A preliminary examination of James Bay oral tradition as recorded by Truman Michelson more than 50 years ago suggests a focus on violence and aggressive self-expression. In contrast, oral tradition recorded on the east coast of James Bay since the 1960s tends to place a negative value on aggression while focusing on personal as well as group survival. Relying on a selection of the Michelson texts and on narratives recorded in 1983 in Waskaganish, Québec, this paper is an attempt to demonstrate a significant cultural distinction between the Cree living on the east coast of James Bay and the Cree living on the west coast of James Bay. Finally, the relationship between these differing perspectives, the Cree concept of "competence" and the Ojibway concept of "power" will be considered.

The content of the Michelson texts, which were recorded primarily by Harvey Smallboy and William Allan at Moose Factory, indicates a more than passing influence from Ojibwa culture on the West Cree. The notes which accompany the narrative texts state that Willy Allan, who acted as interpreter/translator for Michelson, was born at Albany, spent most of his life there, and was 40 years in the Hudson's Bay Company service, 15 of which were spent at Attawapiskat. By 1935 he had been at Moose Factory for three years. Harvey Smallboy is identified as a Moose Cree whose grandfather, the source of many of his stories, was also a Moose Cree. The notes indicate that there were Ojibwa at Long Lac and Severn, and intermarriage between Cree and Ojibwa at Albany (Michelson 1935).

Cree Narrative Tradition

It has been argued elsewhere (R. Preston 1975; S. Preston 1986) that

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1Referred to in the remainder of this paper as "East Cree" and "West Cree" respectively.
recalling events and retelling them with precision is an integral part of Cree narrative tradition. The exactness of statements or precision of memory is not the significant aspect of narrative tradition; rather, it is an ability on the part of the narrator/story-teller to evoke a sense of shared imagery for the listener/reader. It is through this ability to evoke a shared imagery in telling and re-telling stories of two types: atiukan, pre-history or legend, and tipachiman, history or current events, that the East Cree illustrate competent social interaction, reinforcing the norms of reticence, emotional control, self-reliance and non-interference. Developing socially acceptable behaviour in an East Cree context is a matter of observation and participation in events or participation in the re-creation of events in narrative. Because belief is expressed in action, it is not necessarily personalities or events with which narratives are concerned, but with actions and interactions, the relationships between characters, which includes human as well as non-human actors. It should be noted here that not all story-tellers are equally gifted in providing the detail which generates and ensures shared imagery and imparts shared beliefs.

The Smallboy texts provide more detail than texts from other Michelson informants, and from them one can generally infer the cultural content, or intent. The focus is often on competition between men both for access to women and for control of material goods. Included are examples of competition between older men and younger men, between fathers and sons, between fathers-in-law and sons-in-law, between brothers or brothers-in-law; competition in which one party, the stronger, the more successful conjuror, wins access to women and/or material goods, including the resources of the hunt. These narratives are often in striking contrast to many of those recorded in eastern James Bay communities by Richard Preston or myself. The intent of the majority of East Cree narratives suggests a social environment of reticence and co-operation, rather than one of aggression and competition. Of necessity, both the number and the length of narratives to be considered here as illustrations of this distinction must be limited. Judicious editing has been undertaken and is intended to reduce unnecessary repetition, but not to distort the intent of the narrative.

The People With No Hearts

Once a man, his wife and three sons were living together. The man and woman and two sons were killed; only the youngest son was living and he did not know what killed his family. There were people living at that time who had no hearts and while the lad was walking about he came upon these people. He didn't know what kind of people they were. It was dark when he came to them. He went into their tent and they were fast asleep. One of the oldest ones was still awake and this old man asked the boy, "Who are you?" and he took a stick and stabbed the lad with it, and he held him to the fire.
When this lad got hot he started to move about and this old man threw him outside. The lad went away and he found another small tent with an old woman in it. The old woman told the lad, “These are the people who killed your father, your mother and your brothers. Do you know that these people have no hearts? Their hearts are lying outside on the top of the stages.” The old woman told him to go to the cache and lift up the covering very slowly. “And you will see the hearts lying there.” The old woman told the lad to stab all the hearts and all the people will die. She gave him an awl which was very sharp and told him to use that. The boy went to the stage and lifted the covers slowly and saw the hearts lying there. They were wrapped up in feathers to protect them from freezing as it was very cold. When he lifted the covering the old man sang out from the other tent and said, “Who is working on my heart?” And this lad stabbed all their hearts very quickly and he killed all those people. (Michelson 1935)

