

"That's the Story": Analysis of Some Narratives Told by Nat Igloliorte of Labrador

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“That’s the Story”: Analysis of Some Narratives Told by Nat Igloliorte of Labrador

PHYLLIS ARTISS

GENERALLY, WHEN anthropologists, folklorists and linguists study traditional narratives they try to use as their sources storytellers very close to the culture from which the tales arise.¹ In this essay I have chosen to discuss narratives told by a man who for much of his adult life has lived away from his people, the Labrador Inuit. Rather than focussing directly on what these tales reveal about Inuit culture I explore ways in which this narrator uses traditional material to establish his own credibility as a mediator between his people and the white society he now lives in.

The narrator, Nat Igloliorte, was forty-seven years old when I first met him in 1981, living in St. John’s, Newfoundland. He had left Labrador about twelve years earlier and has returned for only brief visits since then. Although officially unemployed when we met, he was fully occupied through volunteer work with Alcoholics Anonymous, and as translator, interpreter and advisor for the Inuit visiting St. John’s.

I enjoyed hearing Nat’s occasional accounts of his early life in Labrador and of traditional Inuit life and beliefs, and asked him if he would be willing for me to tape some of these. Because I was especially interested in exploring ways in which storytellers adapt traditional material to their immediate situations and audiences and because I had noticed how skillful Nat was at such adaptations, I hoped he would come to my home to make the recording in an informal family atmosphere so I would be able to analyze the tales in this context. He preferred, however, to make the tape without an audience present, a decision which is significant for this analysis.

Nat’s tape contains a variety of material, including descriptions of the

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Moravian Mission in Hopedale and its influence on the Inuit people living there, a survey of traditional activities associated with each season of the year, considerable autobiographical information, and eight narratives. This paper presents an analysis of the narratives, which capture the spirit of the tape as a whole.

I begin with a brief commentary on an aspect of tape-recorded material that has been virtually ignored in other studies of oral narratives, that is, the role of an absent audience on a narrative situation. I then turn to the narratives themselves to explore what they contribute to our understanding of an individual negotiating a place for himself in a rapidly changing cultural situation, to show how the narrative structures and techniques create as well as reflect meaning, and to discuss ways in which such tales related by a person long absent from his land can enrich our understanding of his culture and its expressive forms.

Turning first then to Nat's conception of his audience, I find it surprising that there is no evidence that he is addressing me or my family. He does not, for example, refer to any of our shared experiences. Instead he addresses a more general audience, one which seems to remain consistent throughout the performance, although it is clear that his sense of his *relationship* to that audience changes considerably during the course of the performance. Like a writer alone at his desk, he proceeds here without benefit of comments, questions, or other responses, yet all the while modifying his material according to his perception of his listeners and his relationship to them.

At the beginning of the tape Nat speaks formally, much as he would to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting.

My name is Nat Igloliorte.
I'm from Labrador, coast of Labrador.
I was born in Nain, Labrador,
And I was reared in Hopedale, Labrador.

The repetition of *Labrador* (four times within three clauses), carefully articulated each time, not only indicates Nat's strong identification with the place, but also suggests he is addressing non-Labradorians. Throughout the tape he shows similar consideration for his listeners, often reiterating geographical information, as he does here; translating all Inuktitut words; explaining local usage of terms such as *redberry* and *ptarmigans*; and providing other details which indicate that he assumes that his audience includes people who are uninformed about him and Labrador, but are interested in learning about them from him.

Nat continues to use this formal, explanatory tone through the first part of his performance, which includes the traditional narratives occurring approximately halfway through the two-sided tape. After he completes these stories his tone gradually changes to become lighter and more informal so that by the time he concludes the tape, with the *personal* narratives, he seems to sense a closer rapport with his listeners, and a feeling of shared experiences, values and expectations. This contrast in his conception of his audience corresponds to marked contrasts in content, framing, structure and style between the two groups of tales.

