the region (48-54).

The narrator focalizes through several different characters to juxtapose various standpoints toward the region, many of them tied to the land. Numerous tender descriptions include those of mother and son picnicking on the beach and studying stones and drift wood for animal shapes (131-33); the grim but haunting landscape around Ian's hunting cabin (159-160); and the passing of seasons (153). In contrast to this attachment to the landscape, the settlement of New Fort Chimo seems alien through the eyes of Uncle Ian, one of the few Inuit to reject progress and keep living nomadically on the other side of the river. To him, the new town represents a concentration of human life that seems random, distant, and crowded, with bungalows thrown together like dice, and with a meaningless concentration of human life that smothered him (188). Archibald, yet another Inuit character, is calmed by the familiar sound of motors and fears the wilderness, hurrying back to town as fast he can travel. In the person of Elsa, however, the greatest variety of attitudes to progress will emerge as she attempts to negotiate an alternate space of identity.

Estelle Dansereau has analyzed the discursive strategies of the text in which the inner thoughts of the Inuit characters as Other are reported indirectly by a narrator rather than directly with a gesture of appropriation (1996). (See also Babby and Chapman.) Dansereau argues convincingly that the use of shifting focalization and subject positions, and indirect discourse allows the narrators of all four stories to effect a collaboration with the Inuit characters as dispossessed subjects, but without anchoring their speech in generalizations or negative discursive structures or appearing to dominate their thoughts

(471-3). Chapman suitably queries whether shifting narrative positions are enough to constitute a claim that Roy is speaking for the Inuit in an anti-colonial manner in the text. I would suggest that this narrative “collaboration” derives mostly from a respectful empathy that Roy maintains as a liberal humanist. The homogenizing tendency of humanist myth is tempered by her detailed observation of everyday reality and power imbalances.

When Roy visited the region briefly in 1961, as Chapman points out, she spoke little directly to the Inuit but rather through interpreters (53), refusing to speak English to them. (What Chapman does not explain, however, is that to Roy’s mind they should have been learning French, not English, since they were in Quebec, while also preserving their own indigenous languages [Gagné juil.-sept. 1976: 375]<sup>9</sup>). In Roy’s use of pronouns and the space given to non-native speakers in the travel notes, Chapman notes that Roy positions herself mostly as outsider and colonial, whereas within the novel, the narrative techniques construct both insider and outsider views, creating ambivalent colonial and anti-colonial strains in the text. A postcolonial reading of the novel as poverty narrative demonstrates that when Roy speaks through fiction as “the white Inuit,” the field of contamination is not merely exoticized or ventriloquized as ethnic difference, but historicized as the space of dispossession and the supplanting of hunting, gathering, and tribal sharing by a capitalist economy in the North. The aesthetics of this postcolonial novel are deeply rooted in its concern for social justice and testimony, but at times exude pathos. While the problems of appropriation, pathos, ventriloquism, realism, and national allegory have in the past been seen primarily as “pitfalls” of representing the Other in postcolonial fiction, they are currently being re-examined with a more supple approach to the aesthetics of resistance, given the discursive options of the author at the time and the myth of authenticity (Brydon, Moss).

### **The “White Inuit” according to Roy: Contact, Consumption, and the Contaminated Text**

Roy’s own ambivalence toward colonization emerges when she writes at length in her travel notes about her exchange with a telephone company employee who pushes the sale of luxury phones on the Inuit; after initial harsh criticism, she concludes that one must laugh about the *folie* since it is difficult to find the guilty party: “*Il est tout le monde à la fois, personne en particulier*” (Gagné juil.-sept. 1976: 379). Within the novel the cultural politics of contact are ambivalent, slipping sometimes into romantic idealism.

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When Inez and Elsa meet in the cemetery and reflect on the origins of mixed blood babies and conclude that soldiers spawning babies far and wide (like the seeds of a windflower) is perhaps the solution to racial strife in the world, the text romanticizes the connection between (neo)colonization and war. This proposition gives the English title, *Windflower*, a primarily fatalistic ring, since progress, war, and colonization seem as natural to humanity as the restless river in the French title. Through the symbol of the river, Roy paradoxically conflates progress with nature and critiques it for disturbing nature.

The novel replays a romantic stance toward miscegenation and war in the final pages when Elsa muses over whether her son's fate will be similar to his father's, the American GI. She wonders if Jimmy will end up as a soldier in Vietnam, attracting the attention of a shy young girl, "drawing her aside" (*attirer à l'écart*) in hiding: "Tout se répétait dans la vie." (228). Chapman interprets this scene as a desire "to expand the circle of métissage" (57), but does not comment on the idealist gesture of naturalizing the sexual use, if not rape, of women in occupied territories. Nonetheless, Roy does strike an understated critical note in this scene through irony when Elsa recognizes from the newspaper reports that the Vietnamese look much like the Inuit. Such moments underscore a political analysis of war (as in *Bonheur d'occasion*) and of racial hierarchies as well. Chapman rightly suggests that the historical markers of the Korean and Vietnamese Wars anchor the Inuit lives in a particular historical period rather than leaving them essentialized in nature (57, 59). For the astute reader, the passage also demonstrates the way the colonized people of one country are used to colonize those of another—in this case, both in the name of capital.