All action in this narrative is either aggressive or assists in aggressive acts. I am not prepared to argue that the intent is to sanction uncontrolled expression of aggression, but it does sanction retaliation for what could be said to be an interference with the autonomy of one’s family. This particular version does not include the entire narrative; it is only one episode of a very much longer narrative in which the boy must undergo a number of trials in order to secure his own safety. His effort is focused on avoiding or overcoming whatever aggression might be inflicted upon him.

**Some Negative Aspects of Conjuring**

A short statement about conjuring by George Tcistci (CheeChoo) of Moose Factory is also an account of aggressive retaliation and competition for resources:

They made a feast. They called all the old people to their feast. The children were left out. There was a boy standing there begging for something to eat, and he got nothing. The head conjuror was sitting in the tent with his shirt open at one breast. The boy who got nothing to eat got cross and he kicked the fire on this old conjuror and burned him. This head conjuror got very wicked and the feast stopped. He told them to make a conjuring tent, that he was going to kill the boy. After they finished the conjuring tent the boy ran into it first and it started to shake very hard. The conjuror started to talk and said he was afraid it wasn’t going to work as he thought. The conjuror told the boy, “My goodness! I am afraid I am going to get beaten.” Then the conjuring tent began to shake very very violently. All of a sudden the conjuring tent stopped shaking. Then they lifted the cover and they found only the boy, and a tent full of sand. They shovelled away the sand and found the old conjuror dead, smashed with the sand. (Michelson 1935)

The angry self-expression on the part of both the boy and the conjuror reflect, from an East Cree perspective, an unusual lack of emotional control.
As in the previous example, this narrative probably is not intended to sanction an uncontrolled expression of aggression or interference with others, but it certainly suggests that aggression can be expected and retaliation is a viable response.

Another Version of Tchu-shwash

It may be remembered that two years ago I read and discussed at this conference an atiukan, a traditional narrative, told to me by Malcolm Diamond of Waskaganish. The narrative was referred to as “The Story of the Beginning of Conjuring”, and I argued that its intent is to illustrate, through both negative and positive examples, the expectations for appropriate expression of responsibility to others; how one looks after others. The story ends with the protagonist, Tchu-shwash, assuming responsibility for a group of relatives who have unjustly mistreated him and his family, demonstrating that one aspect of Cree competence is an ability to set aside old antagonisms. As one woman so aptly explained to me some years ago, “It’s best to let the past go.”

The Michelson texts include a variation of the Tchu-shwash story, however, the intent is quite different. It is called, “A Girl Who Had No Father and Mother”, referring to the young girl who is the hero’s wife in the Diamond version. The girl has no parents and stays with another family, the parents of the boy. It is not indicated whether they are relatives or not. While the children are playing, the girl makes a small conjuring tent and goes in. In the meantime, the people have not had good luck hunting. When the old man tries the conjuring house, their luck still does not improve. The young girl says she wants to try and is told to go ahead. They build her a small tent and she gives instructions as to what she wants the people to do. Although she is initially successful in getting meat, the old woman does not altogether follow instructions and eventually they run out of food. At this point, the narrative becomes integrated with the Diamond narrative; the young boy and girl have a child by means of urinating in the same place, the people they are with become angry with them, they try to starve them, and eventually leave them. The young couple survive in the same way, but there is no indication that the boy is a competent hunter or conjuror, and no further reference is made to the girl’s ability. They find the people who left them behind, but refuse to share with them. The narrative ends,