The four traditional stories are all Inuit legends about extraordinary events related to hunting or killing animals. In all of them he is concerned, more than at any other point in the tape, to establish the truth value of the account and his own credibility as narrator. What marks them most strikingly as an ethnic genre distinct from the personal narratives is Nat's own labelling of them as "stories." Each of the four traditional legends is framed at both its opening and conclusion by the term *story* and in some cases the label is also repeated in the course of the narrative. Nat uses the word *story* in only one other place on the tape, at the very end, where he says, "I can tell a lot of stories—good stories also," where he seems to be using it in a more general sense to include other types of material as well.

Narrative I, the longest and most complex tale on the tape, begins as follows:

I'm going to tell another story²
 About a famous whale hunter of long ago
 In Hopedale, Labrador—
 During that time way back
 Before guns, before white men came with boats of wood. . . .

(The Appendix contains the complete texts of this and Nat's other narratives.) This story is indeed about long ago, for the methods of whale hunting described here, using kayaks and umiaks, harpoons and sealskin floats, were largely superseded by 1784, when Inuit hunters of the Labrador coast generally adopted guns and ammunition introduced by the Europeans (Taylor 8-11). In spite of the fact that the hunt as Nat describes it disappeared two hundred years ago, and in spite of Nat's own absence from Labrador for twelve years, he relates his story of traditional hunting with the vividness and specificity of one who is familiar with all the details of the activity. Nat, like other Inuit, maintains his link to his culture through an oral tradition based primarily on such tales as this, on the relationship be-

tween the land and the people, and especially on stories of hunting associated with particular locations (Brice-Bennett 318). Pride in themselves and their people is characteristically expressed through such stories of their forebears and their land.

Of all Nat's stories, this first narrative has the most elegiac quality, conveying as it does his sense of a heroic past now vanished. This effect is created largely by oscillation in time between the present and the past. Past time is introduced in terms of later time: the events took place "during that time way back before guns, before white men came with boats of wood." This is immediately followed by a reversal in imagery as well as contrasting verb forms, from simple preterite to past continuous, marked by the quasi-auxiliary *used to*. "Inuit people used to hunt in kayaks and also umiaks." Similarly, the present is described by contrasting it with the past. The present is the time when there are no whales, no whale bones or whalers' huts on the beach near Hopedale. These reversals continue throughout the story.

Here, as in other Inuit legends, the place itself remains as the central link between the present and past. Hopedale (or Aviktok) is referred to nine times in this tale alone, and the landmark, the burial place of the great whale hunter, can still be seen near Hopedale. The link between all this and the listeners is Nat himself, who was reared in Hopedale, who saw the "sern" (pile of stones) and whalebones when he was a child, and heard the stories from his uncle. He provides the connection between then and now and the future; between his own people and his audience; between Labrador and the outside world. He can translate the words literally, and translate the experiences, interpret them so that others can learn about the strength and richness of that life when people lived by co-operating with the land.

The second narrative is again about hunting near Hopedale, but this is an account of a phenomenon which not only happened in the past but is said to continue into the present, about the appearance and disappearance of an arctic hare, or "something like an arctic hare," presumably one of the phantom spirits which the Inuit believe inhabit their land (Hawkes 127). Unlike the first story, this one introduces the supernatural and therefore requires special framing. Nat seems to believe the story himself, even though he cannot explain it rationally: "I don't know how it works." Realizing that his audience may not accept it as true, he stresses the multiple sources of his evidence for this story. Within the forty-line story he says that he has heard the arctic hare story "many, many times," that it has been pursued by "many Hopedale hunters," that "there has been many, many stories regarding that arctic hare," and that "many have experienced it." No such

references to “many” sources or experiences occur in the whale-hunter story, which Nat tells authoritatively as one who expects accounts of his own experiences and the reported testimony of his uncle to satisfy the audience. In order to further maintain his credibility through the story of the disappearing arctic hare, he expresses a certain detachment and objectivity by using such terms as “apparently” and “I think it’s still going on today.” He uses no such qualifiers in the first narrative.