The ambivalence in this work is not the celebrated ambivalence of post-modern aesthetics, but rather ambivalence about conflict and resolution, counter-history and mythical humanism, realism and allegory, social criticism and idealism. With current re-evaluations of transitional texts and postcolonial aesthetics in mind, we can reread *La Rivière sans repos* and *Windflower* as counter discourse that oscillates between the romantic and the resistant, the colonial and the anti-colonial. However, most of the space of the novel and most of its cultural work is devoted to disrupting colonialism and consumerism by testifying to the history of disenfranchisement of the Inuit, and in particular, of Elsa, and the "use" that colonizers and capital make of her, her female body, her mother's love, and her territory.

The second most important space in *La Rivière sans repos* is given over to the humanist goals of the novel, which encourage empathy and spiritual reflection on the universal level of myth. Ricard reports in his biography that Roy was generally unconcerned with politics and interested mostly in writing. But her humanism led her to a worldview that was engaged and caring. It may be argued that several features of the novel serve to romanticize the plight of the Inuit, if not appropriate their voice: the pathos of the realist story, the elemental and universalizing quality of the myth, the omniscient position of the narrator, the reinscription of binaries (progress and tradition) as an ever-present paradox, and the intermittent conflation of indigenous characters with nature and innocence, not to mention the caricature of their physical features. But one cannot overlook that Roy's realism and her allegory are aimed carefully at the radical critique of colonization with its discourse of progress, its culture of acquisitiveness, its systemic use of the Inuit as market and labour, its physical displacement of them (from Old to New Fort Chimo), and its cultural invasion and dislocation of the Inuit as a people.

Throughout the novel, overt passages referring to the historical occupation of the North by non-natives multiply (first for whales and fur, and then motivated largely by military concerns in the 1950s), commenting critically on the adjacent role of the church, schools, the Hudson's Bay Company, competing levels of government, and the newspapers themselves in the dislocation of the Inuit. Importantly, when Elsa and her son flee with Uncle Ian to the other side of the river to pursue a traditional nomadic life, the police are sent to bring Jimmy back to school. The RCMP were routinely used to round up Inuit children for schooling and language training, if not for residential schools (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 4-6). McMillan notes that the federal government of the period encouraged resettlement of the nomadic people into towns or for relocation in other regions in order to better "administer their Inuit charges" (286-7; see also Pritzker on Ungava Inuit 536). At one point, Thaddeus rejects the idea that the Hudson's Bay Company exploited them but in the next breath pronounces: "L'histoire des Esquimaux et l'histoire de la Compagnie n'en font qu'une..." (142-3), collapsing the longer history of the Inuit into that of European trade and settlement.

Unlike other aboriginal peoples to the South, the Inuit were not the target of mass genocide nor did they suffer the expropriation of the majority of their land, but the coming of progress after contact was more rapid, albeit later, in the North than in the South. Since the transformations (that is from

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nomadic to town-dwellers, hunting to wage labour, traditional languages and values to non-native enforced schooling) took place largely within one generation, newly settled villages contained people who had lived nomadically beside others who were born in towns (McMillan, Pritzker). Though this widespread and rapid transformation of Inuit life resulted in numerous negative effects such as illness, malnutrition, a breakdown in traditional family and education, and inadequate housing, by the 1960s, the Inuit had mounted strong resistance to neocolonization. Most notably they launched one of Canada's largest successful land claims movements, which resulted in the creation of Nunavut (our land), a mainly Inuit territory about the size of France which represents roughly one fifth of the land mass of Canada (Pritzker, 523). The national advocacy and activist association established in 1971, the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, and circumpolar alliances with other Inuit have buttressed land claims and the movement to preserve traditional languages and customs. Lest the title of this paper "Used People," and Roy's critique of colonization imply the defeat of a people, we need to recognize the relative autonomy of the Inuit compared to that of other aboriginal peoples to the South. We also need to note, as expressed by the character of Uncle Ian, that historically the threat to autonomy has come whenever non-native capitalist culture discovers treasures in the North or the North itself as treasure. Ian laments the interest in their land shown by the Whites since the lines of war crossed the pole. Whereas once their land was considered too poor to tempt outsiders, now their position is strategic and their land holds worth for others in its minerals and other treasures: "Ah, pauvres nous, finit-il en une sorte de souhait, que Dieu nous garde des trésors!" (170).

