

# Of breathing holes and contact zones

## Inuit-Canadian writer Markoosie in and through translation

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*Harpoon of the Hunter*, originally written in Inuktitut syllabics and published serially in 1969/70, is frequently characterized as the “first Inuit novel” (McGrath 1984, 81; Chartier 2011). It was deemed the “breakthrough” (McNeill 1975, 117) eagerly awaited by those whose stated goal was to save Canada’s traditional northern culture and its stories, songs, poems and legends from being swept aside by the onslaught of southern modernity. Markoosie’s text helpfully allows discussion of (post)colonial contact zones constructed in and through translational acts such as self-translation, retranslation, and relay/indirect translation as these intersect with Indigenous literature. This article explores the complex trajectory, involving various stakeholders, of the translation, circulation and reception of this important contribution to not only Inuit literature, but Canadian literature as a whole. It examines some relevant features of the author’s own translation of his text into English (1970) and traces them through the two existing French translations by Claire Martin (Markoosie, tr. Martin 1971) and Catherine Ego (Markoosie, tr. Ego 2011).

**Keywords:** Inuit-Canadian literature, Indigenous literature, self-translation, relay translation, retranslation, post-colonial translation

### 1. Introduction

Translation from a “minor” or peripheral language into a central, “major” or heavily translated one (typically English, French or Spanish) cannot help but bear witness to an inherently unequal relationship, whereby minority cultures struggle to survive. While contact zones, famously defined by Mary Louise Pratt as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths”

(1991, 34), may be unavoidable in today's globalized world, they remain fraught with danger and opportunities for misinterpretation. Literary contact zones often function as and through translation, which creates space for previously unheard voices and traditions to circulate, and minority cultures are translation cultures by necessity (see, e.g., Cronin 2003, 139). However, as Mona Baker (2014), Pascale Casanova (2010) and others underscore in various contexts, the fact that the language through which minority literatures reach a wider audience has typically also been experienced as the language of oppression can significantly problematize the relations involved. In colonial contexts, translation often operates to construct representations of the other, and these dynamics of representation carry on into postcolonial situations, as the hegemonic powers reinforce stereotypes of certain communities and regions. This certainly holds true in the (post)colonial space where the Inuit and their centuries-old oral storytelling traditions run up against the scribal culture of southern Canada.

*Harpoon of the Hunter*, originally written in Inuktitut syllabics and published in two parts in the government periodical *Inuttituut*<sup>1</sup> (Winter 1969 and Spring/Summer 1970), is frequently characterized as the “first Inuit novel” (see, e.g., McGrath 1984, 81; Chartier 2011),<sup>2</sup> and is certainly the first Inuk-authored<sup>3</sup> fictional text to be circulated in book form in Canada in either English or French. As James McNeill recollected in 1975, Markoosie's work was the “breakthrough” (McNeill 1975, 117) eagerly awaited by those whose stated goal was to save traditional northern culture and its stories, songs, poems and legends from being swept aside by the onslaught of southern modernity. This article explores the complex trajectory, involving various stakeholders, of the translation, circulation and reception of this important contribution to not only Inuit literature, but Canadian literature as a whole. It examines some relevant features of the author's own translation of his text from Inuktitut into English (1970) and traces them through the two existing French translations by Claire Martin (1971) and Catherine Ego (2011), both based on Markoosie's English version.

1. This unilingual periodical, whose title translates as “the Inuit way,” was published by Canada's Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) from 1959; around 1978 its name changed to *Inuktitut* and it began appearing as a trilingual journal.

2. A similar claim is also made for *Sanaaq*, by Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk, who began writing in the 1950s, although her text was not published until 1984, in an illustrated Inuktitut version released jointly by the Association Inuksiutiit Katimajit and Laval University. *Sanaaq* has been translated into French by Bernard Saladin d'Anglure (Nappaaluk 2002) and into English by Peter Frost (Nappaaluk 2014).

3. *Inuk* is the singular of Inuit (there is also a dual form, *Inuuk*). Across Canada, the use of the term ‘Eskimo’ is now considered derogatory and widely avoided.



Bay in northern Quebec. However, his family was among those Inuit forcibly relocated in 1953 to the High Arctic, specifically the community of Resolute Bay on Cornwallis Island, in a bid to reinforce Canadian sovereignty.<sup>6</sup> The second of five children born to Alex and Edith, also known as Alliekayut and Eeta or Etta (McNeill 1975, 116; New 2002, 713), he contracted tuberculosis and from the age of 13 spent three years hospitalized in The Pas, Manitoba (where he learned English), eventually attending high school in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories (McGrath 1984, 82). Markoosie's younger brother John Amagoalik would grow up to fight for Inuit rights and become one of the main negotiators of the treaty that led to the founding of Canada's newest territory – known as Nunavut, or 'our land' – in 1999 (McGrath M. 2007, 243; Wright 2014 also discusses the family's trials), subsequently serving as Chief Commissioner of the Nunavut Implementation Commission.<sup>7</sup> In his own way, our author was also a significant path-breaker: not only the first Canadian Inuk to publish a book of fiction,<sup>8</sup> he was also the first to earn a commercial pilot's license (McNeill 1975, 118), which is how he made his living prior to becoming a government socioeconomic agent back in Inukjuak. While Markoosie published various texts in northern periodicals, including *Wings of Mercy* (a five-part novella drawing on his flying career, which appeared in *Inuttituut* between Summer 1972 and Autumn 1973), his reputation as a writer is based primarily on the success of *Harpoon of the Hunter*.