In both these stories the central idea is the contrast between the manifest and non-manifest, but whereas in the whale-hunter story the oscillation is between different times, in the arctic-hare story it is between the visible and invisible, the appearance and disappearance of the animal. In both cases Nat is the pivot. As reporter, translator and interpreter, he adapts his material to his audience, not only by providing information about his sources but through the very structure of the narratives. In the first story the actual narrative of the whale hunter takes only a few lines. All the rest consists of Nat’s annotation: comments on the action, cultural practices, landscape, contrasts between past and present, and his own involvement in the events. The second story is in fact a series of related narratives, first a generalized one from many sources, and then two specific reports, one told to Nat by a man who himself experienced the phenomenon. Thus Nat, without commenting directly on his qualifications, reveals himself as an appropriate narrator of these stories, being both an expert witness and a man with the skill to weave together the story material into a coherent whole.

Narrative III differs from the other traditional stories in several important ways. It has a simpler structure than the first two, moving rapidly from the genre indicator “Another very short story” to a brief summary, to a translation of the key word *silapeguk* (‘mitten’), to a swift, dramatic account of a woman’s conquest of a polar bear. Unlike the others it is not linked to any specific location, nor referred to any sources. It is lighter in tone as well, with Nat laughing audibly on two occasions. Only at the end of the story does Nat provide any comment on its truth value.

YOU try to swallow a sealskin with fur on it
And you’ll find out how (*laugh*)
What it means.

The authenticity of this narrative is established not by special knowledge on Nat’s part, but by the common sense of the reader, whom Nat addresses directly—even if you have never seen sealskin you can be pretty sure you aren’t going to be able to swallow a mitt made from it. Yet the function is

similar to that of other legends, especially to the whale-hunter story, for they tell of the strength and courage of the Inuit people, and of their skill and ingenuity in using the resources around them (specifically sealskin in both cases) in order to survive. Life depends on death and, as Nat says repeatedly elsewhere on the tape, "It was an endless struggle." Although Nat generally presents women as collectors and preservers of food rather than hunters or killers, here he shows that a woman too can kill when she must, even the most dangerous of all the Inuit's natural threats, the polar bear.

Narrative IV, like the three which precede it, is about attacking a wild animal, and like Narrative III about a polar bear. The introductory frame is also similar to the other three, providing an indication of both the genre and the subject matter.

I have another story—
That has to do with polar bear
That turned into a rock.

Like the first two stories it refers to a specific place near Hopedale. It contrasts sharply with the other three legends, however, in being less fully developed, and told more hesitantly, with more pauses and less dramatic force. In this narrative there is no climax where the details of the hunt or kill are stressed by the narrator's pacing and tone of voice. Each of the other narratives has such a climax. In Narrative I it occurs in lines 32 to 35.

So they would follow that inflated sealskin
And then pursue that whale with another killing instrument
Whole BUNCH of them would be at it
Until they actually KILL it.

In Narrative II the climax appears at lines 30-31: "he knew for sure / That he was going to GIT it," and in Narrative III at line 11: "She just PUSHED that silapeguk right into the polar bear's throat." In contrast, Narrative IV is more like an outline of a story than a fully-developed narrative. Nat provides no specific details about the sorcerers turning the polar bear into a rock, but only a series of cues to this Inuit legend. As a narrator he commits himself less fully to this fourth story, presenting it in a low-key, undramatic voice. He is particularly noncommittal about its truth value. The most definite statement he makes here is that "This rock—is visible—from Hopedale village—at—certain wantage points," and the only evidence is

that "You could see this white rock. . . ." He is prepared to take responsibility for the existence of the rock, but not for the substance of his narrative—that the rock was once a polar bear, that even today it sometimes turns into the shape of a bear, and that this happens because of the action of the sorcerers. Even in this attenuated form, however, the story is important enough for Nat to include it in his performance, for its function, like that of the others in this group, is to link the past with the present through the land, characteristically as here through specific points in the landscape.

The four personal narratives with which Nat concludes the tape also reflect the close association between the Inuit people and their land (three are about Nat's early hunting experiences and the other is about the redberry jam he loved when a child), but this group of narratives contrasts sharply with the traditional legends in framing techniques, in marking the speaker's relationship with audience, and in other narrative strategies such as diction, setting, plot and reported speech.