Old Fort Chimo was the remains of a Moravian mission (1811) and a nearby Hudson Bay fur trading post dating back to the early 1830s, and New Fort Chimo was a larger, mixed white and Inuit settlement developed around the airport and the strategic use of the North. Although not mentioned in Roy's narrative, the actual naming of Fort Chimo (pronounced "shee mo") was, ironically, based on the mispronunciation of the Inuit phrase "saimuuq," meaning "Let's shake hands!"—frequently the first words heard by the European whalers, fur traders, and missionaries when they encountered the Ungava Inuit (Nunavik Tourism Association).<sup>10</sup> Misnaming or renaming is central to the discourses of discovery and progress and thus to postcolonial writing: in the early 1960s when Roy visited briefly, the place was still named through misrecognition.<sup>11</sup> In 1980, the new Fort Chimo would change its name to the Inuit word, Kuujjuaq, meaning "great river."

On the allegorical level of the text, the early rape scene prefigures cultural invasion and misrecognition. It signifies the ambivalence and the imbalance of power between the indigenous people and those who occupy their land. Granted, there is an underlying human dimension to the scene whereby the young woman and young man are simply experimenting with natural desire, but the tone of the encounter is set ultimately by self-interest and abandonment when the GI fails to recognize Elsa or the baby after he has used her as a sexual outlet. Yet the rape itself does not position Elsa uniquely in the victim position. She, like the other Inuit girls, is predisposed toward seduction by white culture in the form not only of romantic movie stars, but also of pre-packaged notions of romance and white superiority. Elsa encounters the GI by surprise on the road, walking home with her girlfriends after watching films at the mission. Though the Inuit girls laugh at the odd practices (kissing) and plot twists of Western romance and the ugliness of Clarke Gable, even their stance mimics the movies as they walk with their arms linked around each others' waists "comme elles l'avaient vu faire au cinéma" (95). Elsa's limited resistance to the rape issues from the unreality of the moment of contact with the GI for when he pushes her down and jumps on her, she feels panic mediated by unreality and humour: "Hors cette panique, tout était cependant tel qu'au cinéma, étrange, lointain, à peine vraisemblable" (100). The unreality of the moment suggests that both seduction and coercion are at play in a (neo)colonialism that sends film images on ahead of armies and businessmen to fill the heads of the indigenous people. But capital follows closely. The rapist presses bills into the hand of his victim immediately after the assault, an action both realistic and allegorically significant. Elsa does not call the encounter rape, and the priest alone implies she has been too compliant. It is left for readers to perceive the imbalance of power between Elsa's innocent compliance and the GI's covert taking of pleasure without asking. Roy adds the detail of his wearing sunglasses to imply coldness and deceit, and when Elsa later spies him marching with other soldiers, he will not acknowledge her. Feminist readers will recognize the covert power of male specularisation as he sizes up and selects Elsa as target of both desire and disgust.

Elsa will encounter the young GI who fathers her baby along the road between the airport and the village: the mythic questing between progress and traditional Inuit culture and the mythic mixing of races in the person of Jimmy are set realistically in the history of "development" of the region. The greatest foray by whites into Kuujjuaq occurred in World War II, with the

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building of the highway to an American army airbase in 1945. The airbase was later bought back by the Canadian airforce and used widely during the building of the Distant Early Warning Line for air defense. While Elsa's back and forth movement between the old and the new has most often been read as an impasse between the binaries of the past (nomadic, Inuit culture) and the future (the white man's progress and technology) or as a spatial metaphor for cultural cleavage and lack of belonging (Dansereau 1996, 462), the road throughout the story appears as a site of ambivalence and hybridity within which racial categories are destabilized and contaminated through contact. For example, although the priest attempts to control intercultural relations by showing movies to segregated groups of whites and Inuit, the young soldiers and the Inuit girls keep coming together on the road outside the village. Furthermore, when they do come together, it is the Inuit especially who appear deeply changed by contact.

When contact is sexualized early in the novel, Elsa's own ambivalence is crucial. White society will invade with its industrialized, technological, and militarized culture that will seep into most aspects of her everyday material and spiritual life. Hence, I do not agree with Chapman's reading that Elsa's experience of hybridity is one of wearing a series of masks between cultures. If one pays close attention to desire within Elsa's story, the contamination of one culture by another is as evident as the binary opposition or separateness of the two cultures. Furthermore, rape/seduction lays the groundwork for a realistic story of cultural invasion by cinema, telephone, radio, western medicine, non-native law, education, airports, highways, and the company store, an invasion that is inexorable and penetrating in its offerings.