## 2.2 Inuit names

Markoosie (in syllabics this is read *Maakusi*), Pauloosie or Elisapee (for Elizabeth) are typically Inuktitut forms of Christian names. Naming, a highly contentious topic in colonial and postcolonial Inuit culture, has been comprehensively addressed

6. For an extended interview with Markoosie about the damage done to him and others through this forced relocation, see <http://www.iqqaumavara.com/en/familles/entrevues/markoosie-patsauq-son-histoire/> (2011). He has also written on this topic in a brief article titled "Memories," published in English and French in 1991. A formal "Apology for the Inuit High Arctic Relocation" was issued by the Canadian government in 2010 (see <http://www.iqqaumavara.com/en/apology-for-the-inuit-high-arctic-relocation/>; accessed September 13, 2015).

7. John is known as the "father of Nunavut" (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/john-amagoalik-father-of-nunavut-honoured-in-iqaluit-1.2816676>; accessed October 10, 2015).

8. As a circumpolar people, Inuit communities linked by a more or less common culture are located in four different countries: Canada, the USA, Russia and Greenland. Each geographic area has its own history of colonization. Of particular relevance for the present article is the fact that in Greenland, literature by and for Inuit was created much earlier and its circulation in both Kalaallisut originals and Danish translations has developed in ways very different from the Canadian context (see I. Martin 2013).



who pursues a rabid polar bear that has killed his father. Kamik, forced to fend for himself on the tundra, is eventually rescued by a search party from his own and another Inuit community, but abruptly commits suicide upon watching his mother and new fiancée drown while on their way to safety. The narrative creates suspense and depth by alternating between four different points of view, including the bear's.

The author's own English version, with illustrations by Germaine Arnaktauyok, was promptly released in book form through McGill-Queen's University Press in the fall of 1970; its initial French translation by Martin appeared the following year. As documented by Philip Stratford in 1977, Canada's literary translation tradition dates from only around 1960, before which time no "significant" novel had been translated in this country (cited in Delisle 1998, 362).<sup>10</sup> This 1971 edition of *Le harpon du chasseur* was released by Montreal-based Le Cercle du Livre de France, which two years later would become the first Canadian publisher to launch a translation series, known as the *Collection des Deux Solitudes* [series of the two solitudes]<sup>11</sup> (ibid.). Therefore, not only must Markoosie's book be ranked among the first generation of Canadian novels (if that is the correct genre; see below) translated from one official language to the other, but it also functioned as a forerunner to an important stage in this country's literary translation history. Ego's 2011 French rendition was published jointly by Les Presses de l'Université du Québec and the Avataq Cultural Institute. *Harpoon of the Hunter* has been furthermore translated into German by Gertrud Rukschcio in 1974 and into Danish by Vagn Lundbye in 1995 (this edition contains new illustrations by Greenlandic artist Aka Høegh).<sup>12</sup> Both of these translations were also undertaken from the English.

10. Outside of Canada is a different story. For example, an English version of Gabrielle Roy's important *Bonheur d'occasion* (originally published in 1945), by Hannah Josephson, appeared in the USA as *The Tin Flute* in 1947; it would not be retranslated for the Canadian market until 1980, by Alan Brown.

11. *Two Solitudes* is the title of a 1945 novel by Hugh MacLennan, and the phrase is widely used to describe the inability of French- and English-speaking Canadians to communicate with one another, or even their lack of will to try.

12. The notion that this is an even more widely translated book remains a stubborn one: New's *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* (2002, 536) claims that Markoosie's text "has been translated into over a dozen languages," and one review of the 2011 French translation states that it has been translated into "une dizaine de langues" [ten or so languages] (Déléange 2012, 236). This misunderstanding may arise from Robin Gedalof McGrath's statement that further versions were published from the English, including one in Ukrainian and "a dozen other languages" (McGrath 1984, 81), although her MA thesis from 1977 states merely that "excerpts have been printed in countries all over the world" (Gedalof 1977, 9). In any case, WorldCat lists translations into only Danish, French, and German, while the *Index translationum* lists only the Danish and French.

The English-language book has been reprinted numerous times (WorldCat), and remains available through McGill-Queen's. As Chartier points out (2011, 10), although Robin (Gedalof) McGrath describes the initial release as being well received, it has been reviewed over the years in only a handful of publications, such as *The Indian News* (Têtu 1970), the *Canadian Geographic Journal* (Bruemmer 1970), *Queen's Quarterly* (Gundy 1971), and the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (Noble 1979). In the early 1980s, influential *Globe and Mail* literary editor William French referenced Markoosie's text in a piece on Arctic epics (French 1982), and two slightly longer journal articles appeared in the *American Indian Quarterly* (Bovey 1991, and Stott 1986, which discusses *Harpoon of the Hunter* alongside two other Arctic "Robinsonades," or survival stories, penned by non-Inuit). As Margaret Harry helpfully underscored as far back as 1985, if critics pay attention to Inuit and First Nations' literature at all, they are apt to be condescending.<sup>13</sup> Among the few reviewers to mention that *Harpoon of the Hunter* is not an original text, Noble (1979, 80) comments that "[t]he English text is the author's own translation. It is usually terse and evocative, but a few clichés obtrude occasionally." Even McGrath, a stalwart promoter of Inuit literature in Canada and its primary historian, is at best lukewarm in her assessment: "a fast-paced story told in relatively simple language with a surprising ending, and as such it has earned its reputation as a fine book" (1984, 82). Granted, without the training and tools that would equip an outsider to appreciate Inuit writing and the oral traditions from which it arises, and to judge it on its own merits, scholarly assessment by other than specialist anthropologists or ethnologists has often been felt to be beyond the reach of southerners. Nonetheless, a younger generation of literary scholars such as Keavy Martin, inspired by the work of J. Edward Chamberlin, Robert Allen Warrior and Craig Womack, are working to redress such attitudes (see, e.g., K. Martin 2010, 2012, 2014).