When they got to the old man they put their tent there also. The old man and his wife had nothing to eat. And the young man gave them nothing to eat. At last the old woman asked them for something to eat. And they would not give her anything. And the young man stayed there a long time. And
when they went away from there they took away all their food with them and left nothing. They only went to show the old man and his wife their own food. And they never saw the old man and his wife again. (Michelson 1935)

It would seem that this narrative has very little to do with how people might cooperate and look after each other. It is an expression of competition, the old woman not being willing to listen to the younger woman; aggression, trying deliberately to starve others, then abandoning them; and finally, retaliation, refusal to share on the part of the young people, apparently because they were unwilling to go beyond past injustice. They were not concerned with looking after others, only with their own welfare. There is no indication in the conclusion that retaliation is not a viable response to aggression.

Before continuing with other narratives recorded at Waskaganish, it should be noted that included in the Michelson documents are numerous variations of the trickster cycle; Tchikabesh/Wishehkechek, the hero, snaring the sun, being swallowed by a big fish, escaping from giants or cannibals, tricking one or another of his little brothers, the animals, and never listening to his older sister. These stories, which abound with examples of trickery, greed and anger, are also part of the oral tradition from the east coast communities. For the purposes of this discussion they are considered only as examples of humour, absurdity, and foolishness, which is implied not only in the term “trickster cycle” but also, for the East Cree, in the context in which they are told, which includes a great deal of laughing, joking, teasing, and more examples of absurdity.

Obviously, as people move back and forth between communities, oral tradition moves back and forth with them. Stories are more or less well remembered, more or less embellished, with content and/or intent being more or less altered to suit the purposes of the story teller; the present discussion of storytelling being no less an example of this than the stories themselves.

*Blending* Tipachiman and *Atiukan*

Most of the narratives which I have recorded over the years have been based on personal experience, some being rich in detail, others not; some focusing on the physical and material aspects of existence, others on the spiritual and mental world; all seemingly concerned with sharing, cooperation, and responsible action without interfering with the personal autonomy or freedom of others. The following is not only an example of all these aspects of story-telling, it is also an example of how stories of events, *tipachiman*, become transformed into *attiukan*, or legend, which confirms and reinforces values and behavioural expectations.
A group of men, including Peter Trapper, were taking supplies up the river to Mistassini. When they got close to Mistassini, it became a bit windy and they decided to put up a sail. They went ashore to cut a pole for the sail. One of the men went up by himself and as he walked along the shore he saw somebody had passed there. The feet were very big. He got the pole and finally, they were quite far from that place. He didn’t tell anyone, but he couldn’t forget what he had seen. They sailed along and it was getting late in the evening when the leader of the group decided they should find a place for the night. As they looked around the one who saw the footprints talked to the man beside him saying, “Maybe we can camp on that small island.” So that’s where they stopped to make their camp. Then the man who saw the tracks told the other men, “Let’s make a birch container.” Sometimes they make a container of birch bark and put water in it and a shaman can look in there, almost like looking in a mirror, he can see people. They made the container and asked Peter Trapper to look into it, to look for the other people who had been traveling with them taking supplies up to Mistassini. He looked in there for a little while and he said, “By the looks of things I don’t think we will have a very good sleep tonight.” And he said to the one who had seen the tracks, “When you went up to get that pole there, you saw tracks of a person walking barefooted. That person is watching us from across, now, on the mainland.” Peter kept looking into the water and told the others what the person across was doing. Finally he said, “He’s going to be able to come across to us. Right now he’s pulling a stump, the whole roots, that’s what he’s going to use to come across the water.” All of a sudden they heard a noise that sounded like something splashing in the water, a big splash. Peter told them the person was throwing the tree into the water and he was going to sit on it to come across. Then he tied a scarf around his head and went out of the tent. He told the people not to listen. As he left, they heard a voice above them, Peter’s mistabeo, saying, “That’s why I came along with you on this journey, because I was going to help you out. I wouldn’t let you see anything that would destroy you.” And from the doorway he was lifted up by the wind, like. But those men were still curious about what was going to happen. They heard chains, the kind they have on ships, rattling. Then for a little while they didn’t hear any more and Peter Trapper was gone. They just sat around and waited to see what would happen. Then they heard Peter singing above them, in the air. Then they heard him just like he touched the ground near the doorway, and they went out to see him. They brought him inside and he told them not to worry anymore, because the person who wanted to come to destroy us is gone. He was blown away to Stack Island and he was chained there at the bottom of the Bay with the chains. They were amazed and wondered where he got all the chains. That’s what happens lots of times with this man, Peter Trapper. He was very young when they knew that he could do things like that. And when he got older, many times he did things like that, like he killed this atoosh. (Malcolm Diamond 1983)