The revolution in technology is important to the "trois nouvelles esquimaudes" preceding Elsa's story in that they prepare the reader for a wider understanding of dislocation and a deeper understanding of the paradox of consent and coercion. The earlier stories disrupt the discourse of progress by questioning the use of the telephone, the wheel chair, and the hospital in the context of the balanced lives of other cultures. The unfolding of the pros and cons of progress in the form of better communication and medicine make readers reflect on colonial assumptions that these innovations were necessarily improving Inuit lives. Yet, instead of pure nostalgia for a pre-contact golden age, Roy depicts her characters enjoying as well as ruing the trappings of "progress" (tea, hospitals, the telephone, schooling, housing, wheelchairs, baseball, processed food, clocks, and a large variety of com-

modities). The absence of these “trois nouvelles esquimaudes” in the English version is regrettable because it diminishes the postcolonial critique and complexity of the novel. The first story, “Les satellites,” dramatizes the advent of airlifts of the sick and hospital care as a means of prolonging life artificially; the second, the advent of the telephone as a novel form of interacting at a distance; and the third, “Le fauteuil roulant,” the advent of the wheelchair as a means of giving mobility to the infirm and the aged. All three stories reflect the paradox of progress and technology that offers, on the one hand, comfort or instant gratification not available in pre-contact times but interferes, on the other hand, with more traditional, balanced cultural practices and expectations based on different notions of caring and community. The airlift to a hospital saves Deborah from her imminent death, but prolongs her life so that she becomes a burden on her family and must face death a second time. The telephone is a new human presence and means of reaching out across the cold or of complaining to the white authorities, but it also provides a way of checking up on each other, invading privacy, and avoiding the pleasure of closer human contact. The wheelchair brings similarly mixed blessings, allowing Ian, an invalid, to be taken out on the tundra and see parts of the shoreline that he has never seen before. Yet it seems like such a gadget and a game that the children forget about old Ian one day and abandon him to the elements overnight during a storm, leaving him perched precariously on a hill alone against the rain and the wind.<sup>12</sup> In all cases, technology ultimately distances members of a community whose earlier culture taught close ties, balance, and interdependence to fight against the elements.

### **Mothering through Poverty/Poverty through Mothering:**

Sa vie s'usait à lui acheter d'aussi riches vêtements et d'aussi charmants jouets qu'en avaient les enfants de Madame Beaulieu. Pourtant, même seule ici avec lui, sans autre témoin de leur élégance que le ciel lointain, elle en était heureuse comme d'un obscur et merveilleux devoir accompli.

Gabrielle Roy, *La Rivière sans repos*<sup>13</sup>

In *La Rivière sans repos*, consumerism mediates mothering as well as time and community. The novel focuses on how a mother uses up her life trying to bridge the gap between needs created by consumer capitalism and colonial culture and the difficulties faced by an aboriginal single mother. As a domestic, Elsa works such long hours that she will become alienated from her son



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by leaving him in his grandmother's care. Hence, progress mediates mothering in negative ways, segmenting time into a commodity. The domestic details explain Elsa's confinement in the cage of progress and consumer culture: she works with her eye on the clock so that she can buy her son white bread, hamburger, snow suits, warm baths, and toys. In passages such as the following, the perverted desire of consumer fetishism is shown to hold the key to the cage: "Mais, ayant touché son premier mois de salaire et couru d'une traite au magasin, elle fut abasourdie de voir tout son argent dépensé avant même d'avoir pu s'en rendre compte. Par ailleurs elle avait pu entrevoir bien d'autres objets qui lui faisaient envie. Elle pensa donc continuer à travailler encore un peu..." (121). The novel is a nuanced reflection on how women as mothers may be complicit in reproducing colonial values. Its subtext signals the limits of economic disenfranchisement and mothering when they meet the broken promises of progress and materialism. Elsa's loss of Jimmy to non-native culture and the richer South echoes the key scene in *Bonheur d'occasion*, when the poor, francophone mother from Saint-Henri watches hopelessly as her child embraces expensive toys and an English nurse in a Westmount hospital. Both mothers know that the other culture holds more riches, attention, and hope than their poor homes can provide.

Elsa's choices for raising more capital to care for Jimmy according to white ways are limited, given the new system of wage labour. She can work more hours, but she cannot easily aspire to a promotion or another position. As one cultural anthropologist has observed, the system implanted by whites in Inuit territory was "caste-like" more than class-like since

Qallunaat, the White, [were] generally temporary residents of the north. As government administrators, teachers, missionaries, shopkeepers or police, these non-natives held the positions of authority. Status differences were clearly evident in the communities, often with the Qallunaat occupying a separate part of the town. Failing to understand the nature of the new institutions, and not speaking the language in which they were conducted, the Inuit found themselves excluded from the realm of decision-making. Only in recent years have the Inuit begun to reclaim control over their lives. (McMillan 286)