Despite the book's relative popularity, its reception as well as its overall packaging have proven problematic on various levels. *Harpoon of the Hunter* (1970) appears in an oversized, slender, large-font format, and is commonly classified as juvenile fiction (see, e.g., WorldCat). *Publisher's Weekly* (quoted on the back cover) described it as "readable for all ages"; entries about the author appear in reference works such as the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* and the *Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*. Although Markoosie has described his work as the retelling of an ancient and specifically Inuit legend – "This is a story of my people" (quoted in Chartier 2011, 17) – its classification by others has tended

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13. "The lack of commitment by publishers and readers to the work of native writers is reinforced by the generally negative attitude of Canadian critics. Perhaps 'non-attitude' would be a better word, since most Indian and Inuit works are not criticized at all" (Harry 1985, 2).

to be highly Eurocentric. The text has regularly been referred to as a novel (see, e.g., New 2002, 200, 536; K. Martin 2014, 24 also uses the term, but helpfully problematizes it when applied to Indigenous traditions that developed along non-European lines), although even if we accept the imposition of European categories, novella would be a more accurate genre, owing to its brevity. In any case, the inside flap of the 1970 edition makes no such claim; the terms used here are “story,” the “first piece of Eskimo fiction,” and “an astonishing tale” (Markoosie 1970, n.p.). Again it is presented in terms not unfamiliar to readers of young adult fiction (e.g. “the hero of this story, young Kamik, achieves manhood”); this impression is further reinforced by the illustrator’s biographical note, which reminds readers that Arnaktauyok is a well-known illustrator of children’s books (ibid.). However, the fact that this tale concludes abruptly and darkly with the young hunter deliberately impaling himself on his own harpoon does not especially suggest a work one would readily put into the hands of a ten- or twelve-year-old. Further, according to Gedalof McGrath, such a distinction is not native to Inuit traditions:

The presence of illustrations in so many Eskimo books frequently leads non-Inuit to assume that the books are intended only for children. This is not so. Eskimos do not have a “children’s literature” and stories are intended for adults and children alike. (Gedalof 1977, 24)

Be that as it may, and despite the esteemed publisher, neither the presentation of the text – which is lacking any critical context aside from McNeill’s three-page foreword – nor its classification for young readers has been such as to encourage serious critical attention.

Claire Martin’s French translation was also reprinted several times and reviewed,<sup>14</sup> which is evidence of a certain popularity, although it has long been out of print. Catherine Ego’s translation appears in a well-established academic series highlighting important but difficult to access books about the north, which are packaged with extensive paratextual matter (no space was allotted for a translator’s note of any kind, however, and thus Ego’s own voice remains absent). It has accordingly refocused attention on this text (see, e.g., Déléage 2012; Furci and Duvernois 2012), providing favourable conditions for further dissemination, within Canada and without. For example, in what constitutes the first Indo-Quebec collaboration related to the literature of Quebec’s north, the book has very recently been translated into Hindi and Marathi (Vencatesen, personal communication, 2016; Ducharme 2014). Both of these versions, undertaken by two professors from Hyderabad’s English and Foreign Languages University, with funding from Quebec’s department of international and francophone relations (as well as from the University of

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14. See, e.g., L’Illettré (1971).

Mumbai, whose director of the French department, Vidya Vencatesen, oversaw the project), would appear to be of the scholarly type (Chari 2016).

### 3. Self-translation

#### 3.1 The practice of self-translation

It is only near the end of McNeill's brief foreword, where a couple of lines relate the book's genesis, that the reader learns that *Harpoon of the Hunter* was not originally written in English. Self- or auto-translation involves a bilingual writer creating two versions of her/his own text. Those who have translated their own literary work include such canonical figures as Samuel Beckett (English/French), Rainer Maria Rilke (German/French), Rabindranath Tagore (Bengali/English), Eileen Chang (Chinese/English), and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (Gikuyu/English). By foregoing dependence on a translator, authors are able, at least in theory, to retain control over how their texts move from one language and culture to another. In practice, however, additional stakeholders in any translation process have undeniable influence over how the work actually reaches readers, and furthermore the art of translating one's own work is anything but transparent or unproblematic. By its very nature, self-translation is a practice that troubles concepts central to translation studies such as author and translator, original and translation – all the more so where, rather than first writing in one language and then recreating that text in another, an author opts to craft two texts simultaneously, allowing work on one to influence the development of the other. In the Canadian literary context, we can look to Nancy Huston, who has published numerous books in both official languages, and caused controversy in 1993 (see, e.g., Mezei 2013, 173) when *Cantique des plaines* won the prestigious Governor General's Award for Fiction in French rather than for Translation into French.

In the case of *Harpoon of the Hunter*, there is a clear distinction and chronological gap (albeit a brief one) between Markoosie's Inuktitut and English versions. McNeill writes in that same foreword of being so excited by the appearance of the initial manuscript – “our first original story written in Eskimo” (1970, n.p.) – that he urged the author to produce an English version. It is likely that the federal government bureaucrat also had a hand in shaping this translation: McNeill's official role “consisted of teaching individual Eskimo people the art of creative writing both in their own language and in English” (McCulloch 1971, 47). Further, a mediating position is made explicit in the acknowledgements: “Our special thanks go to James McNeill, who brought together author, artist, and publisher. Modest and self-effacing, he has nevertheless inspired us all with his enthusiasm for the

project, and has provided generous help and practical guidance at every stage in the production of this book” (Markoosie 1970, 9). It should be noted that these acknowledgements in fact begin by thanking “the Honourable Jean Chrétien and members of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development” – McNeill was employed in its Cultural Development Division – for not only funding, but also “the interest and concern which has discovered and encouraged talent among the Eskimos of the Canadian North” (ibid.). Chrétien was at the time Minister of DIAND and later (1993–2003) Prime Minister of Canada; the department is now known as Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.