Nat does not use the term *story* to refer to any of the personal narratives, but instead *incidents*, *incidences*, or *coincidences*, three terms that he seems to use interchangeably, and he frames the group of personal narratives collectively with the phrase "funny incidences when I was growing up." Nowhere does he use those framing strategies indicating truth value that accompany all the traditional legends. Such lightness of framing suits Nat's perception of his audience, for it seems that by the time he reaches this concluding section of his tape (the last third of the second side) he feels he has established a closer rapport with his absent listeners than he had at the beginning. His attitude seems to be that the serious work has now been done, and that he can therefore relax and assume that his audience knows him well enough to be interested in the "funny little things" of his childhood. This attitude is suggested by such phrases as "you know" repeated several times in the narrative, in a voice that indicates Nat's assumption of shared understanding: "my cheeks were right red you know," and "I was so proud you know, to come back with eleven." The phrase "you know" does not appear at all in the traditional stories.

Nat's contrasting perceptions of his audience are also revealed in his diction, in particular the words he uses to describe his emotions or attitudes. In two of the personal narratives he repeatedly uses *scared* (five times in Narrative V and four times in Narrative VIII); in VI he talks about "liking" redberry jam, and in VII he speaks twice about "wanting" and three times about being "proud." Here Nat explicitly tells his audience how he felt about his experiences—or at any rate how he remembers or reconstructs his

feelings. None of his traditional stories makes use of such affective or subjective verbs or adjectives. We are not told that any of the hunters were proud or scared or puzzled, but only that they performed certain actions, which are all presented from an external point of view.

In these personal narratives Nat seems to emphasize the similarities between himself and his audience. He presents these episodes from his childhood as if he expects his audience to identify with him, to recognize the feelings of wanting to do what the grown-ups do and then of fearing to take the opportunity when it comes; pride in accomplishment and approval; fear of punishment and disapproval. The traditional narratives, on the other hand, emphasize the *differences* between him and the audience, for in them Nat presents the extraordinary stories of his people, tales of heroism and the supernatural which are far removed from the experiences he expects his audience to know from their own culture.

If Nat had chosen to do so, he might have highlighted in these personal narratives the heroism of himself and his people in the thirties, when he was growing up in Labrador, for that was the time when the Inuit experienced the greatest poverty they had known since their earliest contact with whites, a time when extraordinary feats of endurance and courage were required for survival. From 1926 to 1942 the Hudson's Bay Company controlled virtually all trade at the mission stations in Labrador, encouraging native people to hunt primarily the marketable fur-bearing animals, and therefore to devote less effort to hunting seal, fish and other game on which their lifestyle had traditionally depended. This shift from a subsistence to a market economy was disastrous for the Inuit (Kleivan 127-35). Although this poverty is acknowledged indirectly in Nat's stories, most pointedly by his references to the shortage of ammunition (his uncle expects him to bring back one bird for each bullet, and he is frightened to shoot at the fox for fear of wasting a bullet) he does not speak directly of the poverty he must have known as a child. "[W]e had good times / And bad times also," he says as he concludes the tape, but he does not describe the bad times, or the hardships, perhaps because at this point in the performance he is trying to maintain a close identity between himself and his audience, and perhaps because his perception of the genre he has chosen here of "funny little incidences" does not admit such sombre stuff.

Whatever considerations govern Nat's choice of narrative material, it is clear that the generic conventions of these personal narratives are different from those Nat follows for the traditional legends. Although both groups make conspicuous use of parallelism, repetition, contrast and other formal

patterns usually associated with works of verbal art, the feature that more than any other sets the traditional stories apart from "ordinary language" is the metadiscourse related to their truth value, the devices or strategies Nat employs to present himself as one fully qualified to repeat, report and interpret Inuit stories. The distinguishing features of the personal narratives, those features which set them apart from casual conversation, on the other hand, are those which engage the emotions of the readers through the fully realized and shared moment. Like novelists from Daniel Defoe to Margaret Laurence, Nat makes use of at least three strategies of prose fiction to accomplish this end: setting, plot and reported speech.