Ironically, Elsa's acquisitiveness, her overwork, and constant cleaning, which seem to promise to lead her out of poverty and into progress, culminate in an epiphany that warns her against progress. As a domestic, she feels alienated from her own work: she is frustrated at cleaning another woman's house instead of her own, and senses the unreality of her maid's uniform, as if she is acting out a role in the cinema in front of the white women taking tea (123-24). In the latter scene, Elsa questions class/caste difference and rejects

it as artificial: in reality they are all mothers together. Fighting the alienation that has crept between Jimmy and her, Elsa decides to escape from wage-labour back into a more traditional culture of nomadism and subsistence. Following Ian on the hunt is not merely a return to the past or to nature, but to a different social system of caring for one another. Besides subsistence and sharing, her reverting includes breaking the incest taboo to couple with her uncle, a concession to the hunter/man and isolation of nomadic life. But no suggestion of rape figures in this concession to male power—there is even a fleeting suggestion of female desire on Elsa’s part. This segment of the narrative represents a different, older economy based on survival and male dominance with its own use for women, yet one in which sex is tied to caring rather than abandonment.

When forced back to the New Fort Chimo, Elsa will return to wage labour through piecework, sewing dolls and souvenirs, an activity that replaces house-cleaning for non-native women. The commodification of the Eskimo dolls shows how progress swallows tradition as well as the present. As realism, the novel reflects a trend emerging in the 1960s: Inuit arts and crafts (mostly in the form of soapstone carving, but also in the form of clothing, boots, and dolls) were being commercialized with the encouragement of the federal government to fill the gap left in the new economy after whaling and furs had lost a market. Turning from domestic service to entrepreneurship may appear to be progress. But the novel indicates that the introduction of the light bulb will keep the mother sewing long into the night in order to earn more cash. And so her past entrapment in the time, capital, and technology of the new culture repeats.

While Elsa has often been read mythically in the continuum of Roy’s Mother Courage figures, she should also be read materially as a poor woman, a female domestic, a disenfranchised Inuit, and a single mother. Yet Elsa suffers none of the dreadful shame or panic over poverty and illegitimacy that the women in *Bonheur d’occasion* do. The Inuit community around her refuses to shun her son as illegitimate, partly because of his mixed racial status and the way his light hair and skin are viewed as miraculous. Also, a relative absence of shame surrounds the whole notion of “illegitimacy.” The priest alone, importing part of the European and Christian fixation with paternity and ownership of children, expresses negative attitudes toward the pregnancy. Although the novel portrays the single mother in a largely self-imposed isolation from her community, in traditional Inuit social communities, even after contact, extended family parenting, if not informal

adoption, were common solutions to teenage pregnancy (Archibald). Pritzker reports that offspring from non-kin sexual relations were regarded as fully legitimate in Inuit communities (522) and Archibald suggests that in some Inuit communities teenage pregnancies may even have been expected in order to provide an adopted first child for doting grandparents. That, under patriarchal capitalism, the weight of responsibility for parenting falls on the single mother with her limited access to capital represents an upheaval in the nature of caring in the postcolonial poverty narrative, but it also betrays a Western angle of vision. Traditional Inuit culture saw parenting styles shift with the seasons: ranging from a much-extended or tribal form of childcare among ten or twenty families in the summer camp to smaller, yet often extended, family units during the nomadic periods of the winter hunt (Pritzker, McMillan).

The playpen is a powerful image of the shift in mothering under colonization. Bought by Elsa in mimicry of the non-native mothers, it is regarded with horror by the grandparents and Inuit neighbors who practice a different concept of child care based on tolerance and freedom. From recent discussions of parenting in Inuit culture, we learn that “isuma” or the profound respect for the mindset of others leads to parenting that is highly tolerant for at least two reasons: first one should not intrude upon the mindset of another within the family, and second, children are perceived not to have developed their isuma and thus should be distracted or ignored rather than punished for wrong doing (Qitsualik).<sup>14</sup> Elsa’s impatience with Winnie’s parenting arises from different notions of control over the child in spirit and in body as well as Elsa’s internalized racial shame for the disorder of her parents’ home. In showing the single mother establishing largely self-imposed distance from extended parenting, the novel tends to represent a non-native view of the single mother, albeit one that is not marred by great shame over illegitimacy. Further, Elsa’s disrespect for and competition with the elder Winnie defies traditional culture according to which “elders were revered for their wisdom and knowledge, including their valuable advice and expertise in the area of child rearing and parenting” (Kanatami 4). Yet another rift with Inuit child-rearing is Jimmy’s abandonment by his biological father leaving him without a male model to show him his role in a hunting culture. Through close modeling on adult behaviour within both the extended and nuclear units, rather than through formal schooling, cultural memory and education were transmitted in pre-contact Inuit communities (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 4-5). Elsa would carry her baby in her arms rather than on her

back in Winnie's traditional way (126), because he was half white and "afin qu'il vit loin devant lui" (128). This concession to progress in the style of mothering trains the boy in the habit of looking far in front of him, prefiguring allegorically his escape to the South, where he will eventually join the white man's army. The only word Elsa will have from him is indirect news of an incomplete message, filtered through interference in the radio when an unidentified "American" pilot talks to other villagers. In his abandonment of his mother and his choice to join the airforce, Jimmy represents assimilated Inuits and their seduction by technology. Less ambiguous than his mother's fate, his lifeline suggests the faster, more complete assimilation of future generations and the strategic use of the North for military purposes.