### 3.2 Political implications

The political context matters; having literature by Inuit authors made available to be read in the south is an inherent good, but it is not insignificant that *Harpoon of the Hunter* circulates as if it had been written solely in the nation’s dominant language. Mona Baker (2014, 18) rightly underscores that

translation out of the minority language is usually undertaken to raise awareness of the minority language and literature and allow its writers to reach a wider audience. This is often achieved through English, even when the minority language’s relation to English is embedded in a history of oppression.

Markoosie’s work is given a chance to live on, but at the cost of allowing it to be read as if it had been an English-language text all along, with all that this implies about the visibility and viability of his native language and culture. Whether the minority literature in question is Scottish or Irish Gaelic, Gikuyu, or Inuktitut, self-translation into a majority language has a tremendous impact “on the reality of the source literature in terms of its appreciation and survival” (Krause 2013, 127). Furthermore, the very presumption of bilingualism is likewise inextricably linked to a history of colonialism (see, e.g., Casanova 2010, 296–298). While the author of both the Inuktitut and the ‘second original’ in English is one and the same, these texts remain very much asymmetrical: each has unique valences because the dynamics of dominated/dominating language use are so different. In the Canadian Inuit context, the English (and, to a lesser extent, French) language has played and continues to play a colonizing role, and thus any reading of translations into these languages needs to be undertaken with some awareness of this fact.<sup>15</sup>

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15. For a detailed examination of language survival among Inuit, see Dorais (2010).

### 3.3 Markoosie as a self-translator

Lacking the linguistic skills to conduct a full analysis, I have consulted with Inuktitut-speaking friends and colleagues,<sup>16</sup> who have helped me reach some general conclusions about how Markoosie's English translation differs from his original. For example, looking at the opening lines (Markoosie 1970, 1 and 2011, 133), we see that the English version makes use of expressions such as "three sunrises" to translate an otherwise straightforward *ulluq* [a period of daylight, or simply "day"] in Inuktitut, and specifies "igloo" where the original has merely *illu* [dwelling]; throughout the story, the sentences are also shorter and choppy in English. Finally, the melodrama of the book's ending (Markoosie 1970, 81 and 2011, 168) has been exaggerated and overtly Christianized references have been added. Although any firm, detailed claims concerning the self-translation will necessarily await a subsequent study (by which time I hope to have consulted directly with the author, and to have acquired sufficient Inuktitut to read the text), preliminary findings suggest that English-language readers are offered a more 'primitive,' even exoticized text, which was presumably expected to be more appealing. Taken together, such textual changes give rise to questions about how much explicit direction (or even rewriting) may have been provided by McNeill.

As someone with an understanding of how to use the new technologies of not only writing but also flight to succeed in a rapidly changing world, Markoosie is clearly a savvy man, and I do not mean to suggest that he entirely lacked agency in this process (although it goes without saying that an Inuk's social and political standing in late-1960s Canada is very different from that of the well-established self-translating authors named earlier). Markoosie would have realized that publishing solely in his mother tongue meant his work would remain ignored by readers in the south, and thus it is likely that he readily agreed to provide a version in his second language.<sup>17</sup> However, readers of this book are not given the chance to hear his thoughts about either the self-translation process or how the tale came to be published. *Harpoon of the Hunter* is introduced solely by McNeill's foreword, an abbreviated, unsigned French version of which also appears in Martin's translation. Not until the 2011 publication is Markoosie finally given the opportunity to present his own work, albeit briefly and still in a heavily mediated manner. While the author's

16. I read through passages of the Inuktitut original separately with both Inuk Elder Mini Aodla Freeman and the anthropologist Louis-Jacques Dorais, who has published numerous studies of Inuit language and culture. Needless to say, responsibility for any misinterpretation lies with me.

17. As Mark Gibeau writes about Okinawan authors, to insist on writing in a minor language is "to delimit the size and diversity of one's audience; in many respects, to write into a void" (Gibeau 2013, 143).

previously unpublished preface (dated September 15, 2010 and comprising less than 150 words) appears in full in French on page 37 and Inuktitut on page 129, only half of an English version is provided in the handwritten sample reproduced on page 17. Presumably both the Inuktitut and the English are by Markoosie himself;<sup>18</sup> the self-translation again stands in unproblematically for the original, and the process by which the versions evolved, whether consecutively or simultaneously, whether starting from Inuktitut or from English, is not deemed worthy of comment.

### 3.4 The status of self-translations

It is generally held that self-translators occupy a privileged position where the usual occupational standard of invisibility (see Venuti 1995) does not apply, and are thus free to take liberties undreamt of in more regular translation practice: “the special status accorded to, and assumed by, the translator who is also the author of the original means that the self-translator is unique in not being sanctioned for overtly exercising creativity in translation” (Cordingley 2013, 2). In any case, it should go without saying that no two versions of any text (no matter who produces the translation) are ever going to be identical, and close study of versions by the same author may reveal profound differences that function to undermine various “theoretical presumptions and assumptions of the discipline” (Santoyo 2013, 36). After all, as Anthony Pym has provocatively noted, “[s]elf-translation is [...] a question not of texts, but of what happens to the subject in the overlaps of cultures: it is translation of the self, and thus of a self in translation” (Cordingley 2013, back cover).