In two of the three hunting narratives in this second group he opens with vivid descriptions of scene, weather and atmosphere. In Narrative V he says:

I was waiting for my uncle—in a rowboat on the beach
And I saw a fox a l-o-o-ng long ways off.
'Twas a beautiful day
And you could hear a pin drop almost.
It was beautiful, beautiful—no wind or nothing.
And I saw fox l-o-o-ng ways, could hardly see it.

The scene-setting in Narrative VIII, though briefer, is equally skillful, communicating a sense of the dreary afternoon when restless boys are looking for something to do: "It was Saturday afternoon kinda rainy and windy." No such descriptions are provided for any of Nat's legends: although he indicates where the action took place in three of them, he makes no attempt to provide any specific details like those in the personal narratives.

Another novelistic strategy Nat uses for involving his audience's emotions in the personal narratives is plot structure, which depends for its effects in each case partly on suspense or surprise. This again is in sharp contrast to the four traditional legends where Nat avoids such a plot-centred approach by providing an abstract of the whole narrative (in III and IV), or alternately by providing one version of the story followed by others (as in I and II). Each of the personal narratives, on the other hand, has a single-plot structure. Each opens with an introduction to the situation (which includes characters, time, place, and some background information), followed by rising action and then a climax or punch line. Narrative VI ends with such a line, whereas the others conclude with an explicit statement of Nat's feelings about the event.

Nat shows considerable skill in constructing these plots. In Narrative V

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the heightening of suspense of the external action as the fox approaches in the sunlight along the silent shore, "so CLOSE" that Nat can see his eyes, corresponds precisely to the internal tension Nat wishes to communicate—of a young boy scared to shoot and scared not to shoot his uncle's gun.

The plots of Narratives VI and VII are striking in their economy. Nat demonstrates the sure touch of a confident storyteller in concluding VI with the punch line, "I got fat with the jam." In VII he is similarly deft in omitting details that would clutter the plot. After reporting his uncle's warning he leaps ahead in time to the climax of the narrative, "And when I came back I had eleven, eleven partridges."

The last of the personal narratives is presented in a more hesitant, unsure manner than the other three, with more pauses, and with at least one contradictory detail: Nat implies that he and his companion were scared to use the shotgun because they had not used one before, but then he says ". . . we never shot, only the shotgun before." Perhaps he has forgotten the details or is distracted by the end of the tape coming up, or maybe it is only a slip of the tongue—but at any rate he succeeds in presenting the punch line dramatically and authoritatively, "We didn't see no birds."

Here and in the other three personal narratives it is in the recounting of reported speech that Nat throws himself most fully into the performance, taking full responsibility for dramatizing the particular moment for the pleasure of the listener and the sharing of an experience. His pacing, intonation, pitch and stress mark these passages as special, distinct from all other parts of the performance, serving to draw the audience into a given moment or scene and the emotions it aroused in him.

In Narrative V it is an internal speech, "And I was thinkin' / 'Well if I miss it my uncle's going to give me shit.'" In VI the conversation between Nat and the woman in Hopedale is the central event. In VII there is Nat's request to his uncle, and the uncle's ultimatum, "Nat, if you don't come home with ten, ten partridges / I'll never give you—no more bullets to go partridge hunting." And in VIII the punch line is young Nat's reply, "We didn't see no birds." Once again Nat's two genres are in sharp contrast: no direct quotations occur in any of the legends, whereas such quotations provide the central focus in each of the personal narratives.

These narratives, both the traditional and the personal, are no simple "primitive" accounts, or listings of past events. All are artfully constructed tales following clearly defined stylistic and structural conventions which Nat uses to shape his story material, to bring his audience closer to his own

culture, and to present himself as an appropriate mediator. His role as storyteller reflects the role he has assumed in the world around him. As he has taken on increasingly responsible positions it is clear that he is not merely demonstrating to the white population in St. John's what his people are or were like, but is also in the process of negotiating a new identity for himself and his people. This tape represents part of that negotiation.