As in *Bonheur d'occasion*, war and motherhood face off in *La Rivière sans repos* and represent different ways of caring for and using the young. Toward the end of the novel, the disembodied voice believed to be that of Jimmy, an airplane pilot who radios when flying over the community, may be an ironic nod to an ascended Christ figure (Chapman 58)—Jimmy gone white and thus elevated from the abject. But the anonymous radio voice is also emblematic of the loss of human contact. It configures the distancing presence of a society that worships technology and capital, the false gods of progress and war (See Gagne, juil.-sept. 1976). As in Roy's opening stories about the telephone and the wheel chair, technological innovations often displace more direct and balanced means of human care and contact. Progress carries the Inuit further—but further from each other.

Of the three women aligned in the course of the coming-of-age story—Elsa herself, Winnie, and Elizabeth Beaulieu—the text demonstrates that the most sorrowful, the most lost and dislocated emotionally is the white middle-class housewife, who looks idly and forlornly through her window each day at the foreign landscape. On the level of realism, she may suffer from post-partum depression (Babby); on the allegorical level, her behaviour suggests an absence of caring within the non-native system of production and exchange. Mme. Beaulieu's sense of dislocation and sadness emerges not only despite her possessions, but also because of them. When Elsa is working too hard, the narrator reports that she begins to take on the thin, harassed look of her employer and the other young white women who were always anxiously setting themselves more and more difficult goals (129).

Out of sympathy, Elsa mothers her white employer as well as cleaning house for her. The policeman's wife suffers from depression and boredom in her husband's northern posting, dislocated as she is in a place she cannot

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find beautiful, despite her ironic name Elizabeth *Beaulieu*. In contemplating her employer's severe melancholy, Elsa begins to question the ways of the whites, whom she has tried so hard to emulate. In her soulful interrogation, she enumerates Mme. Beaulieu's possessions and wonders why these comforts do not protect the white woman from sadness. Here, Roy underscores the void and deception at the base of consumer culture as well as Elsa's empathy for the white woman:

Pourquoi Madame Beaulieu souffrait-elle autant? Elle avait tout: de beaux enfants, une riche maison sur son roc lui servant de piédestal pour voir le pays en entier, un intérieur douillet, des tapis de laine, des images au mur, et surtout un mari aimant qui chaque soir, en entrant, s'informait avec sollicitude: " Est-ce que tu ne vas pas un peu mieux aujourd'hui, ma petite chérie?" La créature la plus choyée, la plus aimée de Fort Chimo, n'en était pas moins souffrante et triste. Ce chagrin sans cause apparente inquiétait Elsa plus que ne l'eût fait un malheur ordinaire, comme il en serait arrivé à elle ou à sa mère par exemple. La tristesse des Blancs devait être le signe que personne n'y échappait. Vaguement le progrès lui en paraissait parfois la cause. Alors elle prenait peur de cette force terrifiante qui était peut-être au-delà de toute endurance humaine. (148-149)

Whereas Uncle Ian as nomadic hunter and male provider was repulsed by the non-native style of the village settlement (the randomness, smallness, insignificance, and crowded nature of the houses against the landscape) Elsa, the mother and nurturer is repulsed by the deception and sadness *within* the houses. Moreover, when she mimics the whites too perfectly in her own house, the other Inuit become uncomfortable and will not stay for long. Indeed, in such a stern, sterile, and commodified domestic space, Elsa can find no home or sense of belonging.

Toward the end of her journey, Elsa's silhouette is tragically comic as she balances a white woman's hat on her short body and totters on high heels. Instead of modeling herself on her mother and Inuit women, she has donned the costume of the white woman (219). Here she negotiates class as well as racial difference. Like numerous domestics from other minority communities in Canadian literature, Elsa wears "borrowed beauty" (Tynes), and does so awkwardly as evidence of her dislocation, mimicry, and stunted aspirations within a class as well as a racial hierarchy. Yet in the new space at the end of her journey, usually interpreted tragically as an impasse, Elsa has rejected mimicry as a strategy of surviving colonization. On the beach beside the great river, she cuts a different figure from the unbalanced woman on ill-fitting heels. Hers is the mythic figure of the outlaw, the witch, the obstinate,

Aboriginal woman who, though wounded by progress, at times steps in and out of its path to create her own space.