Although there exist numerous individual studies of the famous self-translators named above, this is overall a little researched area in translation studies. The first English-language book of critical essays on this practice *as a practice* was published only in 2013: *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture*, edited by Anthony Cordingley; another useful source, with a focus on pre-modern authors in the Western tradition, is Hokenson and Munson (2007). Significantly, particularly in the case of minor or non-Western-European languages, self-translations confound the prevailing dichotomy whereby a single source text always takes precedence. As a rule, the source text is considered stable or constant, and its target text to be more ephemeral; it is a truism that translations of the classics need to be redone every generation. As Julio-César Santoyo helpfully points out, however, the tables are turned in the case of self-translation from a minor into a major language. Because subsequent translations are typically done relay-style from the hegemonic language, it is that version that becomes the stable text, providing inspiration for and serving to support other versions in other languages. In such cases,

18. Translator Eva Aloupa-Pilurttut is named in the acknowledgements at the start of the book, but specifically as having rendered Chartier’s introduction into Inuktitut.

the self-translated text has ended up superseding the original, which stays 'isolated' in its first language as in a sort of greenhouse, its diffusion into other languages and cultures taking place only through the text translated by its author into a second tongue. (Santoyo 2013, 36)

Santoyo offers several examples, including that of Tagore, whose work has circulated (and sold extremely well) in a wide variety of languages around the world, but exclusively in versions based on his English self-translations rather than the Bengali originals. We see this occurring with Markoosie's work as well, albeit on a more modest scale, but with nonetheless important implications, as the original, minor-language text recedes into the background, for all practical purposes ceasing to exist.

In short, translation is an inescapably political and meaningful act, and self-translation doubly so. The power imbalances of literary domination in colonial and post-colonial contexts in particular reflect the unequal and asymmetrical nature of this exchange and remind us to consider carefully all aspects of translations produced under such circumstances. Readings of works such as *Harpoon of the Hunter* need to be informed by the fact that they *are* translations, whether by the author or someone else and, in the case of multiple versions, it is important for a full understanding of the implications to read one against the other.

## 4. Retranslation

### 4.1 The practice of retranslation

A given text can be translated for a second or third time for any number of reasons: aesthetic, linguistic, commercial, or ideological. A number of recent studies have examined the phenomenon, including Sharon Deane-Cox's *Retranslation: Translation, Literature and Reinterpretation* (2014), which refutes the so-called Retranslation Hypothesis, namely that subsequent renditions of a work are necessarily improved.<sup>19</sup> Works of literature originally written in minor languages are, however, typically granted only one chance at being rendered into a given major language; whether that publication is a failure or a success, the odds of the market demanding another version or a champion stepping forward to insist on it are slim. Accordingly, the initiative to provide an alternative *Harpon du chasseur* is worthy of attention and respect.

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19. For a fuller discussion of retranslation (in a broad sense), with which this article lacks the space to engage in detail, see also Gambier (1994), Kahn and Seth (2010), and others referenced in Deane-Cox (2014). *Target* has recently (2015) published a special issue – 27 (1) – on this topic.

Because there is no space in this article to analyse in detail translation shifts in the two French versions, my discussion here will be limited to more general points.

#### 4.2 The first French translation

As mentioned above, the first French version of Markoosie's self-translation was done by Claire Martin (pen name of Claire Montreuil, 1914–2014) in 1971. Martin is better known as a prize-winning and beloved writer in her own right (her prominence as a literary figure – she had won the 1967 Governor General's Award – is likely what led to her name appearing on the cover in the same font size as the author's) of novels, short stories, and two autobiographies, lauded for her "sharp denunciation of prejudice and social conventions" (Dorion 2008, n.p.). While she did go on to translate her fellow Canadian icons Margaret Laurence and Robertson Davies, *Le Harpon du chasseur* was Martin's first published translation, followed the subsequent year by her French rendition of *Pictures out of My Life* by Inuit artist, photographer and historian Peter Pitseolak (Dorion 2003, 88). Although brought out by a separate publisher, Martin's book is packaged like the English version of the preceding year, in large format, with an identical cover image. While the fact that this is translated from the English is clearly indicated on the front cover, no mention is made of any pre-existing Inuktitut version, although the same page of syllabic text (with Arnaktauyok's illustration of the climactic scene) is reproduced here as is found in the self-translation (see Markoosie 1970, 8, and 1971, 6).

#### 4.3 The second French translation

Exactly forty years later, a second and very different French version, by translator, writer and actor Catherine Ego (who has also translated a Greenlandic poet from the English), was published by a major academic press in Quebec. This volume is of normal paperback size (the thicker format already hinting that it is intended to be taken more seriously), and contains a lengthy critical introduction titled "The First Inuit Novel Written, A Significant Literary and Social Achievement" (Chartier 2011, in French; an abbreviated version in Inuktitut can be found on pages 113–125 and in English on pages 169–180); a four-page chronology that covers from 4500 BCE through to 2011; and a short bibliography. Other information cumulatively adds scholarly weight, such as references to the Avataq Cultural Institute (along with an explanation that the use of Inuktitut terms was based on norms developed by the Institute), as well as to editor Daniel Chartier's international, multidisciplinary research project, titled "Imaginaire/Nord" [Imaginary/North].<sup>20</sup> The book was produced as part of a joint trilingual project, "Hearing and Sharing the Voices of

20. [www.imaginairenord.uqam.ca](http://www.imaginairenord.uqam.ca)

Nunavik,” between UQAM and McGill to mark the International Polar Year. Taken together, all of this clearly claims a degree of authority and importance, aiming to shift the general perception of this work, if not of Inuit literature as a whole.