Nat concludes the tape with the sentence "But I hope someone will get something out of this." The "someone" represents on one level me, the friend for whom Nat is doing a favor. It is also the wider audience who may listen to the tape. And ultimately, I believe, it refers also to Nat's own people, who are now struggling to survive and to preserve what they value in their culture, and whose struggle can be effective only insofar as the dominant white culture is willing to listen to a spokesman such as Nat.

Appendix

Narrative I

- 1 I'm going to tell another story
About a famous whale hunter of long ago
In Hopedale, Labrador—
During that time way back
Before guns, before white men came with boats of wood
Inuit people used to hunt in kayaks and also umiaks.
These umiaks were usually referred to as women's boats—
However they were used also for transporting whole families from settle to
settlement—settlement to settlement—
Or from one hunting ground to the other—
- 10 And they used to hunt whales in these boats (*slowly and emphatically*).
What they used to use were harpoons—
Special kind of harpoons made to kill whales
And these harpoons had inflated sealskins
Attached to them on the end
So that when they harpoon an object
Whether it was a seal, or whales or anything of that nature
When they harpoon it they would let go the whole thing
And that inflated sealskin would be, would be the mark to follow or pursue
to kill the whale.
They also had a special kind of killing thing—
- 20 When a whale surfaced
They would follow the inflated sealskin
Because that inflated sealskin cannot go under water.
It always on the surface
And it **SHOWS** the killer
Or it shows the man
Where the animal is moving, where the animal is moved,

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- And he knows also how long the harpoon line is
And he kinda also knows exactly
Where that whale is going to come up
- 30 According to the distance from the inflated sealskin
And possible (= possibility?) that the whale surfacing
So they would follow that inflated sealskin
And then pursue that whale with another killing instrument
Whole BUNCH of them would be at it
Until they actually KILL it—(*dramatically, with slightly raised pitch*)
The famous whaler, Inuk whaler had told the village, Hopedale village
people
To be buried on the hill
Northwest of Hopedale, about two miles away from the village on a very,
very high hill.
And this high hill—on this high hill even when I was a child
- 40 I could see a sern (= cairn?).
It was made of wood or rather stones piled upon one another,³
And the human being—in that long long time ago (*slowly and rhythmically*)
He was buried there
Because he asked the village people to bury him there.
So all—so when the whalers were pursuing whales
Down near Akvituaksuk
This place Akvituaksuk means the place of whales
Even to this day is called Akvituaksuk
Although there is no whales left in Labrador, in Labrador waters,
- 50 Because they were all killed out
Way way back I don't know when.
But some people might say that
Hopedale waters was a place of whales,
They might not BELIEVE that
Because there's no whales there now
To prove that there was whales there.
However I remember
When I was a child
We used to play on the beach a lot and
- 60 Me and 'nother, other boys
That we used to play on the beach
North of Hopedale village
And there was a lot of whale bones ALL over on the beach
Even and there's, there was even little huts,
Playing with whale bones
That at one time were dwellings of the whalers actually down there—
Among the whale bones
So this shows that
That Hopedale WAS actually a whale hunting area.
- 70 Matter of fact before the name Hopedale came along

It was called Akvitok
Which means—a whale hunting place.
When they used to go through a Akvituaksuk area in a motor boat
Going toward the north
Where long time ago people used to catch whales in a kayak
I could see the sern WAY up on the hill
You could, you could hardly see it
But it's there—
It WAS there.

- 80 My uncle used to always tell us that
That that sern contained a man
That was a famous whaler of Hopedale
Who, at one time, wanted to be buried up there
Because although dead he would watch the whalers down there at
Akvituaksuk . . .
That's the story (*emphatically, with falling pitch*).