Rather than focusing on an image of destruction and aggression, this narrative builds in tension to potential aggression then shifts to a descrip-
tion of what the men hear as Peter Trapper assumes responsibility for group survival. Note also the positive intent of the statement made by Peter’s mistabeo, “I came along because I was going to help you out.” There are other stories about Peter Trapper’s exploits, all equally amazing, but this one illustrates rather well various aspects of competent interaction from a Cree perspective, including the control of power for the security and safety rather than exploitation of others.

Cree Competence and Ojibwa Power

Richard Preston (1976:465) states, “Competence refers to behaviour that demonstrates effective interaction with the environment and to a synthesis of internal strength or will and aptitude that is the potential for such behaviour.” More recently I have argued (S. Preston 1986:10):

Cree social competence is the ability to maintain an acceptable balance between individual autonomy and social responsibility. The degree to which this balance may be observed in action is an indication of the degree of competence one has gained. Because reticence, non-interference, emotional control, and self-reliance are the ideals on which individual action is based a person is more or less competent depending on the degree to which his/her actions and the outcome of those actions reflect the ideals. For the Cree, it is not the single units of reticence, non-interference or self-reliance which are of importance, but the balance one maintains between these ideals and social responsibility.

Social competence also includes an ability to be aware of the consequences of one’s behaviour, intended or unintended, and to alter future behaviour in the light of new knowledge. Within this context a person must be able to assume responsibility for others when the need arises, but at the same time must be able to avoid interfering with another’s autonomy. A competent person is therefore aware of the distinction between ignoring social responsibility, interfering with others, and offering assistance when needed.

Black (1979:146, 147) writes with reference to Ojibwa “power control”: “So far we have found the Ojibwa idea of ‘power’ tempered with that of autonomy or ‘not being controlled’ by outside forces, and the idea of controlling tempered by the inference of ‘responsibility’... For the Ojibwa, power is a relation between a person and his environment.” There seems to be some correspondence between these two concepts, particularly with regard to the interplay between autonomy and responsibility. Black (1977:145) also states, however:

A participant in an ongoing interaction is often not sure how much power the other may have to affect his decisions and ultimate fate. For the individual, a major goal is to be in control — in control of himself and of his destiny.
and self-determination. Stated another way, the ideal is not to be controlled by one's environment — "environment" including other people as well as other natural beings or forces that could affect one's outcomes and render one helpless... Interference with the self-determination of any of the "living things" may have unpleasant consequences and is to be avoided.

It can be inferred from Black’s argument that Ojibwa consider interaction from a negative perspective, that of avoiding control from outside oneself, as well as avoiding interference with others. It has been my experience that the East Cree consider interaction from a more positive perspective, that of demonstrating social competence which includes non-interference. As Black defines it for the Ojibwa, “power” seems to imply an ability to exert force, either to control or to avoid being controlled. Force, in either case could imply interference with the affairs of another, and would under most circumstances imply incompetent rather than competent action in an East Cree community.

Recognizing that I have relied on a limited number of narratives to illustrate the argument, I suggest that Moose and West Cree oral tradition reflect an intent related to the Ojibwa concept of power as defined by Black, a concern to control and avoid being controlled which is expressed in violence and aggression. This concern for control contrasts significantly with the East Cree concept of competence which is expressed in reticence, emotional control, and non-interference.

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