Many of the reductive European colonial perceptions found in the 1970 edition are avoided here. For example, the author’s place of residence is in the earlier book given simply as “deep inside the Arctic Circle” (Markoosie 1970, n.p.) and McNeill echoes a stereotypical, exoticized view in his opening lines, although this is tempered by his acknowledgement that this is an outsiders’ perspective.<sup>21</sup> Its front cover reflects southern preconceptions of the Far North as a desolate, barren landscape, a trope that Chartier (2011, 12) rightly calls “stubborn and deplorable” (“un cliché tenace et déplorable”). Interspersed throughout Markoosie’s English text (as well as Martin’s French translation) are Arnaktauyok’s 13 black-and-white drawings, only seven of which contain any people; needless to say, decisions about which images to include, based on what is believed likely to resonate with readers in the dominant culture, are rarely left to the minority authors themselves (this is also true of the mediation by southerners in the commercialization of Inuit sculpture and prints). Contrast this with Chartier’s presentation, which features a clearly man-made artefact (the eponymous harpoon, of which more below) on the cover, which is designed by an Inuk, Thomassie Mangiok; inside one finds a contemporary photo and detailed biography of the author.

The back cover of the 2011 edition offers a further interesting bit of context: a small-scale northern hemisphere map, with Nunavik (northern Quebec) indicated by a red dot. The implication is that this work and its author belong to Quebec literature, which is underscored by the allusive title of the series to which this publication belongs. Existing to republish significant, out-of-print books for research and teaching, *Jardin de givre* [garden of frost]<sup>22</sup> is a reference to “Soir d’hiver” [winter evening] by iconic Quebecois poet Emile Nelligan (1879–1941). While gestures toward inclusivity in place of exoticism are welcomed, this manoeuvre could be read as having colonial implications. For one thing, while Markoosie

21. “To Southern eyes, the setting of this book is a barren land, a moonscape of snowswept black rocks and of sea-ice wracked into a wilderness of strange and jumbled dolmens and pressure ridges. But there is life hidden everywhere, bird, animal, and marine life, and human life depending on the rest for its survival. This is the land of the Eskimos, the timeless wanderers who understand it and love it with an intensity shared by no race on earth” (McNeill 1970, n.p.).

22. The first and final stanzas of this poem begin: “Ah! comme la neige a neigé! / Ma vitre est un jardin de givre.” In Loup Kibiloki’s translation (there are numerous others), these lines read “Oh! How the snow’s been snowing! / My window pane is a garden of frost.” Both English and French versions of this poem are available here: <http://electrodes-h-sinclair-502.com/2009/02/06/cry-birds-of-february-nelligan-fresh-english-translation-of-soir-dhiver-winter-evening/> (accessed 13 September 2015).

was born in that province and moved back there as an adult, he was living in the then Northwest Territories when he wrote his text, and had been for over a dozen years; further, the Inuit communities in Nunavik tend not to be French-speaking and have been less than fully included in the provincial identity. As Marguerite MacKenzie, whose research focusses on speakers of Cree, Innu (Montagnais) and Naskapi in Labrador, Quebec and Ontario, notes, “Quebec didn’t wake up and realise it had a North until the 1970s and until the 1970s the Quebec Cree oriented towards the rest of Canada, Anglophone Canada” (quoted in Folaron 2015, 4); this holds true for Inuit as well.

#### 4.4 Inclusion of the original (but not source) text

In any case, the book’s most significant feature is that it contains not only the new French translation along with Markoosie’s own new preface, but also the full original text in Inuktitut syllabics (Markoosie 2011, 131–168). Far from being hidden from view, as was the case with Martin’s relay translation from 1971, the text’s roots in the Inuit culture and language are here given great prominence: both the title and the author’s name are given on the front and back covers in syllabics as well as in Roman letters, and the back cover blurb is bilingual in French and Inuktitut. Chartier proudly – and rightly so – notes that the Inuktitut version appears here in accessible book form for the first time, and its presence does have the effect of reversing the elision of Inuit expression experienced previously. Paradoxically, however, this second French rendition is, like Martin’s, done by a non-Inuktitut-speaking translator working from the English (which, importantly, is *not* reproduced in this volume).

## 5. Relay translation

### 5.1 Relay translation and Inuit literature

Relay, indirect, pivot, or second-hand translation is “based on a source (or sources) which is itself a translation into a language other than the language of the original, or the target language” (Kittel and Frank 1991, 3), and is or has been a common practice in the case of minority cultures. In a helpful echo of Pym’s comment on self-translation quoted above, this form of translation practice also tends, erroneously, “to be approached as more a textual phenomenon than a cultural one,” and has likewise been under-researched in translation studies to date (Assis

Rosa, Pięta, and Bueno Maia, forthcoming).<sup>23</sup> For Inuit literature, relay translation remains the norm, as evidenced by the circulation in English of Greenlandic ethnographer Knud Rasmussen's early-twentieth-century Danish transcriptions of Inuit stories and songs, or the Indian translations overseen by Vencatesen mentioned above, which take Ego's French as the source text. The choice of pivot language is not insignificant. In Canada, relay translations from Inuktitut are differentially made available to one official-language readership before the other, based on whether they are translated first into English or French. For example, the 2014 translation into English of Mitiarjuk's *Sanaaq* was done from the French version published a decade earlier. They also appear on the scholarly radar and in language-specific anthologies at different times and in different ways (see, e.g. the discussion of *Sanaaq* in K. Martin 2010), suggesting that Canada's two solitudes remain very much with us.