Over 60 years of age at the time of writing the collection of stories, Roy examines death, care, abandonment, and progress as spiritual and social matters both across cultures and for all of humankind, but she also questions how Inuit women, in particular, negotiate these spiritual and social roles throughout their reproductive years and at the end of their lives. On a mythic level, Roy invokes the image of the witch and the wise woman to draw our attention to the suppressed power and desire in these displaced women. When Winnie competes for Jimmy's love, she cackles like a witch ("elle avait tout l'air d'une sorcière réjouie de ses tours"[146]), when Inez meets Elsa in the cemetery, her head is brimming with memories: "Elle n'avait plus de dents, peu d'ouïe, presque rien de sa vue d'autrefois, mais des souvenirs plein sa vieille tête branlante" (172). And when Elsa, turned part nomad, part homeless woman, paces the beach at the end of the novel, she is mostly freed from domestic labour and material possessions. After losing Jimmy, Elsa also loses the taste for wage labour, selling her sewing machine and closing up her house to live a hybrid, nomadic existence. Pausing long enough for one preferred domestic task only, in front of a cauldron of wash water, Elsa is sketched paradoxically as both empowered and worn out—an Inuk rebelling as homeless woman, witch, and outlaw:

Elle dormait tout habillée. Elle n'avait plus de lit à faire, ni non plus de repas à préparer, car elle mangeait ce qu'elle avait sous la main, une bouchée de n'importe quoi, quand elle avait très faim. Il n'y avait qu'une corvée ménagère à laquelle elle restait fidèle, sa lessive; elle la faisait sur la grève, dans un baquet d'eau mise à chauffer sur un feu de rebuts. Quelquefois elle avait de vieux pneus à brûler dont la fumée noire empestait. À travers, on la distinguait à peine qui attisait le feu. (224)<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately, Elsa figures homelessness and dislocation rather than mythical power or playful ambivalence and displacement. The result of contact is mostly loss. Hospitals, schools, and domestic labour, and mothering itself—all sites of caring among people—are mediated by capital: they all come with a price tag. The ambivalence of progress is resolved in a final image of abandonment and homelessness, suggesting that Roy was not willing to rest her reflections on undecidable paradox. She was commenting critically on the effects of ambivalence in a new economy of (un)caring.

Yet homelessness and dislocation do have a radical potential in the novel as an outlaw space. The in-between space is partially of Elsa's own making:

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somewhere between the refusal to be carried away by progress and the impossibility of returning to the traditional culture. Within it, Elsa enacts a form of bricolage, a declaration of difference, not simply a static space of impasse. She lives outside of the village, “une incorrigible nomade,” an abandoned mother, a prematurely-aged, made woman who repeats herself. In materialist terms, she is gathering and scavenging, yet owning her own domestic labour instead of a working for a wage (240). “Un salaire, un emploi, la sécurité! . . . qu’aurait-elle fait de tout cela! Alors qu’elle ne tenait plus qu’à acheter, au prix de son travail, le droit de rester ensuite à ne rien faire auprès de la rivière, pour se sentir, comme elle, emportée, délivrée.” (225). She solves the problem of doing one’s washing out of doors when fuel is lacking by stirring a pot of boiling wash water over a burning tire, cleaning through the black smoke. Elsa’s is not a liminal space of endless possibilities and discursive play unbound by hierarchies, nor is it an aestheticized space of pure paradox; it is rather a new imaginative space bound by the material and historical circumstances of place and time: the beach, the loneliness, the cast-off mother reusing cast-off products of industrial culture like old tires. The women at the centre of this novel are not merely caught tragically and helplessly at an impasse between cultures and generations, nor merely used up by a system that extracts their sexual services and their domestic work, they are also set in restless motion to show how Inuit women survive these cultural moments. The final scene shows Elsa now become Winnie (232), a mythic aged woman walking the beach, bent over, cackling, smoking, blowing upon a plant as soft as the hair of a child and letting go the migratory seeds. The myth suggests that survival itself can be, after all, a fine means of resistance.

## NOTES

- 1 I am grateful to FQRSC and SSHRC for funding this research and to research assistants, Natasha Dagenais and Jackie Hall. Special thanks also to Ben-Zion Shek for his thoughtful comments on an earlier draft and to the anonymous readers from *Canadian Literature*.
- 2 “Her life was being used up, moreover, attempting to keep up with progress, a difficult master progress: did anyone know what it wanted and where it was leading people?” (*Windflower* 35)
- 3 “When summer returned, there she would be again, a little more worn, a little more bowed, passing along the rim of the broad sky, parallel to that distant chain of ancient mountains that are the most abraded on earth.” (*Windflower* 151)
- 4 In “Industrialism and Cultural Values,” Innis reflected on the lack of understanding between industrialized, capitalist societies and the earlier societies they displace “...an

attitude described by Samuel Butler: “All progress is based upon a universal innate desire on the part of every organism to live beyond its income.’ The concern with specialization and excess, making more and better mousetraps, precludes the possibility of understanding a preceding civilization concerned with balance and proportion. Industrialism implies technology and the cutting of time into precise fragments suited to the needs of the engineer and the accountant. . . . Constant changes in technology particularly as they affect communications, a crucial factor in determining cultural values (for example, the development of radio and television), increase the difficulties of recognizing balance let alone achieving it.” (323)