Narrative II

- 1 I'm going to tell a story
Regarding arctic hare hunting in Hopedale, this place called Uivak.
There I heard this story many, many times in Hopedale—
About a hare, Inuit called it okalilukok,
Say not a real hare
It's—what does dis mean?
In this Uivak, they call it Uivak.
There's an arctic hare can be seen
And can be pursued,
10 And HAS been pursued by many Hopedale hunters.
And—when they shot it
They would go and pick it up
And it's not there (*rising intonation*).
'Nother feller one time said that
He shot it with a 30-30, high powered rifle,
And he saw the hare blow way
And the bullet hole was visible
And when he went to pick up the ra—
The arctic hare wasn't there.
20 Many, many Inuit of Hopedale have experienced—this
In that place called Uivak
And—I think it's still going on today—
Uh—if you go hunting in Hopedale, arctic hare hunting,
You probably would have the same experience.
On Uivak, in that same place.
I heard one guy explain it this way.
He was pursuing that arctic hare.
And he went among the rocks,

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- He saw it going in there,
30 And he knew for sure
That he was going to GIT it.
He knew that he was going to shoot it right among the rocks—inside the
rocks and—(*dramatically*)
Apparently when he went inside these rocks
Only a few rocks there, there's no, there's no hole anywhere else to go to,
(*rising intonation*)
When he was looking in there
There was no arctic (*laugh*) hare, no arctic hare.
So there has been many, many stories regarding that arctic hare,
And—uh—I don't know HOW it works
But that's the way the story is
40 And MANY have experienced it on—in that place called Uivak in Hopedale
Labrador (*falling intonation*).

Narrative III

- 1 Another very short story
Regarding a woman killing a polar bear with a silapeguk
Silapeguk is a mitten, a sealskin mitten with fur on outside,
And—the story goes that
The woman approached this polar bear
When he—the polar bear stood—
To kill her with her (= his) mouth open.
This woman has a l-o-o-ng stick
And on that long stick was this silapeguk
10 And when the polar bear—opened its mouth
She just PUSHED that silapeguk right into the polar bear's throat
And she (s)he pulled the stick away
The silapeguk stayed in the, in the polar bear's throat
And the polar bear choked with that silapeguk
By the way, silapeguks when dry are very, very hard to swallow (*laugh*).
And it stands to reason that it it it could happen
It DID happen, if the story's true it's true.
I can—believe that
Because silapeguks even sealskin when turned inside out or when the fur is
20 YOU try to swallow a sealskin with fur on it
And you'll find out how (*laugh*)
What it means.
That's the story.

Narrative IV

- 1 I have another story—
That has to do with polar bear
That turned into a rock.
This rock—is visible—from Hopedale village—at—certain wantage

(= vantage) points.

If you go—to a certain hill—in this, in Hopedale village

You could see this white rock

Probably about a mile away,

Or a little over a mile away.

The story goes like—um—

- 10 This polar bear was—going to Hopedale

To destroy the whole village

And the angakkuks, the sorcerers, actually turned—this polar bear—into a rock.

Tha's according to the story.

And at some days you could see that white rock

Turning into a shape of a polar bear—on certain days

I think—it's when there's a ship

Or something is come to Hopedale harbour

Or something is coming from the south—southeast of Hopedale—um—

This rock turns—um—like a polar bear—or the shape of a polar bear.

- 20 The story goes like—um—um—

When you see the shape of a polar bear

That means somebody is visiting Hopedale from southeast of Hopedale.

Narrative V

- 1 I gonna talk a little bit about—

Funny incidences when I was growing up.

My uncle as I mentioned earlier

Taught me how to even call living things to me,

To—you know—how to make noises like the animal you pursuing.

Um—my uncle used to tell us that

If we made uh noises like a rat or a mouse

The fox will come—to us.

Uh when I was a child

- 10 I was waiting for my uncle—in a rowboat on the beach

And I saw a fox a l-o-o-ng long ways off.

'Twas a beautiful day

And you could hear a pin drop almost.

It was beautiful, beautiful—no wind or nothing.

And I saw fox l-o-o-ng ways, could hardly see it.

And I started making noises like a mouse,

And it heard me,

And it started running toward me.

And uh my uncle had left a 30-30 in the rowboat

- 20 But he had taken the 22 along with him

When he, when he went to, to attend to his fox traps on a certain island.