A side effect to self-translation by the author him/herself is that it "kill[s] the likelihood of different translations into that language by other hands" (Santoyo 2013, 36). Chartier, by printing the Inuktitut original in its entirety immediately following the new French translation, may be seeking to open up the possibility of someone attempting its (re)translation into English or directly into French. Certainly he intends for the Inuit-language text (previously available only to those willing to seek out in the archive the journal in which it first appeared) to be made available to a new generation of Inuktitut speakers in Nunavik and Nunavut. For the vast majority of readers in the south, in any case, in practice the syllabics function merely as a sort of curiosity or museum exhibit; interesting to look at, but having no practical value, especially since Ego does not draw upon it. The original Inuktitut is brought out of the shadows, as if this were a truly bilingual edition, only to be superseded yet again and even more effectively for readers outside of the Inuit community by the fact that it is not.

## 5.2 Particular challenges for translation from Inuktitut

Admittedly, few translators possess both the well-developed linguistic and literary skills necessary to work directly and successfully from Inuktitut prose or poetry into other languages. Northern translators lack the training and resources available

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23. Alexandra Assis Rosa, Hanna Pięta, and Rita Bueno Maia are editing a special issue on relay or indirect translation for the journal *Translation Studies*, forthcoming in May 2017.

to their colleagues elsewhere,<sup>24</sup> and McNeill's comment from 1970 remains largely true today: "[u]nfortunately, few southerners have been able to translate completely or to commit these stories to writing in such a way that they could become part of the world's popular literature" (1970, n.p.). But surely in the twenty-first century we can and should make the effort to address these disparities; McGrath was writing already in 1989 about ways to "open [Inuit] literature up to English readers" (1989, 701), and she emphasized the importance of working "as much as possible with Inuit colleagues and students" (703); more recently Julie Brittain has argued that, especially in the Aboriginal context, "it takes a team to translate. We can't do it without a team approach" (quoted in Folaron 2015, 7). Indigenous translators can be mentored, or collaborative translations, where two translators/writers pool their respective skill sets, can help deal with linguistic and cultural challenges (a successful contemporary example is the translation, from 2000, of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* done by Richard Pevear, who has limited Russian, and his wife Larissa Volokhonsky). In any case, attention and sensitivity are owed to the very real colonial implications of the translational act in contexts where the power differential between languages and communities is so extreme.

## 6. Breathing holes (by way of conclusion)

Markoosie's self-translation makes use of no Inuktitut words, aside from those naturalized into English (e.g., "igloo") or proper names; the same holds true for Claire Martin's French version. Ego's translation contains a single and striking exception: the term *allou* (or *aglu*), the hole that a seal creates in the ice so it can rise

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24. Although their topic is technical rather than literary translation, Denise Nevo and Marco Fiola helpfully point out that Inuit-Canadian translators and interpreters, contrary to their counterparts in the south but similarly to other minority-language colleagues, "travaillent sur tous les sujets et dans les deux sens (anglais-inuktitut) [...], avec un minimum de ressources matérielles, financières et humaines. De plus, la grande majorité de la centaine d'Inuit qui travaillent à l'heure actuelle comme traducteurs et interprètes au Nunavut, à temps plein ou à temps partiel, n'ont pas la formation suffisante qui leur permettrait d'être reçus aux examens uniformisés du Conseil des traducteurs et interprètes du Canada (CTIC), qui représente les professions à l'échelle nationale et internationale" [work on all topics and in both directions (English-Inuktitut) [...] with a minimum of material, financial and human resources. Moreover, the vast majority of the hundred or so Inuit who are currently working as translators and interpreters in Nunavut, whether full- or part-time, lack the training to allow them to pass the standardized exams of the Council of Translators and Interpreters of Canada, which represents the professions on the national and international levels] (Nevo and Fiola 2002, 207). Training for Inuit translators and interpreters in the form of a two-year diploma programme has nonetheless, for the past 30 years, been provided through Nunavut Arctic College.

to the surface and breathe, appears numerous times (e.g., pp. 50, 51, 52, 83, 87, and 89). Seal hunting – a fundamental aspect of the traditional Inuit lifestyle – has been stigmatized globally owing to widely publicized images of adorable baby seals being clubbed to death. Whatever one’s views of the practice, it remains true that without any opportunity to sell the skins of the ringed seal – commonly known in Markoosie’s northern Quebec dialect of Inuktitut as *natsiq*, although it does have another name (*anmiaq*) that means “the one who makes breathing holes”<sup>25</sup> – on the world market, modern Inuit have been disadvantaged economically. The movement to ban seal-hunting, which threatened and still threatens the Inuit way of life, began in earnest in 1969, around the time that Markoosie was writing.

If we look at the first occurrence, where the author’s English has: “They found three seal holes, and three of the hunters began to watch” (1970, 21), Martin’s French reads as follows: “Sur la glace, ils découvrirent trois trous de phoque. Trois chasseurs prirent la garde” [On the ice, they found three seal holes. Three hunters took up the watch] (1971, 21). Ego (2011, 50) takes a different approach: “Ils trouvèrent trois *allous*, ces trous par lesquels les phoques remontent pour respirer à la surface des plans d’eau gélés. Un homme fit le guet à chacun des trois *allous*” [They found three *allous*, those holes through which seals come up to breathe at the surface of the frozen body of water. One man took up watch at each of the three *allous*].