- 5 Taking a long view of history and prehistory, Wright questions whether progress knows its own way and critiques, in particular, the way capital and social hierarchies may determine that route at the expense of those caught up in what he refers to as “progress traps”: “Civilization is an experiment, a very recent way of life in the human career, and it has a habit of walking into what I am calling progress traps. A small village on good land beside a river is a good idea; but when the village grows into a city and paves over the good land, it becomes a bad idea. . . . This human inability to foresee—or to watch out for—long-range consequences may be inherent to our kind, shaped by the millions of years when we lived from hand to mouth by hunting and gathering. It may also be little more than a mix of inertia, greed, and foolishness encouraged by the shape of the social pyramid. The concentration of power at the top of large-scale societies gives the elite a vested interest in the status quo.” (108-9)
- 6 Gagné does some research into the incidence of illegitimate births at the time of Roy’s visit to Fort Chimo in 1961 and finds that most families are extended or nuclear, but about thirty per cent were not married (1976).  
Gagné does not appear to have statistics on the number of mixed-blood births at the time. The novel itself claims early in the text that there were many such births. Interestingly, Olive Dickason claims the earliest evidence of mixed blood births among the Inuit could be traced back to the fifteenth century where sightings of blond and red-headed babies among the Inuit suggested sexual contact with the Vikings or defecting fishermen (146).
- 7 The practice of using “Inuit” instead of the popular misnomer “Eskimo” (raw meat eaters) became official in 1977 after it was adopted at the first Inuit Circumpolar Conference held in Alaska that year. It was part of the strategy for a pan-Inuit movement to create unity among the people formerly known as Eskimo from Canada, Alaska, Greenland, Russia, and other areas in the Arctic (McMillan 292, see also Petrone).
- 8 See Margery Fee’s discussion of romantic nationalism in Canadian literature and the ideological implications of ritual sharing, gift-giving, and coupling between natives and non-natives.
- 9 Education of Inuit in Nunavik (Quebec) has apparently been more progressive in encouraging the Inuit to teach and cultivate their own language than other areas of the North (Kanatami 6).
- 10 According to oral testimonies in a recent history of Nunavut by McGill-Queens University Press, the traditional act of greeting practised by the Inuit was not to shake hands, but to raise their hands in the air to indicate that they held no weapons. Both oral testimonies and early photographs testify to the practice (Bennett and Rowley 132). For our purposes here, it is interesting to note that one cannot peel back all the layers of hybridity to reveal the authentic and thus misrepresentation itself is a relative term.



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- 11 Chapman comments on the colonial significance of place names (50-51). In the novel all of the Inuit characters bear European names, yet in Inuit culture the ritual of naming has tremendous importance, especially given that the bearer of a name is believed to incorporate characteristics belonging to the previous owner of the name (Ooston). Some Inuit remember that although they had been given English names by missionaries who could not pronounce their Inuit names, they continued to use their Inuit names privately amongst themselves (Hansen).
- 12 The abandonment of the elderly was a practice in some Inuit communities, but it was a solemn ritual (Pritzker, McMillan), not a careless game as in the story of the wheel chair.
- 13 “Her life was becoming used up buying him clothes as costly and toys as charming as those possessed by the children of Madame Beaulieu. Yet even alone with no other elegance to all this elegance but the distant sky, she was as happy about it as at the performance of some obscure and marvelous duty” (*Windflower* 41).
- 14 “If there is a single characteristic that typifies Inuit culture, it is the concept known as *isuma*. As with so many concepts unique to Inuit, *isuma* is difficult for non-Inuit to grasp. It refers to the innermost thoughts and feelings a person has—their mindset. A fundamental tenet of Inuit society was the sacred nature of *isuma*: that another’s mind was not to be intruded upon. Young children were thought not to have fully developed *isuma*, and were consequently considered exempt from adult responsibilities. Misbehaving children were not scolded or punished—the parents instead distracted or ignored them. This was not casual indifference, but rather the belief that the child was simply not old enough to be taught how to behave.” (Qitsualik)
- 15 “She slept fully clothed. She no longer had beds to make or even any meals to prepare, for she ate whatever she chanced to have, a mouthful at random when she felt very hungry. There was only one household task to which she remained faithful, her laundry; she washed on the beach in a tub of water heated over a fire of rubbish. Sometimes she had old tires to burn. Through their evil black smoke she would be seen only dimly, stirring her fire.” (*Windflower* 135)

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