And when I started making noises like a mouse that this fox coming

And I was scared of that 30-30, and I was also scared my uncle might, might not like it if I used a bullet

You know we didn't have too many bullets on the 30-30
 An' I was scared if I missed that fox
 My uncle would jaw
 You know would give me a hard time,
 And the fox was so CLOSE to me
 I was aiming at it
 30 And I was thinkin'
 "Well if I miss it my uncle's going to give me shit."
 And I'm scared of the gun,
 I never shoot a 30-30 before,
 An' I was scared to death to shoot.
 An' I could have shot it because it was so close like
 I could see the eyes an' everything right close.
 Actually I didn't shoot it
 Because I was scared of what my uncle would say to me
 When he came back (*laugh*).

Narrative VI

- 1 Another coincidences little funny thing um—
 When I was a child I used to like redberry jam.
 Um we went to Hopedale
 I think was for Christmas, early Christmas, uh early fall like before
 Christmas
 We came, matter of fact we went in motor boat that time.
 An um one woman asked me—
 I was real fat,
 My, my face were right round
 An' my cheeks were right red you know,
 10 Very healthy looking child.
 An' one woman said to me
 "How did you get so fat Nathaniel?"
 She said like "Natanáile kanuk kuikte suadla lineken?"
 That means, "Nathaniel, how did you get so fat?"
 I said "Jámimun!"
 That means "I got fat with the jam" (*laugh*).

Narrative VII

- 1 And uh another time when I was a child
 I was probably about seven years old I guess
 There was a lot of, lot of ptarmigans, white partridge that year,
 And I wanted to go partridge hunting,
 And wouldn't, I mean I couldn't use a gun very well then
 And I was crying like to my uncle and saying to him
 "Uncle I want to go bird hunting,"
 And he gives me ten bullets
 And said to me—ten 22 bullets and said to me,

- 10 "Nat, if you don't come home with ten, ten partridges
I'll never give you—no more bullets to go partridge hunting."
And when I came back I had eleven, eleven partridges.
And I was so PROUD.
I was—I was so proud you know,
To come back with eleven
When, when he only give me,
When he only give me ten bullets.
An' I was really, really proud—
You know it's incidents like that
20 Good times and enjoying life.

Narrative VIII

- 1 'Nother time me and 'nother fellow—
My uncle when he was loaded drunk on a certain day,
It was Saturday afternoon kinda rainy and windy.
We used to wait for birds at a certain point
Where birds used to fly over—
A whole lot of birds would fly right by me an' this child
We only small kids—
He told us to take the shotgun,
An' we was scared of the shotgun
10 An' every time the birds come by
We would—would try to aim.
I would (be) holdin' the gun,
He would try to hold the other end,
An' we tried to shoot
But both of us were scared to pull the trigger,
Because we never shot, only the uh shotgun before and—
After a while we, we since we were so scared of the gun,
We never even shot
Because, although there was a whole lot of birds goin' back an' forth—
20 When we got back to the house uncle asked us
If we saw any birds,
An' we said "We didn't see no birds" (*laugh*).
And all the time we were only scared of the gun.
And—we had good times
And bad times also
Now that's about the end of the tape.
And—I can tell a lot of stories—good stories also
But I hope someone will get something out of this.

Notes

¹I wish to express my thanks to Carol Brice-Bennett, Jean Chadwick, Tony Chadwick, and Herbert Halpert for their helpful suggestions on earlier drafts of this essay; to Nat Igloḷiorṭe for sharing his narratives and commenting on my analysis; and above all to Richard Bauman whose inspiration and support made the study possible in the first place.

²Nat's use of "another story" in the first line of this narrative might suggest that he considers earlier material on his tape to be "stories," but I do not think this is the case. He seems to use the word *another/nother* at times to mean 'a certain,' as for example in Narrative II, where he says "'Nother feller one time said . . ." where no earlier "feller" is mentioned.

³For an interesting account of similar mounds of rocks on headlands in Newfoundland and Labrador, and the terms used to refer to them, see Colbourne and Reid.

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