Aside from the French being over twice as lengthy as the English (30 words to 13), the direct borrowing of Inuktitut terminology coupled with the explanation in French deliberately trips up the southern reader, forcing him/her out of the entirely domesticated space created by both Markoosie’s English and Martin’s French. The repeated use of an untranslated source-language term disrupts the target-language text and its reader’s experience, forcing him/her to recognize that the world unfolding on the page operates in another language entirely. By adopting a foreignizing strategy, which carries across some sense of the original rather than smoothing it all away, Ego creatively seizes a new possibility for a twenty-first-century translation. Cronin (2010) notes that complications for how minority literary traditions circulate include a limiting of translation approaches to the more literal or heavily domesticated, given that such literatures are typically denied the privilege of employing foreignizing or non-fluent translation in contexts where such strategies may negatively impact their accessibility by a general readership, and thus their very survival. Ego’s choice would have been unlikely to be available to Martin in 1971, or to most initial translations from a minority language.

By examining a reasonably well-known Inuit text that has been self-translated, retranslated, and relay translated, this article has sought to examine “some of the

25. [http://www.arctic.uoguelph.ca/cpl/traditional/traditional/animals/ringed\\_seal.htm](http://www.arctic.uoguelph.ca/cpl/traditional/traditional/animals/ringed_seal.htm). Accessed September 4, 2015.

perils of writing in the contact zone” (Pratt 1991, 37) as evidenced through its English and French renditions. Taking those seal holes seriously allows us to recognize in them the passage from one medium to another – and thus that they are akin to sites for translation, from one world to another. While both water and air are necessary for life, there is also a concomitant vulnerability: the seal must eventually surface, and whenever it does there is a real risk of falling prey to an Inuk hunter or a polar bear. And below the layer of ice, beyond our sight, there is a great deal going on, of which the southerner is rarely fully cognizant. In emphasizing these points of interface through her translation strategy, Ego prompts us to think deeply about contact zones, and it is worth bearing in mind that there is real agency associated with these *allous*, which are not naturally occurring but rather opened up by the seal’s own strong, sharp claws.

On a more prosaic level, in addition to adding local colour, the term *allou* avoids a clumsy repetition of the more wordy French, namely “trou de respiration de phoque” [seal’s breathing hole], although Martin had used just three words. Ego (who told me by email that she had not read Martin’s version) felt that her own solution would help ease comprehension of the text, given that the target audience is non-specialist and cannot necessarily be counted on to understand what precisely a “seal hole” refers to. Further, she wanted to avoid the possibility of an infelicitous reading – to a Quebecois readership which would be acquainted with spoken English, “trou de phoque” could easily give rise to a more corporeal, not to say vulgar, image.<sup>26</sup> The author was not consulted – according to Ego’s recollection he

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26. “De plus, et peut-être surtout, ce terme aurait été ambigu... et possiblement de mauvais goût. L’expression pourrait faire penser – comment le dire élégamment? – à un orifice corporel... [...] En conservant *allou*, je voulais simplement rendre le texte intelligible (grâce à l’explicitation à la première occurrence) sans ouvrir la voie à des interprétations douteuses” [Further, and maybe especially, this term would have been ambiguous... and possibly in bad taste. The expression could make one think – how to put it elegantly? – of a bodily orifice... [...] By keeping *allou*, I wanted simply to make the text intelligible (with an explanation where it first occurs) without opening the gates to dodgy interpretations] (personal communication, September 5, 2015). It might be noted here that in an episode in season 9 (airing 1994–1995) of the popular American sitcom *Married with Children*, daughter Kelly gets her big acting break with a commercial for “Ice Hole” beer; the dubbed French version that played in Quebec was in fact titled “Miss trou de phoque” (<http://www.actucine.com/series-tv/maries-deux-enfants-saison-9-s09e03-miss-trou-de-phoque-162455.html>; accessed September 7, 2015).

was hard to reach at the time and in any case did not speak French – although the translator and editor did discuss and agree on her eventual translation strategy.<sup>27</sup>

It has been argued that, if minority languages, cultures and literatures are to thrive or even merely survive, translation must be conceived as “a world of continuous relational adjustments” (Cronin 2010, 262, citing Isobel Armstrong). In order to avoid writing *trou de phoque*, does Ego perform the valuable service of urging her readers to avoid a *trou de mémoire* [blind spot], wherein Inuit and their traditions, narrative or otherwise, are replaced in translation, whether by the author himself or others, a making invisible abetted by gatekeepers and other stakeholders? To what degree does this translational choice serve to compensate for the otherwise still elided Inuktitut original? It is undeniable that translating from the English rather than the Inuktitut reinforces invisibility, which is characteristic of the positioning of minority language and literature within the dominant culture. Nonetheless, the presence of this competing French version of Markoosie’s work does create a literary breathing space within the contact zone and, potentially, can serve to shift some of the power relationships involved.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mini Aodla Freeman, Norma Dunning, and Louis-Jacques Dorais for their patient and invaluable assistance in answering my questions, especially about Inuktitut. Thanks also to Haley O’Shaughnessy for assistance with the references.

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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27. “Cette décision n’a pas fait l’objet d’une discussion avec l’auteur, et ce, pour deux raisons: parce qu’il était très difficile à joindre à ce moment-là, mais surtout, parce qu’il ne parle pas le français. Elle a par contre été prise en collaboration avec l’éditeur, qui était d’accord avec ma proposition d’utiliser *allou*” [This decision was not discussed with the author, for two reasons: because he was hard to reach at the time, but above all because he doesn’t speak French. But it was made in consultation with the editor, who agreed with my suggestion of using *allou*] (personal communication, September 5, 2015).

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